

TURNING THE THEORY INTO PRACTICE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 134, Hashovas Aveida: Returning Lost Objects. Good Shabbos!

One Who Cheats In His Business Doesn't Believe in G-d

Our Parsha begins "And these are the statutes that you shall place before them." There is a very famous Rashi on the words "And these". Normally "these" would mean "to the exclusion of others". But Rashi says that the conjunction "and" adds to what came before (vov mosif), in Parshas Yisro.

In Parshas Yisro, G-d gave us the Ten Commandments. Rashi here says that just as the Ten Commandments were given at Sinai, so too the laws that are recorded in Parshas Mishpatim were also given at Sinai.

The truth of the matter is that this Rashi requires understanding. There is another famous Rashi [Vayikra 25:1] on the words "On Mount Sinai" (mentioned in connection with Shmita) which asks, "What is the connection between Shmitah and Mount Sinai?" Rashi there answers that just like the laws of Shmita were given with all their rules and intricate details at Sinai, so too all other commands were given with their rules and intricate details at Sinai.

If that is the case, what is Rashi adding here, by telling us that the laws of Parshas Mishpatim were given at Sinai? We know that -- the whole Torah was given at Sinai!

The Ramba"n says a very interesting thing. According to the Ramba"n, Parshas Mishpatim and the Parsha of the Ten Commandments were said together at the initial meeting of G-d with Moshe on Sinai (prior to the 40 day period when Moshe learned the rest of the Torah). Subsequent to that, Moshe Rabbeinu came down, taught the Jewish people what he had learned from G-d and then went back up to Mount Sinai to learn more.

What emerges from this Ramba"n is that the laws of one ox goring another ox, of digging a hole in the public domain, or paying workers on time, all the mundane intricacies of life have the same status and were given at the same time as the Ten Commandments. Therefore, Rashi is stating

something significant.

But, is it not peculiar that almost in the same breath as G-d spoke "I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out from Egypt...", the foundation of Judaism, He also told us about our responsibilities when we borrow our neighbor's car?

Why does Parshas Mishpatim rate the same session as "I am the L-rd your G-d"?

Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, said that this comes to teach us that if a person does not keep Parshas Mishpatim (monetary laws), he doesn't believe in "I am the L-rd your G-d" either.

"I am the L-rd your G-d" is the theory --- I believe. But the other side of the coin, the practice, is do you cheat in your business? If you cheat in your business, you do not believe in "I am the L-rd your G-d".

Rav Moshe continues, if a person believes in G-d with more than lip service, then the person believes that G-d provides him with a livelihood. If a person believes that G-d provides the livelihood, then what reason is there to cheat? "A person's livelihood is fixed for him from Rosh HaShannah" [Beitzah 16a]. If one believes that, there is no need to cheat. Anyone who cheats, does not believe it.

That is why "I am the L-rd your G-d" is in the same session as the law of how to pay one's workers.

There was recently a meeting in New York of the Association of Jewish Certified Public Accountants; an organization appropriately called Cheshbon. Rav Schwab told this group that a person who is dishonest in business is a Kofer b'Ikhar (He denies G-d). For the same reason that we just mentioned -- that if a person really believed, he would not need to cheat. One cheats because he thinks -- "this will get me the parnossah". Cheating indicates that he does not believe that G-d will take care of him.

Then Rav Schwab continued by saying the following. "You will ask that we see people who cheat a tremendous amount and are nonetheless, successful. Now if parnossah comes from G-d, how can that be?"

Rav Schwab explained that such people's money comes from the 'Sitra Achra', from the forces of impurity in the world, not from G-d. No good will ever come out of the money that comes from the powers of impurity (Kochos HaTumah) in the world. He or his children or someone down the line will never see satisfaction (nachas) from that money.

The 'test' of earning a livelihood is not only a test of telling the truth, of not stealing, etc. It is a test of 'I am the L-rd your G-d'. Daily, we are put to the 'test' of whether or not we really believe. If we really, really believe, then there is never a reason to be less than 100% honest in our dealings with other people and with ourselves.

Personalities & Sources:

Rash"i -- Rav Shlomo ben Yitzchak (1040-1105); Troyes and Worms, France. "Father of all Torah commentaries".

Ramba"n -- Rav Moshe ben Nachman (1194-1270), Gerona, Spain; Eretz Yisroel.

Rav Moshe Feinstein -- (1895-1986) Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem; Author of Igros Moshe and Dibros Moshe.

Rav Shimon Schwab -- (1908-1995) Rav of the 'Breur Kehilla' in Washington Heights, New York; previously a Rav in Baltimore, MD.

Glossary

Shmita -- Sabbatical Year

Cheshbon -- Calculations (both mathematical as well as ethical)

Parnossah -- Livelihood

Sitra Achra -- kabbalistic concept "the other force"

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and is available through Project Genesis On-Line Bookstore: <http://books.torah.org/>
