



Parshat Ki Teitze

For the week ending 9 Elul 5759
20 & 21 August 1999

Overview

The Torah describes the only permissible way that a woman captured in battle may be married. In a case where a man is married to two wives, one whom he hates, and she bears a firstborn son, this son's right to inherit a double portion is protected against the father's desire to favor the child of the favored wife. The penalty for a rebellious son, who will inevitably degenerate into a monstrous criminal, is death by stoning. The body of a hanged man must not be left on the gallows overnight, because it had been the dwelling place of a soul which is holy. One who finds lost property has a responsibility to track down the owner and return it. Men are forbidden from wearing women's clothing and vice versa. A mother bird may not be taken together with her eggs; rather the mother must be sent away first. A fence must be built around the roof of a house to prevent people from falling. It is forbidden to plant a field with a mixture of seeds; or to plow using an ox and a donkey together; or to combine wool and linen in a garment. A four-cornered garment must have twisted threads — *tzitzis* — on its corners. Laws and penalties in regard to illicit relationships are detailed.

When Israel goes to war, the camp must be governed by rules of spiritual purity. If as a result of the battle a slave escapes, he must not be returned to his master.

Promiscuity is prohibited to men and women alike. Taking any kind of interest for lending money to a Jew is forbidden. *Bnei Yisrael* are not to make vows even for a good cause. A worker may eat of the fruit he is harvesting, but not take it home with him. Divorce and remarriage are legislated. A new husband is exempted from the army and stays at home the first year to make his wife happy until the relationship is cemented. Collateral on a loan may not include tools of labor, for this may prevent the debtor from earning a living. The penalty for kidnapping for profit is death. Removal of the signs of the disease *tzara'as* is forbidden. Even if a loan is overdue, the creditor must return the debtor's collateral every day if the debtor needs it. Workers' pay must not be delayed. The guilty may not be subjugated by punishing an innocent relative. Because of their vulnerability, proselytes and orphans have special rights of protection. The poor are to have a portion of the harvest. A court has the right to impose the punishment of lashes. An ox must not be muzzled in its threshing, but must be allowed to eat while it works. It is a mitzvah for a man to marry his brother's widow if the deceased left no offspring. Weights and measures must be accurate, and used with honesty. The Parsha concludes with the mitzvah to wipe out the name of Amalek, for in spite of knowing all that happened in Egypt, they ambushed the Jewish People after the Exodus.

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Parshat **Ki Teitze** — 9 Elul 5759, 20 & 21 August 1999

Insights

THE HIDDEN PERSUADERS

"And it will be that if you didn't want her" (21:14)

"P ediatricians Zap Media. No Television For Toddlers" ran the headline in a recent New York Times. "Children under two should not watch television, older children should not have television in their bedrooms and pediatricians should have parents fill out a media history along with a medical history."

These recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatricians were coupled with a warning that "television viewing can affect the mental, social and physical health of young people."

Studies by the American Medical Association, the Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the National Institute of Mental Health have all concluded that there is a link between violence in television and violent behavior by young people.

And yet the beat goes on. Western man sits glued to his TV. It's won't happen to me, he thinks. I'm sophisticated. I can see right through their blatant materialism. I know that my life isn't going to be better if I switch brands of mouthwash.

Don't fool yourself. Just as there is a kashrut for the mouth, there's a kashrut for the eyes. What you see goes in. It stays there.

In the 1960s, a new form of advertising was discovered and almost immediately made illegal. Madison Avenue advertising firms realized that an image of their product on a single frame in a movie playing at 24 frames per second left a subliminal message imprinted in the mind of the viewer. A message of which he was totally unaware. Because of its extremely subtlety, the message managed to sneak under the defenses of the consumer and plant itself into his subconscious.

You are what you eat. You think what you see.

Just because we don't immediately feel the effects of watching television doesn't mean that the message doesn't lodge in our sub-conscious.

In this week's *parsha* the Torah legislates that if a soldier desires a woman captured in battle, he must go through a whole process before he can marry her. "You shall bring her into the midst of your house; she shall shave her head and let her nails grow....She shall dwell in your house and weep for her father and her mother for a full month..." The Torah continues "And it will be that if you didn't want her..." More grammatically correct, the Torah might have written "And it will be that if you will not want her." — in the future tense. Why does the Torah choose the past tense here?

The answer can be found in the way the Torah describes the first meeting between the soldier and his female captive — "and you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form and you will desire her." The Torah here uses a different verb, "and you will desire her." It doesn't say "you will want her."

In life, there are "wants" and there are "desires." A want is based on logic and sound judgment. A desire is just that — a fleeting fancy which fades like a lily and rots. When the Torah says "if you didn't want her," it's not listing an alternative, it's stating a fact. There never was a "want," just a "desire" — thus the past tense. Even though you "desired" her, in truth you never really "wanted" her. Your emotions hijacked your reason.

Next time you turn off your television, notice that feeling of weariness and lethargy that wells up in your body and your soul. You drag yourself out of your chair and, rub you eyes to meet the light.

You just spent a couple of hours tuned into the world of desire. Nothing is real.

Do yourself a favor. Take your TV(s) out into the yard, find a .303 gun and from the safety of your house, put a well-aimed bullet into the screen.

You'll feel a lot better.

Sources:

Ohel Mo'ed in Mayana shel Torah

Haftorah: Yishayahu 54:1-10

AN ORPHAN PRAYER

"Sing out O barren one, who has not given birth...for the children of the desolate outnumber the children of the inhabited." (54:1)

A n old joke: "Rabbi. I prayed and prayed to G-d for some- thing I really wanted, but my prayers weren't answered." "Yes, they were." said the Rabbi, "The answer was no."

Even when we think the answer to our prayers is "no," in reality, no prayer ever goes unanswered. Every prayer makes an impact in the higher spiritual realms. When a prayer seems to have fallen by the way, we look at it as worthless, and yet it makes an awesome impact on the very fabric of reality. Far beyond our comprehension in the loftier spheres, that little prayer is moving worlds.

This is the meaning that lies behind the verse "Sing out O barren one, who has not given birth...for the children of the desolate outnumber the children of the inhabited." The children of the desolate, those "orphan" prayers are changing the universe beyond the limited view of our physical eyes.

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