בית הוראה שערי עזרא
BET HORAAH
SHAARE EZRA
The Weekly Halacha Newsletter of Rabbi Shay Tahan

ZMANIM · NEW YORK
Candle Lighting 4:16pm
Shabbat Ends 5:17pm
R"T 5:45pm

VOLUME 3 · ISSUE 77 **Parshat Vayetze** 11 KISLEV 5787 · NOVEMBER 21, 2026

Halacha Question? WhatsApp 347-666-3467 · askhalacha1@gmail.com · Over 2,500 classes: Rabbishaytahan.com



Illustration

HALACHA & OUR TIMES

The Torah's Answer to the Boycott: Buy Jewish

written by Rabbi Shay Tahan

LAST WEEK IN PHILADELPHIA, ACTIVISTS ORGANIZED A boycott against Jewish-owned restaurants.

THE MITZVAH: BUY FROM YOUR FELLOW

Tucked inside Parashat Behar, in a pasuk most people read as a law about honesty in business, Chazal found this mitzvah. The pasuk says: "וכי תמכרו ממכר לעמיתך או קנה מיד עמיתך, אל תונו איש את אחיו" — "When you make a sale to your fellow, or buy from the hand of your fellow, do not wrong one another" (Vayikra 25:14). The Torat Kohanim asks: why does the Torah stress "your fellow" — amitecha — twice? And it answers: when you come to sell, sell to your fellow Jew; when you come to buy, buy from your fellow Jew. And who is amitecha? "Ze she'itcha baTorah u'vamitzvot" — the one who is with you in Torah and mitzvot.

It is important to be clear about what this mitzvah is, and what it is not. It is not a rejection of anyone else. We shop in our neighbors' stores and do business with people of every background every day, and the Torah obligates us to deal with every person honestly and fairly — as we will see below. This mitzvah is the positive side of community: the same instinct that leads every neighborhood to support its own small businesses, and every community to sustain its own schools and charities. The Torah turns that instinct into a mitzvah of mutual responsibility: when there is a genuine choice, we give our fellow the first place, so that our own community stays strong enough to care for its members.

This does not mean a Jew may never buy from a non-Jew. If you are on the road and need gas, and the only station is not Jewish, of course you stop there. The mitzvah speaks to the choice we face every day: two stores, two sellers, two gas stations — one Jewish, one not. The Torah tells us where to go. The flowers sold on the street corner before Shabbat may be convenient, but a few blocks away there is a Jewish florist paying rent, electricity and wages. The pasuk says: buy from him.

The Rema took this from derasha to halacha lemaaseh. In Shu"t HaRema (Siman 10), he was asked about a Jew who had printed sefarim, when a non-Jew printed the very same sefarim and offered them for sale. The Rema ruled that one must buy from the Jew — the pasuk gives him the right of way.

WHY IT MATTERS: MONEY CIRCULATES

Why does it matter so much? Because money is power, and money circulates. The boycotters understand this very well — that is precisely why they target businesses. When you spend two hundred dollars in a Jewish store, watch what happens to that money. The owner gives maaser to tzedakah. He buys his meat, fish and bread from other Jewish businesses. The largest share of a Jewish family's budget today is tuition — paid to the yeshivot where our children learn. The tzedakah supports the shul and the organizations we all rely on. The money you spent comes back to you. Chazal expressed this long ago: when the people told David Hamelech that Yisrael had no parnassah, he answered, "Go and sustain one another" (Berachot 3b) — do business with each other, and the strength stays within. Every dollar kept inside is a dollar that works for us many times over.



Illustration

EVEN WHEN IT COSTS MORE

But what if the Jewish store charges more? The Rema rules that the mitzvah applies even then — one pays the extra and buys from the Jew. His proofs are striking. The Gemara (Bava Metzia 71a) teaches ami kodem: if a Jew and a non-Jew both ask you for a loan, lend to the Jew — even though you may charge the non-Jew interest and earn a profit, while from the Jew you may earn nothing. You might argue that this only means giving up a profit, not spending more out of pocket. So the Rema brings a second proof. The Torah says of a nevelah, an animal that may not be eaten: "la'ger asher bish'arecha titnenah va'achalah, o machor la'nochri" — give it to the ger toshav in your gates to eat, or sell it to the foreigner (Devarim 14:21). The ger toshav receives it for free; the foreigner would pay. The order of the pasuk teaches that the ger toshav comes first — you give the animal away and lose the sale entirely rather than take the non-Jew's money. If one must forgo the whole profit, certainly one must pay somewhat more, or accept somewhat less, to keep the transaction with a fellow Jew.

THE LIMITS OF THE MITZVAH

How much more? Here the poskim set the boundaries. The Chafetz Chaim, in Ahavat Chesed, explains that the Rema speaks of a small loss; a large loss is not required. Some poskim measure by the shtut of onaah — up to a sixth of the price one should absorb for this mitzvah; the Minchat Yitzchak understands the Rema more strictly, obligating even a significant loss. The Ahavat Chesed adds an important condition: all of this applies where the Jewish seller charges a fair market price. If he exploits the mitzvah and demands more than the market value, that is onaah, and there is no obligation to buy from him; likewise, a seller need not accept less than the market value from a Jewish buyer when a non-Jew offers the full price. And Rav Moshe Sternbuch, in Teshuvot VeHanhagot, addresses why many are not careful with this halacha: the mitzvah is rooted in chesed, in supporting a fellow Jew's parnassah. When the seller is already wealthy and raises his price simply to grow richer at the expense of a buyer who is struggling himself — achicha kodem — your own household comes first. These boundaries matter: the mitzvah strengthens honest Jewish commerce; it was never meant to break the buyer or to shield inflated prices.

It is worth noting that the very same pasuk ends with "al tonu ish et achiv" — do not wrong your brother. The Torah that commands us to prefer our fellow in business also forbids overcharging him, and forbids geneivat daat, deception, toward anyone at all: one may not sell a non-Jew meat that is nevelah while letting him believe it is shechted, and one may not hurt another's feelings with words — onaah of speech, about which Chazal warned most severely regarding one's own wife, whose tears are near and whose hurt is answered quickly. Preference for our own never licenses dishonesty toward anyone.

HOLD HIM BEFORE HE FALLS

Behind all of this stands the neighboring mitzvah: "וכי ימוך אחיך ומטה ידו עמך, והחזקת בו" — "If your brother grows poor and his hand falters with you, you shall strengthen him" (Vayikra 25:35). Rashi gives the mashal of a donkey laden with bundles: while it is still on its feet, one person can steady it; once it has fallen, five people cannot lift it. The Jewish flower shop that closed because everyone bought on the corner is exactly this. And when a business falls, the burden does not disappear — it falls on all of us: his children still need tuition, the shul still needs support, and now everyone else carries his share. Steadying him at the beginning is chesed; it is also wisdom.

One more refinement: amitecha is the one who is with you in Torah and mitzvot. The Chatam Sofer notes that a mumar is not included in this category, and the poskim give preference to a shomer Shabbat seller. The Chazon Ish was careful to buy only from a shomer Shabbat, and would go out of his way to a shomer Shabbat pharmacy even when it was much farther. How far must one go? The poskim compare it to the tircha Chazal required for other mitzvot — the measure of a mil, roughly eighteen minutes of effort — while a trivial purchase, a can of soda, does not demand a journey.

The boycotters of Philadelphia chose their weapon well: a people's livelihood is its strength. But they did not invent this knowledge — the Torah taught it first. Megillat Rut opens with the warning: Elimelech was the parnas of his generation, and his very presence in Beit Lechem created work and livelihood for everyone around him; when he left, the connection was cut, and in Moav everything was lost, down to his sons. Our answer to a boycott is not anger, and not only a one-day show of support. It is the quiet, daily mitzvah: when you sell, sell to your fellow; when you buy, buy from your fellow — and the strength of Am Yisrael stays within Am Yisrael.

**To receive the weekly newsletter please email us at askhalacha1@gmail.com*

HALACHA & OUR TIMES

Why Are Jewish Businesses Being Boycotted? The Torah's Answer

written by Rabbi Shay Tahan

ANTISEMITISM HAS ALWAYS FOUND WAYS TO ADAPT itself to the language and circumstances of the times. In earlier generations, Jews were excluded from professions, barred from marketplaces, and prevented from conducting business with their neighbors. Today, a disturbing version of this old hatred is reappearing under a different name.

Last week, in Philadelphia, activists organized what they called a "Boycott Ride," targeting six restaurants owned by Jewish restaurateurs. Their flyers called for "No business for Zionists!" and declared that these establishments must be driven out of the city. Rather than targeting a government office or political institution, the campaign focused on private businesses and the people who earn their livelihoods through them. The owners were singled out because of their perceived connection to Israel and their support for the Jewish state.



Illustration

The timing was especially disturbing: the protest took place on the eve of the anniversary of Kristallnacht, when Nazi-organized mobs attacked Jewish homes, synagogues, and businesses throughout Germany and Austria. Although the circumstances today are not identical, the historical echo of targeting Jewish businesses cannot be ignored.

Hundreds of people responded by visiting the targeted restaurants, demonstrating that the attempt to isolate these businesses had instead brought the community together. Yet the incident raises a much broader question: When does a political protest become discrimination against Jews, and what does the Torah teach us about economic boycotts, unfair treatment, and the responsibility to protect a fellow Jew's livelihood?

In last week's parashah, Toldot, and in this week's parashah, Vayetze, we find our forefathers facing repeated attempts to undermine their livelihoods and deprive them of what was rightfully theirs.

In Parashat Toldot, we read how the local inhabitants repeatedly stopped up the wells that Avraham had dug, attempting to deny him and his family access to water and the means to sustain their flocks. The wells dug by Yitzchak, too, were met with opposition, as the local shepherds repeatedly contested his right to use them. The Sforno (Bereishit 26:33) explains that altogether six wells had been stopped up: three originally dug by Avraham and three dug by Yitzchak. Only the seventh well was left undisturbed. This, the Sforno explains, is the significance of its name, Be'er Sheva—the well of the seventh.

These were not merely disputes over property; they were attempts to undermine the very foundations of their livelihood.

In Vayetze, we encounter a different form of economic injustice. Lavan repeatedly changed Yaakov's wages and manipulated their agreement, seeking to benefit at Yaakov's expense. Rather than confronting Yaakov openly, Lavan resorted to deception and dishonesty in an attempt to deprive him of the earnings he had worked so hard to attain.

These episodes teach us that economic hostility toward the Jewish people is not a new phenomenon. Throughout our history, Jews have faced attempts to deny them the ability to earn a living, take away their property, and undermine their economic security. Sometimes this hostility comes through open force; at other times, it is disguised as business dealings, changing agreements, or seemingly legitimate economic measures. The Torah records these events not merely as episodes in the lives of our forefathers, but as lessons that remain relevant throughout the generations.

We see a troubling contemporary expression of this same pattern in the recent calls to boycott Jewish-owned businesses. Although presented as a political protest, the Philadelphia campaign singled out private businesses because of their owners' perceived support for Israel, seeking to deprive them of their livelihoods. The method may differ from the Plishtim stopping up wells or Lavan manipulating Yaakov's wages, but the underlying effort is familiar: making it difficult for a Jew to earn an honest living.

But this raises a deeper question: Why are Jewish businesses so often singled out? Why does hostility toward Jewish economic success seem to take on a particular intensity? After all, there are many wealthy and successful nations and communities throughout the world, yet their prosperity does not necessarily provoke the same resentment.

The Torah already offers a striking example of this phenomenon in Parashat Toldot. The Torah tells us that the Plishtim became jealous of Yitzchak because of his extraordinary success. As the pasuk states, "The Plishtim became jealous of him" (Bereishit 26:14). Rather than acknowledge their jealousy, they sought excuses to drive him away. They stopped up his wells and eventually demanded that he leave their land. Their hostility was presented as a practical concern, but its deeper source was envy of his blessing and prosperity.



Illustration

The Kli Yakar offers an even deeper insight into the roots of this resentment. Commenting on the pasuk "פְּנוּ לָכֶם צָפְנָה" (Devarim 2:3), he explains that the Torah is teaching us to conceal our prosperity from those who are likely to resent it. He writes that Esav's descendants view the possessions of Yaakov's descendants as something stolen from them, because they believe that Yaakov took the berachah that was intended for their ancestor. This sense of having been deprived becomes a source of lasting resentment.

The Kli Yakar further explains, based on Rashi (Bereishit 42:1), that the descendants of Yishmael harbor a similar resentment. They believe that Yitzchak took the prosperity that should have belonged to Yishmael, just as Esav's descendants believe that Yaakov took Esav's berachah. In their eyes, the blessings and prosperity of the Jewish people are not gifts granted to us by Hashem, but something taken from them. This perspective may shed light on the recurring accusation that the Jewish people stole their land, despite our people's ancient connection to Eretz Yisrael. The underlying sentiment is that what belongs to the Jewish people should, in their view, rightfully belong to someone else.

This perspective helps explain why Jewish economic success can become a particular target of hostility. The resentment is not necessarily about the wealth itself, but about the identity of those who possess it. Just as the Plishtim could not tolerate Yitzchak's prosperity, others may struggle to accept Jewish success and seek to justify their hostility through various accusations and pretexts. The language changes from generation to generation, but the underlying jealousy described in the Torah remains recognizable.

An interesting point to consider is the contrast between the experiences of our forefathers and the challenges we face today. In the episodes recorded in the Torah, those who sought to undermine the livelihoods of the Avot ultimately failed. Despite the repeated efforts of the Plishtim to stop up the wells of Avraham and Yitzchak, Yitzchak continued to prosper. Despite Lavan's constant deception and manipulation of Yaakov's wages, Yaakov emerged with great wealth. Their adversaries tried to prevent them from succeeding, yet Hashem ensured that their efforts came to nothing.

In more recent history, however, attempts to harm Jewish businesses have often had a real economic impact. Boycotts, exclusion, and discrimination can cause Jewish business owners to suffer significant losses. What accounts for this difference?

The Zohar offers a profound perspective on the economic condition of Am Yisrael in exile (Terumah 152b). It teaches that when Am Yisrael dwelled in Eretz Yisrael and enjoyed their special spiritual standing, material abundance flowed to them from a higher source, while the nations received only what remained. With the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and the subsequent exile, this order was reversed: the nations became the primary recipients of material abundance, while Am Yisrael were left with what remained.

We may be able to connect this idea to another episode in the life of Yaakov Avinu. After Yaakov left his home and set out toward exile, Elifaz, the son of Esav, pursued him and robbed him of all his possessions. The Ohr HaChaim (Bereishit 29:11) asks why Esav did not pursue Yaakov himself and carry out this plan. He explains that Esav understood that his son Elifaz would be more successful in doing so, particularly because Yaakov was traveling and therefore more vulnerable. The Ohr HaChaim further connects this episode to Elifaz's grandson Amalek, who later attacked Am Yisrael on their journey through the wilderness.

We can suggest that this contains an important lesson about the vulnerability of Am Yisrael when they are on the road. A Jew traveling away from the security of his home is in a more exposed position, much like the Jewish people during galut, when they live among other nations without the protection and spiritual security they enjoyed in Eretz Yisrael. It is precisely in such circumstances that others may feel emboldened to target them, undermine their livelihood, and take advantage of their vulnerability.

This teaching may help us understand why parnassah has been so difficult for the Jewish people throughout the long years of galut. The economic struggles of Am Yisrael are not merely the result of individual circumstances or the hostility of others; they are also part of the broader spiritual condition of exile. The contrast between the prosperity of our forefathers and the difficulties experienced by their descendants reminds us that the blessing of livelihood is ultimately in the hands of Hashem.

HALACHA & OUR TIMES

A Love That Does Not Depend on Circumstances

written by Rabbi Shay Tahan

THE TORAH DESCRIBES THE DEEP LOVE YAAKOV

Avinu had for Rachel: "וַיֶּאֱהַב יַעֲקֹב אֶת רָחֵל"—"Yaakov loved Rachel" (Bereishit 29:18). The Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh offers a remarkable insight into the reason for this love. Yaakov did not love Rachel because of her beauty; he loved her because she was his true zivug, the woman destined for him. His love was therefore rooted in something far deeper than outward appearance. It was a bond with the person who was meant to be his life partner.

This teaches us about a love that is not dependent on external qualities or changing circumstances. Beauty may fade, circumstances may change, and life may bring challenges, but a genuine bond is rooted in something deeper.

A similar idea emerges from the words of the prophet Malachi in the haftarah of Parashat Toldot. Hashem declares to the Jewish people: "אֲהַבְתִּי אֶתְכֶם אָמַר ה'"—"I have loved you, says Hashem." The people respond, "בַּמָּה אֲהַבְתָּנוּ"—"Why have You shown us love?" Hashem answers: "הֲלוֹא אָח עֵשָׂו לְיַעֲקֹב... וְאֹהַב אֶת יַעֲקֹב"—"Was not Esav a brother to Yaakov? Yet I loved Yaakov" (Malachi 1:2).



Illustration

The Malbim explains that Hashem is addressing a profound question. The Jewish people might wonder whether Hashem's love for them is merely an extension of the love He had for their forefathers. After all, Esav was also a son of Yitzchak and a descendant of Avraham. If Hashem's love were based only on the merit of the Avot, why should Yaakov and his descendants receive that love while Esav does not?

Hashem therefore points to the fact that Esav and Yaakov were brothers and shared the same ancestry. If His love were based solely on the merit of their forefathers, Esav should have enjoyed that same love. Yet Hashem chose Yaakov and not Esav.

The Malbim further considers the possibility that Hashem's love is based on two factors: the merit of the Avot and the good deeds of their descendants. However, the distinction between Yaakov and Esav challenges this explanation. If Hashem's love were based on a combination of these two factors, Esav, who shared the same ancestry and the merit of the Avot, should at least have benefited from that merit, even if his own actions did not earn him Hashem's love. Hashem would simply have withheld His special love from Esav. Yet the pasuk goes further and states, "וְאֶת עֵשָׂו שָׂנֵאתִי"—"But Esav I hated" (Malachi 1:3). This distinction further illustrates the Malbim's explanation that Hashem's love for Yaakov reflects a unique bond with Yaakov and his descendants, rather than merely a combination of ancestral merit and personal deeds.

But this leads to an even deeper question: Why does Hashem love Am Yisrael? Is it because we have greater merits than the other nations? Because we have fewer sins? Is His love dependent on our good deeds and spiritual accomplishments?

The Kli Yakar finds a remarkable answer in the pasuk near the beginning of Parashat Va'etchanan: "לֹא מֵרַבְּכֶם מִכָּל הָעַמִּים חָשַׁק ה' בָּכֶם וַיִּבְחַר בָּכֶם"—"Hashem did not set His love upon you or choose you because you were greater than all the nations" (Devarim 7:7).

One might think that Hashem chose Am Yisrael because, compared with the other nations, we have more merits and fewer sins. Perhaps He loved us because of our good deeds and chose us because we were less sinful than the others. The Kli Yakar explains that this is not the basis of Hashem's love. He makes a distinction between the people themselves and their actions: "You are beloved, but your deeds are not necessarily beloved." In other words, Hashem's love for Am Yisrael is not a reward for our spiritual accomplishments or for being better than anyone else. It is rooted in the special bond He has with us as His people.

This does not mean that our actions do not matter, or that we are free from the responsibility to serve Hashem properly. Rather, it teaches us that even when we stumble, fall short, or fail to live up to our mission, Hashem's love for us does not disappear. We must always strive to improve our actions, but we should never imagine that our shortcomings have severed our bond with Him.

This is the remarkable message that emerges from the teachings of the Ohr HaChaim and the Kli Yakar. True love is not always measured by what a person does or by the qualities he possesses. Sometimes it is rooted in a bond that runs much deeper. Yaakov loved Rachel because she was his destined zivug, and Hashem's love for Am Yisrael reflects the unique and enduring bond He has with His people. Even when we fall short, that bond remains.

Rabbi Shay Tahan is the Rosh Kollel of Kollel Shaarei Ezra located in Bnei Yosef, on Avenue P and Ocean Parkway, and he is the head of the Bet Horaah Arzei Halevanon. You can hear Rabbi Tahan's classes at Torahanytime.com and in Askhalacha.com.

Also published in The Jewish Vues.

Now you can also download our newsletters from the following websites: Shiurenjoyment, Dirshu, Ladaat, Gilyonos, Kol Halashon, Parsha Sheets, Chidush, Shareplus, Prog.



