

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXXVII: Shelach (Num. 13:1–15:41)

Essay 9. Ritual fringes, prohibited interest, and improper weights

"אל-תמְשִׁכְנִי עִם-רָשָׁעִים" וְכוּ', אֱלוֹ הַפְּסוּקִים מִתְבָּאָרִים עַל הַהֵיָא דְבִפְרָק ה' דְּמִצְעָא לְמָה לִי דְכָתֵב יִצְיָאָת מִצְרַיִם בְּצִיצִית בְּרִיבִית וּבְמִשְׁקוּלוֹת, כְּמוֹ שֶׁהָאֲרָכְנוּ בְּנֵה לְעֵיל פְּרִשְׁת קְדוּשִׁים וְעִי"ש.

“Do not count me with the wicked and evildoers who profess goodwill toward their fellows, while malice is in their heart. Pay them according to their deeds, their malicious acts; according to their handiwork pay them, give them their deserts. For they do not consider the L-rd’s deeds, the work of His hands; may He tear them down, never to rebuild them!” (Ps. 28:3–5).

These verses will be clarified by the fact that in the fifth chapter of tractate Bava Metzia (page 61b), Rava says, “Why do I [need] the Exodus from Egypt [mentioned together] with [the halacha to wear] ritual fringes [*tzitzit*],¹ with [the prohibition against] interest,² [and] with the [prohibition concerning] weights³?” We discussed these things above at length in the chapter for parshat Kedoshim (essay 2), and see there.

Bava Metzia 61b continues with Rava answering his question: “The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: I am He Who distinguished in Egypt between the drop [of seed] that [became] a firstborn and the drop [of seed] that did not [become] a firstborn, [and I killed only the firstborn]. I am He Who is destined to exact punishment from one who attributes [ownership of] his money to a gentile and thereby lends it to a Jew with interest. [I.e., even if he is successful in deceiving the court, G-d knows the truth.] And [I am also He Who is destined to exact punishment] from one who buries his weights in salt [as this changes their weight in a manner not visible to the eye]. And [I am also He Who is destined to exact punishment] from one who hangs [ritual fringes dyed with] indigo on his garment and says it is [dyed with the] sky-blue dye [*techeilet*, which is required in ritual fringes].” Thus, the allusion to G-d’s ability to distinguish between two apparently like entities is why the Exodus is mentioned in all of these contexts.

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¹ Num. 15:38-41: “Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves *fringes on the corners of their garments* throughout the ages; let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner. That shall be your fringe; look at it and recall all the commandments of the L-rd and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge. Thus you shall be reminded to observe all My commandments and to be holy to your G-d. I the L-rd am your G-d, *Who brought you out of the land of Egypt* to be your G-d: I, the L-rd your G-d.”

² Lev. 25:37-38: “Do not lend him your money at *advance interest*, or give him your food at accrued interest. I the L-rd am your G-d, *Who brought you out of the land of Egypt*, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your G-d.”

³ Lev. 19:35-36: “*You shall not falsify measures of length, weight, or capacity*. You shall have an honest balance, honest weights, an honest *ephah*, and an honest *hin*. I the L-rd am your G-d *Who freed you from the land of Egypt*.”

Zera Shimshon first considers how ritual fringes, false weights, and charging interest to a fellow Jew are relevant to Ps. 28:3, “Do not count me with the wicked and evildoers who profess goodwill toward their fellows, while malice is in their heart.”

אל־תִּמְשַׁכְּנִי עִם־רָשָׁעִים" אוֹתָם שְׂתוּלִים קָלָא אֵילָן וְכוּ' וְלוֹבְשִׁים בְּגָד שֶׁל אַרְבַּע פְּנּוֹת בְּלֹא צִיצִית. וְנִמְצָא שֶׁהֵם מְבַטְּלִים בְּמִזִּיד אֶת הַמִּצְוָה,

“Do not count me with the wicked,” those who hang [ritual fringes dyed with] indigo, and who wear a garment with four corners without the required ritual fringes. It is found that those people negate the mitzvah willfully.

"וְעַם־פְּעָלֵי אָנוּ" הֵינּוּ מִי שְׂטוּמָן מִשְׁקָלוֹתָיו בְּמַלְחָה, "כִּי תוֹעֵבֶת ה' ... פֶּלַעַשָׁה עָנָל."

“And evildoers” refers to **one who buries his weights in salt, “for it is an abomination to the L-rd, your G-d, everyone who does these things, everyone who deals dishonestly”** (Deut. 25:16).

"דְּבָרֵי שְׁלוֹם" וְכוּ' מִי שְׂתוּלָה מְעוֹתָיו בְּנִכְרֵי שְׂאוּמֵר לְחֻבֵּירוֹ שְׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לָנוּ וּבִלְבָבוֹ יֵשׁ רָעָה שְׂיִודַע שֶׁהֵם שְׁלוֹ.

“Who profess goodwill toward their fellows while malice is in their heart,” is one who attributes [ownership of] his money to a non-Jew, so that he can charge interest to his fellow Jew, while saying to his fellow Jew, “peace should be upon us,” but in his heart there is evil, for he knows that [the money] is really his and does not belong to the non-Jew.

Zera Shimshon next considers how false weights, charging interest to a fellow Jew, and ritual fringes are relevant to Ps. 28:4, “Pay them according to their deeds, their malicious acts; according to their handiwork pay them, give them their deserts.”

וְלָכֵן "תּוֹלָהֶם כְּפַעְלָם וְכָרַע מַעֲלָלֵיהֶם" דְּאָמְרִינוּ בְּגִמְרָא עַל מִי שְׂטוּמָן מִשְׁקָלוֹתָיו וְכוּ' וְהָא קָא עָבַר עַל בַּל תִּגְזוּל? לְעַבּוֹר עָלָיו מִשְׁעַת עֲשִׂיָּה. וְאֶפִּילוּ אִינוּ מִשְׁתַּמְשׁ בָּהֶם אֲסוּר לַעֲשׂוֹת כֶּד מִשׁוּם "וְאֶל־תִּשְׁכֵּן בְּאֵהָלֶיךָ עוֹלָה". וְזִמְנִין דְּמַתְרַמִּי בֵּין הַשְׁמָשׁוֹת וְשָׂקִיל בְּהוּ. כְּפַעְלָם מִשְׁעַת עֲשִׂיָּה וְאִם יִשְׁתַּמְשׁ בָּהֶם אֲז.

“Pay them according to their deeds, their malicious acts; according to their handiwork pay them, give them their deserts” (Ps. 28:4). **It says in the Gemara** (Bava Metzia page 61b), **regarding one who buries his weight in salt, Rav Yeimar asked: But doesn’t [the use of false weights by a merchant] violate the commandment not to steal? I.e., why do we need a separate prohibition specifically regarding weights and measures? Rav Ashi answered: “[It is written] to [establish that he] violates [the prohibition] from the moment of the act [of burying them].”** I.e., he violates the prohibition even before he actually deceives a buyer with the buried weights. **Even if he does not use [the false weights], it is forbidden to [prepare them], because it is written,**

“And do not let injustice reside in your tent” (Job 11:14). Bava Batra 89b explains that it is forbidden to keep incorrect measures, as **sometimes it happens** [that one measures] **at twilight**, [when people are hurried or cannot see well], **and he** [unintentionally] **weighs with them**. Thus, they will be punished **“according to their deeds”** **at the hour of making [the false weights], and if he uses them, then** also at that time.

"וּכְרַע מֵעַל לֵיהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהֶם תִּן לָהֶם", נִשְׁהַרְיֵבִית נִקְרָא נִשְׁדָּךְ שֶׁהוּא נוֹשֵׂךְ אֶת הַלְוָה מְעַט מְעַט עַד שֶׁמִּפְסִידוֹ הִרְבֵּה וְנִכְסָיו מִתְמוֹטְטִין. וְכֵמוֹ שֶׁהֵם גָּרְמוּ שְׂאוֹתוֹ הַלְוָה יִפְסִיד וְיִמּוֹךְ מִנְכָסָיו כִּן הֵם יִתְמוֹטְטוּ מִנְכָסֵיהֶם, שֶׁהַמְלוֹה בְּרִיבִית נִכְסָיו מִתְמוֹטְטִין.

“Their malicious acts; according to their handiwork pay them,” for the interest rate [ריבית] [*ribbit*] is called **“a bite”** [נִשְׁדָּךְ] [*neshech*], for it bites the borrower little by little until he loses a lot and his assets collapse. Just as [those who charge interest] cause the borrower to lose and to become impoverished of his assets, similarly they cause the collapse of their own assets, for regarding one who lends with interest, his assets will also collapse.⁴

"הַנֶּשֶׁב גְּמוּלָם לָהֶם" מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ לוֹבֵשׁ צִיצִית אֶלָּא קְלָא אֵילָן "יִשׁוּב עֲמָלוֹ בְּרֵאשׁוֹ", נִשְׁסָמָא ל' יִסְזַק בּוֹ וְכָל הַמְזִיקִים יִזְיקוּהוּ, נִשְׁקָלָא גִימְטְרִיא סְמָא"ל.

“Give them their deserts”: One who only wears ritual fringes of indigo [קְלָא אֵילָן] [*kala ilan*] [literally, “ashes of a tree”], instead of the required sky-blue dye [*techeilet*], **“His mischief will recoil upon his own head”** (Ps. 7:17), for Sammael, the angel of death, will seize him and all the damaging forces will damage him, for *kala* [קְלָא] the first word of the phrase “*kala ilan*” [indigo] has the Gematria of Sammael.

Finally, Zera Shimshon considers how false weights, ritual fringes, and charging interest to a fellow Jew are relevant to Ps. 28:5, “For they do not consider the L rd’s deeds, the work of His hands; may He tear them down, never to rebuild them!”

וְמִי שֶׁטּוֹמֵן מִשְׁקָלוֹתָיו בְּמִלַּח נִקְרָא שְׂפוֹפֵר בְּהַשְׁגָּחָה וְכוּפֵר בִּיצִיאַת מְצָרִים וּבְכִרְיַת הָעוֹלָם, וְזֶהוּ פִי לֹא יָבִינוּ אֶל פְּעוּלוֹת ה'.

One who buries his weights in salt is called a heretic in not believing in Divine Providence, and a heretic in not believing in the Exodus from Egypt, and a heretic in not believing in the creation of the universe by G-d, and this is because they will not understand the actions of G-d. I.e., one who defies the Torah is like one who denies the existence of G-d.

⁴ Bava Metzia 71a: “It is taught [in a *Baraita*]: Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: [Concerning] anyone who has money and lends it without interest, the verse says about him: ‘He who has not given his money with interest and who has not taken a bribe against the innocent, he who does these shall never collapse’ (Ps. 15:5). [The opposite can also be inferred:] You learn that [concerning] anyone who lends [his money to another Jew] with interest, his property [i.e., his financial standing], collapses.”

ומי שתולה קלא אילן אינו מבין מעשה קדיו של הקב"ה דהיינו הקריע דכתיב "כִּי־אֶרְאֶה שָׁמַיִךְ מַעֲשֵׂי אֲצַבְעֹתֶיךָ". ותכלת דומה לים, וים דומה לקריע.

Also, one who hangs [ritual fringes dyed with] indigo does not understand the handiwork of the Holy One, Blessed be He, which is the firmament, as it is written, “When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers” (Ps. 8:4). The sky-blue dye [techeilet], which is required in ritual fringes], is similar to the sea, and the sea is similar to the firmament (Menachot 43b).

ומי שְׁמֵלֵנָה בְּרִיבִית יוֹתֵר מִמָּה שְׁמֵרוּיָחִין, מִפְּסִידִין. וְלָכוֹ "נִהְרָסִים", דְּכָל מִי שְׁמֵלֵנָה בְּרִיבִית נִכְסָיו מִתְמוֹטְטִין. "וְלֹא יִבְנֵם" דְּאִמְרֵינָן בְּפֶתַח ה' דְּמַצִּיעָא וְהָאִיכָא מִי שְׁאִינוּ מְלֵנָה בְּרִיבִית וּמִתְמוֹטְט, הִלְלוּ מִתְמוֹטְטִין וְעוֹלִין וְהִלְלוּ מִתְמוֹטְטִין וְאִינָם עוֹלִין.

Also, it is taught in a Baraita that Rabbi Shimon says: Those who lend with interest will lose more than they gain.⁵ Therefore, “May He tear them down” (Ps. 28:5), that regarding every one who lends with interest, his assets will collapse. “Never to rebuild them” (Ps. 28:5). As it says in the fifth chapter of tratate Bava Metzia (page 71a): Isn’t there one who does not lend with interest and [his property] collapses? Rabbi Elazar answers: Those who do not lend money with interest collapse but then ultimately rise, but these, who lend with interest, collapse and do not rise again.

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⁵ Bava Metzia 75b.