

PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

תשפ"ה

This parsha has many mitzvos. Some are startling in the way the Torah formulates them.

The Torah does not allow any (male) convert from Ammon and Moav to enter the Jewish community – not even after ten generations of converts! Why not? What did they do that was so bad? The Torah explains: It is because they did not extend to Klal Yisroel the courtesy of offering them water and food while they were passing through their territory. More than that – they tried to destroy Klal Yisroel by hiring Bilaam to curse them.

So even if they sincerely convert, they may not marry natural-born Jews. And we may not, as a nation, conduct peaceful relations with these two nations.

Why was this failure to offer us food and water such a bad thing?

Chazal explain that Lot owed his entire existence to Avrohom Ovinu. Lot got wealthy – due to Avrohom – and it went to his head. He left Avrohom for the evil city of S'dom – knowing full well that it was evil. When S'dom was condemned to destruction, Lot and his family were saved only because of the zechus of Avrohom. So when Lot and his two daughters gave birth to two nations – Ammon and Moav – these nations owed their entire existence to Avrohom Ovinu.

Hashem expected that these two nations would remember this debt for centuries. This is what the middoh of hakoras hatov demands in the eyes of the Torah.

When Klal Yisroel needed their hospitality 440 years later after leaving Egypt, and Ammon and Moav did not fulfil their hakoras hatov obligations, Hashem says they must be rejected absolutely. We can have nothing to do with them for all time. Middos tovos are such a fundamental part of what the Torah expects of a human being and of entire nations.

Just imagine, someone whose great grandfather received a benefit from someone else's great grandfather, is expected to offer special treatment to that great grandfather's descendant! And if he doesn't, he is considered a despicable human being.

Even if an Ammoni or Moavi does teshuvah and becomes a sincere convert, Hashem says that because he grew up in a culture with such bad middos, he cannot be in a position to influence the Jewish community.

The Chovos Halevovos writes that a person without hakoras hatov has no real connection to Yiddishkeit. Without the middoh of hakoras hatov, you won't feel you owe your entire existence to Hashem and you won't feel any obligation to keep His mitzvos.

Rav Avrohom ben HoRambam asks a simple question: We know that a rosho is someone who transgresses any lo sa'aseh in the Torah. Why does that automatically make him a rosho – someone who is evil and immoral? How is wearing shatnez evil and immoral? He answers that we owe a debt to Hashem for all that He gives and has given us. Keeping Torah is repaying that debt. Someone who doesn't pay his debts is a rosho. The ability to violate Hashem's direct command – whatever it may be – shows a lack of gratitude to Hashem. It shows you are a rosho who refuses to pay your debts, and obeying Hashem's command is a way of paying back that debt you owe to Hashem.

What did Hashem do for us in particular? Hashem made us an Am Seguloh. He lifted us up above all other nations on the planet. We

always manage to survive every golus – Bavel, Rome, expulsions, massacres, Inquisitions, Holocaust, etc. Everyone tries to destroy us and we continue to exist. We are totally unique – we have an exclusive bris with Hashem, and this is what keeps us alive. This creates an eternal debt to Hashem to keep His mitzvos in return. And the halacha is that someone who does not pay his debts is a rosho – an immoral person.

Ammon and Moav owed a debt to Klal Yisroel and they failed to pay it back. And the Torah wanted to drive home the point that middos tovos aren't just an extra thing Hashem wants. The Torah expresses this central value of having hakoras hatov in a very extreme way. Ammon and Moav can never enter the Jewish community. Forever and ever.

There is another middoh expressed in this parsha. It talks about the Egyptian convert and the Edomite convert.

The Egyptians treated us viciously and brutally during the shibbud. But this was only the last 83 years of that golus. The previous 127 years were wonderful. Pharaoh fully supported our entire nation. And because of this, we have to be gracious to any Egyptian and allow him to marry into the Jewish community after three generations. It is a lo sa'aseh to turn down a shidduch with a third-generation Egyptian convert because of his yichus! Incredible! Even though there are grounds to have bad feelings because of the horrible shibbud at the end. It is a mixed bag, but there is still hakoras hatov.

And the same applies to Edomite converts. Even though Eisov wanted to kill Yaakov and the Romans wanted to wipe out Torah! But we may not turn them down. They are to be treated like family. The halacha is that when you have tzedoko funds to distribute, and you have a choice to give a distant cousin or a close neighbor, the chiyuv is to support the relative. And the closer the relative, the greater the chiyuv. Even if you are totally estranged from each other. You owe it to your parents to respect and take care of your siblings and their relatives.

We are obligated to show hakoras hatov to Egypt. And because Ammon and Moav didn't show their hakoras hatov to us, we cut them off completely. Have nothing to do with people with bad middos. We are obligated to treat our family members well.

The Torah reminds us not to forget what happened to Miriam due to loшон hora and not to remove a negah tzora'as which is the punishment for loшон hora.

We learn this lesson from Miriam. She was Moshe's sister. She worried about him and cared for him. And all she did was equate his level of nevuah with all other nevi'im! That was loшон hora and she received tzora'as for seven days. So merely making light of a talmid chochom's madreigoh – no matter what the excuse – is a grave aveiroh. You also can't put down your chavrusoh to your friends.

People have to be conscious of not judging other people. That is the basic principle behind the issur of loшон hora.

There is an amazing posuk at the end of the parsha. In previous parshiyos, the Torah describes certain despicable practices like arayos and avodo zoro as to'eivos. And similarly, here the Torah refers to dishonest business practices as to'eivoh. The Torah is making an astounding equation. You should never forget that.