

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Behar-Bechukotai

The Value of Life

After the hair-raising curses found in Parshat Bechukotai, the Torah discusses the laws of erechim, literally: monetary value. This refers to the advent of someone who vowed to give a monetary donation to the Temple, equivalent to his own or another person's Biblical monetary value. The order of the Torah's chapters and verses is highly significant and must always be understood and researched. What is the connection between the curses which Hashem offered to those who stray away from following His statutes and the laws of monetary value?

Answer

The commentators point out that the laws of one's value are stated immediately after the curses and rebuke of God in order to stress to us that one should not be disheartened by the curses and feel that he is not worth much. Each person is precious and valuable in the eyes of God. The curses are avoidable; God offers many more blessings for those who keep the Torah. The most important part to recognize is that God wants us to succeed and to see our own value.

Two Values

There are two types of monetary donations that one can give. 1) If one promised to give the "erech, set Biblical value" of an individual, then the donor opens the Chumash and gives the amount prescribed by the Torah based on age and gender. Every person fits into a specific category and the price is always the same for the entire spectrum of people in that category regardless of health, honor or standing. 2) If however, someone promised to give "damim, the monetary market value" of another person, then the price fluctuates based on age, strength, skills and any other factor that are specific to that person (Megillah 23b). What is the difference?



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Lesson

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt"l (1895-1986) explains that each person has two values, one value is from being a part of the Jewish Nation and the other is through his or her individual talents. The laws of erechim stress that each Jew is precious and given equal opportunity to greatness. If someone promised to give the erech, Torah value, of Moses at age 120 and that of another simple Jew who was also a 120 year old male, he would pay the same amount. Each Jew is precious. If someone promised to donate the damim, market value of Moses, that would be an entirely different amount than for any other Jewish person. The value would reflect Moshe's individual greatness. We each have a great value as members of the Jewish nation. We also have our own talents and greatness that only we alone have to share with the world.

Shabbat Shalom!

