



RABBI JUDAH

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Dedicated L'Ilyu Nishmas HaChaver
Shlomo Michael ben Meir z'l

Dancing Before a Donkey

The great *gaon* and Kabbalist, Rav Nosson haKohen Adler, zy'a, known as the *Nesher HaGadol*, 'the Great Eagle'), was a legendary *tzadik*. Among his closest talmidim was the Chasam Sofer, Rebbe Moshe Sofer. The Chasam Sofer was so deeply connected to his illustrious Rebbe that when Rav Nosson was *niftar*, he appeared to his *talmid* in a dream vision as a *sefer Torah* draped in black.

One winter, while the two *tzadikim* were travelling together, they hit an icy patch,

and one of the two horses pulling their wagon died suddenly. As the load was too heavy for the second horse to pull alone, the wagon driver walked ahead to the nearest village in search of another horse. After a long while, the driver returned with... a donkey. Seeing the animal, Rav Nosson's face lit up with excitement and he quickly alighted from the wagon. Landing in the deep snow, the *gadol ha-dor* began dancing around the donkey, clapping with intent and full of joy.

The Chasam Sofer was baffled. "Rebbe, what has gotten into you? What is so exciting about a donkey?"

Rav Nosson, zt'l, smiled ear to ear. Our *baal agalah* unwittingly has provided us with an opportunity that I never dreamed I'd merit while sitting in my study in Frankfurt! Torah instructs us against the *issur* of *k'layim*, the commandment to not crossbreed, bind two species of animals

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together under a yoke. How often does a city dweller like me have the *zechus* of fulfilling that mitzvah?

As his Rebbe continued to dance, the Chasam Sofer approached the wagon driver, who returned the donkey, and brought back a horse instead.

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לֹא־תִזְרַע בְּרִמְקָךְ כְּלָאִים... לֹא־תִחְרַשׁ בְּשׂוֹר־וּבְחֹמֶר
יִחְדוּ:

“You shall not sow your vineyard [together with] a mixed variety of species... You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.” (*Devarim*, 22:10)

Rashi elucidates: ‘The same law applies to any two species of animals in the world, and including merely leading them together when they are bound to each other as a pair to transport a load.’ The underlying premise of the halacha is straightforward; an ox, horse or donkey are all formed differently; forcing them to work together is an unequal and unfair distribution of the load intended to carry, and can cause suffering to the animal. The

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ox — a stronger animal by nature — would bear the primary burden of *schlepping* the load. Being harnessed and yoked together would potentially cause discomfort or harm to the less powerful donkey.

Rav Yaakov ben Asher, the Baal haTurim, draws an additional meaningful lesson from the law forbidding the pairing of a donkey, a non-kosher animal, with an ox, a kosher animal. This is because the ox chews its cud, giving the appearance that it is constantly eating, while the donkey does not have access to food while yoked. The Baal haTurim suggests that the Torah is exhibiting concern for the donkey, who might look over at the ox he is paired with and experience some measure of pain or jealousy, so to speak.

Beyond the literal interpretations of these laws pertaining to agriculture, clothing and animal husbandry, their spirit sensitizes us to the world around us. If we are to be aware and careful of the needs and perceived feelings of our animals, how much more so must we be attuned to our neighbors and friends. Thus, when we revisit *Parshas Ki Teitze* each year during the days of Chodesh Elul, the Torah presents a narrative of enhanced sensitivity

and awareness of the needs of others. Among the topics and directives in our *sedra* this week are the obligations of an owner toward his slaves and property, as well as the obligations of a soldier toward a woman captured in battle. We are instructed to ensure the wellbeing of the poor and displaced, and to provide access to food to those who lack.

We are commanded to not withhold the wages of a day laborer, and to treat debtors respectfully, collecting what is owed without pressure or intimidation. Our *sedra* reminds us to always remain focused on those who are struggling or may be in need of support, including widows and orphans. And once again, we are reminded to love our brothers and sisters, those holy souls who have joined *Am Yisrael* as converts.

What more appropriate way for us to prepare for the new year, than by reasserting our commitment to mutual responsibility and drawing close to each other by strengthening our bonds of community.

When we live in rhythm with the *ratzon Hashem*, and recognize the elevated life we can attain when fulfilling His will, it is understandable indeed why one would want to dance before a donkey! ■

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