

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Parshat Mishpatim

This week's parsha, Parshat Mishpatim, contains a plethora of mitzvot - 53 to be exact. Among these 53 are a lot of familiar mitzvot such as hashavat aveida (returning lost objects), being truthful, the prohibition against accepting bribes in judgment and a whole host of others. This dvar Torah will focus on the mitzvah of lending money to another. Through one seemingly insignificant word in the verse, an important lesson will emerge.

Verse 24 in chapter 22 states "אם כסף תלווה את עמי, את העני עמך, לא תהיה לו כנשה" The literal translation of this verse reads as follows: "If you will lend my nation money, the poor man among you, don't glorify yourself over him."

The Ohr Hachaim is puzzled by the word "if" אם.

Rashi tells us that this is one of the three places in the Torah where although the word "if" is used, it connotes something that is not optional. In other words, the verse should be read "When you lend my nation money... do not glorify yourself over them." The Ohr Hachaim wants to know why the Torah specifically uses the word "if" instead of simply saying "when"?

The Ohr Hachaim explains that this word comes to teach us that when a person is in a situation where they have a surplus of money, they have to recognize that that money is not theirs to waste. God has given it to them to lend out to others in need. This is why the verse continues by saying "Don't glorify yourself over him". There is no room for glorification when you realize that the money you are lending out was never really meant for you in the first place.

The Chofetz Chaim, in his book "Loving Kindness", stresses the importance of giving tzedakah with a smile. This concept applies when one loans out money as well. One should not view the borrower as a nuisance, rather as an opportunity to act as God's emissary. With this in mind he will give the money in a pleasant disposition.

Rashi comments on a verse in Deuteronomy (15:8), "Give and surely give." Rashi accounts for this repetitive language by telling us that the Torah is hinting that even if you gave someone money, you should continue to give that person time and time again (even 100 times!) until their needs are met. Additionally one should recognize that each act of lending is a fulfillment of this positive commandment in Parshat Mishpatim and that Hashem promises to reward the lender with heavenly blessing.



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R' Pesach Krohn tells a story that illustrates this concept well. He relates that when he was twenty-one years old, his father passed away and the financial responsibility of the family fell on his shoulders. Although he was a qualified mohel, not many people were interested in hiring a 21 year-old mohel and he was struggling to support everyone. One day, someone in shul approached him and handed him \$1,500. R Krohn was shocked and adamantly declined the money, "We're not poor and we don't need charity, but thank you," he responded. The man replied "This isn't charity, it's simply a loan. "Well then, when is it due?" asked Rav Krohn. "Whenever you are able to pay it back" was the answer. R Krohn accepted the loan and within a year later he was able to get back on his feet. He immediately rushed to the man to repay the loan however the man wouldn't take the money. He explained, "The \$1500 I gave you was given to me as a loan. When I went to repay it the benefactor told me that the way to repay it was to pass it on to someone in need. I gave it to you and now it's your job to pass it on to someone else who needs it." מי כעמך ישראל! Who is like Your nation, Israel!

May we merit to always be on the giving end and to be able to help our brothers in need.

Shabbat Shalom!

