

# PARSHAS KI SEITZEI: VOLUME 26, NO. 44

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Ki Seitzei

## Volume 26, No. 44

*Sponsored by the Sabrin family, in memory of mother Bayla bat Zev a"h (Bella Sabrin)*

Irving and Arline Katz, in memory of her father Moshe Aharon ben Menashe Yaakov Reiss a"h

One of the mitzvot in this week's parashah is the mitzvah of returning a lost object. The Torah instructs us: "You shall not see the ox of your brother or his sheep or goat cast off and hide yourself from them; you shall surely return them to your brother . . . you may not [literally: 'You will be unable'] to hide yourself." (Devarim 21:22-23)

R' Avraham Shaag z"l (1801-1876; Hungary and Eretz Yisrael) asks why these verses repeat themselves. What is added by the last phrase, "You may not hide yourself"?

He explains: Even a person who was born with negative character traits can acquire good traits in their place. This is done by behaving contrary to one's natural tendencies. For example, if one is disposed to hate another person, one can conquer those feelings by going out of his way to do kindness for that person.

Chazal learn from the phrase, "You shall surely return them to your brother," that you must return a lost object even if its owner has already lost it, and you have already returned it, 100 times. If you perform this act of kindness repeatedly, says R' Shaag, "You will be unable to hide yourself"; it will become natural for you to do kindness for the person that you once hated.

R' Shaag adds: Particularly in this month of Elul, when the shofar is blown to awaken us to return to Hashem, we must remove the hatred of others from our hearts, stop lording over others, eradicate lashon hara, and cease other infractions that we commit against our fellows. Maybe, just maybe, by the time Yom Kippur has passed, the good behavior that we adopt during Elul will have become second nature. (Derashot Ha'Rash Vol. I, No. 25)

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*"If you build a new house, you shall make a fence for your roof." (22:8)*

R' Naphtali Zvi Horowitz z"l (1760-1827; Ropshitzer Rebbe) writes: "Building a new house" refers to rebuilding the Bet Hamikdash through the good deeds we do. We pray, "Build it speedily b'yameinu," usually translated, "in our days." However, this also can mean, "Build it speedily with our days," i.e., the good deeds with which we fill our days are the construction materials with which the Third Temple is being built.

The Ropshitzer continues: The verse says that when you do the good deeds that will become the building blocks of the future Bet Hamikdash, "You shall make a fence for your roof." This teaches that your spiritual ascent should not be public; rather, you should conceal your good deeds behind a barrier of humility and discretion. (Zera Kodesh)

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*"When you come into the vineyard of your fellow, you may eat grapes as is your desire, to your fill, but you may not put into your vessel." (23:25)*

On the level of pshat, this verse is referring to a hired-hand's to eat from the crops of a field while he is harvesting them; however, he has no right to take produce home.

R' Meir Horowitz z"l (1819-1877; Dzikover Rebbe) offers an allegorical explanation of this pasuk, as follows: This verse is teaching that one should not become depressed when he returns home from visiting a tzaddik and realizes that his behavior is essentially the same as it was before. Indeed, such depression is a scheme of the yetzer hara, intended to destroy whatever gains the person did achieve and to discourage him from visiting tzaddikim in the future. In reality, even the temporary gains that one experiences while he is in the presence of the tzaddik are worthwhile.

Says our verse: A tzaddik is called a "vineyard" (see Yeshayah 5:7). When you come to a tzaddik, says the verse, eat your fill, even though you know you will not take anything home, for even that short-term gain is worthwhile. (Imrei Noam)

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*"Beware of a tzara'at affliction . . ." (24:8)*

R' Yisrael Isser of Ponovezh z"l (Lithuania; mid-19th century) writes: One of the forms of tzara'at is manifested by skin that appears healthy on the surface, though underneath the area is full of pus. The Torah (Vayikra 13:11) says of a person who has such a blemish, "The kohen shall declare him contaminated." This teaches that a person who acts as if his motivations are pure, though in reality they are not, is tamei. For example, when one is offended and he reacts negatively, he may say, "I

am not angry for my honor, but rather for the honor of the Torah that I have studied. Of course, I am not so vain as to think that I am a Torah scholar, but compared to the person who offended me . . ."

How can a person who lashes out "for the Torah's honor" measure whether his motivations are pure? Let him examine how he reacts when he sees a Torah scholar other than himself being offended. Also, how does he react when he sees a volume of a Torah work being treated disrespectfully? Finally, does this person who considers himself a minor Torah scholar defame the honor of the Torah by acting inappropriately himself? (Menuchah U'kedushah p.83)

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*"When you beat your olive tree, do not remove all of the splendor (i.e., the last fruit) behind you; it shall be for the proselyte, the orphan, and the widow. When you harvest your vineyard, you shall not glean behind you; it shall be for the proselyte, the orphan, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, therefore I command you to do this thing." (24:20-22)*

R' Zvi Hirsch Kalischer z"l (1795-1874; rabbi of Torun, Prussia; best-known for advocating resettlement of Eretz Yisrael) asks: Why does the Torah tie the mitzvah of giving charity to the Exodus? He explains:

The Torah is teaching that one should not do good deeds because they appeal to his charitable nature. After all, if a person has such a nature, it is because G-d gave it to him. If so, what is the person bringing to the mitzvah? Rather, we must do mitzvot because we acknowledge that G-d took us out of the slavery of Egypt to serve Him. (Sefer Ha'Brit Al Ha'Torah)

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## **From the haftarah**

*"Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water." (Yeshayah 55:1)*

The Gemara (Ta'anit 7a) states that water is a metaphor for Torah. R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi of Suvalk, Lithuania) notes four similarities between water and Torah:

(1) Just as plants and animals cannot live without water, so Yisrael cannot live without Torah.

(2) The word "mayim" (water) has the same "hidden" gematria as its "revealed" gematria, as follows: Mayim is spelled mem-yud-mem. If the names of the letters are written as words, "mem" would be spelled mem-mem, while "yud" would be spelled yud-vav-dalet. In each case, the gematria of the "revealed" letter, i.e., the first letter, equals the gematria of the "hidden" letters (40 = 40 and 10 = 6+4).

Similarly, Torah is made up of a revealed part and a hidden part, which are of equal stature. Likewise, the Torah was given partly with great fanfare, i.e., the revelation at Har Sinai, and partly more quietly,

i.e., the Oral Law that was taught to Moshe alone and transmitted by him to Bnei Yisrael. Again, the two parts are of equal stature.

(3) Just as water flows downward, so the Torah came from Heaven to this lowly world.

(4) Just as water cleanses, so Torah study cleanses and helps sinners to repent. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Yad Mitzrayim: Potei'ach Yad)

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## Teshuvah

The Gemara states that Hashem gave Noach and his descendants only seven commandments and the smallest infraction of one of those laws incurs the death penalty. Bnei Yisrael, by contrast, were given 613 mitzvot, most of which carry punishments less severe than death. Furthermore, Hashem has given us a great gift: the possibility of teshuvah / repentance.

R' Moshe Mi'Tirani (the Mabit; 16th century) writes that the possibility of teshuvah exists precisely because we have so many mitzvot; it is nearly impossible for anyone to go through life without violating a commandment now and then. This is, in fact, alluded to by the many verses (e.g. Devarim 30:2; Hoshea 14:20) which mention the name "Elokim," denoting G-d's Attribute of Justice, in connection with Teshuvah. Teshuvah was created because the fact that we have so many laws would likely result in strict justice being imposed against us.

However, the Torah warns (Devarim 30:2), "You will return to Hashem Elokim and heed His voice." Do not use the difficulty of mitzvah observance as an excuse. If you want your Teshuvah to "count" you must sincerely heed Hashem's word and do your best to observe the mitzvot in the future. In fact, the Gemara teaches that a person who tells himself, "I can sin, for G-d will forgive me," will not be forgiven. (Bet Elokim, Sha'ar Ha'Teshuvah ch.1)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **[Torah.org](https://torah.org)** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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