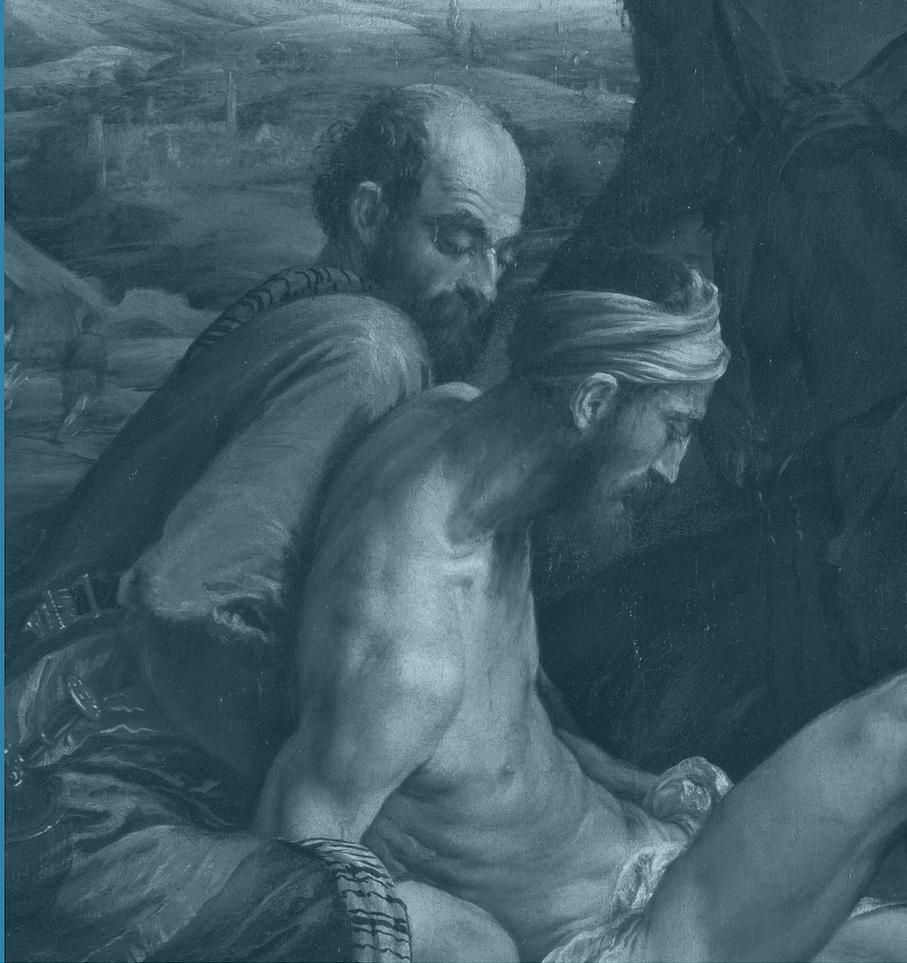


The Purpose of the Commandments

Parashat Ki Teitzei



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Shabbat Shalom. This parasha begins with a beautiful captive who becomes the wife of the captor, and ends with the command to erase Amalek. In the middle of the parasha, there is mention of the relationship between a man and his two wives, their sons, and the division of their communal property.

This parasha speaks of “hashavat aveidah” (“returning lost objects”), “tza'ar ba'alei chayim” (“the ban on causing animals unnecessary suffering”), “s'char va'onesh” (“reward and punishment”), and many other commandments, some of which are simple and understandable, and some of which are irrelevant and impractical today.

The Purpose of the Commandments

There is a long and undecided debate over the reason and the purpose for the commandments.

There are those who say that one should not seek the purpose of the commandment, but rather accept it as a commandment, from the mouth of

God, for God is all knowing and master of everything, and we humans do not know nor need to know everything.

We do not see the full picture. Perhaps one day it will all become clear and understood for us.

The mere fulfillment of the commandment is what indicates the depth of our faith and obedience to God, especially when the reason for the commandment is not understood by us.

On the other hand are those who seek to know the purpose of the commandments, for a number of reasons: to understand them, to fulfill them with joy, and to renew them (when the original validity of the commandment has expired).

This is a long discussion in which both sides have good points.

Finding the Spirit and the Intent of the Commandment

In my opinion, it is important to study the “spirit” of the commandment, so that we can properly implement the will of God. For example, in our weekly parasha we are reminded of the commandment of the nest:

“If you come across a bird’s nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young. You may take the young, but be sure to let the mother go, so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life.” – Deuteronomy 22:6,7 [NIV]

You can read the commandment, so that whenever you encounter a nest of birds, you must let the mother go and take the eggs.

And there are those looking for nests in order to fulfill this commandment, seeking to send away the mother, and take the eggs, even though these eggs are not edible.

But the reason for the commandment is to prevent cruelty towards animals. If we want the eggs to eat, we must not take them when the mother is there, for several reasons. First, in order not to endanger the species itself.

And the second is more important: that we do not have a cruel heart. That we would feel sorry for animals - let alone human beings.

Invalid and Outdated Commandments

In this week's parasha, there are several commandments that can even sound embarrassing today.

How can the Torah force the rapist to marry the person who was raped? Without asking the woman's opinion or taking into account her feelings?

It is clear that this commandment is no longer relevant today, not only is it irrelevant, but it is also considered a particularly cruel commandment (Deuteronomy 22:28).

Or another commandment in our parasha demands the execution of all the adulterers. If we were to fulfill this commandment, half of society today would find itself under a heap of stones (Deuteronomy 22:22).

From this we find that the Torah is not a fixed set of laws that cannot be changed. Reality is stronger than any commandment, there are commandments that are no longer valid and are actually nullified, unless they are revived by an intention that was concealed until now.

Take, for example, the commandment of the tithe (Numbers 18). The source of the commandment is intended for priest and Levites, who do not have an inheritance and in fact have no ability to make a living, and therefore the people of Israel are commanded to tithe.

Today we do not have the Temple or priests and Levites, and we have brought a new meaning to the commandment - today we bring a tithe to the house of God, be it the church, the synagogue, or the congregation.

Our Duty as Believers in Regards to the Commandments

The constant duty of the believer who wishes to fulfill the will of God is to examine the commandments in depth, and to examine the spirit of the commandments - what is correct for the period, and what is wrong for the period.

There are commandments that are directed towards the enlightened and moral side of man, and there are commandments that serve as a compromise with the darker sides of man, and our parasha moves between these two extremes.

On the one hand, for example, we have the obligation to converts, foreigners, widows, and orphans, to leave part of our crops and possessions to the unfortunate. There is a relationship of righteousness here.

On the other hand, we have commandments that concern family problems and problems of power and greed.

The Importance of the Convert and the Foreigner

One point that we should take into consideration is the multitude of mentions of the convert and the foreigner.

In the commandments of the Torah, we the people of Israel are forever those who came out of Egypt, and we must never forget what they did to us as slaves, as immigrants, and as the weak helpless.

It is clear that a person who helps the weak, the poor, and the lonely, who loves the convert, is at the top of the ladder of the commandments, whereas the bottom of the ladder of the commandments is in the mud, the greed, and the forcefulness of man.

And the ladder aspires to righteousness, to the very best, and it is clear that the person who loves the convert first and foremost loves those closest to him.

The love of the convert and the foreigner is one of the keys to preventing war and loving peace.

How to Find the Right Balance

A fairly common question is the question of how one knows the right way, how one finds the right balance between the ends of the same ladder.

“Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. This is how we know that we belong to the

truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence...” – 1
John 3:18,19 [NIV]

The sincere answer of the believer is love.

It is relatively easy for a person to love those who are close to him, it is harder to show love to others and strangers, but the person who succeeds in specializing in love, as if he is a master, is at the top of the ladder of the commandments. Indeed, in doing so he fulfills the purpose of the Torah.

The source of love is in God:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” – John 3:16 [NIV]

Paul the Apostle says rightly that when we act on love - that is, caring, forgiveness, patience, a desire to see good, a desire to help and support others - we fulfill the Torah. This is indeed the heart of the Torah.

“...for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.” – Romans 13:8b [NIV]

According to Yeshua, in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25), we are to help anyone we can who needs help.

Shabbat Shalom.

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