

MORASHAH
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Parashat HaShavuah Series

Parashat Ki Teitzei

No weekly Torah reading is as "jam packed" with *mitzvot* as this week's parasha. In its 110 verses, Ki Teitzei contains 74 commandments (27 "do's"/positives and 47 "don'ts"/negatives) — the most in any weekly reading by far. Parashat R'eh from two weeks ago had 55, and Parashat Kedoshim in the book of Vayikra/Leviticus has 51.

Clearly, if we want to get an intensive portrait of what God expects from His Jewish People, we could not have come to a better place.

It is critical to note that the *mitzvot* presented in the parasha include and extend from the ritual to the personal and the interpersonal. Just as we are commanded not to wear *sha'atnez* (mixture of wool and linen garments in our clothing, including the suits, jackets and dresses we wear), to issue a *get* (Jewish divorce) at the dissolution of a marriage, and not to enter the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in a state of ritual impurity, the very same parasha instructs us to return lost objects (whether, in Biblical times, an animal, or in our own, a lost laptop or Iphone or keys), to insure the physical safety of our property (including our homes and automobiles), to provide for the poor (in the Torah, by leaving fallen grain in the fields for the needy; in our time by supporting the local Jewish Federation and food banks).

In some circles, it is fashionable to focus almost exclusively on the ritual commandments in Judaism. As important as they are, one should never forget the ethical, moral and interpersonal *mitzvot*, as well. Indeed, one without the other is not only "out of balance", but contradicts precisely what the Torah requires of us — as this week's reading demonstrates in such detail.

And to those who maintain that *only* the interpersonal *mitzvot*, those between *adam lechaveiro*/individuals and their friends and society, should be the focus of Jewish behavior, that also is a distortion of the Torah's message.

Living in Jerusalem for the past 26 years, I often have the opportunity to travel to America and speak about How to be More Jewish in the Modern World. There I find that in addition to the familiar ritual *mitzvot*, such as Shabbat, Kashrut, prayer, etc., there is a hunger to apply Jewish life and observance to the personal realms as well. For example, how we integrate the very first *mitzvah* (according to Maimonides), that of Believing in God, into our own personal search for spirituality in the 21st. century; how the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud Av Va'em*/Honoring Parents is operable for adults regarding our aging parents; how we insure that the *mitzvah* of visiting the sick is not relegated to the rabbis alone, but applies to each

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of us; how the *mitzvah* of *Hocheiyach Tochi'ach*/actively intervening in the lives of those whom you care about, is a Jewish answer to the contemporary "mind your own business"; how the Jewish concerns for *Tzniyut* ("modesty") and *Tohorat Hamishpacha*/marital intimacy and sexuality are almost required antidotes to today's societal norms of "everything goes".

And as a *Yerushalmi*, one living in Jerusalem, whose father, grandfather and great-grandfather were born in this Holy City (our family arrive in 1837 from Lithuania, students of the Gaon from Vilna), how we must apply the *mitzvah* of *Pikuach Nefesh*/Saving a Life, to defending the State of Israel and the largest Jewish community in the world (America is number two) from wanton attacks, defamations and growing attempts at delegitimization.

Parashat Ki Teitzei is a critical call for us to bring the message and practice of Torah into *all* realms of life, extending from the observance of ritual to the love and care for our fellow. Only then can we truly bring God's Presence and Glory to the world.

Shabbat Shalom!

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