



KINDER TORAH®



For parents to share with children at the Shabbos table
Parshas Ki Seitze

Family Gratitude

“Hurry up children, we only have a few minutes left. Chavi, finish setting the table. Benny, sweep the floor. Shoshie, Esti, finish getting dressed. Imma, is the food ready?”

“Abba why does everything have to be so nice?”

“Because Mr. Shapira is coming.”

“Oof, Mr. Shapira. We work so hard for Mr. Shapira. Why?”

“Esti, every year around this time, Mr. Shapira comes here to Israel to visit. We are honored to have him as a guest in our house.”

“But Abba, we treat him like he is a VIP”

“He is a very important person to our family. Do you want to know why?”

“Yes, we want to know why we are working so hard to make things nice for him.”

“Many years ago, my great-grandfather and Mr. Shapira’s great-grandfather were friends in Russia. Those were dangerous times for the Jewish people. My great-grandfather was captured by the Cossacks and thrown into prison. Mr. Shapira’s great-grandfather risked his life to get my great-grandfather out of prison. Were it not for him, my great-grandfather would have died a young man in prison, and none of us would be here today.”

“Wow!”

“Now do you see why we give Mr. Shapira the red-carpet treatment?”

“We sure do, Abba.”

“An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of Hashem . . . because they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt, and because they hired Bilaam to curse you” (Devarim 23:4-5). The Ramban z”l explains that Avraham Avinu risked his life to save Lot and his wife from the four kings. Lot was the Patriarch of the nations of Ammon and Moab. Therefore, these nations owed their very existence to Avraham Avinu and his descendants. They should have expressed their gratitude to the Jewish people and performed acts of kindness for them. Instead, they responded with evil. Because of this, even their converts are not permitted to marry into our nation.

Kinderlach . . .

We learn two important lessons from this. One is that we must show our gratitude to those who have helped us. Parents, teachers, brothers, or neighbors who have done nice things for us all deserve our appreciation. Secondly, we must realize that we are part of a family. We are also grateful for good deeds done for other members of our family. If you help my brother, you help me. The Jewish people are all really one big family. We are all descendants of Avraham Avinu. When we help each other, we help ourselves. And we appreciate every good deed done for every Jew.

Compassion

“You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing” (Devarim 25:4). Threshing is the process that separates wheat from its husks. This is accomplished by stepping on the wheat. The husks split off and are left behind. Oxen are used to step on the wheat. One is not allowed to muzzle the ox, thereby preventing it from eating the wheat while it is threshing. The ox becomes hungry while working. To prevent him from eating would be a cruelty. The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 596) explains the reason behind this mitzvah. We must teach ourselves to be compassionate. When we accustom ourselves to always seeking the kind and benevolent path even towards animals, how much more so we will learn to be compassionate towards human beings.

Kinderlach . . .

A person can work on a good middah (character trait) in many ways. Kindness to animals is related to kindness in human beings. The Torah teaches us that we have a greater obligation to our fellow man than to animals. That does not mean that we can be cruel to animals. We must look at it the other way. We must be kind even to animals. How much more so must we be kind to human beings.

Safety

“You shall make a fence around your roof” (Devarim 22:8). The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 546) explains that Hashem is supervising

our lives and He decrees everything that happens to us. Still, a person must guard himself from dangerous situations. Hashem decreed that fire will burn, and water will extinguish the fire. A falling rock will smash a person, and a person who falls from a high roof will die. He blew our souls into our bodies and gave us wisdom to guard ourselves. He then placed us among the elements, subjected us to the laws of nature, and commanded us to guard ourselves from dangerous situations. The exceptions are those chosen tsaddikim like Avraham Avinu, who was able to allow himself to be thrown into a fiery furnace and live. The rest of us however must guard ourselves from danger.

Kinderlach . . .

Fences were erected to protect people from falling. They are not meant for climbing. The jungle gym in the park is for climbing. A thrown rock can hurt someone very badly. A wound inflicted with a metal object is serious enough to allow chilul Shabbos to treat it. A car, traveling at even the slowest speed, is so big and heavy that it will hurt someone very badly. A person can drown in the shallowest water. Firecrackers are so dangerous that they are illegal in many places. Hashem wants you to take care of yourself. He gave you a wonderful body and put a beautiful neshama (soul) into it. He wants you to do mitzvos with that body and soul. How can you do mitzvos properly if you are hurt? We know that Hashem protects all of us. He gives extra protection to His special tsaddikim. We still must protect ourselves. We fulfill His wishes by properly caring for the body that He gave us.

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