

# A TRUE FRIEND

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Mishpatim

### A True Friend

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #889 The Neighbor Who Forgot To Turn Off The Fire. Good Shabbos!*

The pasuk "If the ox of a man will gore his fellow man's ox and it dies they will sell the live ox and split its value and also the dead (ox) shall be split." [Shemos 21:35] is discussed at length in the beginning of Tractate Bava Kamma, along other laws involving damage to or by one's property.

The expression at the beginning of this pasuk "v'ki yeegof shor ish es shor re'eyhu..." is normally translated "When a man's ox will gore his friend's ox". However, the Ibn Ezra quotes an interpretation from a certain 'Ben Zuta' who offers an alternate translation. Ben Zuta claims that the words "shor re'eyhu" mean the "fellow ox" of the ox who is doing the goring. It is not to be translated as "the ox of his friend" as we commonly translate but rather "the ox gores his friend" - another ox!

The Ibn Ezra minces no words in dismissing the interpretation of Ben Zuta. In his inimitable style he writes "the ox has no 'friend' other than Ben Zuta himself!" In other words anyone who says such an interpretation is a worthy companion to an ox and has no place in the Study Hall.

The concept of friendship and the concept of "re'yah" [friend] as in "v'Ahavta l're'yahcha kamocho" [you should love your friend as yourself], only applies to human beings. Friendship is an emotional relationship that reflects an aspect of humanity. Animals can have companions and they can even have mates. But the whole concept of friendship is not applicable to them. Therefore, the Ibn Ezra dismisses the interpretation of Ben Zuta: Do not talk about "friends of animals" - there is no such thing.

Rav Hutner, zt"l, makes the following very interesting observation: The word "re'ya," which is one of several ways of saying "friend" in Hebrew comes from the same root as the word "teruah" as in "It shall be a day of teruah [blasting] for you" [Bamidbar 29:1] (referring to Rosh HaShannah). The Targum Unkelos on this pasuk translates "yom teruah" as "yom yevava". "Yom yevava" means a day

of moaning, or a day of broken up cries.

That is why the main thrust of the shofar sound is the "shevarim" (the broken wailing sound). There is a question in Halacha as to whether the true shevarim is the 3 short sounds we call shevarim or the series of shorter blasts that we call teruah or a combination of both, but whatever its nature, the "shevarim" is the essence of the shofar blowing. The single blast sound (tekiah) that proceeds and follows the "shevarim" merely provides a frame, so to speak, to highlight the essence of the shofar sound - the sobbing cry of shevarim.

Thus, the etymology of Teruah, sharing the same root as re'yus [friendship] has the connotation of breaking something up. Rav Hutner says that is why a friend is called re'yah - the purpose of a friend is to "break you up" and to "give you chastisement". A true friend should stop us in our tracks and give us a kick in the pants, when necessary. A friend is not the type of person who always pats us on the back and tells us how great we are, always condoning whatever we do. The purpose of a friend (re'yah), as is the purpose of Teruah (shofar blast), is to tell us - sometimes - "you don't know what you are talking about!"

Obviously, there has to be an overall positive relationship. Someone who is always critical will not remain a friend for very long. A person needs to have a modicum of trust and confidence in someone before he is prepared to hear criticism from him. But the fellow who always slaps us on the back and tells us how great we are is likewise not a true friend. A true friend must be able to stop us and sometimes be able to break us.

In one of the blessings of Sheva Brochos (recited at a wedding and during celebration meals for the week thereafter), we make reference to the newlywed couple as being "re'yim ahuvim" [loving friends]. There is a message behind this expression. In order for a Chosson-Kallah / Husband-Wife to be "loving friends," they need to have the capacity to be able to say to each other "this is not the way to do it; this is not the way to act". Obviously, a relationship in which this is the entire basis of their interaction is not going to fly. But - if one is deserving of it - the type of wife a person will find will be one who will be a "re'yah ahuva" in the full sense of the word "re'yah".

This is why no ox ever had a "re'yah". No ox will ever tell its companion ox "It is not right to eat like that" or "You are eating too much" or "You are eating too fast." A true friend needs to do that.

Similarly, the Netziv says on the pasuk, "A helpmate, opposite him" [Bereishis 2:18] that sometimes in order for a person to be a helper (ezer), the person needs to be an opponent (k'negdo). It should not just be "Honey, you're great" and "Honey, you are always right." Sometimes it must be "Honey, you are an idiot!" This is a true instance of "re'yim ahuvim".

May we all merit having such true friendship between ourselves and our companions and between ourselves and our spouses.

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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:

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