



A Taste of Torah

Hear Ye, Hear Ye!

Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Someone wakes up one day to discover that his car is not parked where he left it. After checking with his wife and kids, who all deny touching the car (the kids are especially vehement in their denial), the poor guy reports the car stolen. A few hours later, the police contact him and report that the car had been appropriated for a joy ride. The car has been found, the perpetrator apprehended, but there's one slight hitch: the joy ride ended with a collision. The car is totaled. The thief, a jobless drunk, has no money. Sorry.

What would you say to this unfortunate scenario? Lock him up for a decade? That won't help pay for the car, will it? The Torah, though, has a unique solution for this situation: Sell the criminal as a slave for six years, and the money from the sale will be used to pay for the theft.

But wait, the story doesn't end there. At the close of the six years, the slave is entitled to go free. If he wishes to remain with his master, he may do so. However, the Torah states that his ear must be bored, and he remains a slave until the Yovel (Jubilee) Year. Why is his ear bored? Our Sages explain that the same ear that heard at Sinai, "Though shall not steal", but failed to heed that warning, shall now have a hole put through it (see Rashi 21:6).

This explanation is very difficult to understand; if the ear is being bored because of the theft, it ought to have been bored when he was sold initially for the theft. Yet nothing was done at that point, and the ear is bored only if the thief chooses to remain with his master.

Let's examine, for a moment, why the Torah commands the court to sell a thief as a slave. Why not just find him a job and garnish his wages? Or find a long-term position that will insure that the debt created by the theft is paid? Why slavery?

Being a slave, in the Torah's terms, is a means of rehabilitation. This individual committed

an act of theft; he needs to learn how to live a different lifestyle. The Beis Din (Jewish Court of Law) looks for a refined, upright individual who will buy the criminal, and, during the course of the six years of servitude, he will learn and absorb the proper approach to life.

At the close of the six years, the slave should now be ready to return to normal Jewish society. Yet here we have someone who wishes to remain with his master! Essentially, he is saying that he has not yet achieved a level where he can live independently as a fully committed Jew; his inclination towards theft is still an issue.

While a person can make an occasional mistake and steal, the fact that this individual still has this tendency indicates that it is part of his persona, and not mere happenstance. A one-time error isn't indicative of a pervasive failure to internalize the commandments of Sinai, but if six years of living as part of a household of fully observant Jews fails to cure the thief of his problem, a deeper problem surfaces; this person failed to "hear" G-d's commandment at Sinai.

Virtually everyone trips up from time to time, but we stand up again and continue to grow. Sometimes, though, we recognize a deeper problem, we realize that we possess a flaw in our character. It is these flaws that require the bulk of our attention; it is these flaws that we are responsible to reign in and attempt to rectify during our time in this world.

Stories For The Soul

Do Unto Others

A woman was walking down the street when she witnessed a mother berating her young daughter in a brutal manner. The girl cringed, and you could see the terror on her face.

The woman approached the mother and said with sincere concern and respect, "I can see that you care about your child, and it's obvious that she has done things to make you angry. I also have children and sometimes lose my temper. I have some ideas that have helped me. Perhaps my experiences can be helpful for you also."

Amazingly, the mother, who just moments ago seemed to be an evil person, calmed down and replied, "I feel at a total loss. I hate losing my temper. But I do it over and over again. I would love it if you could give me some tips."

Indeed, the frustrated mother, with a little help from friends, became a more fair and effective parent.

A man once asked Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot.

Hillel answered, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your friend. The rest is explanation. Go learn."

Parshas Mishpatim, and indeed the entire Torah, teaches us many detailed laws. The great sage Hillel is teaching us that if we appreciate another person's point of view with compassion and understanding, we will not come to commit any of these prohibitions in the first place.

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Kollel Happenings

14TH ANNUAL BENEFIT EVENT
TO BE HELD MARCH 20, 2012

Please join us for the Kollel's 14th Benefit Event on Tuesday, March 20, 2012 at 7 p.m. at District 475. Event Chairs: Shlomo Fried, Jay Kamlet, Harvey and Stephanie Milzer, Rich and Rochelle Sokol. The theme of the event is "Heartbeat of our Nation" and will include an original musical experience composed and Presented by the Kollel. Special guest speaker: Rabbi Yechiel Spero, author of the 'Touched by a Story' series. The event will feature "Wrap and Roll", A Creative Selection of Sides and Sushi.



WEST SIDE NIGHT SEDER AT THE KOLLEL

Join the West Side community for vibrant Torah learning at the Kollel. Sunday- Thursday, except Wednesday, learning from 8-9 p.m., followed by Ma'ariv. For chavrusas or other information, contact Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher at rmf@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855.



KNOW THY ENEMY TUES. AT AISH

Join Kollel Dean Rabbi Shachne Sommers in studying the tactics and strategies of the Yetzer Hora, and develop your own battle plan for the greatest challenge of your life - the war against the Evil Inclination. Based on the classic work Chovos Halvevos. Tuesday mornings 7:55-8:25 at Aish. For information, please contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at rmh@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855.

Interpersonal Issues Returning Lost Objects

When an item is discovered in a semi-safe location, neither protected nor totally unprotected, the halacha is as follows: if the item has a siman (identifying feature, or it is in an identifiable location), then it is treated

as a lost object and should not be left there. If it has no siman, it should be left where it is.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi Sum-Buddies

Avi Ziskind from South Africa wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

When the Torah records the counting of the Jewish People, it rounds off the numbers to the nearest 50. I find this hard to understand. If one of the purposes of the counting is for Hashem to show His love for each individual Jew, like a king who counts and recounts his precious jewels, how can the Torah round off the numbers just for "neatness" as it seems to be doing, seemingly disregarding the exact number of people, and rather giving us a general idea?

Mel Friedman from San Antonio, Texas wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

There is a census taken at the beginning and end of Bamidbar. The confusing part for me is why are all the numbers apparently rounded to the nearest hundred?

Dear Avi Ziskind and Mel Friedman,

When the Torah lists the number of people in each of the 12 tribes in Parshat Bamidbar, each number is a multiple of either 50 or 100. There are differing views regarding whether or not these numbers are exact. One view is that the

Torah rounded off the numbers. This isn't surprising considering that the Torah does this in other places as well. For example, the Torah says to "Count 50 days" between Pesach and Shavuot, when in reality there are only 49.

Counting the nation benefited the community and the individual. When the individual passed before Moshe and Aharon, Moshe and Aharon would bless the person and pray for him. This itself was a tremendous benefit for the person. Furthermore, each person was counted via his own half-shekel donation, and this served as an atonement for him. These individual benefits were in no way diminished by the fact that the Torah reports rounded numbers.

The communal benefit of the counting was similar to the benefit of any census, which helps the leaders decide how to best serve the needs of the community and tells how many people are available for military service. This was important for the Jewish People who were preparing for war against the Canaanites, and therefore needed to know their own military might. In this sense, round numbers suffice.

Sources:

Sefer HaParshios, Eliyahu KiTov
Bamidbar p. 33
Ramban 1:45

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