

OR HACHAIM RETRIEVES HIDDEN MESSAGE FROM MITZVAH OF RETURNING LOST OBJECTS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Ki Seitzei

Or HaChaim Retrieves Hidden Message from Mitzvah of Returning Lost Objects

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: CD# 955, The Un-Cancelled Stamp - Can you re-use it? Good Shabbos!

There is a very interesting comment of the Or HaChaim Hakadosh in Parshas Ki Seitzei that really needs no further elucidation. The pasuk teaches "You shall not see the ox of your brother or his lamb wandering and hide yourself from them; you shall surely return them to your brother." [Devorim 22:1]. The Biblical commandment to return lost objects (haShavas aviedah) is derived from this pasuk. The Torah continues: "If your brother is not near you and you do not know him, then you shall bring it inside your house, and it shall remain with you until your brother's inquiring about it, then you shall return it to him." [Devorim 21:2]

It is interesting to note that the Torah uses the verb 'hashev teshivem' to express the command of returning a lost object. The Torah could have used the expression 'hachzer tachzirem' to express the exact same idea that the object should be returned. The Shalo"h HaKadosh comments that the use of 'hashev teshivem' connotes the idea of teshuvah [repentance]. The Torah is discussing returning a person's lost wallet or pen, but at the same time, the Torah is eluding a situation where the person himself is lost. By saying "hashev teshivem" (which may be translated as "you shall help them to do Teshuvah) the Torah is urging us to bring "lost souls" back to the Master of the Universe.

The Or HaChaim interprets the entire pasuk as an allusion. The pasuk "When you see a 'shor achicha'" does not only mean "When you see your brother's ox." It also refers to people who might be compared (because of their actions and behavior) to animals. The word "Achicha" refers to the Almighty and the pasuk reminds us that these lost souls are part of the flock of the Almighty. We are

commanded "hashev teshivem l'Achicha" -- to return these souls to Him.

The Or HaChaim explains the next pasuk: "V'Im lo karov Achicha eilecha..." ("If Your Brother) is not near you...") as referring to the final period of exile (haGalus haAchron). He derives this by equating the expression "lo karov" with the expression in Bilaam's messianic vision "I see it but it is not near" (Ashurenu v'lo karov) [Bamidbar 24:17]. The severity and unfathomable length of the exile causes people to lose faith and give up heart - "as we see in these generations", writes Or HaChaim (1696-1743). This hidden end to the exile is hinted at in the words "v'lo yedato" (and you do not know him).

The pasuk then instructs "And you shall gather him into your house and he shall be with you..." This refers to the fact that we shall bring him into the Beis HaMedrash [study hall] and teach him the ways of Jewish living and the way of enlightened existence so that he not wander off the path and be misled by false claims and mistaken beliefs. So this pasuk, which at a simple level is introducing the mitzvah of HaShavas Aveidah, at the level of Remez [allusion] is charging every Jew to become what is today called a "kiruv worker" [engaged in spiritual outreach]. When we see someone who is lost, we have a responsibility to bring him back to the Ribono shel Olam.

This mitzvah is certainly relevant in our times when great masses of our fellow brethren have become estranged and "lost" from the ways of Torah and the ways of the Master of the Universe. We must make whatever effort possible towards Hashev Teshivem - to bring them back to do Teshuvah.

Consider the following: Has it ever happened that one of your children got lost? You were at an amusement park or a ball game, somewhere with throngs of people and you become separated from your child. He is lost. There are few circumstances in life that are more traumatic for a parent than having lost a child. Parents naturally 'freak out' in such circumstances. Most of the time, Baruch Hashem, the child is 'found' but those few minutes - whatever it takes until the child shows up - put gray hairs on the parent's head.

Imagine how grateful a parent feels to a stranger who sees his great distress and approaches him with a child in hand asking "Is this your child?" One feels so indebted to that person that one cannot do enough for him.

The Ribono shel Olam has so many lost children. He has such 'aggravation' at the fact that they have been lost. He is so 'pained' by seeing so many of His children lost. Then the kiruv worker brings back the child to the Ribono shel Olam. Imagine the Joy the Almighty has for such a person. Imagine what He will be willing to do for the person who brought back His lost children to Him. This is the mitzvah of "Do not see your Brother's ox and lamb and ignore them." Do not shut your eyes to all the people who are lost but rather "hashev teshivem l'Achicha" - you shall surely bring them back to your "Brother".

The Woman of Valor's Wardrobe Must Be One of "Beauty" and "Strength"

Parshas Ki Seitzei contains the prohibition: "An Amonite and a Moavite shall not enter into the Congregation of Hashem. Also a tenth generation shall not enter of them into the Congregation of Hashem, forever." [Devorim 23:4] This Biblical prohibition forbids marrying even a convert from Amon or Moab. This contrasts with the law regarding an Egyptian convert, whose third generation descendant may marry into "the Congregation of Hashem."

Why is the restriction regarding the Amonite and Moavite so severe? The Torah explains in the very next pasuk: "because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt..." They were ingrates. Although their ancestor (Lot) owed much to our ancestor (Avraham), they would not so much as give us a glass of water in our time of need when we left Egypt. This is a terrible indictment of their national character. They only existed in the world because Avraham saved Lot and they were so callous to the needs of Avraham's descendants. The Torah treats this gross lack of Hakaras HaTov [gratitude] on their part more severely than the enslavement we suffered at the hands of the Egyptians!

The Torah SheBaal Peh [Oral Law] infers that these laws apply to "a (male) "Amoni" and not a (female) "Ammonis"; to a (male) "Moavi" and not a (female) "Moavis" [Yevamos 69a]. Indeed, the matriarch of the Jewish monarchy, the great grandmother of King David, was none other than Rus, a Moavite convert.

Why should there be a difference between the men and women? The Gemara [Yevamos 76] addresses this by distinguishing between men who by social convention are expected to greet wayfarers and women who by social convention, for reasons of modesty, are not expected to greet wayfarers. The Talmud does ask that at least the Moavite men should have greeted the Jewish men and the Moavite women should have greeted the Jewish women. The Gemara has a lengthy discussion of this question but concludes in the final analysis "Kol Kevodah Bas Melech Penimah" - ultimately the glory of the "Daughter of a King" is her privacy and it would have been inappropriate for the Moavite women to take a public leadership role in providing even for other women.

The Shemen haTov questions this use of the principle of "Daughter of a King" regarding Moavite women. These are, after all, the same women about whom we read in Parshas Balak "And Israel dwelt in Shittim and the nation began to be promiscuous with THE DAUGHTERS OF MOAV." [Bamidbar 25:1] We are not talking here about students of Sarah Schenirer (Founder of the first "Bais Yaakov" school) in Cracow, Poland! We are talking about women who just recently "sold" themselves in attempts to seduce and corrupt the Jewish people! How can the "Kol Kevodah Bas Melech

Penimah" defense be used here to get such women off the hook?

The Shemen haTov explains that these women went out to seduce the Jewish men despite the fact that it went against every sinew in their bodies. They were drafted to do their duty for their country per the advice of the wicked Bilaam. They were basically an earlier day version of the women pressed into "national service" in World War II by the Japanese Government to provide "comfort" for the male soldiers. This was not their choice. This was certainly against their will.

When Balak commanded these Moavite women to compromise the spiritual integrity of the Jewish men, it was not within their ability to refuse on the grounds that it violated their moral principles. The spiritual DNA of women is to be modest. Chazal tell us that Chava was created from a hidden part of Adam's body because that is the way the Almighty wanted women to be -- hidden and modest by their very natures. It was their natural "hard-wired" tznius that got them off the hook for not taking the initiative in going out and offering water and provisions to the Jewish women.

But how can we claim that all women are hard wired to be modest and withdrawing? Look outside! Anywhere we go, we seem to find that this is not the case. Millions and billions of women across the face of the earth are not modest in this sense of always "staying within". What happened to this hard-wiredness? What happened to the fact that they were created from the hidden rib of Adam?

Anyone who has daughters - even those who attend Bais Yaakov - know that matters of expected "tznius" are tremendously challenging in today's world. It is very difficult. The "spirit of the times" is alien to the concept of "tznius" and to withdrawal from taking active roles in society. How can we understand the Talmud telling us that modesty is an innate quality in women when we see the way virtually all women dress and act in our modern world?

The answer is that society has perverted us and perverted our women to the extent that something which should come naturally to women today is a major spiritual challenge. The entire world we live in is so decadent and so obsessed with matters of pleasures of the flesh and so forth that society has succeeded in taking something from its natural state and changing it to the extent that Tznius for women today becomes a major battle. In our world, Tznius is a difficult thing to "sell".

It should not be like that. In the Victorian age, women would not dress like they do today. Society has changed what should be the natural inclination of women and made it into a major challenge.

It always strikes me that in the chapter of Proverbs dealing with the "Woman of Valor," we extol the values of the Eishes Chayil by saying "Strength and majesty are her raiment" (Oz v'Hadar levusha) [Mishlei 31:25]. The word Hadar means beautiful. Shlomo HaMelech is saying that the garments of the Woman of Valor are beautiful. This we understand. But he also describes those garments with the word 'Oz' which means strength. How are we to understand that?

The answer is that Shlomo HaMelech is describing a time when for a woman to dress properly will require tremendous inner strength. The Woman of Valor will need to go from store to store to find

something appropriate to wear. She will need to suffer the stares of people who see how she is dressed in the summer and give her looks like she must come from another planet! This takes strength - the attributes of Oz and Gevurah.

It should not need to be like that but such is the society we live in. Therefore, our women need to dress not only with Hadar [beauty] but with Oz [strength] as well.

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