

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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**Parashot Behar-Bechukotai**  
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**פרשת בהר-בחוקתי**  
**כ"ד באייר תשע"ז**

Torah Reading: *Vayikra* (Leviticus) 25:1-27:34

In these two *parashot*, Hashem tells Moshe to instruct the people in the laws of the *Shmitah* (Sabbatical) and *Yovel* (Jubilee) years, as well as how to relate to those in the community who become impoverished. Hashem then enumerates the rewards for keeping the commandments and the punishments for violating them; the laws of tithes are listed.

Chapter 25, verses 35-38 expound upon an interpersonal law, one from which we can draw general principles:

וְכִי-יָמוּד אָחִיךָ, וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ--וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ בוֹ, גֵר וְתוֹשֵׁב וְחִי עִמָּךְ. אַל-  
תִּקַּח מֵאִתּוֹ נִשְׁאָד וְתִרְבִּית, וְנִרְאִיתָ מֵאֶ-לֶהִיד; וְחִי אָחִיךָ, עִמָּךְ. אֶת-כֶּסֶףךָ-  
לֹא-תִתֵּן לוֹ, בְּנִשְׁאָד; וּבְמִרְבִּית, לֹא-תִתֵּן אֲכֹלְךָ. אֲנִי ה' אֱ-לֹהֵיכֶם, אֲשֶׁר-  
הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם, מִמִּצְרַיִם--לָתֵת לָכֶם אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם  
לֹא-לֵהִים.

If your brother becomes poor and his means fail with you, you shall relieve him, whether he be a stranger or a settler so that he may live with you. Take no interest or usury from him but fear your God that your brother may live with you. Do not give him your money with interest, nor lend him your food with usury. I am Hashem your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan to be your God.

This outlines a very specific law: one may not charge interest on loans. As it is phrased, it also teaches three very important principles.

First, one may not benefit from another's misfortune. By definition, if someone has become poor and is coming to you for money, they have experienced a misfortune.

Far be it from the Jew, says the Torah, to benefit financially from this. The fact that the Torah needs to be explicit here indicates that such a desire may exist in some people. The text therefore adjures all of us not to act on this desire should it exist.

Second, גֵּר וְתוֹשָׁב – *ger v'toshav*, the stranger and the settler – are included in this scenario. We need to look out not only for Jews, but for others as well. Like many other places in the Torah, we are reminded here that we once were strangers in a strange land and, therefore, should always keep in mind the lost feeling a stranger may experience at times.

Third, the Torah says that when someone becomes poor, וְהִחַזְקָהּ בּוֹ – *v'hechezakta bo*. Although translated colloquially as “you shall relieve him,” the words literally mean “you shall hang on to him.” Think of a person hanging onto the hand of someone who is falling off a cliff and not letting go until they make it back onto safe ground. This is how we need to treat the poor. We need to make sure they do not fall any further than they have already fallen and continue to support them until they have regained their financial footing.

These three simple verses, once again, show us the moral sensibilities and sensitivities of the Torah. May Hashem give us the internal power to live up to these standards day in and day out.

Shabbat Shalom.

For discussion:

- What is a loan? What is interest? Why do you think we should not charge interest on loans to poor people?
- How else can we help someone who has fallen on hard times without making them feel bad about it?
- Why do you think the Torah mentions over and over again that Hashem took us out of Egypt?