

MITZVAH 55: BREAKING A DONKEY'S NECK

by Rabbi Moshe Goldberger

"If you do not redeem it, its neck should be broken." (Shemos 34:20)

If a firstborn donkey was not redeemed, its neck must be broken in the back with a hatchet, and it has to be buried. No benefit can be derived from it. From the way the Torah describes this procedure (Shemos 13:13- 15), we learn that it is parallel to Pharaoh's obstinacy in his refusal to send us out of Egypt, which is referred to as "stiffness of the neck" (ibid. 33:3).

We learn from this that avoiding or neglecting a mitzvah does not lead to any gain. In addition, we have a model of how Hashem sends retribution upon those who stiffen their necks and remain stubborn against the teachings of the Torah.

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