



The Returned theft and The Repentant Thief

Parshas Mishpatim

Leilui Neshmas Meira Chaya Nechama Bracha A"H

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The Migdal Ohr dorms were packed with visitors who had come to stay with us for the Pesach holiday. One of the yearly events at Migdal Ohr is hosting a mass Seder for those who wish to come closer to their Jewish heritage.

After the unforgettable event, many participants requested to register their children at our schools, and in this way many have come closer to their Jewish heritage.

One year, during the night of the last day of Pesach, an upsetting incident occurred: a thief took advantage of the fact that everyone was out of their rooms and crept in and stole anything he could put his hands on. In one moment all the participants became upset, expressing their grief over their loss and turning to me for guidance. I stood helpless. Police who were alerted arrived on the scene but found no clues, and some of the guests got up to leave.

I understood that if I did not stop them they would go back to homes that were not clean for Pesach, and may even eat Chametz on Pesach. I stood up and declared: "The thief will be found in the coming hours." How do you know? They inquired. I told them our Sages' teaching that that emissaries of Mitzvah, such as themselves, are not harmed. Hearing my decisive words, they decided to stay.

I lost no time and turned to the police again. I spent hours trying to learn about potential burglars. Thinking back, I remembered a thirteen-year old boy roaming around the campus. I met him on the way out. It now occurred to me that he was casing the place.

He was known to the police, but only as "a small fish," and therefore he was sent by someone else to collect the intelligence. I asked the police to approach the "dispatcher" myself before they got involved, and they agreed.

When the man saw me at his door he was startled but let me in. I asked him to raise a toast in honor of the holiday. He told me his Arak (alcoholic beverage) was locked away for Pesach. He boasted that he was very stringent when it came to observing the laws of Pesach.

In our weekly parsha we read: "And these are the laws that you shall set before them." Rashi explains: "Just as what has been previously stated, namely the Ten Commandments, were from Sinai, these too were from Sinai."

This notion is odd, as all commandments were given at Sinai. Why point this out?

Commentators separate the Torah's laws into three categories: Chukim – statutes; Edos - testimonies; Mishpatim – ordinance, as it is stated:

"These are the testimonies, statutes and ordinances, which Moshe spoke to the children of Israel when they went out of Egypt."

Chukim are commandments with no human logic behind them, such as the Red Heifer and the laws of purity. These commandments would not have been thought of if they would not have been decreed by G-d.



Edos are laws which are explained by the Torah and their value can be understood, such as Tefillin and Tzitzis which have educational significance.

Mishpatim are widely practiced laws, such as the prohibitions against murder and theft and the commandment to respect one's parents.

The Torah stresses that all three types of Mitzvos were given at Sinai, and all three are equally binding, whether we understand them or not. Our understanding is of no consequence to our observation of the Mitzvos.

Our Sages understood that one sins only if he is invaded by a spirit of foolishness. When one is possessed by foolishness he cannot rely in his mind and understanding, and therefore the Torah teaches us: rely only on Sinai.

I sat for a long time at the home of the criminal. I praised him for his observance of the Pesach Mitzvos. I then told him that Judaism always has room for anyone who wishes to admit he has erred. He understood what I was referring to and began to weep, confessing his crime.

I told him: "The Torah commands us to observe the laws of Pesach, and we do so meticulously without any external enforcement by the law or police. However, theft is perceived as an offense that all refrain from, and fear being caught and sent to prison if they commit the crime. You dare to steal. How is this so?"

The explanation is that a man knows that with Pesach he understands nothing and observes the holiday because G-d commanded him to do so. Regarding theft, a man involves his own ideas and tells himself: if he has something and I do not, perhaps then I am permitted to steal.

"You will return what you have stolen," I told him, and you must know that theft is like drinking Arak on Pesach. One refrains from stealing because G-d commanded him to do so. I promised him that if he accepts upon himself not to steal anymore that his sin will be forgiven.

The following year the "criminal" joined us at the Migdal Ohr Seder, as he shared his story of personal redemption.