

Turning an Enemy into a Friend

This week's Torah portion, *Ki Teitzei*, contains 72 *mitzvot*, more than any other portion. The commandments cover everything from marital and family relations, care and concern for other living creatures and nature, business law, communal relations, and dealing with enemies.

With so many potential topics from which to choose, I'm drawn to one in particular:

א לֹא-תִרְאֶה אֶת-שׁוֹר אַחִיךָ אוֹ אֶת-שִׂי נִדְחִים וְהִתְעַלְמָתָּ מֵהֶם הַשֶּׁבַע
תְּשִׁיבָם לְאַחִיךָ: ב וְאִם-לֹא קָרֹב אַחִיךָ אֵלֶיךָ וְלֹא יָדַעְתָּ וְאִסְפָּתוּ אֶל-תּוֹךְ
בֵּיתְךָ וְהָיָה עִמָּךְ עַד דִּרְשׁ אַחִיךָ אֹתוֹ וְהִשְׁבֵּתוּ לוֹ: ג וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְחִמּוֹ
וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְשִׁמְלָתוֹ וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכָל-אֲבֹת אַחִיךָ אֲשֶׁר-תֵּאבֹד מִמֶּנּוּ
וּמִצָּאָתָה לֹא תִוְכַל לְהִתְעַלֵּם: ד לֹא-תִרְאֶה אֶת-חִמּוֹר אַחִיךָ אוֹ שׁוֹרוֹ
נִפְלִים בְּדֶרֶךְ וְהִתְעַלְמָתָּ מֵהֶם הֵקֵם תְּקִים עִמּוֹ:

Deuteronomy 22:1 *If you see someone's ox or sheep gone astray, do not ignore it; you must take it back to your fellow. ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ If you see your fellow's ass or ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it; you must help him raise it.*

The mitzvah instructs us to take special care to return a straying animal and return lost items to your neighbor. Actually, the Hebrew reads, “*hashev t'shivem l'achikha*, return the lost items to your brother.” This is in contrast with a very similar commandment that we read in the Book of Exodus:

ד כִּי תִפְגַּע שׁוֹר אִיבֶךָ אוֹ חִמּוֹ תִעָּה הַשֶּׁבַע תְּשִׁיבֵנּוּ לוֹ: ה כִּי-תִרְאֶה חִמּוֹר
שֹׁנֵאךָ רִבֵּץ תַּחַת מְשָׁאוֹ וְחִדְלָתָּ מֵעֲזֹב לוֹ עֲזַב תַּעֲזֹב עִמּוֹ:

Exodus 23:4-5 *When you encounter your enemy's ox or ass wandering, you must take it back. When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden and would consider forsaking it, you must nevertheless help raise it.*

Note that the passage in Exodus commands us to return and act sensitively to the animal of a person who happens to be “your enemy, *sona'akha*.”

Sages have commented on the fact that the earlier passage refers to how we deal with the property of our enemy, while the later portion deals with the property of our neighbor and friend. The explanation is that when we treat the one who is our “enemy” with kindness and sensitivity, they are turned from enemies into friends.

At the conclusion of this Shabbat we'll only be two weeks away from Rosh HaShanah and the New Year 5779. It is a time of reflection and preparing ourselves emotionally, spiritually, physically, and socially. We consider the experiences of the past year and can recall so many times in which we acted generously and sweetly with others. Some were friends, some were strangers. But there were others with whom we had cross words, tense encounters, and even angry outbursts. Those harsh moments can lay heavy upon us and harden into feelings of enmity that erode our well-being.

But a simple act of kindness: a thoughtful card, a sweet and genuine smile, and a gesture of willingness to let go of past grudges can turn a relationship around. Yes, I know that it "takes two to tango," and that an eagerness to let bygones be bygones may not be reciprocated. Indeed, there are those who we no longer feel safe around and are better off keeping our distance. Sure. But let's hope that those are the exceptions and not the rule.

May this Shabbat bring each of us a renewal of determination to heal, to reconcile, and to forgive.

Our service this Friday night (6pm) will feature special music with Cantor Nesis and Dan Yolles. I'll share a *Drash* on this Torah portion that deals with unfairness and doubt. Rabbi Susan will share a special passage from *Pirkei Avot*.

On Shabbat morning, our early minyan begins at 9am and will be in the Study.

At 10:30am, Janie and Thomas Landgraaf will lead the service in the Abrahams Family Chapel as they become *b'nei mitzvah*.

I hope to see you at services!

Shabbat Shalom!

Rick