

Parshat Re'eh

One of the more famous quotes from the parasha is "*Banim Atem L'Hashem Elokeichem*" "*You are children to Hashem Your G-d.*"ⁱ This, however is only part of the passuk, and is contingent on the latter half which states "*Lo Titgoddedu velo tasimu Karcha Be'in Einechem Lames.*" According to pshat this is loosely translated to mean "*You shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person.*"

What is the connection between "*Banim Atem* and *Lo Titgoddedu*"? Rashi's commentary establishes that it is *assur* to damage one's flesh as an outlet of extreme mourning or tragedy because we are children of *HaMakom*. Rather, as children of the King we are required to be "*VeAtem Raoyin Lhiyot Naim*" "*You are fit to be handsome*" and not cut.

Unlike Rashi, Ibn Ezra takes a more philosophical approach. He understands that considering we are children of Hashem, and He loves us like a father, we should accept what befalls us. "Like a small child that does not understand the actions of their father" so too, we cannot begin to comprehend everything that happens in our life. This reliance can only come about because we are unlike the rest of the nations in that everything is Divinely ordained. Ibn Ezra argues that this knowledge will bring about an acceptance of any situation that is beyond our control and therefore the futility of self-harm. Ramban agrees and explains the words "*Am Kadosh*" from the following passuk as reassurance of Hashem's providence, and that we should not grieve excessively. This warning against excessive grieving is also apparent in other Halachic literature.ⁱⁱ

Reish Lakishⁱⁱⁱ explains "*Lo Titgoddedu*" as a seemingly random and disparate proof of the prohibition against splitting communities. The Gemara learns that there should not be one city with two courts ruling differently. The Rambam^{iv} understands that since *Lo Titgoddedu* follows the phrase "*Banim Atem L'Hashem*", we can infer that as sons, we must also therefore all be siblings, which is how the Gemara derives this conclusion. The Ritva, in comparison explains the meaning of "*Lo titgoddedu*" as "don't split communities" based on the etymological connection to the word "*agudah*" meaning group. But what is the connects the prohibition of splitting communities and the continuation of

the passuk which warns us against making a bald spot between your eyes for the dead i.e. self harm as an act of grieving?

We are reminded of the need for *Arvus* - communal responsibility when entering the land. This is especially true when an individual, *lo aleinu*, goes through a personal tragedy. That is a time when the community need to be at its strongest in providing support for those that need it most, rather than letting them reach a point of despair where they may act in a personally destructive manner. This is a source for Hilchot Nechum Aveilim, whereby an avel cannot eat their own food for the first meal, and must be comforted by the community.^v

Alternatively, the Maharal^{vi} explains that just as a cut splits the flesh of a person, so too disagreement of Batei Din within one city can cause a rift in the community. These two prohibitions are two sides of the same coin with half of the passuk referring to society and the other referring to the individual.

Rav Yosef Shaul Nathanson (1808- 1875) in his commentary on Torah (Divrei Shaul) connects "*Lo Titgoddedu*" with the subsequent passuk. "*For you are a holy people to Hashem, your G-d and Hashem has chosen you for Himself to be an "Am Segula" from among all the people on the face of the earth.*" The phrase *Am Segula* literally means a "treasured nation." The Bnei Yisrael are Hashem's treasure, and even if their neshama is separated from their guf they still maintain their extraordinary worth. This is a comfort to the mourner in the fact that they know that their loved one is still precious and valued in the eyes of Hashem as their neshama lives on. Alternatively the analogy of us being Hashem's treasure also fits into the interpretation of "*Lo Titgoddedu*" to mean "Do not separate communities". Rabbi David Silverberg explains that if it is true that all Bnei Yisrael are a treasure to Hashem, despite our shortcomings and multiple blemishes, then presumably we too must also act in a way that is "*Lo Titgoddedu* – not splitting communities". We must be willing to overlook the imperfections we see in others as they too are part of this "treasured nation" as well as being "*Banim L'Hashem*", and thus our siblings. Only through this mutual respect will we be *zoche* to have our own true value restored.

ⁱ Parshat Re'eh 14:1; ⁱⁱ Moed Katan 27:a/ Rambam Hilchot Avoda Zara 12:3; ⁱⁱⁱ Yevamos 13b; ^{iv} Matanos Anyiim 10:2; ^v Rambam Avel 14:1; ^{vi} Gur Aryeh Devarim :11:1