

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by **Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman** of the **New West End United Synagogue** in conjunction with **Shapell's/Darché Noam***

PARSHAT KI TETZEI

DVAR TORAH: CHEATERS AND LIARS

How does the finder of a lost object make sure he returns it to its rightful owner? In most cases the owner must mention a סימן, an identifying mark on the object that only the real owner would be able to know. But the Gemara (Bava Metzia 23b) also says that if a trustworthy person looks at a well-used object and tells the finder he is certain that it is his – the finder should return it. But who is considered trustworthy?

The same passage in the Gemara defines a trustworthy person (for this halachah) as a Torah sage who is so truthful that he only veers from speaking the absolute truth in three situations referred to as: מסכת, פוריא, ואושפיזא – someone who out of humility downplays how much he has learned; someone who avoids speaking 100% out of personal modesty; and someone who misrepresents how wonderful of a host someone was.

If we translate this into practical terms, it means that even if a learned or pious person approaches a finder and says with certainty that the found object is his – unless he holds to those extremely high standards of honesty the finder cannot return the object to him. To put it bluntly: despite his piety, learning, or even general upright character; unless he has high standards of honesty we suspect that he is taking an object that is not his.

Tacked on to that sugya (passage in the Gemara) is an aggadic anecdote. A group of people, including the great Amora Mar Zutra Chasida, were guests at a certain inn. Mysteriously, the innkeeper's silver goblet disappeared. Mar Zutra noticed that a certain student dried his hands on someone else's cloak. This lack of respect for another person's property aroused his suspicion.

When accosted, the young man admitted to stealing the goblet.

Perhaps the message of that anecdote is that subtle cracks in a person's character might indicate that there is a serious problem underneath the surface. All the student did was to dry his hands on someone else's cloak; and the minor liar might have told an innocuous untruth. But one who doesn't respect another's property might actually have stolen; one who tells seemingly innocuous lies might also lie to claim a lost object that he is not 100% sure is really his.

Heeding the Gemara's lesson might allow us to make an early diagnosis of some of our big inner problems. Like Mar Zutra observing that student drying his hands on his friend's cloak, we should be sound the alarm if we observe ourselves doing small acts that reflect a lack of respect to others' property. Similarly, tiny untruths should be a red light. But the converse is also true: this passage highlights the power of preserving high standards of honesty even in minute situations. Small acts of goodness reveal – and can cultivate – great inner goodness and even result in great acts of greatness.

SOURCE GUIDE: ONE MITZVAH DRAGS ALONG ANOTHER

The beginning of Parshat Ki Tetzei includes a string of mitzvot (commandments) that is quoted as the source of the principle, מצוה גוררת מצוה, one mitzvah leads to another. This source guide explores the mechanics of this principle. Why and how does one mitzvah lead to another?

A. A String of Mitzvot

Shortly after the beginning of our Parshah, the Torah presents a string of mitzvot:

<p>1. Devarim 22:6-12 (6) If a bird's nest chances before you on the road, on any tree, or on the ground, and [it contains] chicks or eggs, if the mother is sitting upon the chicks or upon the eggs, do not take the mother along with the children. (7) You must surely send away the mother, and [then] you may take the young for yourself, in order that it should be good for you, and you should lengthen your days. (8) When you build a new house, you should make a fence for your roof, so that you shall not cause blood [to be spilled] in your house, for someone will fall from it. (9) Do not sow your vineyard [together with] a mixed variety of species, lest the increase, even the seed that you sow and the yield of the vineyard [both] become forbidden. (10) Do not plow with an ox and a donkey together. (11) Do not wear a mixture of wool and linen together. (12) Make for yourself twisted threads on the four corners of your garment with which you cover yourself.</p>	<p>דברים כב:ו-יב (ו) כי יקרא קן צפור לפניה בדרך בכל עץ או על הארץ אפרחים או ביצים והאם רבצת על האפרחים או על הביצים לא תקח האם על הבנים. (ז) שלח תשלח את האם ואת הבנים תקח לך למען ייטב לך והארבת ימים. (ח) כי תבנה בית חדש ועשית מעקה לגגך ולא תשים דמים בביתך כי יפל הנפל ממנו. (ט) לא תזרע כרמך בלאים פן תקדש המלאה הזרע אשר תזרע ותבוואת הפרם. (י) לא תחרש בשור ובחמור יחדו. (יא) לא תלבש שעטנז צמר ופשתים יחדו. (יב) גדלים תעשה לך על ארבע כנפות פסותך אשר תכסה בה.</p>
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The order of these mitzvot seems arbitrary. The Torah moves from chasing away the mother bird to building a fence around the roof of a house. From there it shifts to prohibited combinations: sowing different species together; plowing with an ox and donkey; and wearing fabrics that combine linen and wool, shatnez. Then it jumps to tzitzit, the fringes on the corners of garments.

Rashi explains the progression:

<p>2. Rashi on Devarim 22:8 “When you build a new house” – If you fulfilled the mitzvah of sending away the mother bird from the nest, you will, in the end, be able to build a new house and fulfill the mitzvah of the fence around the roof. For a mitzvah leads to (literally, drags along) a mitzvah. You will reach [fulfilling the mitzvot connected with the] vineyard, field, and nice clothing. Therefore these parshiot (sections) were juxtaposed.</p>	<p>רש"י על דברים כב:ח "כי תבנה בית חדש" – אם קיימת מצות שלוח הקן סופך לבנות בית חדש ותקיים מצות מעקה. שמצוה גוררת מצוה ותגיע לכרם ושדה ולבגדים נאים. לכך נסמכו פרשיות הללו.</p>
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This principle – one mitzvah drags along another – appears in a Mishnah in Pirkei Avot:

<p>3. Avot 4:2 Ben Azai says: You should run to a light mitzvah [just as you do to a weighty one], and flee from a sin. For a mitzvah leads to a mitzvah and a sin leads to a sin. For the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah, and the reward of a sin is a sin.</p>	<p>אבות ד:ב בן עזאי אומר, הוי רץ למצוה קלה (כבתימורה), ובורח מן העברה. שמצוה גוררת מצוה, ועברה גוררת עברה. ושכר מצוה, מצוה. ושכר עברה, עברה.</p>
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B. Why One Mitzvah Drags Along Another

The Mishnah speaks of the principle of מצוה גוררת מצוה as an axiom describing how things work in the spiritual world. But why does it work? What are the mechanics of “one mitzvah drags along another”? The author of the Shem Mishmuel (Harav Shmuel Bornshtein, זצ"ל, the Sochotchover Rebbe, 1855-1926) offers the following explanation:

4. Shem Mishmuel – Shavuot – 5670 (1910)

Our sages said (Avot 4:2) that one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah, because even though different mitzvot are distinct acts; nevertheless, if one does a mitzvah with all of his might – that is, with the power of the soul, as the Zohar says, that the verse, “Do whatever is within your power” refers to a person’s soul – he thereby arouses the root of the mitzvah and its source, for the mitzvot are the 248 “limbs of the King,” and there they are all utterly united.

שם משמואל – שבועות – שנת תר"ע
אמרו ז"ל (אבות פ"ד) מצוה גוררת מצוה, דאף שהמצוות הן פעולות נפרדות זמ"ז, מ"מ אם עושה מצוה בכל כחו היינו שעושה בכח הנשמה – כמאמר הזוה"ק (ח"א קצ"ו ע"ב) כל אשר וגו' בכחך עשה כחך דא נשמת' דב"נ – ומעורר בזה שורש המצוה ומקורה, שהמצוות הן רמ"ח אברין דמלכא ושם הן כולן בתכלית היחוד.

The first step in the process is for a person to do a mitzvah with all of his or her soul. That “arouses the root of the mitzvah and its source.” But because all of the mitzvot are unified at their source, when a person does one mitzvah with all of his or her soul and activates its source, other mitzvot become available:

6. Shem Mishmuel – Shavuot – 5670 (1910)

Therefore one mitzvah has the power to drag all of them along with it. Subsequently (after doing the first mitzvah), all that is incumbent upon the person is to watch that his power does not get flawed or ruined.

שם משמואל – שבועות – שנת תר"ע
ע"כ יש בכח מצוה אחת לגרור אחרי' את הכל, והעשי' שמוטלת על האדם אח"כ היא רק לשמור אותו הכח שלא יתפגם ולא יתקלקל.

To sum it up, מצוה גוררת מצוה is a three-step process: 1. A person does a mitzvah with intensity. 2. This activates the mitzvah at its source. 3. This activates other mitzvot because, at their source, all mitzvot are united. 4. Other mitzvot become available the same person. His approach is in line with the following comment of the Maharal (Harav Yehudah Loewe, זצ"ל, 1525-1609) in his commentary on Pirkei Avot:

7. Maharal – Derech Chaim on Avot 4:2

This is the explanation of this concept, that a mitzvah leads to another mitzvah. This is because all 613 mitzvot are one thing ... Doing one mitzvah is the beginning of another also. Since all the mitzvot are one thing, and therefore one mitzvah drags another because anything that is one is indivisible. When he does a mitzvah, which is only a portion of a thing, this mitzvah drags along another until he does all the mitzvot – which are all one [complete] thing...

מהר"ל – דרך חיים על אבות ד:ב
ופירוש דבר זה מה שאמר שמצוה גוררת מצוה, וזה כי המצות שהם תרי"ג כלם הם דבר אחד ... שעשיית המצוה האחת היא התחלה לאחרת ג"כ, מאחר שכל המצות הם דבר אחד ולפיכך מצוה אחת גוררת אחרת כי כל דבר שהוא אחד אינו נחלק כלל, וכאשר הוא עושה מצוה שהוא חצי דבר המצוה הזאת גוררת האחרת עד שיעשה כל המצות שהם דבר אחד ...

Mitzvot are united, not just individual commands. They are likened to the 248 limbs of the one King. Any individual mitzvah is only a part of a whole, and will by definition draw others along with it. A person starts with one mitzvah, but eventually will find himself fully connected to Hashem through all of His mitzvot.

HOW CAN I FORGIVE? BY RABBI FYVEL SHUSTER

“If you say a chazan (cantor) is not a good baker, that’s lashon hara (evil speech). If you say a baker is not a good chazan, that’s lashon hara. But if you say a chazan is not a good chazan, or you say a baker is not a good baker that’s רציחה, that’s murder” (Harav Yisrael Salanter זצ"ל 1809-1883, founder of the Mussar Movement). I heard the following explanation from Harav Fishel Schachter, שליט"א.

There are two aspects to Rav Yisrael Salanter’s statement. One is that when you say that a baker is not a good baker you kill his professional life and thereby his parnassah (livelihood). But there is also a second meaning. The hurt you cause to the baker when you say he is not a good baker is fundamentally different than that which you cause by just telling him he is not a good chazan. Because he defines himself as a baker, when you denigrate him as a baker you murdered his identity.

People define themselves in all sorts of (often silly) ways: sometimes it is by their clothes; sometimes by their physique; sometimes by their cars; and sometimes it’s by their professions. If there’s something that a person is particularly proud of, cares about, defines himself by, and somebody hurts him in one of those areas – that hurt doesn’t go away easily. He will not be able to forgive, because the one who insulted him touched him בעצם, at the core of what he feels he is.

Yom Kippur – and all of the avodah (the spiritual work) we’re doing from the beginning of Elul until Yom Kippur – is aimed at reaching that level that the Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer (Chapter 45) describes as “standing like malachim (angels) before G-d.” A malach defines himself in very different terms than the way people define themselves. A malach doesn’t define himself by possessions, talents, or profession. A malach defines himself by his mission. He exists for his mission. He realizes he’s here for a purpose, and it is clear what that purpose is. He is involved in nothing else.

Am Yisrael is building themselves up towards Yom Kippur so at that transition point, Erev Yom Kippur, we will define ourselves like malachim. The whole process of teshuvah, the whole process of vidui, involves returning to ourselves, stripping off all other definitions and trying to say, “Who am I, really?”

Before Yom Kippur people often ask: “How can I forgive someone who wronged me? I know that I am supposed to forgive, but what if I don’t? I don’t feel it in my heart. I’m upset. He can come and ask me to forgive him; but – he hurt me; he insulted me; he bothered me; he damaged me. I know that if I was a good person I should be able to wipe it out, but my heart is not in my control.” How can a person forgive another who hurt him?

But Yom Kippur itself provides the answer. The Gemara (Yoma 87b) indicates that Erev Yom Kippur is an especially appropriate day to ask others for forgiveness. This is because on Yom Kippur we will stand like angels before G-d, defining ourselves purely by our mission. If we did the avodah leading towards Yom Kippur, by the time Erev Yom Kippur comes, we can view the hurtful comment we received as no worse than a baker being told that he is not a good chazzan. However they insulted us, they did not strike at how we truly define ourselves.

We have to start thinking now in Elul about being that person that we truly are, and asking how we define ourselves. Defining ourselves by our Divine missions enables us to truly forgive others who wronged us.

שבת שלום ומבורך

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v’Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples’ programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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