

perspectives

on the Parsha



פרשת משפטים - שקלים

29 Shevat 5773

February 9, 2013

Happiness can be an elusive goal. People try to do the things that they think should make them happy, yet often feel that they haven't achieved happiness. What makes it so hard to achieve? Why can't we become happy just by doing the things we want? The Torah teaches us that some of the things we do in seeking happiness actually leave us feeling empty, and unhappy.

In פרשת משפטים we learn that one who steals an ox or sheep and sells or slaughters it has to pay an extra fine; four times the value of the sheep, and five times the value of the ox. Rashi explains why there is a difference in the fine for the ox and the sheep: the thief who steals a sheep degrades himself because he must carry it on his shoulder, while the ox can walk on its own. The Torah recognizes the thief's shame in carrying the sheep on his shoulder and excuses him from some of the extra fine.

What shame does the thief feel? He wanted a sheep, and decided to steal one, knowing that he would have to carry it home on his shoulder! No one forced him to do this; he acted purely in his own self-interest. When he arrived home with the sheep he was probably quite satisfied with himself, and would do the whole thing again! Why does the Torah assume that this thief is ashamed of doing exactly what he wanted to do?

This teaches us an important lesson about the greatness of Man. A person is truly a refined creation of Hashem, made in His image, and degrades himself when he does things that are shameful, such as carrying an animal on his shoulder. Every human being, even a lowly animal thief, has real *חשיבות*, and such activity is beneath him.

Even more, it seems that the thief sensed this shame. Rashi explains that the thief already received some of his punishment by carrying the animal on his shoulder. If he did not experience that shame, he wouldn't be excused from the extra penalty. This means that on some level, this thief, who was not above brazenly stealing someone else's possessions, sensed the shame of carrying the sheep.

So why did he do it? How can we reconcile the thief's perspective – it was worth going through the shame to get the sheep - with what the Torah is telling us about human nature – carrying the sheep on his shoulder was embarrassing enough to be considered partial punishment for the crime of stealing it?

The answer is that the thief *does* feel an overall sense of unhappiness when he degrades himself this way, but he fails to recognize the source of this feeling. He believes that getting this sheep will make him happy, and attributes his unhappiness to some other cause. He might even try to steal another sheep to

shake off his unhappiness, but that will just make him feel worse!

The implications of this lesson on our own happiness are great. Our innate greatness, as Hashem's creations, dictates that we will not find happiness in pursuits which the Torah tells us are beneath our dignity and stature. If the Torah tells us that something is wrong, we will feel shame when we do it.

The Torah is our guide to happiness.

This may be why people find true happiness to be elusive. Many of the things we assume will make ourselves happy, which fulfill our worldly wants and desires, actually make us *less* happy. We may try again and again, only to be frustrated by the same result.

Hashem designed people to be perfectly suited for doing mitzvos and serving Him. When we do what we were designed to do, we feel satisfied and happy. The Torah, then, is our guide to happiness. When we use the Torah as this guide, we will do things that Hashem tells us will make us happy. Then we can avoid negative feelings and achieve real happiness. ■

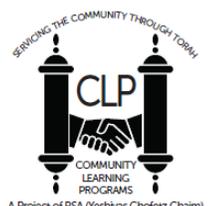
This week's Perspectives on the Parsha is by R' Shimon Gewirtz, member of Kollel Ner Dovid, based on ספר חדושי הלב.

Many people have joined our effort to learn Sefer Chofetz Chaim as a זכות for a רפואה שלמה for Rabbi Yosef Kalter, a young father of three who was recently diagnosed with cancer. We ask you to please join in our effort. A calendar is printed on the back to help you stay on track. Please have יוסף בן רות in mind in your תפילות.



GOLDEN TREASURES 2013 ANNUAL CHINESE AUCTION

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