



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 19 | Va'eschanan* | Sichah 3

Neighbors

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*and *siyum* of tractate *Sukkah*

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1.

BAR METZRA

From the verse,¹ “You shall do what is fair and good in the eyes of Hashem,” we derive the law of *bar metzra*.² When a person sells a field to someone other than his neighbor, his neighbor — the *bar metzra* (i.e., the owner of a field right next to the field being sold) — has the right to evict the purchaser from the field and buy it himself. This is because it is advantageous for a *bar metzra* to have all of his fields contiguous.

The law of *bar metzra*, as mentioned by the Gemara³ (and as Rambam rules)⁴ is that if a purchaser already bought the field, he is **evicted** from the field, based on the principle that “you shall do what is fair and good.” This shows that the obligation to “do what is fair and good” rests primarily upon the purchaser, since, in contrast to the *bar metzra*, it makes no real difference to the purchaser whether he buys **this** field or a field somewhere else. Therefore, it is “fair and good” for the *bar metzra* to be given the right to buy this field.

The Gemara teaches another law that also shows that the obligation rests primarily upon the purchaser:⁵ “If a field was sold to a gentile, the purchase is not subject to the law of *bar metzra*... a gentile is certainly not bound by the command that ‘you shall do what is fair and good.’” Meaning, this law of *bar metzra* is an obligation placed upon the purchaser; therefore, it cannot apply when “a field was sold to a gentile.”

¹ *Devarim* 6:18.

² {A neighbor’s right of preemption.}

³ *Bava Metzia* 108a.

⁴ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Shecheinim*,” ch. 12, par. 5.

⁵ *Bava Metzia* 108b.

2.

TWO WAYS TO UNDERSTAND THE LAW

We can explain, however, the parameters of the law of *bar metzra* in two ways:

(a) It is **just a** proper and moral practice. Meaning, the acquisition of the field by a purchaser {who is not a neighbor} is fully binding *halachically*. The Sages, though, obligated him to behave in a “fair and good” way.” Therefore, he must (take his purchase and) **yield** it to the *bar metzra* (and the same holds true regarding other laws of *bar metzra*).

b) The obligation that “you shall do what is fair and good” **has an effect**, and the *bar metzra* receives a measure of ownership in the field. Therefore, the purchaser needs to yield the field to the *bar metzra* not only because he is obligated to behave morally, but because the *bar metzra* has an invested interest in the field. As *Nimukei Yosef* says,⁶ “It is as if the *bar metzra* has {already} a small stake in the land.”

3.

THE DIFFERENCE

The difference between these two explanations is as follows: According to the first explanation — that the law of *bar metzra* is only righteous conduct — the law devolves upon the **purchaser**. Meaning, **he** must behave fairly and morally, and yield the field to the *bar metzra*. (If he does not want to, however, the court forces him.) According to the second explanation, the law of *bar metzra* pertains to the **acquisition of the land**. Although the commandment, “**You shall do** what is fair and good” applies to the purchaser, even according to this explanation, the commandment, however (and its implementation), also concerns the court: On account of the directive to “do what is fair and good,” the **Sages** gave a *bar metzra* a degree of ownership of the actual field. This, then, weakens the purchaser’s acquisition, so consequently, the purchaser must leave.

⁶ *Nimukei Yosef* on *Bava Metzria* 108b, s.v., “*vehilchesa tzarich lemiknei minei.*”

4.

RASHI AND RAMBAM

On this basis, we can suggest that this matter is subject to a dispute amongst the *Rishonim*,⁷ and in particular, this is emphasized in the difference of opinion between Rashi and Rambam:

Regarding the rationale behind the law of *bar metzra* — based on the verse, “You shall do what is fair and good” — Rashi says:⁸ “In this matter, you⁹ {the would-be purchaser} incur no substantial loss, since you can find land elsewhere. Therefore, do not trouble the *bar metzra* who might otherwise wind up with detached properties.”

Rambam explains this law and its rationale:¹⁰

His friend, the *bar metzra*, has the right to pay the purchase price to the buyer and remove him.... This practice stems from the verse, “You shall do what is fair and good.” Our Sages said that since the sale is {fundamentally} the same, **it is fair and good** that the property **should be acquired** by the *bar metzra*, instead of the person living further away.”

In other words, according to Rashi, it is **righteous conduct**, relevant entirely to the **purchaser**. “In this matter, **you incur no... loss.... do not trouble** the *bar metzra*....” As Rashi emphasizes later in the discussion regarding the law that “if a seller sold a field to a gentile... the gentile is not bound by the command, ‘You shall do...’” “Regarding the law of *bar metzra*, we **only** apply the commandment that ‘you shall do what is fair and good’ to the **purchaser**.... Meaning, the **purchaser** is told ‘extend your hand, so this person can take the field.’”

However, according to Rambam, this law is not merely righteous conduct incumbent upon the purchaser (for the benefit of the *bar metzra*), but this is

⁷ {Sages of the 11th through 15th centuries.}

⁸ *Bava Metzia* 108a, s.v., “*ve’asisa*.”

⁹ {*Bava Metzia* 108b, s.v., “*leis behu*.”}

¹⁰ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Shecheinim*,” ch. 12, par. 5.

generally righteous conduct. Meaning, the Sages say that this is being good and fair (**beginning with** — and primarily — to the *bar metzra*): “His **friend... Our Sages said... it is ‘fair and good’ that the property should be acquired** by the *bar metzra*....” This was implemented by the power that the Sages gave the *bar metzra* in obtaining a stake in the field itself.

On this basis, we can appreciate why, regarding the law of one who sold a field to a gentile, Rambam says,¹¹ “When a person sells property to a gentile, the seller is ostracized until he accepts responsibility for any loss that the gentile might cause his neighbors, and the gentile agrees to conduct himself in relation to his neighbors according to Jewish law in all matters.” (a) Rambam **omits** the reason that the Gemara gives, “the gentile is certainly not bound by the command, ‘You shall do what is fair and good’”; (b) Rambam **adds** (to the Gemara’s wording), “and the **gentile agrees to conduct himself in relation to his neighbors** according to Jewish law.” The reason for this is that, in Rambam’s view, the law of *bar metzra* places an obligation not (only) for the **purchaser** to conduct himself in a “fair and good” manner.

5.

ZOOMING OUT A LITTLE

On numerous occasions, we have discussed that many concepts and laws in the Torah, on the surface, appear to address various unrelated topics and concepts. Yet, since “the Torah is one,” if we analyze the concepts thoroughly, we can often find a common denominator, or discover how two concepts are “built” on the same foundation. Many of the great Sages employed this method of study, specifically, the Rogatchover Gaon.¹²

We can posit, based on the above discussion, that these two rationales of the *bar metzra* law make up a deterministic criterion (that applies in each context, according to the particular parameters of each context): Does being a

¹¹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Shecheinim*,” ch. 12, par. 7.

¹² {Rabbi Yosef Rosen, 1858-1936.}

neighbor engender a deeper connection between two parties, i.e., does it change the nature of a neighbor (in our context, conferring a stake in the other's field)? Or is the relationship merely external (in our context, an obligation regarding a person's conduct)?

The practical ramifications of this question are numerous, within the three general categories known, in the lexicon of Chassidus, as “space,”¹³ “year,” and “soul.”¹⁴

Regarding “**space**” — this relates to the relationship of a neighbor in terms of place, regarding the law of *bar metzra*, as discussed.

6.

ADDING TIME TO SHABBOS

Regarding “year” — this refers to the concept of time in respect to the law of adding mundane, weekday time to the holiness of Yom Kippur (an addition that is biblically mandated according to all opinions),¹⁵ to the holiness of Shabbos, and to the holiness of festivals. (There are various opinions whether this obligation is biblical or rabbinic).¹⁶ This is also a matter of “neighborliness.” The time before and after Shabbos is a “neighbor,” and is adjacent to Shabbos. Here, we can also explain it in one of two ways:

(a) The proximity creates an actual connection. The times before and after Shabbos changes, because it is close to Shabbos, and attains some of the actual holiness of Shabbos.

¹³ {in the original Hebrew, “*olam*”; lit., “world.”}

¹⁴ These three concepts are the foundation of the *Sefer Yetzira* (*Or HaTorah*, “*parshas Yisro*,” p. 816, ff.).

¹⁵ *Beitzah* 30a, *Tosafos*, *ibid*, s.v., “*Yom Hakipurim mid’oraisa*”; *Yoma* 81b; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Shevisas Osor*,” ch. 1, par. 6; *Tur* and Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” end of sec. 608.

¹⁶ *Rif*, *Yoma*, *ibid*; *Rosh*, *ibid*, ch. 8, sec. 8; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 261, par. 2 (par. 4); Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 608, par. 1; regarding Rambam’s view, see the commentators on Rambam, *ibid*, and the commentators on *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 261 and sec. 608; see also *Sdei Chemed*, “*Klolim*,” *Maareches* “*Tav*,” *klal* 54.

(b) The time before and after Shabbos itself does not attain any of the holiness of Shabbos. Since, however, it is a “neighbor” to the time of Shabbos, a person is obligated to use this time to prepare for Shabbos.

7.

EXPLAINING THE *KIDDUSH* TIME DISPUTE

On this basis, we can explain the dispute among the halachic authorities regarding whether a person can fulfill the mitzvah of kiddush during the time he adds to Shabbos.

The authorities¹⁷ who maintain that during the time prepended to Shabbos, a person can fulfill the mitzvos of kiddush, and the Shabbos meal, etc., are of the opinion that this additional **time** attains the holiness of Shabbos or the festival.

[Nonetheless, even these authorities would agree that on Pesach, a person cannot make kiddush and fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah during the time prepended to the festival. The reason is that **these** mitzvos are linked with the **reality** of **night**,¹⁸ and “neighborliness” cannot transform the **reality** day time (into night).]

However, some authorities¹⁹ maintain that the only consequence of the time prepended to Shabbos is regarding the prohibition of (a person) performing labor. This is because, in their view, the additional time only has a superficial connection to Shabbos, but it does not attain the properties of Shabbos and become a part of Shabbos. Consequently, during this time, a person can only

¹⁷ This is the opinion of Rabbeinu Yitzchak of Kurbil, *Tosafos, Pesachim*, 99b, s.v., “ad”; *Rosh*, loc. cit., sec. 2; *Rosh, Berachos*, ch. 4, sec. 6; Rabbi Yitzchok Avuhov and Rabbeinu Yerucham quoted in *Beis Yosef*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 267; *Taz*, “*Orach Chaim*,” end of sec. 291, and end of sec. 668, at length; the first opinion mentioned in Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 267, par. 3 (see *Magen Avraham*, ch. 267, sub-par. 1, end); Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 472, par. 2.

¹⁸ {In the original, “מציאות פון לילה.”}

¹⁹ *Tosafos, Kesubos* 47a, s.v., “de’masar”; Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 261, *ibid*, sec. 491, par. 3; *Minchas Chinuch*, “*Mitzvah* 323,” par. 1.

impose **upon himself** the prohibition of performing labor, etc., but he cannot fulfill the mitzvos associated with the time of Shabbos.

8.

TURNING TO THE *SUKKAH SIYUM*

Regarding “**soul**” — the mishnah, at the conclusion of tractate *Sukkah*,²⁰ records how the Sages penalized the *mishmar*²¹ of Bilgah. [Although the law is that “the incoming *mishmar* apportions {holy food} in the north section of the courtyard” (the *mishmar* beginning its work would take portions of the holy food in the north part of the courtyard, for the northern part is the main section), however,] “the *mishmar* of Bilgah always apportions in the south [as the outgoing *mishmar* does], its ring was fixed in place, and its recess was sealed.”

The Gemara then records two reasons why they were penalized: (a) Because of the “incident involving Miriam, the daughter of a member of the Bilgah *mishmar*, who became an apostate” (as the Gemara describes at length); and (b) because, “once, some members of the Bilgah *mishmar* arrived late {for their shift in the Temple}.”

Following this, the Gemara asks:

Granted, according to the one who says that Bilgah was penalized because members of his watch arrived late, this is why the entire *mishmar* was penalized. However, according to the one who says it is on account of Miriam, the daughter of Bilgah, becoming an apostate, do we penalize the entire *mishmar* of Bilgah on account of his Bilgah’s daughter? Abaye said: Yes. For as people say, the speech of a child in the marketplace is learned either from his father or his mother. And on account of Miriam’s father and mother, do we penalize an entire *mishmar*? Abaye said: Woe unto the wicked, woe unto his neighbor.²² Good for the righteous, good for his neighbor, as the

²⁰ *Sukkah* 56a.

²¹ {Lit. “watch.” The word *mishmar* refers to a group of *kohanim*. The *kohanim* were divided into groups and assigned days to work in the *Beis Hamikdash*.}

²² {*Negaim* 12:6.}

verse says:²³ “Say of the righteous that it shall be good for him, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.”

[Since the Gemara analyzes the first reason (“the incident involving Miriam, the daughter of a member of the *mishmar* of Bilgah”), this implies that this is the main reason the *mishmar* was penalized.]

Rashi, at the end of the tractate, elucidates: “From here they said, ‘Woe unto the wicked, woe unto his neighbor.’ And consequently, ‘Good for the righteous, good for his neighbor,’ since the measure of goodness is greater.”

Since Rashi needs to apply the maxim that “the measure of goodness is greater” in order to substantiate the principle “good for the righteous, good for his neighbor,” this proves that his version of the Gemara did not include the prooftext, “Say of the righteous....” (Indeed, in many editions of the Gemara, this prooftext is not found). We need to clarify the reason behind this, and what is the difference whether the proof is obtained from the verse or from the maxim, “the measure of goodness is greater”?

9.

RASHI AND RAMBAM AGAIN

We will understand by first clarifying the meaning of “its ring was fixed in place and its recess was sealed.” We find two explanations:

Rashi explains:²⁴ “Its ring was fixed” refers to the rings that were “in the courtyard, in the area where the slaughtering took place.... These rings were attached to the stone floor. The ring would open on one side and he would turn the opening upwards. The neck of the animal would be inserted into the ring, and then its opening was turned back into the floor.”²⁵ The ring of Bilgah was

²³ *Yeshayahu* 3:10.

²⁴ *Sukkah*, *ibid*, s.v. “*vetabaasa*,” and s.v., “*chalonah*.”

²⁵ {Thus, the animal would be held down by its neck. This would facilitate the slaughtering of the animal.}

affixed {to the floor}, and it could not be turned, so they would need to use the ring of another *mishmar*.”

Rashi explains the meaning of “its recess was sealed”: “There were recesses in the Chamber of the *Chalifos*, in the thickness of the walls. The *kohanim* would hide **their knives** there. Bilgah’s recess was sealed.” In other words, the ring and the recess both aided in slaughtering the animal and in storing the necessary instruments.

Rambam, in his *Commentary on Mishnah*, explains:

“Its ring was fixed in place and its recess was sealed.” Every *mishmar* had a ring from which they would hang the animal while skinning it. All the rings were attached to the walls. When each *mishmar* would begin its service, they would hang up that ring in order to signal that they were performing the service in the *Beis HaMikdash*. Similarly, there were 24 recesses where each *mishmar* would store their priestly garments....”

That is, the ring was used in the skinning of the sacrificial animals, and the recesses were used to store the *kohanim*’s garments.

10.

DOES IT AFFECT THE NEIGHBOR ALSO?

The difference between these two explanations: According to Rashi, Bilgah was penalized with something that was also related to women. Slaughtering an animal may be done by non-*kohanim* and by **women**. Even as an initial preference, a woman may slaughter an animal (using a long knife).²⁶ Only “from the collection of the blood and onward is the mitzvah in the exclusive purview of the *kohanim*.”²⁷

According to Rambam, however, Bilgah was penalized with respect to functions not connected to women at all. Skinning the animal was performed on

²⁶ *Zevachim* 31b ff.

²⁷ *Zevachim* 32a.

the rings in the *Azarah*²⁸ {which women could not enter}, and certainly, the garments of the *kohanim*, which were necessary for the *avodah*, also had no connection with women, for women may not perform the service in the *Beis HaMikdash*.

The crux of their dispute was the following: According to Rashi, this *mishmar* was penalized (because they were “neighbors”) only regarding matters that have some connection with their wicked “neighbor” — the young woman (Miriam — for **she**, too, could have done these things {e.g., slaughter the sacrifice}). Consequently, the punishment and shame underscores that it all came about because of that young woman.

According to Rambam, however, the *mishmar* was penalized also in matters that had no connection to the wrongdoer — that young woman.

This, then, connects back to the general parameters of being neighbors: Does being a neighbor cause an internal connection between the parties and effect change to the extent that it {the character of the first party} becomes the character of the neighbor, or is the relationship merely external?

Rashi and Rambam are consistent in their opinions: According to Rashi, the connection between neighbors is merely external, and it does not affect the character of the neighbor (as discussed above regarding the issue of *bar metzra*).

[This is, in fact, consistent with Rashi’s general method of always explaining the *pshat*.²⁹ According to *pshat*, the statement, “we **penalize** the entire *mishmar* of Bilgah,” means that it was nothing more than a **penalty** and **punishment** because of one person’s wickedness.]

Therefore, Rashi understands that the punishment and embarrassment imposed on this *mishmar* because they were her “neighbor” only applied to

²⁸ {An area of the *Beis Hamikdash* that women could not enter.} *Tamid* ch. 3, *mishnah* 5; *Midos* ch. 3, *mishnah* 5; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*,” ch. 5, par. 13.

²⁹ {The plain meaning of Scripture, often referred to as “*pshat*.” Rashi says in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of the Scripture.” Though there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

areas (slaughtering) that had some connection with the perpetrator herself (the woman), since it all came about because of her {sin}.

However, according to Rambam, being neighbors creates an actual substantial change. Thus, in our case, “woe unto his neighbor” refers not only to external matters (**the punishment** of the neighbor) but also to the wickedness that the neighbor association effects in the neighbor’s character.

[We can posit that Rambam is consistent with his opinion in *Hilchos Deos*, where he says:³⁰ “It is natural for a person’s **character** and actions to be influenced by his **friends** and **associates...**” as he discusses there at length.]

Consequently, we can also appreciate why the punishment and shame was not confined to functions directly indicative of the harm wreaked by the wicked person (that young woman), since the punishment was given because of the wickedness in the neighbor himself.

11.

EXPLAINING RASHI’S SOURCE

On this basis, we can appreciate the nuance regarding whether the version of our Gemara includes “as the verse says: Say of the righteous that it shall be good for him...” as a proof that “good for the righteous, good for his neighbor,” or we infer this fact logically, as discussed above.

Understood simply, the explanation of how the verse, “tell of the righteous that it shall be good for him, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings” serves as a proof for this concept, is:³¹ The verse begins in **singular**, “Say of the **righteous** that it shall be **good** for **him**,” and concludes in **plural** — “for **they** **shall eat** the fruit of **their** doings.” This proves that other people, — **the**

³⁰ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Deos*,” ch. 6, par. 1.

³¹ *Iyun Yaakov on Ein Yaakov*.

neighbors of the righteous man, also eat the fruits together with the righteous man.

But a question comes to light: Seemingly, the verse should have said, “for they shall eat the fruit of **his** doings,” since they eat the fruits of the **righteous man’s** doings! In fact, the Gemara intends to teach us exactly this by quoting this verse as a source. As a result of the {conduct of the} neighbors, not only do the people benefit on account of the righteous person — they receive reward because of the righteous man — but moreover, “they shall eat the fruit of **their** doings.” They transform themselves to the extent that the righteous man’s actions also become their own.

This is precisely the meaning of the verse, “**Say of the righteous** that it shall be good for him.” We tell the righteous (or regarding the righteous, i.e., praise of the righteous) that the reason that other people are eating the fruits of **their** actions is because they are neighbors with the **righteous**. They learned from **him** and became **different**.

Thus, we understand that according to Rashi’s opinion, as discussed, being neighbors changes nothing in the neighbor’s nature itself, rather, the change is merely insofar as an external relationship is concerned, it would make no sense to cite the verse, “Say of the righteous that it shall be good for him” as a proof.

For this reason, he cites the explanation, “for the measure of goodness is greater” as proof that “good for the righteous, good for his neighbor”: If we find this to be the case in a negative context — the superficial relationship of a neighbor leads us to say, “Woe unto his neighbor” — this would certainly also apply to the righteous person, “(Good for the righteous) good for his neighbor.”

12.

IS GREATER THAN

But this explanation is not altogether smooth:

According to Rashi, why do we need the detail, “(for the measure of goodness is) **greater**”? Even if the measure of goodness was equal to its negative counterpart, we could still conclude that just as “woe unto the wicked and woe unto his neighbor,” so, too, “good for the righteous, good for his neighbor.”

The explanation:

The penalty imposed on the *mishmar* of Bilgah did not affect it inwardly, only externally: The *mishmar* was not disqualified from performing any *avodah*, nor not even part of an *avodah*. Rather, the *mishmar* was disgraced and shamed only concerning certain details of the *avodah*.

This fits well with the general idea of “woe unto the wicked, woe unto his neighbor.” Punishment only affects the external aspects of a Jew; it cannot affect his inner being. As our Rabbis say regarding the harshest of punishments, “but you will not be troubled in the World to Come.”³²

This dovetails with the fact that wickedness, in any form, is merely an external layer of a Jewish person’s being, i.e., it is a subordinate appendage to his true being. Thus, the punishment is also only external and temporary.

This is in contrast to the teaching, “good for the righteous, good for his neighbor.” The flow of goodness that a righteous person draws to his neighbors triggers inner and permanent change, affecting the inwardness of a Jew.

Thus, we can appreciate why saying “good for the righteous, good for his neighbor” would not be sufficient at the same level and measure corresponding

³² *Sanhedrin* 43b.

to “woe unto the wicked, woe unto his neighbor.” For, as mentioned, the superficial relationship with a wicked neighbor only results in a superficial **impact**. In contrast, being neighbors with a righteous person, even on a superficial level, with no deep connection, creates a deep impact upon his Jewish neighbors and brings them profound benefit.

Therefore, Rashi must say, “for the measure of goodness is **greater**.” By doing so, it is clarified and emphasized how the **good** bestowed upon a righteous person’s neighbor has a **deep** and substantial influence.

13.

AVOID SIN AND DO GOOD

These two ideas, “Woe unto the wicked, woe unto his neighbor,” and “good for the righteous, good for his neighbor,” hint at the deeper meaning of the two general aspects of “neighborly” proximity discussed above: “*Bar metzra*,” and the extra time added to Shabbos and the festivals.

In *avodah*,³³ the word “woe” in the dictum, “Woe unto the wicked, woe unto his neighbor” refers to pain. (As we see, it is naturally the case that when a person feels a deep pain, he expresses it by exclaiming “*oy* {woe}.”) This refers to the pain a person feels over his sins. This is the *avodah* of repentance that breaks and crushes negativity.

This, then, explains these two aspects: “Woe unto the wicked” represents breaking wickedness, meaning, the *avodah* of refraining from sin (and internally, this refers to embitterment and pensiveness {resulting from a person’s lowly state}). “Good for the righteous” refers to the *avodah* of performing good deeds (and internally, this refers to the mode of joy).

When a Jewish person brings himself to succeed at both of these elements of *avodah*, it causes “**woe** unto his neighbor” — destroying and nullifying

³³ {Divine service.}

wickedness — i.e., his neighbor also “abstains from wickedness.”³⁴ Additionally, he brings “**good** for his neighbor,” i.e., his neighbor performs the *avodah* of “do good.”³⁵

In the world, this is represented by the two ideas of *bar metzra* and the time we add to *Shabbos* and the festivals:

The law of *bar metzra*, on a basic level, obligates a person to act contrary to his natural inclination. He must **relinquish** a field that **he purchased** in order to avoid imposing a financial loss on, or annoying, another person. This, then, is the mode of avoiding sin.

In general, the law of *bar metzra* applies not to matters of holiness and mitzvos, but rather to things such as a field — mundane matters. “Avoid sin” applies primarily to these matters.

This is in contrast to the time added to *Shabbos* and the festivals. This refers, in general, to matters relating to “do good”: A person must add to *Shabbos* and festival type activities, which means injecting more goodness and holiness into the world.

14.

ELUL

In light of the above second explanation of the saying “woe unto the wicked, woe unto his neighbor,” we will also appreciate why *Megaleh Amukos*³⁶ says that Elul — אלוּל — stands for “אוי לרשע ואוי לשכנו” — woe unto the wicked, woe unto his neighbor.” Seemingly, this is difficult to understand: Elul is the month of **mercy and forgiveness**. How would something having to do with **punishment** — such as, “woe unto the wicked, woe unto his neighbor” — be relevant to the month of Elul?

³⁴ {*Tehillim* 34:15.}

³⁵ {*Tehillim* 34:15.}

³⁶ In his commentary on Torah, *parshas Eikev*, 55a).

But the answer, based on what was explained above, is that “woe unto the wicked” refers to overcoming wickedness through the repentance performed in the month of Elul. And, “woe unto his neighbor” refers to the overcoming of wickedness in the month of Elul that also affects Elul’s “neighbor” — the time adjacent to Elul — the month of Av.

The explanation: In the *Zohar*,³⁷ it says that the months of Nissan, Iyar, and Sivan belong to Yaakov (our patriarch). These are months of holiness. On this basis, Eisav should have also received three months. But he actually only took only two months — Tammuz and Av. {As the Zohar puts it} “It was not found, and it was lost, for Elul is not his.” And in the month of Av itself, only nine days³⁸ are “his,” and not more.

Understandably, then, there is a difference between the days of Av (following Tishah B’Av) and of Elul.

Therefore, “woe unto the wicked,” refers to the month of Elul itself. In the month of Elul, the evil and negative forces are broken at their core, and they are given no “hold” on this time, even though, in theory, this month should have belonged to the negative forces. “Woe unto his neighbor,” refers to the way Elul also shatters the wickedness of its “neighbor,” i.e., in the time closest to it. Meaning, that even in the month of Av itself, from Tishah B’Av and on, “it is lost and not found.”

[For this reason, *Korban Nesanel*³⁹ says that the teaching,⁴⁰ “A Jew who has a court case with a gentile, should avoid it {in the month of Av}” only applies until Tishah B’Av.]

³⁷ Vol. 2, 78b.

³⁸ {Ending with Tishah B’Av.}

³⁹ Commenting on *Rosh*, “*Taanis*,” ch. 4, sub-par. 5.

⁴⁰ *Taanis* 29b.

15.

MENACHEM AV

However, the purpose of obliterating evil, after all, is for the realm of “do good,” to also be augmented with an increase in the revelation of G-dly light.

This is also the purpose of destroying wickedness in the month of Av. This brings to an increase in G-dly light, alluded to in the name of the month, **Menachem** {comfort} Av. After we bring about the destruction of wickedness and judgment (“woe unto the wicked,” as discussed) during each of the {first} nine days {of Av}, the days of the month of Av itself become “Menachem — a comfort.” This comfort continues until we receive the double comfort⁴¹ — “comfort, comfort, My people”⁴² — and, “I, I am He who comforts you!”⁴³

Subsequently, we enter into the month of Elul, the month of **mercy**, when Hashem’s thirteen attributes of mercy, which transcend the continuum of Creation,⁴⁴ emanate. This is the preparation for being written and sealed for a good year on Rosh Hashanah. And certainly, every person is immediately written and sealed in the book of the completely righteous.⁴⁵

— Based on talks delivered on 20 Menachem Av, 5714 (1954) and 6 Tishrei, 5728 (1967)

⁴¹ *Eicha Rabasi*, end of ch. 1.

⁴² *Yeshayahu* 40:1.

⁴³ *Yeshayahu* 51:12.

⁴⁴ {Lit., “*Seder Hishtaleshelus*,” referring to the chain-like descent of spiritual worlds until this physical world.}

⁴⁵ *Rosh Hashanah 16b*.