

United We Stand

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Parshas Ki Seitzei

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The Parsha's Paths

You shall not see your brother's donkey or ox falling on the road and hide from them; you shall stand them up with him (22:4).

This week's Parsha begins with a string of *mitzvos* that apply while on the road. The commandment to help one whose animal has fallen and reload them follows the command to return one's lost object and is followed by the command not to cross-dress.

Chazal teach that every passage that is next to another, at least in *Sefer Devarim*, is for a reason. The connection between returning a lost object and helping one with one's fallen animal seems straightforward enough; both involve showing concern for another's property, and by both, we are commanded not to "hide from them." But what is the connection between the command to help one reload their animal and the command not to cross-dress?

Abarbanel explains that the command not to cross-dress is a manifestation of a broader imperative to act in accordance with who G-d made us to be. A man must own his manhood and a woman her womanhood; to crossdress would be to hide from one's G-d-given identity.

He proceeds to explain that that normally, women do not lift heavy loads, and would not be expected to help if they see an animal fallen under its burden. A man seeing such an animal may be tempted to assume the role of a woman in this situation and hide from his duty to help out. The Torah is thus adjuring us, "No! G-d made you as a Jew with the wherewithal and responsibility to help out! Do not hide from your role, pretending you're not fit for the task! Help out!"

When we confront the person whom G-d made us to be, we recognize our tremendous greatness and the responsibility that puts on us to live differently. Such a revelation can be daunting, and there's a constant temptation to hide from it. The Torah warns us that this is the antithesis of G-d's will; G-d gave us an exalted identity to own and to actualize, not to evade and hide from.

Such respect for our unique identities not only leads to a personal sense of moral responsibility; it also leads to greater respect for others. The command following the prohibition to cross-dress is to send away a mother bird before taking her eggs. Rav

Hirsch explains the connection as follows: A quintessential quality of womanhood is motherhood. This is expressed most potently in a mother's complete dedication and self-sacrifice for her children. When taking eggs from a nest, the mother bird does everything in her power to defend her eggs, which is why she stays so close to her nest and makes herself vulnerable. To take her in that moment would show an utter disregard for the sacredness of motherhood. If the prohibition to cross-dress is about respecting men's and women's unique roles and identities, not taking away the mother bird as she tries to protect her young is one powerful way we show that respect.

Thus, recognizing how we each have unique, G-d-given identities not only empowers and adjures us to own up to our own roles; it also allows us to appreciate and respect the roles of others. By making others' roles off-limits for cheap imitation or inappropriate emulation, we recognize their sacred character and treat them with greater reverence.

This goes far beyond gender differences. Every Jewish community and individual has unique talents, strengths, outlooks, and paths in serving G-d that are uniquely suited for them. To blur these differences and look at everyone through the same standard and prism undermines their unique value and the sacredness of their role. Likewise, looking at ourselves through such externally-imposed prisms is likewise dehumanizing and hides our special *tzelem E-lokim*. Let us all strive to follow the spirit of the Torah's mandate not to cross-dress in not hiding from our role nor from the unique roles of others, and may we merit the promise following the command to send away the mother bird: *that it may we well with you, and that you may prolong your days*, together with the Ultimate Redemption, *bimheira viyameinu*.

Deeper Meanings

Reprinted from 5781.

You shall not wear clothing combining wool and linen (22:11).

This week's Parsha includes the commandment to send away the mother bird before taking her eggs, to put a fence around (flat) roofs, not to cross-dress, not to plant certain kinds of seeds together, not to harness certain types of animals together to work them, and not to wear shatnez, among many other laws. The latter three are examples

of the three different types of forbidden mixtures - plants, animals, and garments. What's the reason for these cryptic commandments?

Rabeinu Bachya explains, particularly regarding shatnez, that wool and linen are spiritually incompatible. While it's difficult to fully grasp what this means on a metaphysical level, the Lubavitcher Rebbe suggests that these prohibitions offer an important perspective on how we relate to the world. We generally pursue unity and harmony as an ideal, subsuming things into concepts and concepts into systems, connecting with the humanity and holiness of everyone and, ultimately, all of creation. However, we simultaneously value the uniqueness and individuality of things, appreciating people for their special characteristics and the particular purpose of every aspect of creation. The challenge becomes one of balancing our sense of unity and subsuming things into a collective whole while retaining everything's unique identity. The key to this is the laws of forbidden mixtures. Whether in the field of agriculture, creatures, or our clothing - which helps give us a sense of identity - we are given certain limitations to remind us of each thing's uniqueness. While in general we can combine and integrate, sometimes we have to take a step back and take things on their own terms.

Perhaps this relates to Rav Soloveitchik's idea of catharsis. He explains that we serve G-d in two ways. One way is by taking what He's given us and building, enhancing, and perfecting them to do His will. When we have a new insight in Torah, invest in building new infrastructure in our communities, do acts of chesed, and countless other mitzvos, we are taking what G-d gave us and doing something with that to serve Him.

However, the other aspect of serving G-d is ceasing our work and stopping to submit to His majesty. We take His world on its own terms and just appreciate and allow ourselves to be humbled by what He has given us. This is what we do when we daven and why we cease our work on Shabbos. This allows us to remember and appreciate that all the work we do is not from our own strength and for our own ends, but because G-d gave us the resources and responsibility to do it.

The laws of forbidden mixtures help us appreciate that in every aspect of our lives, we don't have full control and we can't do as we please. At the height of our ambition and creativity, we pause. There are some things we simply cannot do; some resources that G-d does not allow us to combine. We have to give every element in nature the space to appreciate them on their own terms, and that helps crystallize their unique value and our responsibility in using them properly.

Perhaps, according to this train of thought, we can understand why the laws of forbidden mixtures are placed next to the commandments to send away the mother bird, to fence our roofs, and not to cross-dress. Rabeinu Bachya explains that we don't kill the mother bird and her young together because this is similar to eliminating a species, which we're not allowed to do. In that sense, this mitzva is about taking a step back and refraining from a complete control of nature to preserve and appreciate it as is. The command to make a fence around our roofs is a safety measure which reflects our refraining from reckless haphazardness in humble recognition that G-d demands we abide by the laws of nature and safety, even as we trust that G-d is in charge. The command not to cross-dress reflects the boundaries between man and woman and our refraining from nullifying their differences. All these mitzvos offer limits to how we use the world that help us appreciate the unique place of each of G-d's creations and our responsibility to use them according to His will.

The Rav and the Rebbe both offer valuable perspectives that complement each other. Just as we need a catharsis in building up G-d's world and stopping to appreciate it, we need a catharsis in seeing the world as a united whole and appreciating the individual parts. These perspectives go hand in hand in enriching our sense of responsibility towards every part of Creation/Creation as a whole as well as our humble appreciation of it. As we progress through Elul, reconnecting to G-d and strengthening our mitzvah observance, let's be mindful of the Torah's nuanced attitudes towards how we view the world and ourselves, coming closer as individuals and as members of a united nation to doing G-d's will.

Goal of the week

Write a thank you letter to someone who's not expecting it.

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This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for Shaindel Temma bas Rochel Zlotta, Marina bas Frieda, Masha Sarah bas Tziviah Leah, and Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

Have A Great Shabbos!

Our Mission is to bring the third Beis- Hamikdash by facilitating Jewish unity through Torah.