



# MISHNAS CHAYIM

# משנת חיים

## MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

### פרשת שלח תשס"ט 5769 Parshas Shelach

#### NAME YOUR PRICE

R' Yitzchok Zilbershtein (*Tuvcha Yabiu, parshas Shelach*) sets forth an important principle in mitzvah observance, which he develops through an uplifting illustration:

#### ENTREPRENEUR

A simple, sincere Yid sought counsel from his Rebbe regarding his dire financial situation.

"My advice," his Rebbe instructed, "is to head straight to the marketplace. With the small sum of money you have, acquire the first piece of merchandise you can and then sell it at a profit."

Heeding his Rebbe's words, the "prospector" went right to the bazaar. He remained on the sidelines, however, observing the tumult of sellers peddling their wares and potential buyers trying to haggle down the price.

Suddenly, a veteran merchant approached this greenhorn and asked him what he was doing. "I – I'm here to buy some merchandise," he managed to say.

The astute merchant quickly sized up the situation. "Say, you look like a religious fellow," he began. "I have the best merchandise for you. How would you like to buy my portion in Olam Haba (the World to Come)?"

The poor Yid – who was determined to faithfully adhere to his Rebbe's instructions – jumped at the opportunity. And so he gave the merchant his little cache of coins.

The slick businessman started out toward home, eager to share the news of his clever business deal with his wife.

Alas, his spouse possessed more scruples than he. "What?" she exclaimed. "You got rid of your Olam

Haba?! I cannot be married to a man who has no portion in the World to Come!" She delivered an ultimatum: buy back his Olam Haba or leave forever.

The merchant trudged back to the marketplace, seeking the Yid who now possessed his afterlife.

"Listen, the deal's off," he said when he found his customer. "I need my portion in Olam Haba back."

"Okay," said the pauper. "I'll sell it back to you... for \$100,000!"

"Are you serious?!" the merchant exclaimed. "That's way too much!"

"Hey, this is Olam Haba we're talking about," the Yid responded, as he reveled in his Rebbe's wisdom. "If you want it, that's the price you have to pay."

The case was brought before the *beis din*, who ruled in favor of... the "poor" Yid! To the astonished merchant, they explained: "You charged only a few pennies, because that's all "Olam Haba" was worth in your eyes. But this simple Yid had a much higher estimation of Olam Haba. To him, it is truly worth an astronomical sum. Hence, he has every right to charge you that price!"

This Yid greatly valued Olam Haba. For him, its price was set on a much higher scale. By increasing our valuation of *mitzvos*, we too can "set the price" for our own reward.

R' Zilbershtein utilizes *tzitzis* – a mitzvah introduced in this week's *parshah* – as a classic example: When a person wears *tzitzis* in the wintertime, he performs a mitzvah and deserves reward. But when he wears *tzitzis* in the summer, despite the intense heat, he shows just how valuable the mitzvah is to him. At that point, it becomes evident that this mitzvah is much more than something "nice" to be done when it's comfortable and convenient. Rather, it is

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by Mrs. Leah Louis, Boca Raton, Florida

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of חנה בת אברהם ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange for Torah study on behalf of her neshamah.

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something very precious, for which he is literally willing to "shvitz."

This display of enhanced estimation for the mitzvah changes its "pay-scale" for the *entire year*. Not only will his reward be increased in the summer, when the going is tough, but in the winter, too, he will reap greater compensation. By demonstrating just how estimable the mitzvah is in his eyes, he has increased the value of the mitzvah of *tzitzis*. Consequently, he will be "paid" – even in the winter – at the higher summer rates.

### **THE FLIP SIDE**

A similar idea can apply in reverse, however. Neglecting a *mitzvah* in even a particular circumstance can affect its overall observance.

Actually, this notion emerges from what appears at first glance to be a legalistic issue concerning the financial obligations of neighbors, a topic dealt with extensively in Maseches Bava Basra.

Reuven owns a tract of land that is surrounded by Shimon's fields. When Shimon erects fencing on the borders, Reuven may be obligated to share the cost – if he benefits as well. The Mishnah (1:3) explains:

הַמִּקְיף אֶת חֲבֵרוֹ מִשְׁלַשׁ רוּחוֹתָיו, וְגָדַר אֶת הָרְאשׁוֹנָה וְאֶת הַשְּׂנִיָּה וְאֶת הַשְּׁלִישִׁית, אֵין מַחֲזִיבִין אוֹתוֹ. רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אֹמֵר, אִם עָמַד וְגָדַר אֶת הָרְבִיעִית, מְגַלְגֵּלִין עָלָיו אֶת הַכֹּל.

"A neighbor (Shimon, in our illustration) owns land that surrounds the field of his friend (Reuven) on three sides. When he erects a fence (only) on the three sides, Reuven is not obligated to contribute to the cost. R' Yose says: if the fourth side acquires a fence, Reuven must pay his share of the fencing for *every* side."

As long as the inner field lies somewhat unprotected, the three walls that had been erected were basically irrelevant to Reuven, and so he did not have to pay anything. With the appearance of the fourth wall, the entirety of Reuven's field was suddenly enclosed, and (retroactively) he benefited from the first three walls as well. Hence, he must now contribute funds for all of them.

R' Yosef Engel (*Gilyonei Hashas, Bava Basra 4b*) sees an application of this principle in regard to general mitzvah observance. For example, a person is generally exempt from Torah study during the time when he is truly busy – earning a living, taking care of his needs, etc. He is not held accountable for the *bitul* Torah (lack of Torah study) that results at those times.

Suppose, however, that the same individual neglects to engage in Torah study even when he has free time. This omission is a serious offense. So serious, in fact, that his actions – even during his "busy" hours – are re-evaluated.

Previously, he may have been excused for the *bitul* Torah of his "busy hours"; after all, what was he to do? By neglecting to study Torah in his spare time, however, he has demonstrated that his *bitul* Torah results principally from lack of interest and appreciation, not because of preoccupation and need. Hence, R' Yose's statement applies to him: *הַמִּגְלָגֵלִין עָלָיו אֶת הַכֹּל*, he becomes liable – retroactively – for *all* of his *bitul* Torah, even when he *is* indeed too busy to learn.

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