

### **Mishpatim: Exodus 23:4-5**

כִּי תִפְגַּע שׁוֹר אֹיֵבֶךָ אוֹ חֲמֹרוֹ תֵעָה הַשֵּׁב תְּשִׁיבֵנּוּ לוֹ: <sup>5</sup>כִּי-תִרְאֶה חֲמֹר שֹׁנֵאֵד רֵבֵץ  
תַּחַת מְשָׁאוֹ וְחִדַּלְתָּ מֵעֲזֹב לוֹ עֲזֹב תֵעֲזֹב עִמּוֹ:

#### **English translations:**

(Now) when you encounter your enemy's ox or his donkey straying, return it, return it to him. (And) when you see the donkey of one who hates you crouching under its burden, restrain from abandoning it to him—unbind, yes, unbind it together with him. (Everett Fox translation)

If you come across your enemy's ox or ass going astray, you must take it back to him. If you see the ass of your enemy lying helpless under its load, you must by no means abandon him. You must help him with it. (Brevard Childs translation)

#### **Aramaic translations (verse 5):**

If you see your enemy's donkey lying under its burden, and you would refuse to take it off of him, you shall surely let go of all that is in your heart against him, and unload it with him. (Targum Onkeles)

At that moment completely leave/forget the hatred in your heart against him and help to release and load the burden. (Targum Yonatan)

**Rashi** (verse 5): The word *ki* ("If") here has the meaning of "possibly," or "perhaps" ... The sense of the verse thus is: "Can you possibly see his donkey crouching beneath its burden and refrain from helping him?"

**Talmud:** If a friend requires unloading [which usually takes precedence over loading], and an enemy requires loading—our first duty is to attend to our enemy, in order to discipline our *yetzer*. (Bava Metzia 32b)

#### **In the Midrash:**

*If a person returns evil for good, evil will not depart from his house* (Proverbs 17:13). Rabbi Shimon ben Abba said: Not only the one who returns evil for good, but even the one who returns evil for evil, "*evil will not depart from his house.*" Rabbi Alexandri commented on the verse: Now the Torah said: *If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it, you shall lift it up.*" Of this Scripture says, *The one who returns evil for good, evil shall not depart.* (Bereshit Rabbah 38:3)

(over)

## **Midrash, continued**

*You have established uprightness* (Psalms 99:4): Rabbi Alexandroni said: Two donkey drivers were traveling along the same road, and they hated each other. The donkey of one of them fell down. The other saw it and passed by. After he had passed by, he said: "It's written in the Torah, *If you see the donkey of one who hates you...you shall surely release it with him.*" He immediately went back to help him with the load. The other one considered in his heart, and said, "So-and-so is evidently my friend, and I didn't know!" Both went into a roadside inn and drank and ate together. What caused them to make peace? Because one of them looked into the Torah. That is the meaning of the verse, *You have established righteousness.* (Tanhuma Yashan Mishpatim)

## ***Sefer HaChinuch:***

The root of this *mitzvah* is to teach our souls the quality of love/compassion, which is a very exalted *middah*. There is no need to say that we are required to have compassion on a person who suffers in his/her body; but even if s/he is suffering the loss of goods and possessions, it is incumbent upon us to have compassion and to rescue him/her.

## **Nechama Leibowitz:**

Negative avoidance of evil is not sufficient. The positive doing of good is demanded to lend your enemy a helping hand. The Targumim expounded the spirit of the text even if they did not reflect its surface reading...The Torah did not confine itself to the abstract moral injunction of "You shall not hate your brother in your heart" (Leviticus 19:17), but provided in these two verses practical guidance on how to achieve this and eradicate hatred from one's heart. The restoring to him of his lost property is one step nearer reconciliation. But it does not necessarily lead to intimate contact. The article can be returned without a word being exchanged or through a third person. Helping him to load and unload a beast, on the other hand, involves direct personal contact and cooperation.