



The Meaning Of *Innu* on *Yom*

Kippur

By Rabbi Saul J. Berman

In this week's parsha, the Torah describes the principle of "Innu Nefesh", of "afflicting souls", that is to be done on *Yom Kippur*. There are five *Innuim*, restrictions, on *Yom Kippur*: the prohibitions against eating and drinking, anointing the body, sexual relations, washing the body for pleasure, and the prohibition against wearing leather.

Those five restrictions are critical elements in our awareness of the distinctiveness of the day of *Yom Kippur*, and they are expressed as a negative precept in *Leviticus*, 23:29.

But, on the basis of the verse in this week's parshah, *Leviticus* 16:29, where the Torah says "Ta'anu et nafshoteichem," "You shall afflict your souls," the Rambam contends that *Innu* is also a *Mitzvat Aseh*; that there is a positive duty of *Innu* on *Yom Kippur*. What does it mean for *Innu* to be a positive duty?

There are four different contexts in which the Torah uses the word *Innu*. One of its most common use is in relation to the enslavement of the Jewish people in Egypt where, from the very beginning, God had told Abraham (*Genesis* 15:13) that his descendants would become enslaved in a land that was not theirs, "Ve'innu otam," and that the Egyptians would afflict them. What is the affliction of enslavement? It is the total compulsion exercised against another person to submit his or her productive energies to the will of another. Torah could preserve a form of *Avdut* as a limited form of control, not the all encompassing enslavement of *Innu*. The Torah repeats again and again that the nature of the enslavement of Egypt was the total compulsion for the submission of one's productive self to the will of another.

Another meaning of *Innu* in the Torah is that of rape, as in *Deuteronomy*, 22:24. The term *Innu*, then, also means to compel the sexual submission of another, whether by physical force as the mechanism of compulsion and force by seduction. So that, for example, when the Torah says in relation to *Dinah*, "Vayishkav ota, vaye'anehah," that he raped her, the midrash is able to understand that there may actually have been an event of seduction. The critical issue was gaining sexual power over the other in which one's will substitutes for the will of the other.

The third usage of the word *Innu* appears in *Deuteronomy*, 21:14. The Torah had provided that in circumstances of war it would be permissible for Jewish men to take non-Jewish women captives back to the land of Israel and to marry them, the law of *Yefat to'ar*. The Torah continues immediately to say, "And what happens when you tire of her? When you no longer desire her," then, "You are not permitted to treat her as a slave. She has become your wife. You need to treat her as a wife who is to be set aside, not simply as a slave or a captive." Why? "Because you, after all, did *Innu* to her." You see on the surface, according to the Rambam, that usage of the word *Innu* might be understood as rape.

After all, you raped her in the course of the war and then you took her home to be your wife. But according to Ramban and others there is never a permissible rape. Even in the case of *Yefat To'ar*, the Torah forbade rape during war. It only permitted you to bring her to the land of Israel, there to try to persuade her to accept the religion of Israel and to agree to marriage. If she refused within a year, you are bound to set her free and let her return to her people. Only if she then consented to conversion and marriage could you marry her. What is the *Innu* here? There was compulsion of cultural identity. She was severed from her cultural identity and moved into a new culture, and through persuasion true, not through force – she was compelled to abandon her own cultural values and marry and convert. And in consequence of that, you bear a special responsibility for her condition and for her identity even after the marriage ends.

The fourth use of the term *Innu* emerges in *Exodus* 22:21-22, where the Torah instructs the nation in regard to the care that has to be taken of the widow and the orphan. The Torah says, "You shall not afflict the widow and the orphan." And God warned "if you afflict them, all they need to do is cry out to me and I will show you. I will make your wives and children into widows and orphans and see how you like it when they are in that position of vulnerability." *Innu* here is the abuse of emotional vulnerabilities, not just the economic issues that are at stake in the treatment of the orphan and the widow. You may not compel their emotional submission which they would be tempted to do out of their vulnerable position.

Innu is the act in which one person compels another to submit his or her productive and consumptive energies, his or her sexual identity, his or her values, and his or her emotions to the forces of another, to enslave those to the will of another. Well, if that's what *Innu* is, what is *Innu nefesh*? *Nefesh* has nothing to do with the soul. *Nefesh* in the Torah is the self. *Innu Nefesh* is the demand for the reclaiming by the self of control over these dimensions of our own lives.

What happens to us over the course of time is the natural tendency to gradually allow others to define who we are – to define who we are in terms of our productivity and our consumption, in regard to our sexuality, in our real values, and even our emotions. But there comes a point during the year when we need to reclaim those dimensions of ourselves, when all of the *Innu* that others have exercised over us needs to be transformed. If in the course of the year our productivity and our consumption have been defined externally and we've allowed the world to convince us that we are what we produce and that we are what we consume and that we need simply to produce more and to consume more, a point comes when you must reclaim that for yourself, become aware again that your productivity is just a piece of your whole self and that your consumption doesn't define you, that you really have the capacity to be a *Same'ach be'chelko*, to rejoice in the portion that you have, to experience gratitude for what you already have.

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