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Restoration of Lost Property

22: 1-4

Restoration of lost property DIG: What underlying principle and attitude lies behind this mitzvah? Why not “finders keepers, losers weepers?” Who actually owned all the property of the Israelites? How did this help in the understanding of these mitzvot?

REFLECT: When was the last time you helped a stranded motorist change a tire? When was the last time you baby-sat for a neighbor in distress? Have you ever been cared for in the way these verses encourage? What happened? Who is your brother? Who is your sister?

A neighbor wasn't only someone who lived next to you; he was anyone whom you could help.

While several of the mitzvot grouped in **22:1-12** refer to mankind's relationships with our neighbors, there are also mitzvot about the care of animals and birds. The impression remains that **the Second Address: The Specific Stipulations of the Covenant (12:1 to 26:19)**, covers a wide range of topics. The present group of **eleven mitzvot** in **22:1-12** make it clear that the scope of **ADONAI's** concern for proper treatment in the covenant community was just as wide. There was to be a wholehearted application of **the Torah**. In these next **twelve verses**, much of them are concerned with **the love** that should be shown to other members of the covenant community (**Deuteronomy 15:1-18; Leviticus 19:1-37**). While the brief statement: **Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39)**, and **do to others what you would want them to do to you (Matthew 7:12)**, does not occur in **Deuteronomy**, however, it is implied here, and in many parts of the book. The covenant mitzvot was comprehensive in its demand for **love**. **The love of YHVH**, and **the love** for one's **neighbors**.⁴⁶⁹

The Torah has much to say about our relationship with our **neighbors**. Are we concerned, or indifferent **neighbors**? Do we turn the other way when someone is in trouble? Or do we reflect **the love** of **God** to others? This is the “lost-and-found” section of **the Torah**. If an item is ever found it is to be returned to the rightful owner. It never really belongs to you.

By observing this simple principle, we will not violate the eighth (**to see link click Bs - You Shall Not Steal**), and tenth (see **Bu - You Shall Not Covet**) commandments. We need to be content with what **the Lord** has given us. But there is a beautiful twist within this commandment, when a person who found something could keep it.

1. This warmhearted mitzvah builds on **Exodus 23:4-5**, where it occurs in a list of mitzvot for those taking part in court cases. That is why the animals there are said to belong to **your enemy** or **one who hates you**, in-other-words, adversaries in a court case. The point is that animals should not have to suffer because of human disputes. Here, **Moses** lifts the mitzvah from the judicial context of **Exodus** and changes **your enemies' ox**, to **your brother's ox**, thus widening its relevance to all **Israelites** at any time.⁴⁷⁰ There were few fences and walls on Jewish farmland, so it would be easy for livestock to wander away. If you found such an animal, you were to return it to the rightful owner. **You are not to watch your brother's ox or sheep going astray and ignore them - you must certainly bring them back to your brother (22:1)**. Such a response could only come from an attitude of the heart.

2. **If your brother is not near you or if you do not know him, then you should bring it into your house and it will remain with you until your brother comes searching for it and you return it to him (22:2)**. Animals should not have to suffer because of human neglect either. **Deuteronomy** adds some additional details to the original mitzvah. If the owner lived too far away, you were to "board" the animal until the owner came to get it. **The Temple scroll specified that the distance of not near you, was set at a three days journey from the Temple (11QTemple 52:14)**. Farm animals were both expensive and essential; neither the farm family nor the nation could survive without them.

3. But **Moses** didn't limit these mitzvot to restoring strayed animals; **he** said that anything a Jewish person found was to be guarded and returned to the rightful owner. He was not to ignore it because of the extra time and labor involved. **You are to do the same with his donkey or his coat or anything lost by your brother, that may be lost by him and you find - you may not ignore them (22:3)**. This mitzvah is not warning **God's** people against theft, but is requiring that they go out of their way to restore any found property to its rightful owner.⁴⁷¹

4. Then there was the direct help of a neighbor in crisis. If a beast of burden was lying **on the road**, a man was to help **his** neighbor get the animal back on its feet. The animal would be loaded down with baggage, and therefore it would not be able to get up by itself and would be too heavy for one man. In that case, **Moshe** demanded: **You must not watch your brother's donkey or ox fall down on the road and ignore it - you must certainly**

help him lift it up again (22:4). All members of the covenantal nation must show genuine interest in the welfare and success of their fellow **Israelites**. For the animals' sake, and for the owner's sake, the men would get together and turn this emergency into an opportunity to practice **brotherly love**. Emergencies don't make people; they show what people are made of.⁴⁷²



The significant phrase in these verses is **do not ignore it in verses 1, 3, and 4**. Literally, it means *do not hide yourself from it*, which contrasts the natural human tendency to pretend not to see in matters that do not relate directly to us. **Moshe** exhorts **God's people** to take the initiative in assisting **their** fellow **Israelites** as **they** walked through life's journeys. This was supremely illustrated by the priest and the Levite who passed the injured man on the Jericho road (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Gw - The Parable of the Good Samaritan](#)).⁴⁷³ At the end of the parable **Messiah** asked **the expert in the Torah: Which one of these seems to you a neighbor to the one attacked by robbers?** And he answered and said: **The one who showed mercy to him. Then Yeshua said to him: Go and you do the same (Luke 10:36-37).** Who, then, was his neighbor? The Samaritan. Therefore, our neighbor is not only those whom we **love**, but also those that we count as our enemies.

Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **Your** wonderful kindness! Though **Isra'el** is **Your firstborn (Exodus 4:22)**, **You** have opened the door of relationship with **You** to Gentiles. **"I, ADONAI, called You in righteousness, I will take hold of Your hand, I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations (Isaiah 46:9).** Praise **You** for making all who choose to love and follow **You**, to be **Your** children. **But whoever did receive Him, those trusting in His name, to these He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).** How awesome that though the Gentiles were once far from **God**, **You** have brought us near thru **Messiah's** blood. **Therefore, keep in mind**

that once you - Gentiles in the flesh - were called “uncircumcision” by those called “circumcision” (which is performed on flesh by hand). At that time, you were separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Isra’el and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah (Ephesians 2:11-13). You are wonderful and I delight in loving and serving You. In Yeshua’s holy name and His power of resurrection. Amen