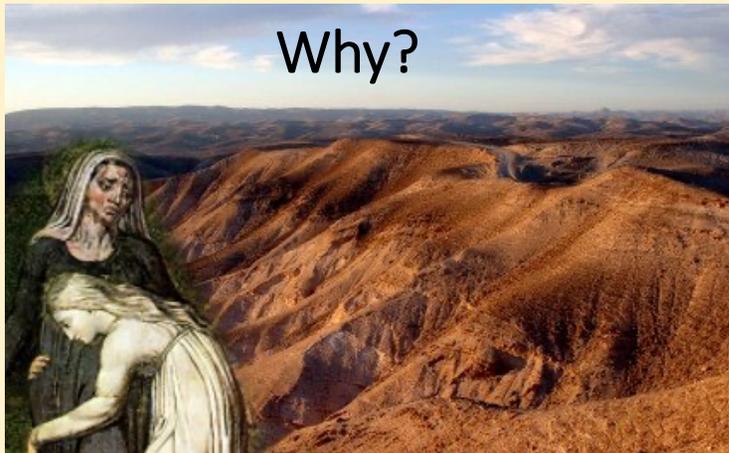


Loving the Stranger

Torah for Mishpatim, Kedoshim, Behar, Ki Teitzei, Refugee Shabbat



We often take the commandment to *"love your neighbor as yourself"* to be one of the moral foundations of universal human dignity. But the Torah divides "love" for people into two commandments; the complementary commandment says, *"The stranger who sojourns with you... you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."*



Presentation based on resources and teachings by **R. David Seidenberg**, neohasid.org, 2021.
Find the expanded resource packet including all the verses about the stranger throughout Tanakh on www.neohasid.org/torah/lovingthestranger/.

Detail of illustration from William Blake, "Book of Ruth"

Lev 19:18:

You shall neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people; and you shall love your friend/fellow/*rei'ekha* (usually translated: 'neighbor') like yourself/*kamokha*. I am YHVH.

לֹא-תִקֹּם וְלֹא-תִטַּר אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ,
וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ. אֲנִי יְהוָה.

Lev 19:34:

Like a native/citizen/*ezrach* from among you, so shall the stranger who sojourns with you / *hager hagar itchem* be for you, and you shall love them as yourself/*kamokha*; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

I am YHVH your God.

כְּאֶזְרָח מִכֶּם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם הַגֵּר הַגֵּר אִתְּכֶם
וְאָהַבְתָּ לוֹ כָּמוֹךָ כִּי-גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם. אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

Let's assume that the Torah is giving us the best possible foundation for a moral and humanistic ethic.

What necessitates this doubling of the mitzvah (commandment), in which the stranger is both like the neighbor and unlike the neighbor?

Why is that a better foundation than just saying "love every human being as yourself"?

The Shmita (Sabbatical year) connection

Our connection with the land is defined by how we treat the stranger and the poor, not the neighbor, and by seeing ourselves as strangers, not owners.

Exodus 23

9 And **you shall not oppress/*tilchatz* a stranger – and you have known the soul/*nefesh* of the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.**

10 Six years you may sow your land and gather in her produce. 11 But in the seventh [year] you shall release her and let it go; and the poor of your people will eat, and what they leave over, the beasts of the field will eat. So shall you do to your vineyard [and] to your olive [grove].

12 Six days you may do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, in order that your ox and your donkey will rest, and your maidservant's son and **the stranger will be re-ensouled/*vayinafeish*.**

Leviticus 25

6 The shabbat [produce] of the land (in the Sabbatical year) will be for you and for your male and female servant and for your hired worker **and for your migrant settler living-as-a-stranger with you / *ul'toshav'kha hagarim imakh***; 7 and for your animal and the wild animal living in your land – all of her produce will be for eating...

23 The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is Mine and **you are strangers and (temporary) settlers with Me / *gerim v'toshavim imadi*.**

What is the connection between knowing the soul of the stranger and loving the stranger? What is the connection between knowing the soul of the stranger and loving the land?

Discuss these texts (with a partner or small group) in light of the command to empathize with both stranger and neighbor:

Lev 23:22 – Remember the stranger when you harvest

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the stranger living-as-a-stranger (sojourning) among you / *ha-ger ha-gar b'tokham*. I am YHVH your God.

Deut 23:16-17 – Rights of refugee/fleeing servant to live anywhere

You shall not detain-to-deliver/*tasgir* a slave/servant/*eved* unto their lords/masters/*adonav* when they have been rescued from their masters. With you they will dwell in your midst, in the place where they choose in one of your gates where it is good for them. Do not mistreat him /*tonenu*.

Deut 27:19 – Justice for the stranger – part of the blessings and curses

“Cursed is the one who bends justice of the stranger, the orphan or the widow.”
And all the people will say, “Amen!”

“Your whole misfortune in Egypt was that you were strangers there. As such, according to the views of other nations, you had no right to be there, having no claim to rights of settlement, home, or property. Accordingly, you had no rights in appeal against unfair or unjust treatment. As aliens you were without any rights in Egypt, out of that grew all of your bondage and oppression, your slavery and wretchedness. Therefore beware... from making rights in your own State conditional on anything other than on that simple humanity which every human being as such bears within.”

R. Shimshon Rafael Hirsch (1808-1888, Germany),

translated by Uri L'Tzedek

Commentary on Exod 22:20: You shall not mistreat */toneh* a stranger and you shall not oppress him */tilchatzenu*, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.