

TORAH SHMOOZE KI TETZEI

Scriptural Context

- You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep gone astray and hide yourself from them; you shall surely bring them back to your brother. (Deuteronomy 22:1)
- If your brother is not near you and you do not know him, then gather it [which you have found] inside your house, and it shall remain with you until your brother inquires after it, and you return it to him. (22:2)
- So shall you do for his donkey, so shall you do for his garment, and so shall you do for any lost article of your brother, that may become lost from him and you find it; you shall not hide yourself. (22:3)

Commentary

- "Brother" includes every Jew (Chofetz Chaim), your enemy too, "because the Torah speaks in opposition to the inclination to [do] evil," that is, the tendency to see others as less the children of God than us. (Sifre)
- It is not sufficient that that which is "lost" is not in the control or possession of your brother; it must be found in a state of "disarray," or be "uncontrolled," for us properly to assume responsibility for it. (Sifre)
- "Our Rabbis . . . explain that [although the verse clearly means that one must *not* ignore them, nevertheless, the verse is alluding to] situations when one is, in fact, permitted to ignore them [for example, if he is a *kohen*, and the animals have wandered into a cemetery, where *kohanim* may not enter. . . .]" (Rashi)
- "The mitzvah of restoring lost property involves not merely the passive taking charge of the article till the owner claims it, but also an active concern with safeguarding one's neighbor's possessions, so that they remain intact and constitute something worth restoring." (N. Leibowitz)
- "You must also restore him (to his home) if he himself is lost." (Sifre)
- Our responsibility extends beyond the property to the person of anyone "who finds himself in spiritual danger." (J. Hurwitz)
- "Someone who violates God's commandments is considered as having gone astray [נודחים]. The Torah commands that we must not ignore such people but bring them back to one's 'brother,' i.e., to God." (Or Hachayim)
- We are obligated to help that [spiritually endangered] person return to the path of righteousness (בדרך ישרה), because every soul that is lost to the Jewish people—including our own, which we are especially obligated to reclaim—diminishes the nation's ability to do God's work in the world. This obligation includes Jews who are "preoccupied with the trivialities of the times" to the exclusion of Torah and mitzvot. (Chafetz Chaim)
- For tinokos shenishbu (Jews "held captive") by Gentiles, we are obligated to bring them back to Torah and, if there is no one else to do this, to dedicate a tenth of our time to this mitzvah. (M. Feinstein)
- The very fact that the redemption does not seem near at hand is apt to estrange the Jewish people to God. . . . Nonetheless God commands ואספתו אל תוך ביתך, you are to gather him inside your house.' The house the Torah speaks of is the Torah academy, etc. There you will teach him the paths of Torah so that the

- light radiated by Torah study will save this person spiritually." (Or Hachayim)
- We are obligated to speak out and act whenever we can prevent a loss. (N. Scherman) While we have the physical wherewithal to hide ourselves, there is no acceptable moral choice but to speak and act for our fellow Jews—except when to do so would cause greater loss to us than to others who are at risk. (Sifre)
 - The closing phrase [of the verses], "you shall not hide yourself," לא תוכל להתעלם, may also be taken to mean: "After you have performed the mitzvah three times . . . , then you will know that the observance of the mitzvah is, once and for all, firmly implanted within you, so that whatever the circumstances, 'you cannot hide yourself.'" (M. Alshikh)
 - "Concerning the repetition of the words השב תשיבם, 'be sure to restore,' our sages in Baba Metzia 30 explain that one has to keep doing this even 100 times if necessary. All of this is part of the paths of mercy and kindness which we are to practice. . . ." (Rabbeinu Bachya)
 - We do not put much stock in the fashionable expressions of modesty that one should not challenge others because each of us lives our life far from moral or ethical perfection. The Chofetz Chaim comments pointedly on the less attractive motivation for such false modesty: "When people encounter such mitzvot they are known to delude themselves by saying, 'I am the least important person in town and my words surely will be rejected. Why should I talk in vain?' If a person looks inward, however, he [or she] will conclude that this is just the Evil Impulse talking. After all, if while thinking such humble thoughts, this person was insulted by someone even slightly, our 'humble' individual would breathe fire and arouse many to take his side against the offending party. Yet when it comes to defending God's honor, he makes himself out to be modest and humble of spirit."
 - "The words והשבות לו, 'and you will return it to him,' mean that your concern for the straying Jew will be accounted for you as if you had rescued him from becoming totally lost." (Or Hachayim)
 - "It [i.e., this precept] applies in every place and every time, for both man and woman." (Sefer haHinnuch)

Questions

- Why do you think it matters, if you do, whether or not Jews become "totally lost" to the Jewish people?
- What business, if any, is it of ours if an individual Jew decides to abandon Judaism and Jewish life?
- Does it make any difference to you if the person who is abandoning Judaism and Jewish life is a relative or close friend?
- What are the risks of challenging or not challenging someone to live Jewishly—and how can it be done effectively?
- Why is it safer to defend our own honor than to defend God's honor?