

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

SEPTEMBER 14, 2024 This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Yisroel ben Aryeh Leib, by his sons Lawrence & Dr. Alan Kuczynski. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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11 ELUL

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

Being True to One's Nature

You shall not see the ox of your brother or his lamb go astray, and hide yourself from them, you shall surely return them to your brother [...] so you shall do for any lost article of your brother that you have found, you cannot hide yourself. You shall not see the donkey of your brother or his ox falling on the road whilst you hide from them, you shall surely raise it with him (22:1, 3, 4).

In this week's *parsha*, we find laws relating to the obligation of returning lost objects and helping fellow Jews with animals that are struggling under a heavy burden. Clearly, the Torah is teaching us how much care and concern we must have not only for our fellow Jews, but for their property as well.

Yet the Torah communicates these laws to us in an unusual manner; in both the case of returning a lost object and helping a struggling animal, the Torah states that you shall not hide from this obligation. Rashi (22:1) explains that hiding refers to "concealing the eye, as if he doesn't see it." This means that there is a prohibition against ignoring your friends lost object or the fact that his animal is struggling under a heavy burden.

Yet the Torah teaches us this prohibition in an odd manner: Instead of focusing on the requirement of the situation, the Torah focuses on one's act of pretending he doesn't see the situation. Surely, the Torah could have simply said, "you cannot ignore the needs of your friend." Why does the Torah teach us this prohibition in such a poetic manner as "you cannot hide yourself"?

The Gemara (*Yevamos* 79a) quotes Dovid Hamelech as saying that the Jewish people have three distinguishing

character traits: They are 1) compassionate 2) bashful and 3) do acts of kindness. In fact, Rava says, that anyone who has those three identifying marks you will know is from the children of Avraham Avinu. In other words, these character traits are part of the spiritual DNA of the Jewish people.

We have such an instinct for *chesed* that the only way we could ignore the plight of our fellow Jew is by pretending not to see it. For this reason, the Torah phrases the prohibition as "you shall not hide." The Torah is telling us that we must be true to ourselves, and not construct a false sense of reality, though it may be more convenient.

This message is relevant in all aspects of our lives, whether it be professional or personal, and particularly as we enter a period of self-reflection in preparation for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

After all, the first step in effecting positive change within ourselves is to identify behaviors that need improvement. Here, the Torah is teaching us that we must stop deluding ourselves ("you shall not hide") in order to justify what we want to do (ignoring someone else's misfortune). Only when we are honest with ourselves can we truly have an honest relationship with the Almighty.



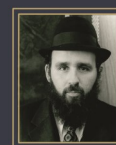
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Family Interest

You shall not lend upon interest to your brother [...] to a stranger you may lend upon interest; but to your brother you shall not lend upon interest (23:20-21).

This week's *parsha* contains the prohibition against lending money with interest to another Jew. It is prohibited to charge interest or pay interest to another Jew. Yet, at the same time, the Torah makes it very clear that it is permissible to lend money to non-Jews and charge them interest. In fact, Maimonides (*Yad—Malveh Veloveh* 5:1) rules that it is a positive commandment to charge non-Jews interest. This dichotomy in lending practices has often been used as a pretext to attack Jews all over the world during the last two millennia.

In truth, the laws against charging interest and paying interest require a deeper understanding. As an example: Reuven needs money to pay for his daughter's wedding, and he happens to know that his friend Shimon has a lot of money sitting in the bank earning 2% interest. Reuven wants to borrow some of that money but he feels very uncomfortable asking Shimon, especially knowing that Shimon would be losing that 2% interest that the

bank is paying him. Reuven also realizes that he is already asking for a big favor because he knows that Shimon is taking a bigger risk by withdrawing it from the bank and lending it to him. Moreover, by Shimon lending Reuven the money and thereby losing his 2% earned interest, Reuven now feels like a charity case.

In reality, Reuven would MUCH prefer to pay interest so that he isn't uncomfortable asking Shimon for the loan and isn't made to feel like he is receiving charity; so why should Reuven not be allowed to pay interest?

The answer is that the Torah is teaching us that paying interest between two Jews isn't appropriate. Why not?

Let's say that a person's mother needed money; would a healthy person charge their own mother interest? Or their son, or their brother? Of course not. Functional families are devoted to each other even at a cost. Moreover, a son asking his parents for a loan doesn't feel like he is receiving

charity by not paying interest. The Torah is teaching us that the reason you aren't allowed to charge interest isn't because one shouldn't take advantage of another; the reason is because one Jew is obligated to treat another as family. This is why the Torah characterizes the borrower as family (23:20-21), "You shall not lend upon interest to your brother; [...] to a stranger you may lend upon interest; but to your brother you shall not lend upon interest."

This also explains why it is not only okay to charge non-Jews interest but actually a *mitzvah* to do so. We need to internalize that they aren't our family. Obviously, we shouldn't charge exorbitant interest, just something reasonable that they are happy to accept. Non-Jews understand that they aren't family and they, in fact, are more comfortable asking for a loan and paying interest because otherwise it would be like receiving charity.

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