

Snapshot Torah



GUIDE TO THE WEEKLY PARSHAH

ISSUE 18

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MISHPATIM

27th Shevat 5776

Kohen - First Aliya:

Chapter 21, verses 1 - 19.

- ✚ Bnai Yisrael receives the social laws from Moshe beginning with how Masters should treat their Jewish slaves and maidservants.
- ✚ A person who kidnaps or intentionally kills another will be put to death. However if the victim was killed unintentionally, the murderer is allowed to seek sanctuary in a city of refuge.
- ✚ The death penalty would be meted out to a child who either curses their parents or strikes them hard enough to make them bleed.

Levi - Second Aliya:

Chapter 21, verse 20 - Chapter 22, verse 3

- ✚ Someone who wounds another, but not fatally must compensate them for the injury caused as well as all of the financial losses sustained during their recovery. Including medical fees and lost income.
- ✚ Any slave that is hurt due to the negligence of their master, must be released.
- ✚ Any murderous ox who kills someone must be put to death. If the ox's owner was aware of his dangerous ox and was found guilty of not taking the necessary safety precautions he must pay the victim's family damages to the value of their loss. The laws relating in compensation for goring animals, and fines meted out for theft are also discussed.

Sh'lisi - Third Aliya:

Chapter 22, verses 4 - 26

- ✚ Damages and reimbursements relating to animals grazing on another person's field and any land or property destroyed by fire are related here.
- ✚ An unpaid custodian cannot be held liable for any loss of an object if they swear they were not negligent in any way; however if they are employed, they are held responsible and must reimburse the owner for the loss. They are also made to pay damages if an object gets broken or livestock in their care dies. Unless they make an oath, stating there was no way it could have been prevented.
- ✚ If a man seduces a single woman, then he must marry her or pay the woman's father 50 shekels if he doesn't agree with the marriage. Anyone caught practising the occult or performing idolatry must be killed.
- ✚ A person is prohibited to oppress a stranger or charge interest to his fellow for loans borrowed.

R'Vi'i - Fourth Aliya:

Chapter 22, verse 27 - Chapter 23, verse 5

- ✚ The prohibition of cursing anyone of authority over you, i.e. a judge or a king.
- ✚ Firstborn children, animals and all first produce harvested must be redeemed as they belong to Hashem.
- ✚ The rules of what you must do if you come across a stray or fallen animal is discussed next.

Chamishi - Fifth Aliya:

Chapter 23, verses 6 - 19

- ✚ The prohibition of taking bribes or favouring a poor person without sufficient evidence and giving false testimonies are mentioned here.
- ✚ The mitzvahs relating to Shmittah, Shabbat and the festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot are spoken about next along with the prohibition of consuming meat and milk products together.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya:

Chapter 23, verses 20 - 25

- ✚ Hashem instructs the nation to respect the authority of His Navi's (Prophets) and Rabbis.
- ✚ Hashem then promises to chase out the seven nations who currently inhabit the land of Israel and forewarns Bnai Yisrael in against making a treaty of peace with them.

Sh'vi'i - Seventh Aliya:

Chapter 23, verse 26 - Chapter 24, verse 18

- ✚ Hashem explains the means by which the seven nations will be chased out of Israel.
- ✚ The borders of Eretz Yisrael (The Land of Israel) are defined.
- ✚ Moshe builds an altar and offers up a Korban (sacrifice). Bnai Yisrael proclaim "Naaseh Vnishma (We will do and we will listen). Moshe is told by Hashem, to ascend Mount Sinai where he will remain for 40 days and nights learning torah, so he can teach Bnai Yisrael all the mitzvahs upon his return.

Haftorah –

YERMEYAHU (JEREMIAH) Chapter 34 verses 8 to 22 and Chapter 33 verses 25 & 26

OVERVIEW:

- ✚ Jerusalem is under siege by the Babylonians and is on the brink of defeat.
- ✚ King Tzidkeyahu (Zedekiah) proclaims that all slaves must be set free.
- ✚ At first the slaveholders comply, but they soon regret this and force them back.
- ✚ Yermeyahu (Jeremiah) sees this as a violation of the covenant made at Mount. Sinai and against the essence of creation.
- ✚ Hashem promises Yermeyahu that even though, Jerusalem will fall because of their actions. In the future, out of love for his people, he will personally assist them in reclaiming what's rightfully theirs.

GEMATRIA LINKED TO SEDRA:

- ✚ The numerical value of the words 'בסקילה הא זה' b'skelah ze hu (this one is stoned)' is 225
- ✚ In Torah law, a person found guilty of cursing ones' parents is given the death penalty. The phrase **אביו ומקלל** aviv umkalel (and he who curses his father.) In gematria also adds up to 225. Hinting that the death penalty issued for this crime is death by stoning.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION:

Imagine the scenario, you walk into your bank, asking them to loan you £700,000 without interest so you can buy a house. I'm pretty sure they would laugh at you and think you must be crazy. In your defence you could argue that The Torah specifically tells us that a Jew is forbidden to lend to another Jew on interest, even at the regular rate but this is not what the Torah is actually teaching us.

It goes without saying that if usury meant a person was taking advantage of desperate people by charging them exorbitant interest rates, then of course the Torah would forbid it; but regular interest is part of the economy process and there's nothing unfair about that, hence this type of interest would be allowed according to Jewish law. It's a fact that money can be invested in order to earn a profit, and therefore possession of that money over a period of time has a monetary value too. This means lending money without charging interest is like giving away money for free. The Torah views these types of loans as investments rather than a loan. Implying that the prohibition of charging interest would not apply in such a case. When a person buys property they are doing so in the hope that it will go up in value over the years, and usually it does. Therefore, the interest payments made to the bank are really dividends of the property's increased value.

There is no denying that the Torah does say that a Jew is forbidden to lend to another Jew on interest, even at the regular rate but the concept here is just as we are obligated to give charity and support to our poor brethren, we are obligated to give them free loans. The meaning of these verses are clear. Any basic act of human kindness should be done freely without demanding anything else in return. For the lender to take interest on such a loan would be to impoverish the borrower still further. A free loan is a charitable handout, but it preserves the dignity of the receiver more than a plain handout. Our sages can't stress enough the importance of doing chesed in a complete manner as possible, without lessening the effect of the kindness. Consequently, even though it is a great mitzvah to lend someone money, the lender must be extremely careful not to diminish the effect of his kindness by even pressurizing the borrower to pay back what is owed. Let alone charging interest on the amount borrowed.

We learn from the mitzvot relating to lending money that when a person is doing a chesed for his fellow it is essential that they strive to maximize the positive effect of their kindness and not let it be tainted in any way. This applies in many instances in our daily lives; very often a person is approached to do some kind of favor; he / she may agree to do it, but with a reluctance that makes the person in need feel uncomfortable about inconveniencing the person asked. Rather, the giver should strive to be as positive as possible about helping his / her friend. This greatly enhances the actual positive benefit at results, because, as well as being helped, the person in need is not made to feel guilty about their request. Similarly, when one gives to charity they can do it with a smile or with a sour face.

In order to do chesed properly we should strive to do it with a pure heart without malice. We have seen that the mitzvot with regard to money lending teaches us the importance of doing chesed in as complete a manner as possible. May we all merit to help others in the most effective way possible.

