**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT KI TETZE**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

One of the numerous laws presented in Parashat Ki-Teitzei is the prohibition commonly known as *shikhecha*, which forbids one from returning to collect harvested sheaves of grain that were forgotten in the field. These forgotten bundles of grain must be left for the needy (24:19).

In defining the precise parameters of this command, the Mishna in Masekhet Pei’a (6:4) addresses the case of a person who begins collecting sheaves from the beginning of every row in the field. The Mishna establishes that the sheaves which were left on the ground after the farmer passed by them qualify as *shikhecha*, whereas the sheaves in front of him, which he did not yet pass by, may still be collected. Meaning, even if the farmer left a bundle of sheaves on the ground at the end of the row, and moved on to a different row, that bundle is not considered *shikhecha*, since he never passed by that area, and may very well still intend to go there and collect it. Bundles are considered *shikhecha* and thus left for the poor only after the farmer collecting the bundles passed by them without collecting them.

Rav Yehuda Leib Ginsburg, in his *Mussar Ha-mishna*, suggests explaining on the basis of this *halakha* the “*Hadran*” proclamation customarily made after completing the study of a *masekhet* (tractate of the Talmud). In this proclamation, we declare our intention to return to the *masekhet*, emphasizing that although we are now moving on to a different tractate, we are committed to returning to the recently-completed *masekhet* to review it and study it in greater depth. Rav Ginsburg explains that whenever we learn, we understand and accept the likelihood that we will forget a great deal of the material we study – despite *Chazal*’s stern warning in *Pirkei Avot* (3:8) about the gravity of forgetting Torah knowledge. The solution to this problem, Rav Ginsburg suggests, is found in this Mishna in Masekhet Pei’a. Since we sincerely and fully intend to return to the *masekhet* we just completed, the forgotten material is not considered “*shikhecha*” – truly “forgotten.” It resembles the bundles which the farmer had not yet passed, which, though temporarily neglected, cannot be said to have been actually “forgotten,” since the farmer still intends to pass by that area. By the same token, material that we have learned and then forgotten is not truly deemed “forgotten,” since we have plans to return to that area of study and review it. As long as this is our sincere intention, we are not considered to have actually “forgotten” material which we no longer remember.

Sunday

The command of *shikhecha*, which the Torah presents in Parashat Ki-Teitzei (24:19), requires leaving for the poor agricultural produce that was forgotten in the field during the collection of harvested produce. In discussing the application of this law to fruit trees, the Mishna in Masekhet Pei’a (7:2) describes the case of rows of olive trees that are separated by rectangular-shaped arrangements of plants. The Mishna states that if the farmer forgot to collect the olives of middle tree in the middle row, that tree does not qualify as *shikhecha*, and it is permissible to return to it and collect its olives. Most commentators (including Rash Mi-Shantz and *Tiferet Yisrael*) explain this ruling as an example of the law established in the previous Mishna that a tree situated in a unique location does not become *shikhecha*. Due to its special stature of importance, such a tree cannot be considered to have been “forgotten” even if it was passed by when the orchard’s fruits were collected. Accordingly, the middle tree in the arrangement described above is not subject to *shikhecha* due to its unique location, situated right in the middle of a special formation of trees.

The Rambam, however, explains this *halakha* differently, explaining that this tree is not considered “forgotten” since it was missed only because it was concealed. The *shikhecha* requirement applies to readily accessible produce that was, for whatever reason, overlooked during the collection. In this instance, however, the olive tree was concealed by the surrounding vegetation, and thus its fruit was simply never seen, and not overlooked.

Rav Yehuda Leib Ginsburg, in his *Mussar Ha-mishna*, suggests that this *halakha* perhaps symbolically expresses the common phenomenon of people who seem “forgotten” because they are overshadowed by others. Many remarkable, accomplished individuals fail to receive the recognition and respect they rightfully deserve as a result of their being “concealed” by others in their fields who, for whatever reason, are more visible and noticeable. As in the case of the hidden olive tree, these individuals are no less important or accomplished than others, and they are “forgotten” only because of their “concealment.” This *halakha*, then, reminds us that public recognition is not a yardstick by which anyone can measure his or her worth, or the significance of his or her achievements. The fact that somebody is not widely known, recognized or respected in no way undermines the extent of that person’s importance and greatness, or the extent to which such a person should be admired by those who know him or her – including that individual himself or herself.

Monday

The Torah in Parashat Ki-Teitzei (23:19) introduces the prohibition of *etnan zona*, which forbids offering as a sacrifice an animal that was used as payment for prostitution, calling such an offering an “abomination to the Lord your God.” Intuitively, of course, the reason for this prohibition would seemingly lie in the inappropriate association between the sanctity of the *Beit Ha-mikdash* and the sinfulness of harlotry. The Ramban, however, offers a different explanation for this law. He writes that it was common for prostitutes to use a percentage of their earnings for sacred purposes, figuring they could thereby atone for their immoral lifestyle. Accepting these animals as sacrifices, the Ramban writes, would encourage harlots to continue practicing their ignoble profession under the delusion of achieving atonement through sacrifices. The Torah therefore forbade the use of these animals as sacrificial offerings.

Rav Chaim Elazary, in his *Mesilot Chayim*, notes that conceivably, the Ramban’s theory should warrant expanding this rule beyond the narrow context of prostitution. The conclusion we might reach in light of the Ramban’s comments is that charitable donations, such as contributions to synagogues and Torah institutions, should not be accepted from unrepentant sinners who think they can achieve atonement through their charity. Like the women described by the Ramban, these people make their contribution in place of repentance. Instead of resolving to change their conduct, they delude themselves into thinking they can offset their wrongdoing by donating to an important charitable cause. Conceivably, then, according to the Ramban’s understanding of the *etnan zona* prohibition, it would be inappropriate to accept donations from such people. (It should be clarified that this refers only to donations made with the specific intent of atoning for conduct which the donor has no intention at all of changing.)

Regardless of whether or not this actually the case, the Ramban’s comments serve as an important reminder – one which is especially relevant during the month of Elul – regarding the nature of repentance. There is no shortcut to the process of growth and change. *Teshuva* requires making real changes in one’s life, not ceremonial gestures that one hopes can magically negate guilt and culpability for wrongdoing. It is about identifying bad habits that need to be reversed, or behaviors that must be avoided in the future, and working to achieve these goals. God has no interest in our “sacrifices” if they are not accompanied by a sincere desire and attempt to change our behavior. Repentance requires a genuine quest for improvement, and cannot be substituted by simple gestures.

Tuesday

The Torah in Parashat Ki-Teitzei (22:5) introduces the prohibition against cross dressing, forbidding a man from wearing women’s clothing, and vice-versa. The *Sefer Ha-chinukh* (542), based on the Rambam, offers two reasons for this prohibition, explaining firstly that it is intended to help prevent sexual immorality. Dressing like members of the opposite gender would likely result in excessive interaction and mingling with members of the opposite gender, which could then lead to forbidden relationships. This reason likely reflects the view among the *Tanna’im* cited by the Gemara in Masekhet Nazir (29) defining the prohibition as dressing like members of the opposite gender and then proceeding to inappropriately mingle with them. The *Chinukh* then adds that cross dressing was practiced by the ancient pagans, and the Torah therefore forbade such conduct as part of its effort to keep *Am Yisrael* away from pagan mores.

An additional perspective on this law may be gleaned from a Chassidic reading of this verse by Rav Yaakov Yosef of Polonne, in his *Toldot Yaakov Yosef*. He finds in this prohibition an allusion to the dangers of embracing a lifestyle and mode of conduct that is not appropriate for us at our current level. The *Toldot Yaakov Yosef* suggests that just as a man – a member of the gender which generally has greater physical strength – may not dress as a woman, and vice-versa, similarly, those with great spiritual “strength” should not act like those of lesser spiritual “strength,” and vice-versa. Each person, he explains, should act in a manner appropriate for those of his or her stature. People of distinction must conduct themselves with a special level of dignity, refinement and piety, and those of lesser spiritual stature should not endeavor to live at an especially high standard of piety which is unsuitable for them.

According to the *Toldot Yaakov Yosef*, this prohibition conveys a broader message that we must not try to become somebody who we aren’t meant to be. Certainly, we must constantly aspire to grow and become greater than we are, however, our immediate goals and ambitions must be appropriate for our current standing. Our objective should be achieving the most we can under our current conditions and circumstances, rather than “dress” ourselves in the “attire” of those whose conduct is not, at least yet, suitable for us. When the Torah forbids men from dressing as women, and vice-versa, the broader message conveyed is that we must be the best version of ourselves, rather than try to be somebody who we cannot be at this point. Personal growth must be incremental, undertaken through modest, reasonable changes on a step-by-step basis, and in accordance with our current capabilities. The Torah here warns us against “dressing” in “attire” that is not appropriate for us, trying to be somebody who we are not – at least yet – capable of being.

Wednesday

Towards the beginning of Parashat Ki-Teitzei (21:15), the Torah addresses the case of a man with two sons from two different wives, and the older son is born by the wife whom he likes less. While the man might wish to grant birthright privileges to the younger son, whose mother he loves more, the Torah forbids him from doing so, commanding that the older son be granted the double portion to which firstborns are entitled.

Rav Eliezer Papo (author of the famous work *Pele Yoetz*), in his *Elef Ha-magein* Torah commentary, finds in this command a broader message relevant to religious life generally. Like the man with children from both a more preferred wife and a less preferred wife, to all of whom he has certain responsibilities, we all have in our lives obligations that we like more and those which we like less. Some religious responsibilities assigned to us by the Torah appeal to us more than others. And, like that father, we instinctively wish to grant priority to our “preferred” obligations, to those which we find more enjoyable, more convenient, or more intellectually or emotionally satisfying. We are naturally inclined to pay greater attention to these areas of Torah life than to those which we find more difficult, more tedious, or less gratifying. The Torah’s command to the father of these two children, Rav Papo writes, warns us against compromising our commitment to those aspects of religious observance which do not immediately appeal to us, which we find uninteresting or uninspiring. Our devotion to Torah, and our determination to meet all the obligations it imposes upon us, must be unconditional, absolute and all-encompassing, and not subject to our personal whims and preferences.

Thursday

One of the laws presented in Parashat Ki-Teitzei is that of the *ben sorer u-moreh*, or “wayward son.” Startlingly, the Torah requires parents of a habitually disobedient youngster to bring him to the local court, who would put the youngster to death (21:21). The Gemara in Masekhet Sanhedrin (71a) famously comments that this law “never happened and will never happen in the future.” As the Gemara proceeds to note, the conditions that need to be met for this law to apply make a situation of *ben sorer u-moreh* all but impossible. Specifically, the Gemara mentions the requirement that the two parents look and sound alike, and are the same height – a condition which can hardly be imagined being met. The Gemara states that this law was nevertheless included in the Torah for the purpose of “*derosh ve-kabel sekhar*” – to offer us the opportunity to study it and thereby earn reward.

Some have suggested a deeper reading of the Gemara’s comment based on the Mishna’s famous remark (Sanhedrin 71b), cited by Rashi (to 21:18), that a *ben sorer u-moreh* is punished “*al sheim sofo*” – in anticipation of what he would otherwise become. As Rashi explains, a youngster who routinely commits the offenses that render him a *ben sorer u-moreh* is all but guaranteed to become a criminal as an adult. The Torah therefore determined that such a boy should be killed before this eventuality unfolds. It has been suggested that this understanding of the institution of *ben sorer u-moreh* lies at the heart of the Gemara’s assertion that such a situation never occurred and will never occur. Never, the Gemara teaches, will there ever be a sinner who has no hope of changing, who has fallen to such depths of depravity that a future of sin and criminal behavior is assured. The Torah depicts a prototype of a wayward youngster who is certain to continue his downward moral spiral without any possibility of reversing his course, but the Gemara clarifies that this depiction is purely hypothetical. In reality, there will never be an irredeemably bad sinner; nobody will ever be a *ben sorer u-moreh*, a person who has no hope of improving his conduct.

We might, however, ask, for what purpose did the Torah depict this hypothetical circumstance? If we are guaranteed to always have the ability to change and to raise ourselves from the abyss of sin, then what value is there in portraying the theoretical image of a somebody without this ability?

The answer, perhaps, is that the hypothetical model of the *ben sorer u-moreh* warns us of the difficulty involved in changing habits and modes of conduct. The fact that it is theoretically possible for somebody to fall into such depths of evil that he has no ability to recover shows us that behavior patterns are extremely difficult to reverse. While it is true that there never was or will be a *ben sorer u-moreh*, an individual so evil that he lost the power to change, there have been countless people who failed to utilize their power to change because of how hard the process is. The extreme, unrealistic case of the *ben sorer u-moreh* is perhaps intended to urge us all to develop proper habits and routines, and to avoid falling into habits that will be exceedingly difficult – though never impossible – to change later.

Friday

In the *haftara* read on Shabbat Parashat Ki-Teitzei, the prophet Yeshayahu (54:1) exclaims, “*Roni akara lo yalada*” – “Exult, O barren one, who has not borne [a child]!” As the commentators explain, Yeshayahu here likens Jerusalem’s condition after its inhabitants were exiled to that of an infertile woman who lives alone, without any children. Jerusalem should “exult,” Yeshayahu announces, because “*rabim benei shomeima mi-benei be’ula*” – the “children” that would one day fill the desolate city would be more numerous than the populations of other cities whose inhabitants flourish and prosper as she lay in ruins.

Rav Moshe Chaim Efrayim of Sudlikov (grandson of the Ba’al Shem Tov), in *Degel Machaneh Efrayim*, finds in this verse an allusion to the common phenomenon of seemingly ineffectual prayers. Very often, people who pray feel “barren,” seeing that their prayers produce no results. Like a couple trying unsuccessfully to bring a child into the world, people who pray desperately seek to produce a certain result, and when their goal is not achieved, they feel “barren.” According to this Chassidic reading of the verse, the prophet assures such people that “*rabim benei shomeima*,” that while their world seems “desolate,” bereft of the blessing for which they pray, in truth, their prayers have produced great results. No sincere prayer is ever wasted, and each and every one is valuable and productive, even if it does not yield the precise results which the worshipper desired.

In essence, the Rebbe of Sudlikov here draws a comparison between our seemingly unsuccessful spiritual efforts to the condition of exile. After the fall of Jerusalem, it seemed impossible to dream of the city again becoming a vibrant, bustling center of Jewish life. But Yeshayahu assured the people that their current state of desolation was temporary, and would eventually give way to a state of joy and prosperity. The Rebbe of Sudlikov teaches that we must approach our personal spiritual struggles with this same mindset of hope and optimism. While it may at times appear that our efforts are “desolate” and fruitless, they are in truth valuable and significant. Even if we do not see the results now, they bring us closer to the goal we seek to achieve. We should never feel discouraged by what we perceive as the futility of our efforts to grow and improve, and should instead trust and recognize that every bit of work invested is intrinsically precious and significant, and will, at some point and in some way, propel us forward, if only slightly, which is precisely what our objective ought to be.

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