



Parashat Mishpatim 5772 - #222

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On the Parashah...

"When you Lend Money" (Shemot 22:24)

Dispute over amount of money repaid

Question: I lent someone 400 shekels, and he brought me the money. I counted the money later and only counted 300 shekels. He insists that he gave me 400. What do I do?

Answer: We have a principle "One who wants to extract money from his fellow is obligated to bring proof." The person who to whom the money is due must prove that the other person owes him. If not, he loses out. You needed to create a way to count the money so that it would have been clear how much there was. Our Rabbis say that when you lend money, you should write a document specifying the details of repayment. By having this document, and referring to it when you received payment, you would have been saved from this current dispute. At this point, it is difficult to prove that you are owed anything.

Rav Aviner on...

I am a Convert (a true story)

[B-eAhavah U-Be-Emunah- Yitro 5772 – translated by R. Blumberg]

My name is Jonathan Israel. My wife and I were born in Korea. After searching in various directions, we decided in 1996 to visit Israel and to study Hebrew at the Bet Ha-Am Ulpan in Jerusalem. There we encountered an amazing sight: in one small classroom sat a cross-sampling of the entire world - immigrants from Russia, Poland, Brazil, Argentina, France and the U.S. There were light-skinned people and Asiatic people. I understood that all of these people were new immigrants, and slowly realized that this was no coincidence. We were witnessing the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu 3:14, "I will take you, one from a town and two from a clan, and bring you to Zion." I saw with my own eyes that the words of Scripture were being fulfilled. The ingathering of the exiles was not science fiction. It was not just some ideal longing. Rather, it was a real fact.

When I understood this, it made me tremble. I saw with my own eyes proof that G-d exists and rules over the universe. This made me want to subjugate myself to Him. I said, "I'm no longer so young, but I've still got half of my life ahead of me, maybe less, and I must decide what I am going to do with it."

I recalled Ruth, who had lived with Naomi in Moab. When Naomi decided to return to Eretz Yisrael, Ruth had to choose between two paths: Staying in Moab was the easy one. She would keep her old language, culture, food, family and friends. The second path, to Eretz Yisrael, was the hard one. In general, people look for the path that is convenient and pleasant. But Ruth chose the Land of Israel and the G-d of Israel. She understood that living within the Jewish People was a source of blessing, and that the truth would be found there. She therefore decided, "Your people are my people, and your G-d is my G-d" (Rut 1:16). If the G-d of Israel is the only G-d, then I too, must come on board with the Jewish People, like Ruth. If the G-d of Israel is the One and Only Master-of-the-Universe, then I have no choice. I must choose the right path.

We spent about thirteen years in Israel as tourists. We had no tomorrow, only today.

We had to leave the country once every three months because we were tourists. Obviously, we had a lot of expenses. We also dreaded being detained at the airport. The security services would interrogate us as though we were escaped convicts. One time my wife's visa had expired by one day, and that caused us no end of trouble. Every time, as we approached the airport, we felt terrible tension. For thirteen years, our situation was unstable. Everything was temporary. People didn't understand why I remained in Israel with so tenuous a status. They didn't understand me and they thought that I was not normal. But I knew that the truth resides only within the Jewish People. I understood that secret.

Our forefather Yaakov was born second and had to fight to earn Yitzchak's blessing, and in the end he changed his fate. It was the same with me. I was born a non-Jew, with a history very removed from that of the Jewish People. All the same, I wanted to receive a blessing like Yaakov did. Quite a while ago I changed my last name to "Israel". I wanted to be Yaakov, to be one of the people of Israel. I had no alternative.

I did what I could and I cried out to G-d. I rent my heart at the Western Wall for thirteen years. G-d performed a miracle for me, and at long last my dream was fulfilled. Thank G-d, I am now a Jew. Thank G-d who gave me a blessing. I belong to the Jewish People. Now I have a new family, a great many new families that are helping me.

I study the Torah several times a week. I am still an infant, and I know that I must learn a great many things. I must learn Judaism in depth, endlessly. I also must pray hard that G-d will help me, because there are people who do not like converts. The pathway I chose is not easy, but it is the only route to the blessing. I pray that G-d will help me to come closer to Him every day. My wife is very much loved by all, from adults to children. We wed twenty years ago and until now we have had no children, but we are very happy.

In Korea we were Christians. When I arrived in Israel, I switched directions to Judaism, and then we began to grow apart in our views and in our thinking. We didn't respect each other. We quarreled. The Christians claim that they believe in G-d, but actually, they are the religion of Jesus. For them, only someone who believes in Jesus will have a place in heaven, and everyone else has no chance at all to go there, regardless of how good you are as a person. Everyone else, without exception, will go to Hell. It was this that my wife feared. My wife's Christian friends strove to strengthen her in her belief in Jesus, and several friends also advised her to divorce me.

There was no harmony in our home, only tension and loneliness. When she went to Church, I remained home alone. I felt all alone in the world. After all, my wife was everything to me: my wife, a bit of a mother, a bit of a sister and a bit of a daughter. And suddenly we were apart. True, we lived in the same house, but our thoughts were entirely different. We were in the same bed, but the gap of faith distanced us. We only shared mundane words: "Did you eat yet? Was it good?" There was no warmth in our home. I didn't feel that I had a friend. One year went by like that, and then another, and several more years crept by. I could do nothing but wait. It was clear to me that one person cannot change another.

One time we approached a woman whose husband was the head of a yeshiva, and that woman warned us, "It would be tragic for you to undergo conversion without believing in it. Better to do nothing." My wife was shocked, and her heart closed up even more.

Several more years went by. She, for her part, didn't want to separate. She wanted to wait. I couldn't do a thing, but HaShem performed a miracle. Slowly my wife began to change, and

after ten years, she began to light Sabbath candles. When she began to study at Machon Ora [Machon Meir's study program for women], a great change transpired in her.

She came home happy from every class. She began to understand why I had waited for her for so many years. She greatly enjoyed the classes and she would explain to me what she had learned. Each day breathed new life into her, and she gained a sense of how important the woman and the family are in Judaism. In Korea, the men are the important ones. Sometimes they even beat their wives. There, a woman is nothing, just a baby machine. No one worries about women's welfare. If a husband decides to leave his wife, he divorces her without giving her a cent.

Judaism, by contrast, is another world. My wife felt very free. In Judaism, you don't force people to do things. If someone doesn't come to services, you don't demand that he give an accounting of himself. In Christianity, even someone ill has to go to Church on Sunday. There is no excuse for not showing up. If someone doesn't come, he is classed as lacking faith. Likewise, the Church forces people to donate money to it even if there isn't enough food at home. But Judaism says: First worry about your family. If you've got something to eat, then you can donate.

My wife understood that she was standing before G-d on her own. No one was forcing her to do anything. It was all between her and G-d. She began to realize how profound Judaism is, how many secrets are hidden in it, how marvelous a thing the family purity laws are. She understood that Jesus was not the Messiah, that certain conditions must be fulfilled for someone to be the Messiah: He must gather the dispersed Jews and fight against Israel's enemies. Jesus did not meet these conditions, and obviously he is not G-d.

When I ask her, "Do you have any regrets that you converted?" she answers, "If I hadn't been exposed to Judaism, I might regret converting, but having experienced the taste of another world, I can no longer stop mid-way..." and she adds, "Now, even if my husband leaves Judaism, I'm staying! I want it with all my soul!"

My wife goes to Torah classes four times a week. I thank G-d that she has changed entirely. My wife and I are very happy with our new lives and we thank G-d who helped us enter the pathway of truth of the Chosen People. I pray that He should help me to come closer and closer to Him.

Stories of Rabbenu — Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

Deficiencies in the State of Israel

Our Rabbi would speak out with great force against deficiencies in the State of Israel, but this did not limit his love towards it. When people claimed that Prime Minister Ben Gurion permitted raising pigs in Israel, our Rabbi responded: I don't want Ben Gurion's pigs, but I love the State of Israel of which Ben Gurion is the head (Iturei Yerushalayim #65).

Learning from the Secular

There was once a meeting on one of the secular kibbutzim between the kibbutzniks and some yeshivah students. One of the kibbutzniks asked what the "Religious" can learn from the "Secular." The students did not respond. When this was related to our Rabbi, he said: There is certainly what to learn from the "Secular": courage, self-sacrifice, settling the Land of Israel, etc. (Amnon Bardat from Ha-Rav Oded Valensky – Iturei Cohanim #57).

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