



LOVE YOUR FELLOW —EVEN WHEN IT'S DANGEROUS?

What is more important:
my own life, or saving someone else's?
A discussion on moral dilemmas and courage.

TEACHER'S MANUAL



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A. Do Not Stand by Your Fellow's Blood.....1

This week's Torah reading tells us, "Do not stand by your fellow's blood, for I am G-d." Rashi explains: "Do not watch him die while you could have saved him. For example, he is drowning in a river and being attacked by animals or bandits."

The Rebbe asks:

A. What prompted Rashi to explain this verse with an explanation that doesn't seem to add anything?

B. Why does Rashi use a specific and detailed example? It is clear that there are all kinds of possible dangers.

The explanation:

The reader of the above verse may ask why the Torah needs to give such a commandment. The Torah has already commanded us to help our fellows and seek their wellbeing ("Love your fellow as yourself," for example). It must be that this verse is teaching us something new. What is new here?

B. Two Conflicting Values.....4

To explain this, Rashi emphasizes that this verse is dealing with a situation where the rescuer may be putting their own life on the line to save the victim. This is why the Torah says "Do not stand by"—you must endanger yourself to save your fellow.

To illustrate this, Rashi brings a real-life example that poses this dilemma: A person is drowning, and simultaneously being attacked by animals or bandits taking advantage of their vulnerable state. Does a passerby have an obligation to rescue them, thereby putting their own life in danger? The Torah says yes: If the victim can be saved, it is obligatory to attempt a rescue. The Talmud recounts how Rabbi Isi fell into the hands of murderers and Rabbi Yochanan believed nothing could be done. Reish Lakish, however, chose to endanger himself and save Rabbi Isi from the murderers, and he succeeded (Source 2).

C. "Blood is the Life"13

Rashi's deeper meaning: Blood represents the life-force of a Jew, our spiritual life which is Torah and mitzvot. Here, a Jew is in mortal spiritual danger: They have lost their passion and vitality for Torah and mitzvot, because they are drowning in negative elements. The Torah commands us: "Do not stand by your fellow's blood"—we may not stand idly by. If by Divine Providence we encounter a Jew in spiritual danger, that means it is up to us to work to revive them by drawing them closer to Judaism.

Introduction

Imagine this: you're walking along the riverbank when suddenly you spot someone being swept away by the current, struggling for their life. There's no lifeguard in sight. Your heart races, and you're hit with a dilemma: should you jump in and risk your own life, or stay on the shore and search for help?

In moments like these, the Torah does not leave us without guidance. In this week's Torah portion, Kedoshim, we encounter one of the most powerful moral imperatives:

"Do not stand by your fellow's blood."

We are forbidden to remain passive when someone else's life is in danger.

But does the obligation to save another person also require us to risk our own lives? To what extent are we expected to give up our personal safety for someone else's sake?

Let's dive together into the depths of this issue and discover what the Torah expects of us, and the lessons we can learn about courage, sensitivity, and personal responsibility.

השיעור לפרשת אחרי מות - קדושים

משיחת שבת פרשת קדושים ה'תשמ"ו
תורת מנחם ה'תשמ"ו חלק ג',
עמוד 259 ואילך (בלתי מוגה), עמוד 278 ואילך (מוגה)

A. Do Not Stand by Your Fellow's Blood

Parshat Kedoshim includes many fundamental laws, and therefore it was conveyed to the Jews during a gathering of the entire nation. The very first command given is: "You shall be holy, for I, the L-rd your G-d, am holy." This is followed by numerous and varied commandments.

In Parshat Kedoshim, there are many mitzvot. Rambam counts 51 commandments in total – 28 positive commandments and 23 prohibitions.

Here are a few examples:

Prohibitions: Cursing one's parents, stealing and robbery, making false oaths in monetary cases, cursing others, tripping up a blind person—whether literally or by offering deceptive advice to someone unfamiliar with a matter, conducting dishonest business or deceptive trade, gossip, hating another Jew, taking revenge or bearing a grudge by reminding someone of past wrongs, disrespecting the convert.

Positive mitzvot include: "Love your fellow as yourself," rising before the elderly and showing them respect, honoring one's parents (though not at the expense of keeping Shabbat).

In this class, we will focus on one of the most important mitzvot mentioned in this parshah:

Source 1 Leviticus 19:16

Student's
pg. 1 You shall not go around as a gossip amongst your people. You shall not stand by your fellow's blood. I am G-d.

לֹא תֵלֵךְ רֵכִיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ, לֹא תַעֲמֹד
עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ, אֲנִי ה'.

Rashi

Student's
pg. 1 You shall not stand by your fellow's blood: Do not watch him die while you could have saved him. For example, he is drowning in a river and being attacked by animals or bandits

לֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ.
לְרֹאוֹת כְּמִיתָתוֹ וְאַתָּה
יָכוֹל לְהַצִּילוֹ, כְּגוֹן
טוֹבֵעַ בְּנָהָר וְחִיָּה אוֹ
לִיְסוּטִים בָּאִים עָלָיו.

>> The Rebbe

What does Rashi want?

Student's
pg. 1

There are a few points that need explanation:

1. The verse "Do not stand by your neighbor's blood" seems straightforward and easy to understand. It would seem there is no need for any additional explanation. So why did Rashi need to comment on this verse? What difficulty did he find in the verse that made it necessary for him to offer an explanation?

2. Rashi gives an example of what "your neighbor's blood" refers to—he says, "for example," and offers a specific case. This is puzzling: what is he adding by giving a particular example? The beginner student reading the verse would already know that there are many different situations where a person could be in danger. So why did Rashi find it necessary to bring a specific example?

צריך להבין :

(א) הפסוק "לא תעמוד על דם רעך" - מובן בפשטות, ואין כל צורך, לכאורה, בביאור והסבר. מדוע אם כן, הוצרך רש"י להתעכב על פירוש הפסוק? - מה הוקשה לו בפסוק שבגלל זה הוצרך לפרשו?!

(ב) רש"י מביא דוגמא למצב של לא תעמוד דם רעך - "כגון טובע נהר וחיה או ליסטים באים עליו". ואינו מובן: מה בא רש"י ללמדנו בהבאת הדוגמא? הרי ה'בן חמש למקרא' יודע שבעולם הזה ישנם ריבוי מקרים ומצבים של סכנה, ואם כן, מדוע צריך רש"י להביא דוגמא לכך?

Of course we have to save lives!

Student's
pg. 2

The explanation is as follows:

When a beginner student reads the verse "Do not stand by your neighbor's blood," they understand that the verse is not just teaching us the basic rule that one must save another person from mortal danger. There is nothing novel about that idea, so what would the verse be teaching us?

There are already many verses that teach us about proper interpersonal behavior. For example, we are told that Abraham "commanded his sons

והביאור בזה:

כאשר ה'בן חמש למקרא' לומד את הפסוק "לא תעמוד על דם רעך" - הוא מבין שאין כוונת הכתוב להשמיענו את עצם החיוב של הצלת חבירו ממיתה - משום שאין בזה כל חידוש!

ישנם כמה וכמה פסוקים שתוכנם על דבר הנהגה טובה בין אדם לחבירו, החל ממה שהובא

and his household after him . . . to perform righteousness and justice.” There are also verses like “Lend money to My people,” “You must help him,” and others. And most importantly, there is the general command in our Torah portion to “Love your fellow as yourself.”

Given all of this, there would seem to be no need for an additional verse simply to tell us that if we see another person in mortal danger, we must do whatever we can to save them.

באברהם "אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחריו גו' לעשות צדקה גו"¹, "אם כסף תלוה את עמי גו"², "עזוב תעזוב עמו" וכיוצא בזה, עד לציווי הכללי שבפרשתנו³ (בסמיכות לפסוק "לא תעמוד גו'"): "ואהבת לרעך כמוך",

ובמילא, אין כל צורך להשמיענו שכאשר אדם רואה את חבירו בסכנת מיתה, הוא צריך לעשות את התלוי בו כדי להצילו.

Evidently, the verse is telling us something else, something new. What is that?

3. קדושים יט, יח.

1. וירא יח, יט.
2. משפטים כב, כד.

B. Conflicting Values

When Saving Another Puts Me at Risk

In Tractate Bava Metzia, Ben Petura and Rabbi Akiva disagree about a difficult case:

“Two people are walking on a journey, and one of them has a jug of water. If both drink, they will both die. But if only one drinks, he will survive and reach civilization.

Ben Petura taught: It is better that both drink and die, rather than one see the death of his fellow.

Until Rabbi Akiva came and taught: ‘Your brother shall live with you—your own life takes precedence over the life of your fellow.’

What are they arguing about? The core issue is whether a person is required to put their own life at risk in order to save someone else.

Rabbi Akiva—the very one who famously taught that “Love your fellow as yourself” is a central rule of the Torah—is the one who says that this love does not mean giving up your own life for someone else.

This leads us to the central question: Is there an obligation to endanger oneself in order to save another?

And this question breaks down into two parts:

- 1. If we say there is no obligation to risk one’s life to save another, is one permitted to do so voluntarily?*
- 2. If we say there is an obligation, how much risk must one take? Must one enter a situation of equal uncertainty (a 50/50 chance), or even where danger seems more likely than survival?*

Rashi addresses this very dilemma, stating that the verse “Do not stand by your fellow’s blood” refers specifically to such a case:

>> The Rebbe

Do I need to endanger myself?

Student's
pg. 3

Rashi is therefore compelled to explain that this verse is talking about a specific situation where there is a real need for the commandment "Do not stand by your neighbor's blood," instructing us not to "watch them die if you can save them."

What kind of situation is this? When the other person is in such a form of danger that any attempt to save them would also involve risking one's own life. In other words, if someone doesn't remain in their place but goes out to try and rescue the other person, they are putting themselves in danger.

In this case it can be argued that one is allowed (and perhaps even required) to stay put in order not to endanger themselves. It is about such a situation that the special command comes: "Do not stand by your neighbor's blood." When it is a matter of someone's life at stake (and not merely injury or a loss of money), it is forbidden to stay on the sidelines and watch the other person die when one is in a position to try to save them. One must get up and act, even if it involves personal risk.

A common scenario

Student's
pg. 4

Rashi brings an example in order to clarify and illustrate the meaning of the verse. Based on the principle that "the Torah addresses practical situations," Rashi needs to bring an example that would be common and practical. This is why Rashi chooses the case of "someone

ולכן, מוכרח רש"י לפרש שבפסוק זה מדובר אודות מצב מיוחד שבו יש צורך בציווי "לא תעמוד על דם רעך" - "לראות במיתתו ואתה יכול להצילו".

הא כיצד - כשחבירו נמצא בסכנה כזו שכל ניסיון להצלתו כרוך בסיכון עצמי, כלומר, אם לא ישאר לעמוד במקומו, אלא יתקרב לנסות להציל את חבירו, אזי מסכן בכך את עצמו, ובמילא, יש סברא ומחשבה שבמקרה כזה יכול (ואולי גם צריך) להישאר לעמוד במקומו, כדי שלא לסכן את עצמו, הנה, על זה בא ציווי מיוחד: "לא תעמוד על דם רעך" - שכאשר מדובר אודות "דם רעך", סכנת מיתה (מה שאין כן בפציעה בלבד, ועל אחת כמה וכמה בממון בלבד), אזי - "לא תעמוד", אסור לך להישאר אדיש, לעמוד ו"לראות במיתתו", בהיותך במצב ש"אתה יכול להצילו", אלא עליך ללכת ולעשות כו', אפילו אם בכך אתה מסכן את עצמך.

ומביא רש"י דוגמא לדבר, "כגון כו'", כדי להבהיר ולהמחיש את פירוש הכתוב.

ובהקדמה: על פי הכלל ש"דיבר הכתוב בהווה"⁴, צריך רש"י להביא דוגמא

4. פרש"י משפטים כא, כח. יז, כא, ל.

drowning in a river and being attacked by animals or robbers.”

The beginner student knows that people usually settle near rivers. Water is essential for life—people need it to drink, to water fields so they can grow crops for making bread, and so on. Therefore, people typically live close to a river, rather than living in dry areas like a desert. A river is preferable over the sea because the river's water is fresh, unlike the salty seawater. Living next to a river enables people to draw water from the river at hand, without needing to exert themselves and dig wells where they may or may not find water.

It is also normal for people to enter the river to bathe. Especially among the Jewish people, immersion in natural bodies of water is a major part of family life, a regular monthly practice. In the absence of a constructed mikvah—such as when the local community activists aren't building one...—women need to go to the river to immerse, using a partition for privacy. Some men also use a mikvah regularly, and all use it on the eve of Yom Kippur.

As a result, the scenario of someone “drowning in a river” was very much a real, everyday concern. A person bathing in the river might suddenly feel weak—perhaps from overworking or, for a young child learning this text, from tiring themselves out with study—or a strong wind might suddenly

שבהווה דווקא. ולכן, מביא רש"י את הדוגמא של “טובע בנהר וחיה או לסטים באים עליו”, כדלקמן:

ה'בן חמש למקרא' יודע שישובי בני אדם הם - בדרך כלל - בסמיכות לנהר, שכן, המצרך הכי עיקרי בחיי האדם הוא - מים כדי לשתות ולהשקות את השדות שיצמיחו תבואה שממנה יעשה לחם וכו', ולכן, דרכם של בני אדם להתיישב (לא במדבר, שאין בו מים, כי אם) בסמיכות לנהר (נהר דווקא, שמימיו מתוקים, ולא ים, שמימיו מלוחים ואינם ראויים לשתיה), שאז יוכלו לשאוב מים מנהר שנמצא בקרבת מקום (ולא יצטרכו להתייגע ולחפש מים על ידי חפירת בארות וכיוצא בזה, ומה גם שאפילו לאחר החפירה יתכן שלא ימצאו כי אם טיפין טיפין כו'). וכמו כן דבר הרגיל אצל בני אדם להיכנס לתוך הנהר - כדי לרחוץ במי הנהר.

ובפרט אצל בני ישראל הרי הטבילה - ב"מקוה מים" היא ענין הכי עיקרי בחיי משפחה, ודבר הרגיל - מידי חודש בחדשו, ובמילא, במקום שאין “מקווה” (מכיון שאין “עסקנים” שיתעסקו בבניית מקווה...), צריכות הנשים (ועל דרך זה האנשים הזהירים בטבילת עזרא⁵, או בערב יום הכיפורים⁶) לילך לטבול בנהר⁷.

ומכיון שכן, הרי גם המציאות של “טובע בנהר” היא דבר שבהווה, כאשר האדם הרוחץ בנהר מרגיש לפתע חלישות (מפני שהתייגע בפרנסתו וכיוצא בזה, או

7. על ידי הקפת מפץ וכיוצא בזה. ראה רמב"ם הל' מקוואות פ"ט ה"ג. שו"ע יו"ד ס"א ס"ב.

5. ראה ברכות כב, ב. ב"ק פב, א. רמב"ם הל' ק"ש בסופו. הל' תפלה פ"ד ה"ד. שו"ע אדה"ז או"ח הל' ק"ש רס"ח. ועוד.
6. שו"ע אדה"ז או"ח הל' יוהכ"פ סתר"ז ס"א ואילך. וש"נ.

Student's
pg. 5

arise. Situations like these could lead to someone being in danger of drowning, which is why Rashi highlights this example of something that happens in everyday life.

A Combined Danger

Student's
pg. 5

The example of "someone drowning in a river" by itself does not fully explain why there would need to be a specific command like "Do not stand by your fellow's blood." After all, there's no good reason to think one could just stand by and do nothing. Even if the person is afraid to jump into the river because they might drown themselves, they could still try to help by throwing a rope or something similar. The beginner student has already observed this possibility earlier in the Torah, when Moses was saved. Pharaoh's daughter stretched out her hand, and a miracle occurred that allowed her to reach the basket he was in. So again—why the need for a special command not to stand by? It seems obvious that you should try to help.

This is why Rashi adds to the example and says "drowning in a river and an animal or robbers are approaching."

Student's
pg. 6

When someone is drowning, they naturally struggle with all their might to reach the shore and get onto dry land. This effort weakens them. So, if an animal happens to be waiting on the riverbank—even a regular predatory animal that wouldn't usually attack humans—it might now see a chance. Seeing a person so weak and helpless, the animal may sense that it can attack without resistance.

אצל הבן חמש למקרא - מפני שהתייגע בלימודו) או כשבאה לפתע רוח חזקה, וכיוצא בזה, שאז עלול לקרות שיהיה במצב של "טובע בנהר" - דבר שבהווה.

אמנם, בדוגמא של "טובע בנהר" כשלעצמה - אי אפשר להמחיש מקרה שבו יש צורך בציווי "לא תעמוד על דם רעך" (שלילת עמידה במקומו), שהרי אין כל סברא ומחשבה להישאר לעמוד, שכן, גם אם אינו יכול לקפוץ לתוך הנהר מפני שחושש שמא יטבע בעצמו, יכול לנסות להצילו על ידי זה שיזרוק לו חבל וכיוצא בזה (וכסיפור מפורש של הצלת משה - שכבר למדו הבן חמש למקרא - "ותרא את התבה... ותשלח את אמתה (ידה), שנשתרבה אמתה אמות הרבה) ותקחה"⁸), ואם כן, מה בא ללמדנו בציווי "לא תעמוד"? פשיטא שלא ישאר לעמוד במקומו, אלא ינסה להצילו!

ולכן, מוסיף רש"י "טובע בנהר וחייה או לסטים באים עליו": דרכו של "טובע בנהר" - שמשתדל ומתייגע ביותר לטפס ולעלות ליבשה, ועל ידי זה נחלש וכו'. ובמילא, כאשר על שפת הנהר עומדת "חיה" - הרי אף שאינה "חיה רעה" (שהרי דיבר הכתוב בהווה), אלא חיה סתם, שבדרך כלל פוחדת להתנפל על בני אדם, וכמפורש בקרא⁹: "ומוראכם וחתכם יהיה על כל חית הארץ", ובפרט בפירוש רש"י שם: אפילו "תינוק בן יומו" - מכל מקום,

8. שמות ב, ה ובפרש"י.
9. נח ט, ב.

The same applies to robbers. We're not talking about violent criminals who attack anyone on sight, but rather about opportunists. Normally, such robbers are afraid to attack people openly, but when they see someone drowning and struggling, they might decide to wait for him to reach the shore, knowing they can easily overpower him.

In a situation like this—someone drowning, with a threat waiting nearby—there might be a natural assumption that you're allowed to stay put. After all, approaching to help might put you in harm's way. The animal or the robbers might come after you too. That being the case, you may think it's acceptable—or even required—to protect yourself and not get involved.

Don't stand by

Because intervening to save this person is dangerous, there's a logical reason to believe that it is permitted—or even required—to stand by and not intervene.

This is exactly the kind of situation the verse addresses with the words "Do not stand by your fellow's blood." If someone's life is at risk, you're not allowed to stay back and watch, even if helping them involves some danger to yourself.

בראותה אדם הטובע בנהר, יתכן (ורגיל) שתמתין לו ("באים עליו"), ביודעה שתוכל לנצחו בקלות.

ועל דרך זה כאשר על שפת הנהר עומדים "לסטים" - לא "לסטים" שיתנפלו על כל אדם שימצא בקרבתם, דוגמת "חיה רעה" (שהרי דיבר הכתוב בהווה), כי אם, "לסטים" דוגמת "חיה" סתם, שבדרך כלל פוחדים מבני אדם, ורק בראותם אדם הטובע בנהר, אזי "באים עליו", ביודעם שיוכלו לנצחו בקלות.

במקרה כזה - "טובע בנהר וחיה או לסטים באים עליו" - יש סברא ומחשבה להישאר לעמוד:

כאשר חיה או לסטים עומדים על שפת הנהר וממתנים לטובע בנהר, הרי כשיתקרב מישוהו כדי לנסות להצילו - יש להניח שהחיה או הלסטים יתנקמו בו, שכן, אף על פי שמדובר אודות חיה או לסטים שבדרך כלל לא יתנפלו על בני אדם, מכל מקום, במקרה כזה, כשעומדים וממתנים לטובע בנהר, ואז ינסה מישוהו להצילו כו' - זה יהיה שונה¹⁰.

ומכיון שיש חשש סכנה להתקרב להצילו, יש סברא ומחשבה שמותר לו (ואולי גם צריך) להישאר לעמוד, ולא ללכת להצילו, מכיון שאין לו לסכן את עצמו.

הנה על זה נאמר בכתוב "לא תעמוד על דם רעך": כשמדובר אודות "דם רעך" (סכנת מיתה) אסור לך להישאר לעמוד ("לא תעמוד") "לראות במיתתו", כאשר "אתה יכול להצילו", גם אם יש בכך חשש סכנה.

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תורת מנחם ה'תשמ"ו חלק ג', עמוד 278 ואילך - מוגה

10. להעיר מהנתפס כשכא במחזרת (משפטים כב, א וכפרש").

Story - The Child Rescuer

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This story was written by the Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Chana, in her memoirs, about her nine-year-old son:

In 1911 my son accompanied me to a health clinic in Balaclava, Crimea. There was a cave that led to the sea. The narrow stream of water flowed between the two walls of the cave and rolled into the sea. The place where the stream and the sea met was very dangerous; even experienced swimmers were cautious.

One time I was at the shore, where we gathered to spend time. I heard that a boy was drowning, and went to see what was happening. I heard from others, and saw for myself, that a small child had rowed out in a single-person boat with one oar—a kayak. As I said before, the place where the stream and the sea met was a very dangerous place. The boat began to sink with the child inside.

When my son noticed this, he swam out to the boat, climbed inside, and took the oar from the exhausted, barely conscious boy. Taking control, he steered it out of the danger zone and brought it to the shore, saving the passenger.

But after this difficult—extraordinary, I would say—rescue, my son was physically and emotionally strained. With no warning or forethought, he had to create a strategy to determine in which direction he could safely steer to a less dangerous area. My son therefore became very weak, and he himself began to struggle to stay afloat close to the bank. When I saw him, he was exhausted and pale, and his clothes were drenched.

Thank G-d, we succeeded in bringing him out safely.

In the following Talmudic story, we see how two great sages grappled with this issue:

Source 2 Jerusalem Talmud, Terumot 47a

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pg. 8

Rabbi Isi was captured in Safsufa. Rabbi Yonatan said, may the dead be wrapped in his shroud. Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said, even if I should kill or be killed, I shall go and save him by force. He went and negotiated, and they handed him over to him. He said to them, come to our old sage, he shall pray for you. They came to Rabbi Yochanan. He said to them, what was in your heart to do to him shall be done to these people. They hadn't yet reached Apipsaros and they were all gone.

רבי איסי איתציד בספסופה. אמר רבי יונתן יכרה המית בסדינו. אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש עד דאנא קטיל ואנא מיתקטיל אנא איזיל ומשיזיב ליה בחיילא. אזל ופיסון ויהבניה ליה. אמר לון ואתון גבי סבין והוא מצלי עליכון. אתון גבי רבי יוחנן. אמר לון מה דהוה בלכבכון איעבד ליה יתעביד לון ימטא להווא עמא. לא מטון אפיפסרוס עד דאזלון כולהון.

Dead be wrapped in his shroud: That is to say, he had given up on him and believed he had no hope, and the only thing to do was to prepare burial shrouds. But Reish Lakish heard of this and said, “Either I will kill or be killed—I will go and rescue him by force.” He went and appeased those bandits, and they released the man and handed him over to Reish Lakish.

Reish Lakish then said to them, “Come with me to our elder—Rabbi Yochanan—and he will pray for you, for having returned him to me.” They came before Rabbi Yochanan, and he said to them, “What you intended to do to him shall be done to you.” And indeed, all that had been decreed upon them came to pass, and before they reached the place called Apipsaros, they had all been killed.

כָּרַךְ הַמֵּת בְּסִדְיָו. כְּלוּמַר, שֶׁנִּתְיָאֵשׁ הֵימָנוּ וְאֵין לוֹ אֵלָּא לְהַכִּין לְעֲצָמוֹ תְּכָרִיכֵי הַמֵּת. וְשָׁמַע רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן לָקִישׁ וְאָמַר: "אוֹ אֲנִי אֶהְרַג אוֹ אֲנִי נִהְרָג – אֲנִי אֶלֶף וְאַצִּיל אוֹתוֹ בְּכַח", וְהִלֵּךְ וּפָּסַס לְאוֹתָן הַגִּזְלָנִים וְהַנִּיחָוּהוּ וְנָתַנוּ אוֹתוֹ לְיָדָיו.

וְאָמַר לָהֶן: "וְתֵבְאוּ עִמִּי אֶצֶל הַזִּקֵּן שְׁלָנוּ – וְהוּא ר' יוֹחָנָן – וְהוּא יִתְפַּלֵּל עֲלֵיכֶם עַל אֲשֶׁר הִחֲזַרְתֶּם אוֹתוֹ לִי". וּבָאוּ אֶצֶל ר' יוֹחָנָן וְאָמַר לָהֶן: "מָה שִׁהֲיִיתֶם רוֹצִים לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמּוֹ, בֶּן יַעֲשֶׂה לָהֶן וְיָבֹא עֲלֵיהֶן הַכּוֹל". וְכֵן הָיָה, שֶׁלֹּא הִגִּיעוּ לְמָקוֹם אֲפִיפְסָרוֹס, עַד שֶׁנִּהְרְגוּ כָּלָן.

Optional Section:

Who was Reish Lakish, and what was his background?

Some say that in his youth Reish Lakish studied Torah, but due to poverty he left his studies and sold himself to the Ludim—gladiators who fought wild beasts in the arena for public entertainment. That was his livelihood, and with his strong build, he succeeded in this dangerous trade. Eventually, he escaped from the Ludim—and then came the moment that changed his life...

The Talmud (Bava Metziah 84a) recounts that one day Rabbi Yochanan was bathing in the Jordan River. Reish Lakish (who had known him in their youth) saw him and jumped in after him. Rabbi Yochanan said to him: “Your strength should be used for Torah!” Reish Lakish responded: “Your beauty is fit for women!” Rabbi Yochanan, who was famously handsome, replied: “If you return to Torah, I will give you my sister—who is even more beautiful than I—as your wife.”

Reish Lakish agreed. Rabbi Yochanan then taught him Tanach and Mishnah, and made him into a Torah scholar—to the point where he nearly equaled Rabbi Yochanan himself. He studied day and night and devoted his life entirely to Torah. Reish Lakish is the one who famously said (Berachot 63b): “The words of Torah endure only in one who kills himself over them.”

•

Perhaps this explains why Reish Lakish volunteered to go and risk himself to save Rabbi Isi—

because he was uniquely capable of doing so. He came from that kind of background, and had the tools to help. Rabbi Yonatan, on the other hand, did not.

Indeed, this is how halacha is ruled: when someone is drowning or in another form of danger, if there is a lifeguard or trained officer nearby, they are under a greater obligation to risk themselves to save him. First, because they are trained; and second, because this is their profession, and therefore they are believed to have special Divine assistance.

Ultimately, it comes down to the level of piety of each person.

And so, for example, during the October 7 massacre, there were ambulance crews who were afraid to enter the Gaza Envelope areas and followed official orders not to enter an area that had not yet been cleared. But there were also medics who risked their lives, entered areas still crawling with terrorists, and saved many Jewish lives.

(End of optional section)

What does Jewish law say?

Source 3 Shulchan Aruch Harav, Laws of Bodily Injury and Harm

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One who sees their fellow drowning, or being attacked by bandits and they can personally save them or hire others to, must save them or hire others, and the rescuer can be repaid later if the victim is able to. If the victim does not have the means, the rescuer is still obligated to save them, as the verse says: "Do not stand by your fellow's blood."

הַרְוֵאָה אֶת חֲבֵרוֹ טוֹבֵעַ בַּיָּם
אוֹ לְסֻטִּים בָּאִים עָלָיו וְיָכוֹל
לְהַצִּילוֹ הוּא בַּעֲצָמוֹ אוֹ לְשָׂכָר
אַחֵרִים לְהַצִּילוֹ – חַיֵּב לְטָרַח
וְלְשָׂכָר וְלְהַצִּילוֹ, וְחוּזָר וְנִפְרָע
מִמֶּנּוּ אִם יֵשׁ לוֹ. וְאִם לֹא –
לֹא יִמְנָע, וְאִם נִמְנָע – עוֹבֵר עַל
"לֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ".

When it comes to effort or paying money to save a person from danger, it is clear that one is obligated to do so. The question arises, however, when it comes to risking oneself:

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For the rescuer to place himself in potential danger—some say they must, in order to save the victim from certain danger, and others disagree. Practically, we are lenient when it comes to a doubt over a life-and death ruling.

וְאִפְּלוּ לִכְנֹס בְּסִפֶּק סִכָּנָה – יֵשׁ
אוֹמְרִים שְׁצָרֶיךָ כְּדֵי לְהַצִּיל
אֶת חֲבֵרוֹ מִמִּיתָה וְדֹאֵית (וְיֵשׁ
חוֹלְקִין בְּזֶה. וְסִפֶּק נִפְשׁוֹת
לְהִקָּל).

The first opinion that the Alter Rebbe brings is that one must take the risk. However, he continues and says there is an opposing opinion, and therefore, in a case of doubt regarding lives, one can be lenient.

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C. Blood is the Life-force

>> The Rebbe

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A deeper reading of Rashi's commentary teaches us a lesson about spreading Torah and Judaism.

The verse states "the blood is the soul," and the spiritual meaning of this is Torah and mitzvot, "for they are our life and the length of our days."

This is the deeper meaning of "do not stand by your fellow's blood"—it is referring to a Jew who is in a state of mortal danger in the spiritual sense. This is a Jew who has lost true vitality—vitality in matters of Judaism, Torah and mitzvot, and is in a state of "dry bones."

Rashi gives an example of this: "such as a person drowning in a river." The reason the person has reached this state of danger of spiritual death is the "wicked waters," which refers to all negative influences in the world. Due to his immersion in these negative matters the person has reached a state of drowning in a river, and moreover, drowning in the sea (as per the expression used in Maimonides and in the Shulchan Aruch), where the danger is even greater than drowning in a river.

And about such a situation the Torah says: "Do not stand by your fellow's blood." This means that when we see a Jew who is in a state of spiritual danger of death, G-d forbid—we must not stand by and watch his death,

ויש להוסיף שהענין של הפצת התורה והיהדות - מודגש בתוכן הפנימי של פירוש רש"י.

ביאור הדברים: כתוב¹¹ "הדם (דם רעך)" - הוא הנפש, וענינו ברוחניות - תורה ומצוותיה, ש"הם חיינו ואורך ימינו"¹².

וזהו הפירוש הפנימי של "לא תעמוד על דם רעך" - יהודי שנמצא במעמד ומצב של סכנת מיתה ("דם רעך") ברוחניות, חס ושלום, יהודי שאיבד את החיות האמיתית, חיות בעניני יהדות, תורה ומצוותיה, בבחינת "עצמות היבשות"¹³.

ומביא רש"י דוגמא לדבר - "כגון טובע בנהר", שכן, הסיבה לכך שהגיע למעמד ומצב של סכנת מיתה, היא - "מים הזידונים"¹⁴, שמתייחס לענינים הבלתי-רצויים שבעולם, אשר, מפני היותו מונח בהם, הגיע סוף כל סוף למצב של "טובע בנהר", רחמנא ליצלו, ויתירה מזה - "טובע בים" (כלשון הרמב"ם והשולחן ערוך), שאז, הסכנה היא גדולה יותר מאשר "טובע בנהר".

ובכן, אודות מצב כזה אומרת התורה: "לא תעמוד על דם רעך", כלומר, כאשר אתה רואה יהודי שנמצא במעמד ומצב של סכנת מיתה רוחנית, רחמנא ליצלו - אסור לך לעמוד לראות במיתתו, רחמנא ליצלו,

14. תהלים קכד, ה. וראה תו"א ר"פ נח. המשך מים רבים תול"ו בתחלתו. פ"ה. ועוד.

11. דברים יב, כג.
12. נוסח תפלת ערבית. וראה ס"פ נצבים. האזינו לב, מז.
13. יחזקאל לז, א ואילך. וראה שיחה הנ"ל ס"ל ואילך.

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since we are able to save him. It is in our hands to restore and revive his soul—by spreading Torah and Judaism.

The very fact that we saw—by Divine Providence—a Jew in such a state, is itself proof that we are able to save him. For if not, why was he shown to us? It cannot be that he was shown to us merely so that we should feel pain. Rather, we must conclude that we are able to save him, and this is why he was shown to us, so that we should save him through our efforts in spreading Torah and Judaism.

There is an interesting novel point here. Generally it is taught in Chassidut that when we notice a shortcoming in another, it is by Divine Providence, to show that this same flaw exists in a more subtle form within ourselves. Here, however, the Rebbe takes it in a completely different direction: We were shown this because we are the ones who can help him.

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Additionally, the act of saving our fellow must be done without any personal calculations, even when the act of saving entails self-risk, due to the beast or the bandits, etc. That is, the effort to spread Torah and Judaism must be done in the manner of *lechatchila ariber* (boldly overcoming obstacles, from the outset).

Helping another does not always come easily. At times, it is difficult, and sometimes it even involves risk. The Rebbe says: just as a person takes a risk and jumps into the sea to save someone who is drowning, so too it is in the spiritual realm—we must be willing to take risks for another Jew.

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Yet, since one may fear the danger involved, the verse continues: I am G-d. Meaning, G-d is the true Master over the river, over the beast, or over the bandits, and therefore, when one acts to fulfill G-d's command to save his fellow, there is no need to fear anything in the world.

מכיון ש"אתה יכול להצילו"... בידך תלוי הדבר להשיב ולהחיות את נפשו - על ידי שתעסוק בהפצת התורה והיהדות!

עצם העובדה שראית - בהשגחה פרטית - יהודי שנמצא במעמד ומצב האמור ("לראות במיתתו"), מהווה הוכחה ש"אתה יכול להצילו", כי אם לא כן, מדוע הראו לך אותו?! לא יתכן שיֵראו לך אותו אך ורק כדי שתצטער... אלא ודאי בהכרח לומר ש"אתה יכול להצילו", ולכן הראו לך אותו, כדי שתצילנו - על ידי פעולתך בהפצת התורה והיהדות!

ונוסף לזה, צריכה להיות פעולת ההצלה של "רעך" ללא כל חשבונות כו' - כאשר פעולת ההצלה כרוכה בסיכון עצמי, מפני חיה או לסטים כו'... כלומר, שההתעסקות בהפצת התורה והיהדות צריכה להיות באופן של "לכתחילה אריבער" [- לכתחילה מלמעלה].

אמנם, מכיון שבכל זאת חושש מפני הסכנה שבדבר - ממשיך הכתוב: "אני ה'", כלומר, הקב"ה הוא בעל הבית האמיתי על ה"נהר", על ה"חיה", או על ה"לסטים", ובמילא, כאשר הולך לקיים את ציווי הקב"ה להציל את רעהו, אין לו לחשוש משום דבר שבפעולתו!

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There is an additional point here: "I am the L-rd—faithful to give reward, and faithful to punish." We have a negative inclination who tries to derail our good work. We must tell our negative inclination that G-d is faithful to give reward, as we read in Ethics of the Fathers, "know before Whom you labor and Who is your Employer, Who will pay you the reward of your work," and "your Employer is faithful to pay you the reward of your work."

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And at times, we must also remind the negative inclination that there is also a "stick"—faithful to punish—for this will frighten it from disturbing or preventing our work in saving our fellow through spreading Torah and Judaism.

All of the above is especially relevant to the *shluchim* engaged in spreading Torah and Judaism and spreading the wellsprings outward, on the mission of the Rebbe. One *shliach* can appoint a further *shliach*, and the chain can go on even a hundred times over. Everyone must know and remember that the Rebbe's instruction to engage in spreading Torah and Judaism is not just an enhancement of a mitzvah—it is actual saving of lives, for the Rebbe stands and declares: "Do not stand by your fellow's blood," "You are able to save him..."

At this point, we must keep in mind and emphasize: every Jew is a *shliach*. And every participant in this class is a *shliach* of the Rebbe's *shluchim* to spread Judaism to their friends, acquaintances, and so on, so that they will not drown.

ועוד ענין בזה - "אני ה'", "נאמן לשלם שכר ונאמן להיפרע": מכיון שישנו את היצר הרע שמנסה לבלבל מעבודה זו - צריכים להודיע לו שהקב"ה "נאמן לשלם שכר", ועל דרך מה שכתוב בפרקי אבות של שבת זו - "ודע לפני מי אתה עמל ומי הוא בעל מלאכתך שישלם לך שכר פעולתך"¹⁵, "נאמן הוא בעל מלאכתך שישלם לך שכר פעולתך"¹⁶.

ולפעמים, יש צורך להזכיר ליצר הרע שיש גם "מקל"... "נאמן להיפרע", שכן, דבר זה ירתיעו מבלבל ולהפריע לעבודתו של יהודי בהצלת רעהו על ידי הפצת התורה והיהדות.

כל האמור לעיל שייך במיוחד ל"שלוחים" העוסקים בהפצת התורה והיהדות, והפצת המעיינות חוצה, בשליחותו של כבוד קדושת מורי וחמי אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו - "שליח עושה שליח", אפילו מאה שלוחים¹⁷ - שעליהם לדעת ולזכור שציווי והוראת נשיא דורנו לעסוק בהפצת התורה והיהדות אינה בבחינת "הידור מצוה", כי אם, פיקוח נפש ממש, שכן, נשיא דורנו עומד ומכריז: "לא תעמוד על דם רעך"... "אתה יכול להצילו"...

17. ראה שיחת ליל שמחת"ת ש.ז. ס"ט (התועדויות ח"א ע' 342).
וש"נ.

15. פ"ב מי"ד.
16. שם מט"ז.

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And since this is the case, we must increase our activities in fulfilling the Rebbe's mission with even greater strength and even greater vigor, engaging in spreading Torah and Judaism and spreading the wellsprings of Chassidut outward, as stated, in the manner of *lechatchila ariber* (boldly overcoming obstacles, from the outset).

ומכיון שכן, יש להוסיף ביתר שאת וביתר עוז במילוי השליחות של נשיא דורנו - לעסוק בהפצת התורה והיהדות והפצת המעיינות חוצה, וכאמור, באופן של "לכתחילה אריבער" [- לכתחילה מלמעלה].

משיחת שבת פרשת קדושים ה'תשמ"ו
תורת מנחם ה'תשמ"ו, חלק ג', עמוד 259 ואילך -
בלתי מוגה.

Key Points:

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- The verse in our Torah portion states, "Do not stand by your fellow's blood." Rashi explains that this refers to a person drowning in a river, surrounded by animals or bandits, and the Torah commands that one must rescue the drowning person.

- The Rebbe explains that the verse is not telling us that we must save a fellow Jew from mortal danger—this is already known from earlier verses. Rather, it refers to a situation where the rescuer must place his own life in danger to save the one drowning.

- Thus, Rashi brings a practical example: A person who is drowning in a river, and on the riverbank, there is an animal or bandits who wish to exploit the drowning person's weakness to harm him. In such a case, there is a danger to anyone who attempts to help.

- The Torah teaches that when there is a possibility to save the drowning person, one should not stand aside, but must rescue him, even at the cost of personal danger.

- The Spiritual Meaning of the Verse: When a Jew is in spiritual danger, it is an obligation to save his soul, even at the risk of one's own spiritual well-being.

Takeaway:

When we encounter a Jew in need of spiritual assistance—for example, someone sitting next to us in the synagogue who needs help with the prayer book—we must offer our help with a full heart, even if it disrupts or confuses our own prayer. This is the mission that G-d has given us, and He delights in such acts of selfless service to others.

