

א ביסל תורה!

The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

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כי תצא

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Seeking Refuge

By Avi Abbett

Midway through this week's פרשה, פרשת כי תצא, gives us a bunch of new מצוות spanning from agriculture to clothing to purity, but one מצוה catches the eye. "לֹא-תִסְגֵּיר עֶבֶד אֶל-אֲדֹנָיו אֲשֶׁר-יִנָּצַל אֵלֶיךָ מֵעַם" (דברים 15:12). "You shall not turn over to the master a slave who seeks refuge with you from that master" (דברים 15:12). We are given the מצוה of protecting runaway slaves trying to escape the cruelty of their masters. Is this מצוה talking about Jewish slaves, Jewish masters, neither? The פסוק doesn't seem to give a clear answer.

"עבד כנעני" gives us insight into what the פסוק is talking about. He says that even in the case of an "עבד כנעני" "a Canaanite slave" who escaped from a foreign country, with a Jewish master, must be protected. רש"י understands this to include everyone, it doesn't matter whether a Jew or not, the law to protect a slave who is escaping a cruel master applies to all.

אבן עזרא takes this even further. He adds that even when Israel is at war, in the land or out of it, an escaped slave who isn't Jewish and whose master is also not Jewish, is to be protected and not returned to his life of suffering. This man comes from another nation to be a part of בני ישראל and join in the glory of ה'. If a Jew turned him away and sent him back to where he came from it would be like the Jew is desecrating ה's name. This is why it says "לֹא תוֹנֶנּוּ" in the next פסוק, "You shall not wrong him", meaning in any way, whether it is sending him away from the camp or even back to his master.

The מצוה continues in the next פסוק. "עִמָּךְ יֵשֵׁב בְּקִרְבְּךָ בְּמִקְוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחָר בְּאַחַד שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּטוֹב לוֹ לֹא תוֹנֶנּוּ" (דברים 15:27). "They shall live with you in any place they may choose among the settlements in your midst, wherever they please; you must not ill-treat them" (דברים 15:27). We are not given the commandment just to keep them away from their master, but to go above and beyond sheltering them too, in any place they choose to be. They are escaping an old life to build something new, to make something more of themselves, and we can not do anything to prevent that.

The חזקוני adds on, explaining the what and the why. We are to give this person a chance not just to live freely but also to prosper, and to find opportunities in ארץ ישראל. The פסוק ends with the command to treat the freed slave fairly. If we're doing all this for him isn't that implied, why does it need to be explicitly said? The חזקוני responds by saying that this commandment goes along with how we should treat everyone who wants to enter our land and learn about who we are. No one should be treated any worse because of their status as a slave or even as someone outside of בני ישראל, we all have the chance to prosper and discover all that the land can provide for us.

The commandment of giving an escaped slave refuge can give us insight into how to live our lives even now when meeting people outside of our bubbles. No one should be treated any differently due to their backgrounds, jobs, or anything else. This does not only give insight but gives us a blueprint on how to live our lives.

מצוה גוררת מצוה, ועבירה גוררת עבירה

By Theo Fraenkel

You may have heard the phrase “מצוה גוררת מצוה, ועבירה גוררת עבירה”, “מצוה causes another מצוה and an עבירה causes another עבירה.” This phrase quoted in פרקי אבות in the name of ר' עזאי has its source in פרשה's this week.

רבה notices that the order of מצוות listed comes to teach us how the above idea is true. The first mitzvah listed is that of the אשת יפת תאר. When a Jew goes to war and sees a woman, he is allowed to marry her as long as he shaves her head, cuts her nails, and forces her to stay in his house for a month. Through this מצוה, ה' allows the marriage but also discourages the marriage through these steps. If this man does not follow these steps and marries the woman, the next mitzvah בן סורר ומורה deals with him. A בן סורר ומורה is a son who disobeys his parents' orders and therefore can be put to death. The idea here is that those who do not follow the rules of אשת יפת תאר cause themselves to be considered an unruly son. The next mitzvah is regarding how to deal with the body of someone put to death for their sins. This person started out by marrying someone he shouldn't and ended up being put to death.

Another important example of this principle is found in the mitzvah of שילוח הקן. A person who does שילוח הקן (sending away the mother bird), is rewarded by being able to build a new house. In building a new house he can fulfill the next מצוה, written next, by building a fence on the roof. On his newly acquired property, he can plant crops while avoiding the איסור of כלאים (planting two types of crops together). He can then harvest the crops and fulfill the next מצוה of not plowing with an ox and donkey together. With those plants, he can make a textile while avoiding the איסור of שעטנז and then add גדילים/ציצית to it.

From the idea of מצוה גוררת מצוה, ועבירה גוררת עבירה, we should realize the weight of all of our actions. Every time we choose to do something—whether good or bad—we are set on that path. This אלול we should all be זוכה to choose the right path and bring the שלמה גאולה.

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