

YOU SHALL NOT HIDE YOURSELF*

וְאִם־לֹא קָרֹב אָחִיךָ אֵלֶיךָ וְלֹא יָדַעְתָּו
וְאִסְפָּתוּ אֶל־תּוֹךְ בֵּיתְךָ
וְהָיָה עִמָּךָ עַד דִּרְשׁ אָחִיךָ אֹתוֹ וְהִשְׁבַּתוּ לוֹ:
וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְחֹמְרוֹ וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְשִׁמְלָתוֹ
וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכָל־אֲבֵדֹת אָחִיךָ
אֲשֶׁר־תִּאֲבֹד מִמֶּנּוּ וּמִצָּאָתָהּ
לֹא תוּכַל לְהִתְעַלֵּם:

If your brother is not near you and you do not know him,
then gather it [which you have found] inside your house,
and it shall remain with you until your brother inquires after it, and you return it to him.
So shall you do for his donkey, so shall you do for his garment,
and so shall you do for any lost article of your brother,
that may become lost from him and you find it;
you shall not hide yourself.

If your brother is not near you and you do not know him—“Brother” includes every Jew (Chofetz Chaim), your enemy too, “because the Torah speaks in opposition to the inclination to evil,” that is, the tendency to see others as less the children of God than ourselves (Sifre). Then gather it [which you have found] inside your house, and it shall remain with you until your brother inquires after it, and you return it to him—We are obligated to act personally for the well-being of our fellow Jew, and to do so until that person can respond for his or her own well-being. So shall you do for his donkey, so shall you do for his garment, and so shall you do for any lost article of your brother—Our responsibility extends beyond the property to the person of anyone “who finds himself in spiritual danger” (J. Hurwitz). We are obligated to help that person return to the path of righteousness (בדרך ישרה), because every soul that is lost to the Jewish people—including our own, which we are especially obligated to reclaim—diminishes the nation’s ability to do God’s will in the world. This obligation includes Jews who are “preoccupied with the trivialities of the times” to the exclusion of Torah and mitzvot (Chofetz Chaim). For tinokos shenishbu (Jews “held captive” by Gentiles), we are obligated to bring them back to Torah and, if there is no one else to do this, to dedicate a tenth of our time to this mitzvah (M. Feinstein). That may become lost from him and you find it—It is not sufficient that that which is “lost” is not in the control or possession of your brother; it must be found in a state of “disarray” or be “uncontrolled” for us properly to assume responsibility for it (Sifre). You shall not hide yourself—We are obligated to speak out and to act whenever we can prevent a loss (N. Scherman). While we have the physical power to hide ourselves, there is no acceptable moral choice but to speak and act for our fellow Jews—except when to do so would cause greater loss to ourselves than to others who are at risk (Sifre).

* Deuteronomy 22:2-3 (in Ki Teitzei)