THE NEEDY DO MORE FOR THE RICH THAN VICE VERSA

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Mishpatim

The Needy do More for the Rich than Vice Versa

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 713, Adam haMazik and Liability Insurance. Good Shabbos!

The pasuk in this week's parsha says: "When you lend money (im kesef talveh) to My people, to the poor person who is with you, do not act toward him as a creditor; do not lay interest upon him." [Shemos 22:24] Despite the fact that the Torah uses the word "Im" (which often means "if"), in this case, the word means "when". There is a great mitzvah to lend money to fellow Jews. We must perform this mitzvah without charging interest.

The Medrash points out that there is a fundamental difference indicated here between human beings and the Almighty. The Medrash quotes a pasuk [verse] in Proverbs "All a pauper's brothers hate him..." [Mishlei 19:7]. It is the nature of human beings, that if they have poor relatives, they really do not want to claim "credit" for them. The rich executive likes to distance himself from his "poor cousins". The successful cousin cringes every time his impoverished relative greets him, as if he were afraid that poverty was contagious or perhaps it is just out of pure embarrassment. According to the Medrash, this is the nature of "flesh and blood". However, the Almighty is not like that, as it is written, "Wealth and honor come from You and You rule everything - in Your hand is power and strength and it is in Your hand to make anyone great or strong." [Divrei Hayamim I 29:12]. He has all the wealth in the world and yet He has a special place in His heart, so to speak, for the poor. It is for this reason, the Medrash concludes, that the Torah emphasizes, "When you lend money to MY NATION."

The more common Biblical style is to say, "When you loan money to your brother (achicha)" or "to your friend (rey-echa)". The expression "to MY NATION" is noteworthy. It indicates G-d's closeness and concern for His people, even when (and perhaps especially when) they are poor.

The Medrash then cites a pasuk in Tehillim [61:8] and interprets it homiletically: Dovid HaMelech [King David] comes before the Almighty and asks, as it were, "Why, G-d, don't You become a

socialist? Why did you make a world having both wealthy and poor people? Why isn't there an equal distribution of wealth (Yeshev olam lifnei Elokim)?" The Almighty answers (based on the continuation of the pasuk) "If I would do this, then who would practice Kindness and Truth? (Chessed v'Emes man yintzeruhu?)"

According to the Medrash, this pasuk foreshadows the famous dialog between the wicked Turnus Rufus and Rabbi Akiva: Turnus Rufus asked, "If your G-d loves the poor, why does He not provide them with a livelihood?" Rabbi Akiva answered: "So that we might be saved through them from the punishment of Gehinnom" [Bava Basra 10a].

The purpose of G-d allowing poverty to exist in this world is so that people should be able to practice Chessed - acts of charity and kindness towards the unfortunate. People should realize that if they are more wealthy and successful than someone else it is because the Almighty gave extra resources to them in order that they may do Chessed with their money.

"Rav Yehoshua taught: More than the wealthy person does for the poor, the poor does for the wealthy person." [Vayikra Rabbah Behar 34:8] G-d created poverty because He wants people to learn how to give. The world was created for the purpose of Chessed. This is so vital and so important that in order to facilitate it, people are created with many serious needs so that others might have the opportunity to fill those needs by doing acts of Chessed and kindness for them.

Holy People will not Come to Eat Non Kosher Meat

The pasuk in this week's parsha says: "People of holiness shall you be to Me; you shall not eat flesh of an animal that was torn in the field, to the dog shall you throw it." [Shemos 22:30]

We learn the Biblical prohibition of eating "torn meat" (basar treifah) from this pasuk. However, the Torah prefaces this prohibition with the words "And you shall be 'Anshei Kodesh' [holy people] to Me."

We can learn a lot from the Rambam merely by studying his placement and categorization of the various laws within his halachic compendium (Mishneh Torah/Yad HaChazakah). One of the 14 volumes of the "Yad HaChazakah" is "The Book of Holiness" (Sefer Kedusha). Sefer Kedusha contains both the laws of forbidden sexual relationships and the laws of forbidden foods. "Holiness" means to abstain. Holy does not necessarily mean wrapping oneself in a tallis all day long and not having anything to do with human beings. It merely connotes the ability to rule over one's instincts and desires. The whole concept of forbidden foods is a manifestation of kedusha. Yet, the Torah does not preface every mention of forbidden food or illicit relationship with an expression of holiness, such as we find here -- "You shall be a holy people". Why do we find such a preface here?

The Pardes Yosef quotes a fascinating Zohar. According to the Zohar, the words "be a holy people" is not a preface to the rest of the pasuk in the sense of "be a holy people, and therefore do not eat treife [non-kosher] food". The Zohar interprets: "If you will be a holy people, you will never come into

contact with something that is forbidden."

The Gemara says, "G-d does not cause the righteous to stumble" [Chulin 5b]. This means that if a person is on a high spiritual level, he will never accidentally eat non-kosher food. The Gemara then says that the righteous Pinchas ben Yair was so pious that not only could he himself never ingest something non-kosher, but even his donkey refused to consume produce that had not been properly tithed.

Rabbi Mordechai Kaminetsky relates the following true story, which he connects with the Zohar cited by the Pardes Yosef:

A Yeshiva student was flying back to Yeshiva from a visit home. He was late for the plane and had to skip breakfast, but knew he had ordered a kosher meal so that he would not need to fast the whole day. Sitting next to him was a non-Jew from the South, who knew nothing about Judaism.

The Southerner got into a long discussion with the Yeshiva student about religion. Finally the meal came - a Kosher deli sandwich. The Yeshiva student was famished. He unwrapped the package and then remembered that he did not yet wash his hands. He put the sandwich down, went to the bathroom in the back of the plane to wash, and returned to his seat to begin his meal. He was about to take his first bite into his deli sandwich when he remembered the halacha of "basar shenisalem min ha'ayin" [meat from which one lost eye contact]. It is forbidden to leave meat out unattended when one does not know what might happen to it.

Even though the possibility of it being switched for non-kosher meat at 35,000 feet was highly unlikely, the halacha is the halacha. He decided not to eat the deli sandwich, despite his hunger. However, since he had already washed and made a blessing for the washing, he was concerned about the "al netilas yadayim" being a blessing in vain. Therefore, made a blessing over bread and took a small bite out of the roll in which they served the deli sandwich.

The Southerner asked the Yeshiva student, "Why aren't you eating your sandwich? - You told me you were hungry!" The Yeshiva student, who had already greatly shocked his travel partner by all that he had told him about Judaism, said: "You are not going to believe this, but according to Jewish law, if meat is left unattended, one is forbidden to eat it. We must take into account the far-fetched possibility that somehow the kosher meat got switched for non kosher meat."

The Southerner responded, "I must say G-d certainly watches over you Jews. I have an admission to make to you. All my life, I have been hearing from my friends in New York about 'Kosher pastrami' I said to myself 'When will I ever have the opportunity to taste such a thing?' So when you were in the bathroom - I am embarrassed to say this - I took out your pastrami and replaced it with a piece of meat from my sandwich. Now I know that G-d must be watching you and did not let you eat the non Kosher meat!"

This is exactly how the Pardes Yosef interprets the pasuk in our parsha based on the Zohar: You

shall be holy people to me, THEREFORE I will not let you come to eat treife meat from the fields.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Mishpatim are provided below:

Tape # 043 - Malpractice
Tape # 086 - Withholding Medical Treatment
Tape # 134 - Hashovas Aveida: Returning Lost Objects
Tape # 181 - Medicine, Shabbos, and the Non-Jew
Tape # 227 - Taking Medicine on Shabbos
Tape # 271 - Experimental Medical Treatment
Tape # 317 - Wrecking a Borrowed Car
Tape # 361 - Bankruptcy
Tape # 405 - Litigating in Secular Courts
Tape # 449 - Is Gambling Permitted
Tape # 493 - Bitul B'Rov
Tape # 537 - Losing Your Coat at a Coat Check
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Tape # 713 - Adam haMazik and Liability Insurance
Tape # 757 - M'Dvar Sheker Tirchak: True or False?
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Tape # 889 - Mishpatim -- The Neighbor Who Forgot To Turn Off The Fire
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