**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT RE’EI**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The Torah in Parashat Re’ei (15:12) reiterates the requirement to release an indentured servant after six years of work, a command which appears already earlier, in Sefer Shemot (21:2). Here in Parashat Re’ei, the Torah adds the command of *ha’anaka*, which requires the master to give the servant generous gifts to help him begin his new life as a free man (15:13-14).

*Tanna De-bei Eliyahu* (22) notes the broader significance of this command, in light of the fact that the institution of *eved ivri* – indentured servitude – exists primarily for the benefit of thieves who stole, were caught, and are then unable to pay back the victim. The thief would sell himself as a slave in order to obtain the funds with which to repay what he had stolen. *Tanna De-bei Eliyahu* thus comments that if the Torah provides gifts to “the wicked who are sold on account of their theft…all the more so the supremely righteous, who fulfill the Almighty’s will each day.” If a thief receives generous gifts in reward for his six years of service to his master, then we cannot even imagine the rewards awaiting righteous individuals who faithfully serve the Creator each day throughout their lives.

The Tolna Rebbe added further insight into the fact that this *mitzva* requires bestowing gifts upon somebody who had been convicted for theft. He explained that the master is obligated to provide the servant with these gifts to compensate for the humiliation and shame the servant has suffered. Although he was found guilty of theft, the servant nevertheless deserves mercy and compassion on account of the disgrace he has endured, and for this he is granted special gifts. This *mitzva*, the Tolna Rebbe noted, thus teaches us the importance of showing sensitivity to the feelings of even the lowliest individuals, that even those who have committed serious offenses, for which they need to be severely punished, deserve a degree of compassion for the humiliation they experience.

The Tolna Rebbe went even further, advancing a bold, fascinating theory about the relationship between the *eved ivri* and his master. Numerous writers raised the question of why somebody would purchase a convicted criminal to be his servant. Wouldn’t people naturally be wary of bringing a thief into their homes, and trusting them to perform work for them? The Tolna Rebbe proposed a surprising answer to this question – that the one who is most likely to enlist the thief as his servant is the victim. If somebody lost a large amount of money due to theft, and the thief does not have the means of repaying, then, considering that people are not likely to want to purchase the thief as their servant, the victim’s best chance of retrieving what he lost lay in having the thief work for him. That way, at very least, he receives six years of service in lieu of payment. If so, the Tolna Rebbe observed, then the *ha’anaka* obligation becomes even more striking. After the servant works for his victim in lieu of repayment for the stolen goods, the master must shower the servant – the thief who stole from him – with lavish gifts. This is how far the Torah goes in emphasizing the importance of compassion and sensitivity even towards those who are guilty of serious offenses – one must show compassion and sensitivity even to the thief who stole from him, granting him gifts in consideration of the shame and humiliation he has suffered.

The Tolna Rebbe applied this lesson specifically to the area of education and child-rearing. Even a child who has acted wrongly and must be punished is entitled to compassion for the humiliation endured. The experience of punishment, even when it is deserved, causes great pain and embarrassment, and parents and educators must show consideration to these difficult feelings. Punishment must be accompanied by compassion, as all people – even when they act improperly – deserve sensitivity, and it is specifically through sensitivity that they can be motivated and led back to the path of proper conduct.

Sunday

Among the topics addressed in Parashat Re’ei is the case of a *meisit* – a person who attempts to lure others to worship idols, which the Torah considers a capital offense, punishable by execution. A number of writers understood this law as symbolic of the “*meisit*” within each and every one of us, our negative instincts and impulses that often “lure” us to sin. The Torah’s exceedingly harsh treatment of the *meisit* expresses the vigilance and determination with which we must respond to our inner “*meisit*.”

*Sefat Emet* explains in this vein the specific requirement that “*yadekha tiheyeh bo ba-rishona*” – that the one whom the *meisit* sought to lure should begin the execution process, and the others should then follow (13:10). Symbolically, *Sefat Emet* writes, this represents the fact that when we successfully resist the efforts of our inner *meisit*, and “fight back” against its attempts to lead us astray, we influence and inspire others to do the same. “*Yadekha tiheyeh bo ba-rishona*” – we must take the lead in opposing our negative tendencies and instincts – and then “*yad kol ha-am ba-acharona*” – we will serve as an example for other people to follow.

*Sefat Emet* here teaches that whether or not we realize it, our actions and decisions have an effect on other people. When we live with resolve and determination, making the right choices even when we are tempted not to, we not only avoid wrongdoing, but also have a positive impact upon our surroundings, inspiring people through our example of steadfast commitment to our principles. By contrast, if we are weak and undisciplined, easily distracted and attracted by the countless lures and temptations that we face each day, we inadvertently diminish from the strength and resolve of our peers. We bear responsibility for our conduct not only because of the intrinsic value of our good deeds and intrinsic harm of our sinful deeds, but also because of the influence we inevitably wield. We should never make the mistake of thinking that our actions matter only to ourselves, because in some way and on some level, our actions affect other people, and this itself is a reason to resolutely and determinedly resist the lures of the many different forms of the “*meisit*” that we confront.

Monday

The Torah in Parashat Re’ei presents the *mitzva* of *shemitat kesafim*, which requires canceling outstanding debts at the end of the *shemitta* year. In discussing this law, the Torah anticipates the natural reluctance of prospective lenders to grant loans as the *shemitta* year approaches, as they would, understandably, fear that the money would be lost. The Torah sternly admonishes prospective lenders not to harbor such thoughts, warning that if one denies a pauper’s request for a much-needed loan, “he will call out to the Lord about you, and you be guilty of sin” (15:9). Those with the ability to lend money are urged to generously grant loans to the needy even as the *shemitta* year approaches, and are promised great reward for these acts of kindness (15:10).

A creative reading of the Torah’s warning is offered by Rav Yaakov Tanenbaum, in his [*Shemen Afarsamon* commentary](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=35270&st=&pgnum=226). He notes Rashi’s comment to the opening verse of Sefer Vayikra, where Rashi asserts that the verb *k.r.a.* (“call”) is an expression of “*chiba*” – affection. When a person is described with this verb as calling out to another, it denotes feelings of warmth and fondness. If so, Rav Tanenbaum contends, then it seems difficult to understand why this word is used in reference to the pauper who was denied a loan and cries out to God, venting his grievance against a person who refused his request for help. Why would the broken, desperate pauper feel any feelings of love and affection as he expresses his anger towards those who refused to help him? Rav Tanenbaum answers this question by boldly asserting that the Torah speaks here of a righteous pauper who, despite his natural feelings of resentment towards the prospective lender, does not want that prospective lender to be punished on his account. He selflessly calls to God on behalf of the person who refused to help him, pleading that he not be punished for his cruelty. The Torah warns that despite the pauper’s prayers that the lender be forgiven, nevertheless, “*ve-haya bekha cheit*” – the lender deserves punishment for heartlessly refusing to help his impoverished fellow. Although the pauper piously forgives him and prays on his behalf, the person who denied his request will be held accountable.

This clever insight into the verse perhaps teaches that we must ensure to deal kindly and sensitively even with those people who easily forgive and tolerate wrongdoing. The fact that a person does not appear to be troubled by our behavior towards him or her – and may, in fact, not be troubled – does not absolve us of guilt for acting towards them in an inappropriate or inconsiderate manner.

The Rambam, in his well-known conclusion to *Hilkhot Tuma’t Tzara’at*, discusses the unique severity of *lashon ha-ra* – negative speech about other people – and points to the famous example of this sin found in the Torah: the *lashon ha-ra* spoken by Miriam about her brother, Moshe. Miriam was punished by being stricken with the *tzara’at* skin infection, despite several factors that seemingly mitigated the severity of her offense. The Rambam points to several mitigating factors, including the fact that Moshe was unaffected by what Miriam said. The Torah makes a point of informing us of Moshe’s unparalleled humility in the midst of the story of Miriam’s improper speech about him (Bamidbar 12:3), and the Rambam understood that this was mentioned to indicate that Moshe paid no attention whatsoever to the gossip spoken by Miriam. And yet, the Rambam writes, Miriam was severely punished for speaking inappropriately about her brother. Our responsibility to act properly towards other people is as much about refining our characters as it is about avoiding causing harm. We are to extend kindness and speak to and about people respectfully not only for their sake, but also for our own sake, as part of our lifelong process of developing a true Torah character.

Tuesday

We read in Parashat Re’ei (15:10) the command to lend money to a person in need, and the Torah’s stern warning against denying requests for such loans, even shortly before the *shemitta* year, when outstanding debts are cancelled. The Torah instructs, “*Naton titein lo*” – using the emphatic repetitive form of “*naton titein*.” Rashi explains that this repetitive form indicates that the command requires granting loans “even one hundred times,” meaning, as often as the pauper needs to borrow money and as long as one is in a position to lend. The Gemara in Masekhet Bava Metzia (31b) interprets “*naton titein*” to mean that one is required to lend money to the poor even if all he can afford is a *matana mu’etet* – a modest amount. One might have presumed that offering financial assistance to the needy constitutes a *mitzva* only if one is capable of providing a considerable sum that brings significant relief to the pauper’s state of poverty. The Torah therefore emphasized, “*Naton titein*,” alluding to the fact that any amount given to assist a needy individual fulfills the charity requirement, and the *mitzva* is not restricted to large sums.

Rav Shlomo Gantzfried (author of *Kitzur Shulchan Arukh*), in his *Apiryon*, suggested a different reading. Sometimes, he writes, giving is actually a means of receiving benefit. The Gemara in Masekhet Kiddushin (7a) establishes that in certain situations, a woman can be betrothed by giving a gift to the groom, if giving this gift brings her benefit. The halakhic act of betrothal is defined by a man giving something of value to the woman, and so if the man is a person of prominence, such that his acceptance of a gift brings benefit to the giver, then the woman can be betrothed through his acceptance of her gift. Since he does the woman a favor by accepting her gift, he can betroth her through that benefit. (See *Shulchan Aruch*, E.H. 27:9.) Rav Gantzfried thus suggests that the command of “*naton titein*” requires us to assist the poor even when this brings us no benefit. Often, charitable donations and acts of kindness bring a person respect and notoriety. People feel honored to grant assistance to prominent individuals and institutions, and people often receive honor and prestige through their charitable activities. The Torah command of “*naton titein*” obligates us to do what we can to alleviate the plight of those in need irrespective of whether we stand to benefit by providing this assistance. The idea of kindness is to do what is beneficial for our fellow, not what is beneficial for ourselves. And so the Torah emphasizes, “*naton titein*” – that we must give purely for the sake of giving, and not as a means of receiving benefit.

Significantly, the command of “*naton titein*” appears in the specific context of loans granted shortly before the *shemitta* year, such that the lender risks losing his money if the borrower is unable to repay before debts are annulled at the end of *shemitta*. When we do somebody a favor, we oftentimes anticipate the beneficiary’s indebtedness. Part of our motivation is for the beneficiary to feel grateful and express his appreciation and admiration for us. Our sincere desire to help is combined with a desire to earn the recipient’s respect and fondness. The command to lend even as the *shemitta* year approaches underscores the importance of giving and helping without expecting anything in return – not even the recipient’s debt of gratitude. Of course, beneficiaries of kindness should feel indebted to their benefactors, and are required to express gratitude. However, even if their indebtedness and expressions of gratitude are not forthcoming, we are nevertheless required and expected to help. Kindness must be performed as an act of giving, not with the intention of receiving, and so even when there will be no “debt” that will be repaid, we must be willing and happy to grant assistance to those who need it.

Wedensday

Parashat Re’ei concludes with the *mitzva* of *aliya le-regel*, which requires all males among *Benei Yisrael* to visit the *Beit Ha-mikdash* on Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. The Torah commands coming to the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, and warns against coming “emptyhanded,” without sacrifices (16:16). Accordingly, the Rambam includes in his listing of the Torah’s commands an affirmative command to appear before God in the Temple on these three occasions (*asei* 53), and a prohibition against appearing on these occasions without a sacrifice (*lo ta’aseh* 156).

In his *Mishneh Torah* (*Hilkhot Chagiga* 1:1), the Rambam seems to indicate that the affirmative command of *aliya le-regel* is inherently linked with the offering of sacrifices. He writes that one who appears in the Temple on one of these occasions without a sacrifice violates the prohibition of appearing “*reikam*” (emptyhanded) and also fails to fulfill the affirmative command of *aliya le-regel*. The simple understanding of the Rambam’s comments is that the command of *aliya le-regel* is defined not simply as appearing in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, but as appearing in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* with a sacrifice. Indeed, the Rambam writes explicitly in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* that this command requires “that a person journey to the Temple…and offer a burnt-offering when he goes there.” This would certainly appear to indicate that in the Rambam’s view, the definition of this command is to appear in the Temple with a sacrifice, and thus one who appears without a sacrifice not only violates the prohibition of appearing “emptyhanded,” but also does not fulfill the *mitzva* of *aliya le-regel*.

*Sefat Emet* (beginning of Masekhet Chagiga), however, understood the Rambam’s view differently. He suggested that although, in principle, the *mitzva* of *aliya le-regel* is not linked with the sacrifice, in practice, it cannot be fulfilled without a sacrifice. The reason, *Sefat Emet* explained, is because an act which violates a Torah prohibition cannot fulfill a *mitzva*. Since appearing in the *Mikdash* “emptyhanded” on the festival violates a Torah prohibition, it cannot fulfill the *mitzva* of *aliya le-regel*. Therefore, although the obligation of *aliya le-regel* does not, inherently, require bringing a sacrifice, practically speaking, there is no possibility of fulfilling the *mitzva* if one appears without a sacrifice, since this transgresses a prohibition.

Rav Asher Weiss (*Minchat Asher*, Parashat Re’ei) notes that these different perspectives become significant with respect to the situation of one who appears in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* on a festival during the nighttime hours. *Minchat Chinukh* (489) raises the question of whether one fulfills the obligation of *aliya le-regel* at night, when sacrifices cannot be offered. It would appear that this issue hinges on the question as to the relationship between the requirement to appear in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* and the festival offerings that are required. If the obligation is defined solely as appearing in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, then it stands to reason that one can fulfill this obligation even at night, when sacrifices cannot be offered. According to *Sefat Emet*’s understanding of the Rambam’s view, then, one can fulfill the *mitzva* at night, since there is no intrinsic connection between *aliya le-regel* and the offering of sacrifices, and this does not violate the prohibition of “*reikam*,” since there is no possibility of offering a sacrifice at night. However, if we accept the plain reading of the Rambam’s comments, that the *mitzva* of *aliya le-regel* is defined as a requirement to appear in the Temple with a sacrifice, then we would certainly conclude that one fulfills this *mitzva* only by visiting the *Mikdash* during the day, when sacrifices may be offered.

Thursday

Yesterday, we addressed the question concerning the obligatory *aliya re-regel* pilgrimage on Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot, whether or not it is inherently linked to the requirement to offer special holiday sacrifices on these occasions. The Rambam, in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* (*asei* 53), appears to indicate that the *aliya le-regel* obligation is defined as a requirement to appear in the Temple and offer a sacrifice. However, *Sefat Emet* (beginning of Maskehet Chagiga) proposed that the relationship between *aliya le-regel* and the obligatory holiday sacrifice might be purely incidental. Since the Torah in Parashat Re’ei (16:16) forbids appearing in the Temple on these occasions “*reikam*” (“emptyhanded”), without a sacrifice, one cannot fulfill the *mitzva* of *aliya le-regel* without a sacrifice, as an act which violates a Torah prohibition cannot fulfill a *mitzva*. In essence, the *mitzva* of *aliya le-regel* requires only visiting the *Mikdash*, but since there is a prohibition to visit the *Mikdash* on these occasions “emptyhanded,” one cannot fulfill a *mitzva* by visiting the Temple without a sacrifice.

Rav Asher Weiss (*Minchat Asher*, Parashat Re’ei) notes two possible sources for the first perspective, that the *aliya le-regel* obligation is inherently – and not just incidentally – linked to the festival sacrifice. The *Or Samei’ach* (*Hilkhot Chagiga* 1:1), as Rav Weiss cites, draws our attention to a passage in *Torat Kohanim* (Parashat Acharei-Mot) which compares the *mitzva* of *aliya le-regel* to the *kohen gadol*’s entry into the inner sanctum of the *Beit Ha-mikdash* on Yom Kippur. Just as all men are required to be present in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* on the three pilgrimage festivals, similarly, the *kohen gadol* is required to be present in the *kodesh ha-kodashim* – the inner chamber of the Temple – on Yom Kippur. Clearly, the *Or Samei’ach* writes, the *kohen gadol*’s obligation on Yom Kippur is to enter the inner sanctum for the purpose of performing the special atonement rituals there. It thus follows from the comparison drawn by *Torat Kohanim* that the *mitzva* of *aliya le-regel* is defined as an obligation to go to the *Mikdash* for the purpose of offering sacrifices – just as a *kohen gadol* is obligated on Yom Kippur to enter the *kodesh ha-kodashim* for the purpose of performing the special atonement rituals.

Rav Weiss notes also a different source – the Gemara’s ruling in Masekhet Chagiga (4a) that those who are unfit to enter the Temple grounds cannot send their holiday sacrifices through a messenger. Normally, a person who is *tamei* (ritually impure) and thus forbidden from entering the *Beit Ha-mikdash* is able to offer sacrifices by proxy, by sending the animal to the Temple for sacrificing with an appointed agent. In the case of the obligatory festival sacrifices, however, the Gemara establishes that only those who are able to personally come to the *Beit Ha-mikdash* on the festival bring the festival sacrifices. This *halakha* would certainly appear to reflect a close link between the *mitzva* of *aliya le-regel* and the obligation to offer sacrifices, such that the two are interdependent on one another. Rav Weiss speculates that the Rambam inferred from the Gemara’s discussion that just as there is no *mitzva* to offer sacrifices without making the pilgrimage to the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, likewise, making the pilgrimage does not fulfill any *mitzva* without the offering of the festival sacrifices. Once the Gemara establishes that the festival sacrifices do not fulfill a *mitzva* without visiting the Temple, it follows that the reverse is also true – one cannot fulfill a *mitzva* by visiting the Temple without offering sacrifices. And thus the Rambam concluded that the *mitzva* of *aliya le-regel* by definition requires bringing sacrifices, and not only appearing in the *Mikdash*.

Friday

The Torah in Parashat Re’ei (15:8) presents the *mitzva* of charity, commanding, “For you shall surely open your hand to your brother, the pauper…”

The Gaon of Vilna found it significant that the Torah formulates the command of charity by depicting the image of an opened hand. This image, the Gaon explained, refers not only to generosity, but also to recognizing the particular needs of the recipient. When a fist is clenched, all the fingers appear to be the same size. It is only when the hand opens, and the fingers are outstretched, that we discern the different size of each finger. The Gaon explains that this is the meaning of the command to “open your hand to your brother” – to recognize and appreciate the unique needs of each and every individual. The verse proceeds to instruct providing the pauper with “*dei machsoro asher yechsar lo*” – all that the pauper lacks. Rashi, based on the *Sifrei* and the Gemara (Ketubot 67b), famously comments that this requires providing the pauper even with luxuries and comforts to which he had grown accustomed before financial hardship set in. The example given is that of a wealthy nobleman who was accustomed to have a servant run before his chariot as a sign of honor, and then fell upon hard times. The *mitzva* of charity requires providing not only the fellow’s basic necessities, but even this luxury of a servant running in front of his chariot. And thus the Torah speaks of opening our hand – to emphasize that we must discern the unique size of every finger, the unique needs of every person, recognizing that all people are different, and that charity must not be approached as a “one-size-fits-all” undertaking.

The Gaon here teaches us that charity and kindness require not only selfless generosity, the desire to give of oneself, but also the humility and open-mindedness necessary to see what other people need. Charity means the ability to imagine ourselves in our fellow’s place, to recognize what is right and beneficial for him, given his unique character, his unique background, and his unique circumstances. It means understanding that people are like the five fingers on our hand – they are very different from one another, and need different forms of assistance. Generosity alone does not necessarily lead us to true kindness, as we might be willing to grant somebody the kind of assistance that we would want, but not the kind of assistance that is right for the individual in need. The Torah’s ideal of kindness is that we open our “hands” and appreciate the distinctiveness of each “finger,” that we recognize that no two people are alike, and that we try to help people in the manner that is best for them, even if we ourselves would want or need something different.

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