



YOUNG ISRAEL OF GREAT NECK

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The Parsha in Practice

Don't Look the Other Way

"Just keep going" often seems like a sound piece of advice. Whether we are walking down the street and see some commotion or are driving and see flashing lights or a person stopped on the side, it's usually in the best interests of our time and focus to not get sidetracked. We tell ourselves "I'm sure it's nothing, they don't need me, and I can't be of help."



Is that what is expected of us? We read this week (Devarim 22:1-3):

לֹא-תִרְאֶה אֶת-שׂוֹר אֲחִיךָ אוֹ אֶת-שִׂיר נִדְחִים וְהִתְעַלַּמְתָּ מֵהֶם הֲשִׁב תְּשִׁיבָם לְאֲחִיךָ: וְאִם-לֹא קָרֹב אֲחִיךָ אֲלֶיךָ וְלֹא יָדַעְתָּ וְאִסַּפְתָּו אֶל-תּוֹךְ בֵּיתְךָ וְהָיָה עִמָּךְ עַד דָּרַשׁ אֲחִיךָ אֹתוֹ וְהִשְׁבַּתָּ לוֹ: וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְחִמְלֹו וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְשִׁמְלֹתָו וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכָל-אֲבֵדֹת אֲחִיךָ אֲשֶׁר-תִּאֲבֹד מִמֶּנּוּ וּמִצֵּאתָהּ לֹא תִנְכַּל לְהִתְעַלֵּם: (ס)

If you see your fellow's ox or sheep gone astray, do not ignore it; you must take it back to your fellow. If your fellow does not live near you or you do not know who he is, you shall bring it home and it shall remain with you until your fellow claims it; then you shall give it back to him. You shall do the same with his ass; you shall do the same with his garment; and so too shall you do with anything that your fellow loses and you find: you must not remain indifferent.

In this well-known section, we read of the mitzvah of Hashavat Aveida, the requirement that we return a lost object to its owner. These laws can be difficult to keep. Depending if there is identifying information on the item, a person might need to formally announce the find, or might even be required to hold onto it for an indeterminate amount of time.

While the requirement to return a lost object and track down the owner seems difficult enough, it is obvious from the Torah's description that that is only part of the obligation. This might seem obvious, but in addition to being responsible to RETURN an object, you are also responsible to FIND it.

One could have imagined that the laws of returning things would only apply to a person when the object finds you, say, if your neighbor's item blows or rolls onto their property, or you realize that someone forgot something in your home after a visit. The Torah goes further than that. It stresses that wherever we are, when we pass something that we recognize does not belong, we are required to respond. Stop the car, get out, pick up the item and deal with it. This is not easy. Especially if you are in a rush.

The Ibn Ezra notes how this section follows the section that deals with a soldier who goes out to war and homiletically suggests that the juxtaposition implies:

אפילו אתה יוצא למלחמה

even if you are going to war

You need to pay attention and stop what you're doing - even if you are going out to war! Even if I have a hundred other - extremely important - things on my mind, the Torah emphasizes: "לֹא תִוָּכַל לְהִתְעַלֵּם", do not remain indifferent" or literally: "do not remain blind to them."

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 73a) teaches that this premise of וְהִשְׁבַּתוּ לוֹ, "you shall return it to him" informs us about the general concern we are meant to have for others, and not just for their property. We are not only obligated to make them whole by returning their things, but are also asked to help a person if they are in medical, emotional or personal distress of any kind.

Again, this is well known, but what is less considered is that the focus of this section is as much on **noticing the problem** as it is on fixing it. When we are out and about, when we are speaking with others, and in spite of whether or not we are dealing with our own "wars," we must be scanning the world and the people around us for problems that might exist that we can assist with. We can never "keep our head down," or "look the other way" and pretend that we didn't see, or didn't hear, the plight of another. Instead, just as we must return their item to them, we similarly must restore them to where they need to be.

There are so many things we had taken for granted that have been upended in these past six months. Simple human contact, a warm embrace, and an unmasked smile have become more rare. Our ability to handle logistics like shopping, shul, or going to work has been altered significantly. To the extent that we ourselves have adapted to these changes, have we had the ability to scan for those who have not been so fortunate? Are there people in our orbit who have "lost" something that we might be able to "return?" Have we even looked?

Our parsha would have us remember that while returning the object might be part of the mitzvah, perhaps the greater focus should be on finding it in the first place.

Shabbat Shalom!

Shmuel Ismach