

Discard the Enmity **Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer**

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Parshat Mishpatim

If thou encounterest thine enemy's ox or ass going astray, be sure to bring it back. If thou seest thine enemy's beast of burden faltering under its load, though thou wishest to refrain from helping, thou shalt make every effort to help. (Exodus 23:4-5)

On the surface, the plain-text meaning of these verses is clear. It may be that you have an enemy, but your dislike for your enemy must not be permitted to extend to harming your enemy's animals; they have done nothing to you. While your efforts to help your enemy's beast of burden may have the effect of helping your enemy, so be it! The animal must not be made to suffer because you have an argument with its owner.

On a deeper level, the *Midrash Lekach Tov* interprets these verses to mean that it is incumbent on us, when we see our enemy's beast of burden struggling under its load, to discard our enmity. The Hebrew verb *azov*, found twice in the second of these two verses and traditionally rendered as *help*, can also mean *discard*. When we see our enemy's beast of burden struggling under its load, we are commanded, *Midrash Lekach Tov* tells us, to discard our enmity. Not just put it aside for the moment, but discard it! We are commanded to do so!

But there is a deeper level still. Every character in Torah is an aspect of each individual's personality. The other may choose to be our enemy, but it is our choice – our choice entirely – to accept that enmity or to reject it. If we accept that enmity, responding in kind, in enmity, then it is we who become the ox and the ass, and we will inevitably find ourselves struggling under the unbearable load of enmity and hatred. When we realize that it is our feelings of enmity and hatred that reduce us to being no more than oxen and asses, then we will have no choice but to discard our enmity and hatred. When we refuse to respond to the other's enmity and hatred in kind, we re-humanize ourselves – and the other as well.

To recovery from all hatred and enmity may we all soon be led.

Shabbat Shalom.