



Incredible Impact

At its most basic level, the mitzvah of *hashavat aveida*, returning lost objects, seems to be elemental in a functioning society. Showing concern about the property and welfare of others creates an environment of care and mutual love. However, as the Torah can be understood on multiple levels, this *halachah* teaches us something even more profound and impactful.

The *Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh* understands this directive as a call to return “lost souls” to one’s “Brother” i.e., Hashem. We each have a responsibility not to ignore those who are on a wayward path, rather we are enjoined to gather them close and inspire them to return to Torah life. “*Ve’im lo karov achicha eilecha, ve’lo yadato, va’asafto el toch beitecha* - if your brother is not near you, or you don’t know who [the owner is], you must gather it in to your house,” (*Devarim 22:2*) Allegorically, this verse refers to the times pre -Mashiach during which we are told to bring these lost souls to the “house of Hashem”, to the Batei Midrash, and teach them Torah living.

The law of returning lost objects applies to anything that has even minimal value

and, further, there is no limit to how many times one must return something he finds. A relevant example would be if someone continuously leaves her water bottle at a shiur every week, the host of the shiur must keep giving it back. How much more so, teaches the *Chafetz Chayim*, one must do what he can to return a lost person, one who is far from his holy connection to Hashem! This mitzvah overlaps with the injunction, “*lo ta’amod al dam re’echa* – you shall not stand idly when your fellow’s life is in danger.”

Rav Moshe Rosenstein, in *Yesodei Hada’at*, offers a beautiful *mashal* to explain this idea. Imagine, a prince who is wandering lost in a forest. Although it is meaningful to provide for the prince’s needs, the greatest kindness one can do is to return him back to the King’s palace. All Jews are *benei Melech*, children of the King; the greatest kindness we can do is to return Hashem’s children back to His palace.

It is fascinating to learn from the *Chovot HaLevavot* that there is no comparison between the merit of one who works on perfecting himself to one who positively impacts others. The latter is credited with not only the accomplishments of those whom they impacted for all time, they are also credited with the numerous merits of their families and offspring *ad sof kol hadorot*, for everlasting generations. One

does not need to be a “kiruv professional” to share an inspirational idea or a new halachah one has learned with family and friends thus helping to bring others just a little bit closer to “home.”

Rav Kestenbaum in *Olam Ha'avodah* shares another powerful way to impact others. He notes that after 120 years, you can potentially be credited with the return of hundreds of *ba'alei teshuva* that you had affected. “But I was never involved with these people!” you say with great surprise. “Ah,” responds the High Court, showing you the power of your tefilah when you recited the brachah “*Hasheveinu Avinu letoratecha*” in the Amidah. When we daven a heartfelt tefilah for Hashem’s children to return to His Torah, it is considered part of the mitzvah of *hashavat aveida*, returning lost souls to their Source. ■

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