



הַמִּזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

PARSHA WEEKLY

PARSHAT MISHPATIM 5783 • 2023



ISRAEL Parsha Picture








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וְאֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר תָּשִׂים לְפָנֶיהֶם:









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The Speed of Trust



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrahi

Every time I send my car in for a service, I am faced with a big dilemma – one which touches on a core reality of human interaction.

Somehow every time we take our car in for any type of service, we are always quoted all types of parts of the engine and car that need to be fixed. Sometimes this costs many thousands of shekels for all types of things that I know nothing about. Sometimes it's a problem with the brake plugs or the brake pads; sometimes the carburetor or the head of the engine (a really costly one) or some engine part that I've never heard of. I always then start thinking to myself the following thought process – I know absolutely nothing about the inner workings of a car and the motor mechanic could be telling me any story he wants. I find myself musing over the same dilemma and always come back to the same questions – Are they being honest with me and how well do I know them? More directly – do I trust them?

I think further. Who do I know who knows this person? How did I get to them in the first place – who referred me to them? Do I trust those people who referred me to the mechanic and how well do they know him? Since I lack the professional knowledge of the inner workings of car engines, the only yardstick I have to access if this person is reliable and believable is indeed how trustworthy they are and the people who referred me to them. Are they honest decent people who are telling me the truth and that would not cheat me?

The same is true when we go to a doctor, but often the stakes are much higher – our health and lives can be at stake. When we go to doctors for medical assessments, the doctor may diagnose a certain problem

and suggest a certain operation or course of action involving great discomfort and risk. Are we sure that this is the right diagnosis? Is this definitely the best plan of action especially since so much is at stake. Ultimately, we face the same dilemma – do we trust this doctor's competence, abilities and honesty? Would they undoubtedly only give us advice that is in our best interest? Are they amongst the best in the business – do we trust their ability to diagnose and operate? If we get a second opinion and it is different then it is even more challenging as we have to further research to determine the best course of action. This then comes down to assessing the doctors' reputations, how well we know them or the people who referred us to them before we put our lives and future in their hands?

It is clear that no matter how big or small the issues we face are in life, the secret to interpersonal relationships is indeed the value of trust and trustworthiness.

In fact, trust and trustworthiness are the essences of human relationships and how society function. In his book, "The Speed of Trust" Stephen Covey says that the operating system of societies is trust. The cost of doing business, and the effectiveness and efficiency of how society operates is through the currency of trust. When there is trust and trustworthiness, things work incredibly quickly; when there is none, things do not progress.

When there is trust, handshakes often suffice and contracts are in place to ensure that people understand each other correctly. As much as our word should be our bond, it is important on many levels to formalize understandings in contracts. When the component of mutual trust is present, things move forward as smoothly

as possible. When there is little or no trust, negotiations take forever, contracts can be hundreds of pages and even all that is not enough to ensure the success of the relationship.

Trust and trustworthiness are key.

Na'aseh Ve'Nishmah

This component of trust is exactly the rationale at the heart of arguably the most iconic Jewish collective utterance – Na'aseh Ve'Nishmah – we commit to do and only then to understand.

In this week's parasha the Giving of the Torah is further elaborated:

וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע. (שמות כ"ד:ז)

Then he took the record of the covenant and read it aloud to the people. And they said, "All that G-d has spoken we will do and we will listen!" (Shemot 24:7)

Regarding Bnei Yisrael's acceptance of the Torah – the "Na'aseh Ve'Nishma," the Gemara in Shabbat 88a relates:

ההוא מינא דחזייה לרבא דקא מעיין בשמעתא, ונתבה אצבעתא דידיה תותי פרעא וקא מיין בהו, וקא מבועו אצבעתיה דמא. אמר ליה: עמא פזינא, דקדמיתו פומיכו לאודניכו, אפתי בפחזותיכו

קדימיתו. ברישא איבעיא לכו למשמע, אי מציתו – קבליהו, ואי לא – לא קבליהו.

A heretic saw that Rava was immersed in studying halakha, and his fingers were beneath his leg and he was squeezing them, and his fingers were spurt-ing blood. Rava did not notice that he was bleeding because he was engrossed in study. The heretic **said to Rava: You impulsive nation, who accorded precedence to your mouths over your ears. You still bear your impulsiveness,** as you act without thinking. **You should listen first.** Then, **if you are capable of fulfilling the commands, accept them. And if not, do not accept them.**

Indeed, it's a big question – who accepts something upon themselves without knowing what they have agreed to? How can you say rationally and responsibly "Na'aseh Ve'Nishmah – we will do and we will listen"? You don't know what G-d will command of you! He will dictate what you and your progeny must do until the end of days - with enormous consequences. You might not like it or agree with it! How can rational people do such a thing?

The answer, of course, is the speed of trust. Because we trust G-d; Hashem is

trustworthy. We didn't encounter G-d for the first time at Mount Sinai. This is the G-d who revealed Himself to our forefathers and mothers. The same G-d who redeemed us from Egypt, brought ten plagues never seen before or after, split the sea with unparalleled miracles in order to redeem us from suffering and servitude. The G-d who made promises to our forefathers and mothers hundreds of years before- making eternal covenants to one another. Placing great trust in each other. This is the same G-d who is about to give us the Torah. He is reliable and trustworthy. And when there is trust, that we are absolutely sure that what is about to be said is for our own good, we are prepared to make commitments until the end of days.

I think the message is very clear: Relationships are first and foremost about trust. If we want to earn the trust of others, we have to be trustworthy people.

In life and in leadership, if we are to succeed and gain the trust of others, we need to be trustworthy people. When we are trustworthy, reliable, dependable and authentic, nothing facilitates the best and smoothest relationships than that of trust.

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רבי יונתן אומר, כל המקיים את התורה מעני, סופו לקימה מעשר.
וכל המבטל את התורה מעשר, סופו לבטלה מעני: (אבות ד: ט)

Though we aim to observe *mitzvot* properly and maximize our Torah learning, the realities of life often make this challenging. Rabbi Yonatan relates to one of these realities — poverty — and asserts that anyone who fulfills the Torah¹ in a state of poverty will eventually fulfill it in a state of wealth.²

Mei'oni: Poverty's Potential

The *meforshim* debate how poverty (potentially) impacts Torah fulfillment. Most *meforshim*³ understand that poverty makes fulfillment more difficult. It generates discomfort, insecurity and instability, which impair one's ability to focus on Torah learning and spiritual growth. Rabbi Yonatan inspires the poor to overcome these challenges by promising them wealth as a future reward.⁴

The problem with this interpretation is that Rabbi Yonatan's promise is not always evident: many of those who live Torah lives remain impoverished. How can Rabbi Yonatan claim that "all those who fulfill in poverty" are rewarded with wealth, if so many are not?⁵

For this reason, other *meforshim* explain the mishnah differently. Their explanation begins with a careful reading of Rabbi Yonatan's words. Rabbi Yonatan does not refer to those who fulfill "b'oni — in a state of poverty," but "mei'oni — through poverty." Poverty is not just the state within which we fulfill. It should also *facilitate* better fulfillment.⁶

Avot 2:7 teaches that "the more we own, the more we worry." Poverty allows the living of a simpler life. Having less money, property and investments to manage affords us more time for *avodat Hashem*.⁷ This is why Avot 6:4 describes the Torah lifestyle as "eating bread with salt, rationing water and sleeping on the ground." A Torah life focuses on developing the spiritual, not the physical, side of our existence.

Rabbi Yochanan is making a profound statement about poverty. It is not (just) a

challenge to overcome. It should actually *assist* fulfillment; it is an *opportunity* to take advantage of.

Sofu L'kayma Mei'osher: Ultimate Riches

This understanding of Rabbi Yonatan's first words facilitates a deeper understanding of his next ones: "One who fulfills Torah *mei'oni*, will eventually be *mekayem mei'osher* — fulfill with wealth." How does fulfillment *mei'oni* lead to *kiyum mei'osher*?

Many *meforshim* understand the *osher* as referring to a heavenly reward.⁸ As mentioned previously, the difficulty with this interpretation is that the righteous are not always rewarded with wealth.

The Alshich therefore explains the Mishnah differently. The literal meaning of the word "sofo — ends up" presents the *osher* as a natural implication (not a reward).⁹ Though fulfillment *mei'oni* does not necessarily generate a heavenly reward of wealth, it does prepare us to succeed in such a state.

Commitment to Torah in a state of poverty hinges on the ability to focus on what is truly important and helps us develop positive personality traits such as *pashtut* (simplicity), humility, and persistence. This personal development helps people maintain focus and continue serving Hashem properly even once they become wealthy.¹⁰ Rabbi Yonatan does not promise wealth. He explains what prepares us to live correctly once we receive it. Living life properly when poor enables one to do so when wealthy as well.

Taking Advantage of Our Osher

In the second half of the mishnah, Rabbi Yonatan presents the reverse equation: "One who is "mevateil Torah *mei'osher* — negligent about Torah in a state of wealth" will be "mevateil Torah *mei'oni* — negligent about Torah in a state of poverty." We are meant to use the *osher* that Hashem gives us to strengthen and enhance our *avodat Hashem*. One who does not will have the *osher* taken away¹¹ from him.

What is the *osher* that we are expected to use properly? The simple translation of the word "osher" is "wealth." Hashem blesses us with wealth and resources that make our lives easier and more comfortable. We should show our appreciation for these gifts by using them to increase our commitment to *avodat Hashem*.

This message is particularly relevant to our generation. Hashem has blessed us with significant wealth, comfort and opportunities. Machines work for us and save us travel time, electricity extends our days, and the internet allows for quick communication and easy access to meaningful content everywhere at any moment. We need to make sure to devote this "newfound" time and energy to Torah learning and fulfillment.

The Ohr Hachayim explains that this is how the mon tested the readiness of the Jewish People for *kabalat haTorah*. Ready-made mon from heaven freed them from the need to devote time and energy to working and preparing food. Hashem wanted to see if they would use this time for meaningful pursuits. If they did, it would show that they were ready to take advantage of the opportunity to learn Torah.

Though we do not have *mon*, modern technology has freed us from backbreaking labor and afforded us much free time. We, too, need to make sure that we devote our time and energy to Torah learning and fulfillment. If we do, Hashem has good reason to continue blessing us with this "wealth".

In addition to wealth, we are blessed with enabling abilities and enabling circumstances. Our intellectual capacity, educational background and social setting offer the opportunity to think, grow and have a meaningful impact. These gifts are much more important than money and property. This is why the Gemara teaches that "ein ani ela b'deah — (true) poverty is (only) the lack of intelligence." True poverty is the inability to function in a meaningful way; true wealth is the capacity to do so.

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HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

SHEKALIM: Quality & Equality



Rabbanit Shani Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

This Shabbat is the first of four special Shabbatot preceding Pesach wherein we read a special *maftir* reading and its parshanut through the *haftarah* (Megillah 29a). At the time of the Mikdash half-shekalim funds were collected annually from every citizen as contributions for the communal sacrifices. Announcements were made on the first of Adar to remind and encourage the nation to donate the required half-shekel before the new year, beginning in Nissan. The Amoraim debate which *pesukim* should be read on the Shabbat preceding Rosh Chodesh Adar: Rav maintains that we read from Bamidbar 28:1 concerning communal sacrificial offerings and Shmuel maintains (and such we practice) – that we read from last week's parasha, parashat Ki-Tissa of the commandment to provide a mandatory half-shekel contribution (at a time of census) to be used for the construction of the Mishkan. The *haftarah*, however is unanimously agreed upon: “We read as a *haftarah* for parashat Shekalim about Yehoyada the Kohen.”

Both parashat Shekalim (Shemot 30:11-15) and the *haftarah* (Sephardim Melachim Bet 11:17-12:17, Ashkenazim 12:1-17) deal with monetary contributions meant for the Mishkan/Mikdash. The initial half-shekel “tax” was paid by everyone who “entered the record” – “העבר על הפקודים” to atone for the people – “לכפר על נפשותיכם”. Similarly, Yehoash, responsible for renovating the Mikdash after years of neglect and defilement, commanded the kohanim “All the money brought into the House entered as sacred, the money of individuals valued as souls – כסף עובר איש כסף נפשות ערכו.” Just as in the parashah wherein the building of the Mishkan follows the

consecration of a covenant (Shemot 24), Yehoash rededicates the Mikdash preceded by a covenant.

The differences, however, are evident through the respective procedures of raising the money for the Mishkan/Mikdash. The Torah commands “And they shall bring Me an **offering** (*terumah*), of every man whose heart prompts him to give you shall take My **offering**. And this is the **offering** which you shall take of them.” (Shemot 25:2) Hashem initially implores of Am Yisrael to participate in the construction of the Mishkan, encouraging their active involvement and spirit of voluntarism. Parashat Shekalim balances this message with egalitarianism and obligation through the commandment of the mandatory uniform half-shekel payment. Although easier to raise money through individual large donations, the Torah mandates involvement and equal partnership of the people to share the responsibility and privilege of contributing to the Mishkan.

When Yehoash raised money for the Mikdash repairs, he proposed that all the money collected should be given to the kohanim for their personal use (Rashi) in exchange for fixing and maintaining the Mikdash on a regular basis. He felt a personal connection to the Mikdash, having spent six years hiding there from his notorious grandmother Atalya, yet he was aware that the people of Yehuda, and the kohanim in particular, had neglected the Mikdash in favor of alternate altars and idol worship. The king thought that through directly involving the kohanim in the fundraising process and making them responsible for upkeep and operation of the Mikdash, he could encourage greater participation, investment and concern, at the cost of equality. Yehoash adopted the

policy and approach of parashat Teruma – collecting personal voluntary donations!

“But it happened in the twenty third year of King Yehoash, that the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house” (Melachim Bet 12:7). The system of voluntary contributions poses a danger of loss of momentum and inertia. With the passage of time, initial excitement wanes and weariness ensues. Additionally, pursuing funds from particular donors distances the rest of the people from a sense of partnership, identification and responsibility toward the project. Yehoash therefore switched his initial fundraising policy of voluntary donations with one that encouraged equality and consistency. Each person was encouraged to place an anonymous donation straight into a chest where all the money was collected and mixed together and then distributed to laborers and craftsmen, similar to the half-shekel system.

Each person would feel responsible for, inspired by, and faithful (v.16) to the project of mutual participation in renovating and elevating the Mikdash! This is why it is chosen as the *haftarah* for parashat Shekalim, presenting us with commentary, explanation and insight to the need for a transition from the first system of individual voluntarism (parashat Terumah) to the preferred system of national “half-shekel” quality and equality! This system, explains Resh Lakish (Talmud Yerushalmi Megilla 3:4), precedes the holiday of Purim and the fateful shekalim weighed by Haman to commission genocide of the Jews, to provide for unity and mutual responsibility to offset dispersion, hierarchy, internal conflict and national vulnerability!

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council

Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

Question: Would it be permissible/recommended to make a siyum of a masechet at sheva brachot? Does this pose a problem of “ein me’arvin simcha b’simcha” – not having two simchas celebrated at the same time?

Answer: The source for the concept of “ein me’arvin simcha b’simcha” relates to the prohibition of having a wedding over chol hamo ined. This is the case in the Gemara in Moed Katan 8a and brought down lehalacha in the Shulchan Aruch (OC 546:1). However, the Gemara says that one may get engaged (kiddushin) during chol hamoed, as that does not constitute a significant simcha. Similarly, the Shulchan Aruch paskins that one may have a seudah for a brit milah/pidyon haben over chol hamoed as these do not constitute a great simcha to the same extent as a wedding.

The Shu”t Minchat Yitzchak writes about a case of a Torah dedication and bar mitzvah. He writes that one should designate some food for each of the smachot, and if possible, to even have a separate small meal for the Torah dedication before the bigger bar mitzvah meal. Nevertheless, it is permissible even without any of this as the main prohibition of ein me’arvin simcha b’simcha relates to a wedding.

In our case, it seems that it is permissible as only a wedding truly poses an issue.

One should be sensitive that all are happy with this combination of smachot and ensure that one simcha does not take all the attention from the other.

Question: For the siyum of ta’anit bechorot, can I make a siyum on something like midrash/halacha/aggadah/Rambam? Does it need to be Gemara?

Answer: The parameters of a seudat mitzvah and the exemption for the fast of bechorot are not entirely defined. Shu”t Chavot Yair writes that the definition of seudat mitzvah is very hard to define. He brings many different examples, including a siyum masechet, and adds a case of a group of learners that finish a sefer. From here, it sounds like a completion of other sefarim can constitute a seudat mitzvah. Shu”t Pri Kehuna writes based on this Chavot Yair that for the fast of bechorot, other sefarim may be used.

However, it is clear that ideally the siyum should be on a masechet of Gemara. If one is unable to, he can do a siyum over mishnayot. However, there is room, as we have seen, to make a siyum over a different sefer that one worked on, such as Tanach. Perhaps even finishing one sefer of Tanach or one of the five books of the Torah would be enough. This is true as well for learning Rambam/Shulchan Aruch, and perhaps even finishing one of the fourteen sections of Rambam or one chelek of Shulchan Aruch. It is difficult to allow for a siyum over modern sefarim, however, if one works hard over a sefer halacha and feels that he has really mastered the information, he has who to rely upon to make a siyum if he cannot make one over a masechet.

Question: Does one need to start getting food early in the week for Shabbat?

Answer: The mitzvah of “zachor et yom hashabbat lekadsho” expresses itself in many different ways, including kiddush on Shabbat and the way we count the days of the week. Another ramification is mentioned in the Mechilta:

“Rabbi Eleazar the son of Chananyah the son of Chizkiyah the son of Garon says: ‘Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy, and remember it from the first day of the week, so that if a good portion happens to come your way, prepare it for the Sabbath.’”

In our reality, it is easy to find high quality foods for Shabbat every day of the week, and one does not need to buy them earlier in the week. Buying food later in the week is actually better, as it is more apparent that the food is set aside for Shabbat (Seder Hayom). Nevertheless, the principle of having Shabbat on our minds and caring for Shabbat even earlier in the week still applies and can be expressed in different areas. For example, if one reads a beautiful piece of Torah, he can choose to set it aside to share on Shabbat. Another example could be a recipe that one stumbles upon and chooses to set it aside for Shabbat preparations.

● *Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.*

דיון משפחתי: פרשת משפטים

הרבנית שרון רימון
Tanach teacher and author



איך מתנהגים כלפי עבד (או עובד) בצורה מכבדת; איך דואגים שלא לגרום נזק לזולת, ואיך משלמים על נזק שגרמנו, בכוונה או בטעות; איך מתייחסים לחלשים בחברה (גרים, יתומים אלמנות, עניים וכו'); איך מלווים כסף בצורה שלא תרושש את הלווה; איך מתייחסים בכבוד למנהיגים; איך משיבים אבידה לבעליה; איך עוזרים לאדם בצרה אפילו כשמרגישים כלפיו שנאה; איך מדברים בלשון נקיה, וללא שקרים; איך שופטים בצדק; מהם המועדים המקודשים במהלך השנה ואיך חוגגים אותם; ועוד ועוד.

כל פרטי המצוות, המופיעים מעתה ואילך לאורך התורה כולה, מעצבים חברה שחיה את חיי הימים שלה לפי דבר ה' ומכוונת את כל מעשיה אל הטוב. חברה שמנכיחה את ההתגלות האלקית בעולם הזה, ומאפשרת לשכינה להתגלות בכל הרבדים של המציאות, בכל מקום ובכל עת: "וְאֵנִי קֹדֵשׁ תִּהְיוּ לִי" (שמות כ"ב, ל).

Continued from page 4

Each of us are meant to use the capabilities and opportunities Hashem blesses us with in order to serve Him. We should use our intellectual ability to study and appreciate Torah as deeply as possible and use our skills to serve Hashem to the best of our ability.

If we use the resources and abilities Hashem has granted us for the right purposes, He blesses us with more. If we do not, He (*chas v'shalom*) takes them from us.

Challenges and Opportunities

Both poverty and wealth pose challenges. Neither challenge is insurmountable. The gemara teaches that after we die, we are asked why we failed to maximize our opportunities for Torah learning. Those who were poor or wealthy each used their challenging circumstances to justify their behavior. The heavenly court responds by pointing to poor and rich people (Hillel and Rabbi Elazar ben Charsum, respectively) who found ways to devote themselves to Torah learning. If there is a will, there is a way.

עבורם, והם נסוגו אחור ואף ביקשו שמושה ישמע את דברי ה' ויעבר אליהם.

והנה, מסתיים המעמד הגדול, וה' מצווה עליהם: "שובו לכם לאהליכם" – תחזרו לחיים הרגילים. לחיי המשפחה, החברה והמסחר על כל התמודדויותיהם הרגילות, היומיומיות.

ועם ישראל שואל את עצמו – כיצד? איך אפשר לחזור אל המציאות היומיומית אחרי שחווים התגלות אלקית עצמתית?

האם ההתגלות תשאר על הר סיני, ותצרב בתודעתם כזכרון, כנחלת העבר? או שההתגלות עשויה לשנות את פני העתיד שלהם ותבוא לידי ביטוי בחייהם?

פרשת משפטים, המגיעה מיד לאחר מעמד הר סיני, נותנת את המענה:

ההתגלות של ה' לעם ישראל אמורה להצרב עמוק בתודעתם של ישראל, ומעתה ואילך חיהם עומדים להשתנות: עליהם לחיות את חיי היומיום הרגילים עם חוויה של נוכחות אלקית, המעצבת את ההתייחסות שלהם לכל פרט ופרט בחיים:

Poverty and wealth also offer opportunities. Wealth makes life easier, and poverty helps us develop healthy character traits. We are meant to take advantage of whichever opportunities we are offered.

May we realize that we have the ability to overcome whatever challenges Hashem places in our path, and therefore take advantage of the opportunities Hashem offers us through our unique life circumstances.

May doing so allow us to merit Hashem's continued and increased blessings.

● Summarized by Rafi Davis.

1. Avot D'Rebbi Natan (35:1) explains that the term "fulfill the Torah" refers to Torah learning in particular. This would make this Mishnah a natural continuation of the previous ones. On the other hand, based on the terminology ("mekayem" instead of "osek"), Rabbeinu Yonah understands the phrase as referring to the general fulfillment of Torah and mitzvot.
2. Avot 4:9.
3. See Rabbeinu Yonah, Meiri, Rabbeinu Bachya, Machzor Vitri.

ל רעיון גדול צריך להתממש במציאות בעזרת פרטים מעשיים, טכניים, אשר עשויים להיראות כקטנוניים ומכבידים, אך בלעדיהם אי אפשר לממש במציאות את הרעיון: על מנת להקים עסק, צריך להציב חזון ומטרה, ולפרוט אותם לתכנית עסקית מסודרת ומפורטת, הכוללת שלבי עשייה מפורטים ומדויקים, לר"ז, ותכנון כלכלי; כדי להקים משפחה צריך לעסוק בכל הפרטים הטכניים של תפעול הבית (קניות, בישולים, נקיון וכו') ויחד עם זאת לעסוק בחינוך ילדים, המתפרט אף הוא למעשים של יומיום ושעה-שעה, וכמובן שהאהבה בחיי המשפחה צריכה להתבטא בפרטים קטנים של עשייה ונתינה הדדית באופן קבוע; כך גם לגבי ערכים ואידיאלוגיות – על מנת שהם יבואו לידי ביטוי בהתנהלות של מדינה צריך לתרגם אותם לחוקים המסדירים את ההתנהלות של אזרחי המדינה על פי ערכים אלה.

במעמד הר סיני עם ישראל חווה התגלות אלקית עוצמתית. כולם התקדשו לקראת המעמד, היטהרו, כבסו בגדים ופרשו מחיי אישות לכמה ימים. על אף ההתקדשות, החוויה של ההתגלות הייתה לא פשוטה

4. An excellent example of this is Rabbi Yonatan's rebbi, Rabbi Akiva (see Talmud Yerushalmi Ma'asrot [5:2] that makes this connection) who began his Torah learning while poverty-stricken (see Masechet Ketuvot 62b).
5. See Alshich and Maharal, who ask this question.
6. See Ruach Chaim (of Rav Chaim Volozyn) to Avot 4:9, who makes this inference and elaborates on this idea. See also Talmud Bavli, Masechet Chagigah (9b) which records that Eliyahu Hanavi told Bar Hei Hei that a state of poverty helps people succeed in life.
7. See Tanna D'vei Eliyahu (2: pg 13) which explains that a person's poverty is a sign that Hashem loves his learning and does not want him to be busy with other things.
8. For example, see the Rashbatz, based on Kohelet.
9. See, for example, Mishnah Avot 2:2, Sanhedrin 8:5,6; Talmud Bavli, Masechet Nedarim 20a; Kohelet Rabbah 7:16.
10. Rav Chaim Volozhin adds that recognizing that poverty is meant to help us grow earns one enhanced reward.
11. The "sofo" in this part of the mishnah refers to a punishment, not a natural implication. (See, for example, *Sefat Emet* to *Sefer Devarim*, Parashat Ki Tavo 5643). Presumably, the word is used here to parallel the usage in the first part of the mishnah.

From the Mountain to Life



Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

Do you want to do great things? Start with the small details. A moment after the Ten Commandments, after the historic Mt. Sinai event, begins the Mishpatim Portion. Fifty-three (!) different Mitzvot are in it, and they deal with the tiniest details in our lives. That is, after the big drama, after the thunder and lightning, we translate the great principles into the most practical things. The Portion deals extensively with our attitude towards violence, bribery, returning a lost object to its owner, eating, holidays, Shabbat, Eretz Israel, our attitude towards widows and orphans, and a lot more. High, exalted ideas are important – but without the tiniest details of what's permitted and what's forbidden, of how much, how and why – we cannot move forward. It is true in regard to everything in life. The first impression and enthusiasm may dissipate if we do not think about how to preserve them.



The most amazing aspect of parashat Mishpatim is, indeed, its many mishpatim or statutes. Only last week we stood at Mount Sinai and received the Ten Commandments. How can it be that we immediately transition from that dramatic event to a mundane list of 53 mitzvot, with details within details of halachot regarding every area of ordinary life?

Our commentators explain that this is exactly the point: Greatness is in the details. The parasha concerns conduct towards parents, business dealings, tzedakah, holiday observance, eating, and agricultural practices; all of our regular concerns. In order to come down from the mountaintop, yet retain the mountaintop's message, thunder and lightning need to be broken down into the components of everyday life.

This Shabbat marks the sixth anniversary of the passing of Rabbi Ya'akov Edelstein. He was the rabbi of Ramat HaSharon and a living example of Torah greatness expressed in small acts.

Here is a story about him from a resident of Ramat HaSharon:

“I worked for years as his housekeeper. He would always turn on the light for me if he saw that I did not turn it on myself. I was there for his last day at home. A doctor was called and they sat together in the kitchen. It was then decided that the rabbi must go to the hospital. He got up and went to his room. I was at the other end of the hall and dusk had fallen. Not darkness, but no longer afternoon sun. Just as he was packing up a few things, much to my astonishment, he walked back into the hall and pressed on the light switch. Here he was about to leave for the hospital, yet in such a tense moment he was still sensitive to another person. This was the last time that I saw him. From his stay in the hospital he did not return. The last thing he did before leaving his home forever was to pay attention to his housekeeper and take several extra steps for her sake. In a certain sense, that's the job for all of us in this world: to turn on the light for someone else.”



The greatest people pay attention to the littlest things. Here are just two stories from our book “Reaching to Heaven” on Rav Ya'akov Edelstein ability to notice, with penetrating sensitivity, the smallest details. In a certain sense, this is what Parashat Mishpatim is all about – to take the highest ideals from Mount Sinai, bring them down to earth, and apply them to everyday life.

Rav Yitzchak Zemel:

“During his final days, the Rav was staying in a hospice apartment in Netanya. Each Friday night, a group of local chasidim came by to sing Shabbat songs with much joyful excitement. But in the adjoining apartment a blind woman was living. The Rav turned to me and said that since the woman was blind, perhaps her sense of hearing was especially well developed and she heard the songs loudly, in a manner that was disturbing to her. This needed to be checked. Furthermore, he knew that she was Sephardic and perhaps she did not like Chasidic music. His constant concern for the other person amazed me time and again”.

Kivi Hess, a publicist:

“A young mother passed away and I was asked to prepare an announcement for the purpose of collecting funds for her orphaned children. I wrote something very sad and emotional and asked the Rav to sign off on it but he was not satisfied with what I had written. ‘I understand your desire that people will make a contribution,’ he explained to me, ‘but I am thinking about the orphans. One day they will grow up and read this. It's just not proper to write that ‘they have no consolation’ or ‘their home has no one to lean on’. Write something less ‘explosive’ – that was the word he used. As far as I know, this was the last item that was brought for his approval, when he was 93 years old. Until the end of his days, he taught us that every person is an entire world, that everything we write is important, that there is no limit to human sensitivity”.

May his memory be a blessing.

For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis
Deputy CEO, World Mizrachi
Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**A**nd these are the laws that you shall place before them: When you acquire a Hebrew slave, he shall work for six years and in the seventh he shall be released for free” (Shemot 21:1-2).

Following Shemot's exciting story lines of Joseph and his brothers, slavery in Egypt, the ten plagues, crossing the sea, arriving at Sinai and receiving the Ten Commandments, Mishpatim has a greater legal focus, containing 23 positive and 30 negative commandments. With such a vast array of civil ordinances to choose from, why were the laws of the Hebrew slave chosen to be the opening laws of this section?

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the underlying concept of the laws in this week's Parsha is "K'vod HaBriyot" – respect for humanity. The basic recognition that everybody was created in the image of Go-d is the starting point for respecting other people and their property.

This message appears most clearly with the Hebrew slave.

The Hebrew slave is a thief who was unable to pay off his debt and consequently placed in bondage. When the Torah wants to teach us about K'vod HaBriyot, it starts off by telling us how to treat the criminals of society. The treatment of the slave is so demanding that the Gemara states, "Anyone who acquires a Hebrew slave – it is as if he acquires a master for himself" (Kiddushin 20a).

I once joined a group led by Rabbi Yitzchak Levi on a series of visits to inmates at a special ward of an Israeli prison, which houses inmates who failed to find their place in the regular prison system and require special attention. As we walked past the prisoners' toilet on our first visit to the cells, Rabbi Levi stopped, took a look inside and asked the warden to explain how the prisoners are meant to flush the toilet. (The warden explained that there

was a pedal instead of a normal handle which could be broken off and used to threaten others). Meeting the offenders for the first time, their ability to flush the toilet was the last thing on my mind, but witnessing the extent of Rabbi Levi's concern for the inmates, regardless of how they ended up in a special prison ward, made a deep impact on me.

The Torah intentionally opens the section of laws "bein adam lechaveiro" (between man and his fellow man) with the laws of the Hebrew slave. Our respect for humanity should not be limited to our family and friends, but should extend to every human being at every level of society, however far they may have strayed from the accepted path.

"The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons" (Fyodor Dostoevsky).

Shabbat Shalom!



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Doing and Hearing



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

One of the most famous phrases in the Torah makes its appearance in this week's *parsha*. It has often been used to characterise Jewish faith as a whole. It consists of just two words: *na'aseh venishma*, literally, "we will do and we will hear" (Ex. 24:7). What does this mean and why does it matter?

There are two famous interpretations, one ancient, the other modern. The first appears in the Babylonian Talmud,¹ where it is taken to describe the enthusiasm and whole-heartedness with which the Israelites accepted the covenant with God at Mount Sinai. When they said to Moses, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will hear," they were saying, in effect: Whatever God asks of us, we will do – and they said this *before they had heard any of the commandments*. The words, "We will hear," imply that they had not yet heard – neither the Ten Commandments, nor the detailed laws that followed as set out in our *parsha*. So keen were they to signal their assent to God that they agreed to His demands before knowing what they were.²

This reading, adopted also by Rashi in his commentary to the Torah, is difficult because it depends on reading the narrative out of chronological sequence (using the principle that "there is no before and after in the Torah"). The events of chapter 24, according to this interpretation, happened before chapter 20, the account of the revelation at Mount Sinai and the Ten Commandments. Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, and Nachmanides all disagree and read the chapters in chronological sequence. For them, the words *na'aseh venishma* mean not, "we will do and we will hear," but simply, "we will do and we will obey."

The second interpretation – not the plain sense of the text but important nonetheless – has been given often in modern Jewish thought. On this view *na'aseh venishma* means, "We will do and we will

understand."³ From this they derive the conclusion that *we can only understand Judaism by doing it, by performing the commands and living a Jewish life*. In the beginning is the deed.⁴ Only then comes the grasp, the insight, the comprehension.

This is a signal and substantive point. The modern Western mind tends to put things in the opposite order. We seek to understand what we are committing ourselves to before making the commitment. That is fine when what is at stake is signing a contract, buying a new mobile phone, or purchasing a subscription, but not when making a deep existential commitment. The only way to understand leadership is to lead. The only way to understand marriage is to get married. The only way to understand whether a certain career path is right for you is to actually try it for an extended period. Those who hover on the edge of a commitment, reluctant to make a decision until all the facts are in, will eventually find that life has passed them by.⁵ The only way to understand a way of life is to take the risk of living it.⁶ So: *Na'aseh venishma*, "We will do and eventually, through extended practice and long exposure, we will understand."

In my *Introduction* to this year's *Covenant and Conversation* series, I suggested a quite different, third interpretation, based on the fact that the Israelites are described by the Torah as ratifying the covenant three times: once before they heard the commandments and twice afterward. There is a fascinating difference between the way the Torah describes the first two of these responses and the third:

The people all *responded* together, "We will do [*na'aseh*] everything the Lord has said." (Ex. 19:8)

When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they *responded with one voice*, "Everything the Lord has said we will do [*na'aseh*]." (Ex. 24:3)

Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They *responded*, "We will do and hear [*na'aseh venishma*] everything the Lord has said." (Ex. 24:7)

The first two responses, which refer only to action (*na'aseh*), are given unanimously. The people respond "together." They do so "with one voice." The third, which refers not only to doing but also to hearing (*nishma*), involves no unanimity. "Hearing" here means many things: listening, paying attention, understanding, absorbing, internalising, responding, and obeying. It refers, in other words, to the *spiritual, inward dimension of Judaism*.

From this, an important consequence follows. Judaism is a *community of doing* rather than of "hearing." There is an authoritative code of Jewish law. When it comes to *halachah*, the way of Jewish doing, we seek consensus.

By contrast, though there are undoubtedly principles of Jewish faith, *when it comes to spirituality there is no single normative Jewish approach*. Judaism has had its priests and prophets, its rationalists and mystics, its philosophers and poets. Tanach, the Hebrew Bible, speaks in a multiplicity of voices. Isaiah was not Ezekiel. The book of Proverbs comes from a different mindset than the books of Amos and Hosea. The Torah contains law and narrative, history and mystic vision, ritual and prayer. There are norms about how to act as Jews. But there are few about how to think and feel as Jews.

We experience G-d in different ways. Some find Him in nature, in what Wordsworth called "a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused, / Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns, / And the round ocean and the living air."⁷ Others find Him in interpersonal emotion, in the experience of loving and being loved – what Rabbi Akiva meant when he said that in a true marriage, "the

Divine Presence is between” husband and wife.

Some find G-d in the prophetic call: “*Let justice roll down like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream*” (Amos 5:24). Others find Him in study, “*rejoicing in the words of Your Torah...for they are our life and the length of our days; on them we will meditate day and night.*”⁸ Yet others find Him in prayer, discovering that G-d is close to all who call on Him in truth.

There are those who find G-d in joy, dancing and singing as did King David when he brought the Holy Ark into Jerusalem. Others – or the same people at different points in their life – find Him in the depths, in tears and remorse, and a broken heart. Einstein found God in the “fearful symmetry” and ordered complexity of the universe. Rav Kook found Him in the harmony of diversity. Rav Soloveitchik found Him in the loneliness of being as it reaches out to the soul of Being itself.

There is a normative way of performing the holy deed, but there are many ways of hearing the holy voice, encountering the sacred presence, feeling at one and the same time how small we are yet how great the universe we inhabit, how insignificant we must seem when set against the vastness of space and the myriads of stars, yet how momentously significant we are,

knowing that G-d has set His image and likeness upon us and placed us here, in this place, at this time, with these gifts, in these circumstances, with a task to perform if we are able to discern it. We can find God on the heights and in the depths, in loneliness and togetherness, in love and fear, in gratitude and need, in dazzling light and in the midst of deep darkness. We can find G-d by seeking Him, but sometimes He finds us when we least expect it.

That is the difference between *na'aseh* and *nishma*. We do the G-dly deed “together.” We respond to His commands “with one voice.” But we hear G-d’s presence in many ways, for though G-d is one, we are all different, and we encounter Him each in our own way.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- Why is it important that, as a community we all follow the same behaviours and actions, for instance, by following halachah,?
- Why can’t there be one sure way to connecting G-d and to spirituality?
- Rabbi Sacks mentions several paths to G-d in this essay. Which of these speak to you? Are there any other routes you have found to G-d?

1. Shabbat 88a-b.
2. There are, of course, quite different interpretations of the Israelites’ assent. According to one, God “suspended the mountain over them,” giving them no choice but to agree or die (Shabbat 88a).
3. The word already carries this meaning in biblical Hebrew as in the story of the Tower of Babel, where G-d says, “Come let us confuse their language so that people will not be able to understand their neighbour.”
4. This is the famous phrase from Goethe’s *Faust*.
5. This is similar to the point made by Bernard Williams in his famous essay, “*Moral Luck*,” that there are certain decisions – his example is Gauguin’s decision to leave his career and family and go to Tahiti to paint – about which we cannot know whether they are the right decision until after we have taken them and seen how they work out. All such existential decisions involve risk.
6. This, incidentally, is the Verstehen approach to sociology and anthropology; namely that cultures cannot be fully understood from the outside. They need to be experienced from within. That is one of the key differences between the social sciences and the natural sciences.
7. William Wordsworth, “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798.”
8. From the blessing before *Shema* said in the evening prayer.




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Siyata Dish'maya in Psak Halachah



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them. (Shemos 21:1)

Rashi, citing the Mechilta, notes that the parsha that deals with judicial cases is juxtaposed with the preceding parsha that discusses the construction of the mizbei'ach. The Tanna'im explain (Sanhedrin 14b) that this teaches us the correct location in which the Sanhedrin should be situated – adjacent to the mizbei'ach. As the passuk specifies, the Beis Din HaGadol (Supreme Court) had to be located inside the Beis HaMikdash, “that place that Hashem will choose” (Devarim 17:10).

For this reason, during the period of the Bayis Sheini, the Sanhedrin met in the Lishkas HaGazis (Chamber of Hewn Stone), which was divided into two parts. One half was sanctified with the kedushah of the Azarah (Temple Courtyard), while the other half had only the kedushah of the Har HaBayis (Temple Mount). Only a king who is a descendant of malchus Beis David is permitted to sit in the Azarah; thus, even the seventy-one members of the Sanhedrin had to be careful to sit only in the half of the room that did not have kedushas ha'Azarah (Yoma 25a).

The basis for this requirement of placing the court next to the mizbei'ach is the realization that human beings are fallible. Even Moshe Rabbeinu, who had the most profound knowledge of Torah of any man who ever lived, made a mistake in halachah, and he admitted his error when Aharon corrected him (Vayikra 10:19-20). As is apparent from the institution of the bull for the communal error,

the Beis Din HaGadol might issue a psak in error as well. The Gemara in Horayos (3a) describes that this special korban is brought on behalf of the tzibbur as a whole, when a majority violates a serious din based on a unanimous mistaken ruling of the Sanhedrin. Although we have no record as to whether this korban was actually ever offered in practice, the Halachah does provide for such a theoretical possibility.

The notion in some camps of Orthodox Jewry that gedolei hador are somehow flawless is something borrowed from Catholicism, which believes in papal infallibility. We believe, in contrast, that only Hashem is infallible; all human beings can make mistakes.

With regard to the psak of the Sanhedrin, the passuk states, “You shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left” (Devarim 17:11). Rashi comments, based on the Sifrei, “Even if he says to you about right that it is left and about left that it is right.” The simple understanding of this comment is that even if the Beis Din HaGadol is mistaken, their ruling is binding.

However, the Ramban proves that this cannot be the meaning of the Sifrei, as the Mishnah in Horayos (1:1) clearly teaches that a member of the beis din or a student worthy of ruling who is convinced that the beis din had erred is obliged not to follow the beis din's ruling. If he does, he is responsible for his actions and must bring a personal Korban Chatas for kaparah. Erroneous rulings of the Beis Din

HaGadol, or any rabbi for that matter, are not binding. A halachic ruling is only binding on the assumption that it is not mistaken.

Instead of the above text of the Sifrei, the Ramban (Devarim 17:11) explains that the actual text reads, “even if it appears in your eyes about right that it is left,” referring to a situation in which the layman believes that the rabbi was mistaken in his ruling. This language implies that it is only an appearance – “in your eyes” – that the Sanhedrin's decision is incorrect. Thus, this passuk imposes on the layman an obligation to have emunas Chachamim and to assume that the rabbis ruled correctly.

Given the reality of possible fallibility in psak halachah, there was a need for the Sanhedrin to meet in the special location of the Lishkas HaGazis. This way, the Sanhedrin would have hashra'as ru'ach hakodesh from the aron hakodesh and the luchos. The proximity to the Shechinah would endow the Sanhedrin with a siyata diSh'maya (Divine assistance) that it not be led to issue a mistaken ruling. As the passuk states: “G-d stands in the Divine assembly” (Tehillim 82:1). In the words of the Ramban: “For the spirit of Hashem, may He be Blessed, is on those who service His Sanctuary, and He will not forsake His devout ones; they will forever be protected from error and from stumbling.”

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha II.

Learning from Experience



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

In this week's Haftorah, Yirmiyahu HaNavi admonishes the Jewish people for not dealing with an Eved Ivri properly. He admonishes Klal Yisrael for not keeping to the Torah's commandment of sending out an Eved Ivri at the end of the 7th year of enslavement. He opens by saying:

"Thus said the LORD, the G-d of Israel: I made a covenant with your fathers on the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage, saying..." (Yirmiya 34:13)

The phrase 'on the day I brought them out of Egypt' seems quite surprising. This week's Parsha, where the commandments regarding the Eved Ivri are first detailed, did not take place on the day that Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim. This week's Parsha follows Mattan Torah. It is at least 50 days after the leaving of Mitzrayim. How can the Haftorah say that it was on the day Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim that they were taught this?

Some of the commentators explain that the phrase doesn't mean on the literal day of the exodus from Mitzrayim but rather it means in that period of time. However, a clear question still remains.



Once a person walks out of a certain experience, he himself has to be extra careful to learn from that.

All 613 mitzvot were commanded in this period of time! What is unique about Eved Ivri that it is associated specifically with this time period?

The Baalei Mussar provide the following explanation. They ask why Parshat Mishpatim starts with the Mitzvah of Eved Ivri as theretare many more practical Mitzvos in the Parsha? They answer that the Torah is teaching us that if you go through an experience and you see how terrible something is, you have to be extra careful in your own life to be alert in that Middah. If you suffered from a warped Middah, you have to be careful not to make mistakes with that very same Middah yourself. When Klal Yisrael left Mitzrayim, Hashem immediately warns

them not to veer in their own treatment of slaves due to the suffering they had experienced being slaves themselves. Once you felt the mistreatment of others, you have to be supersensitive not to be the one who mistreats other people.

That is what Yirmiyahu means. If you look closely at the Posuk he doesn't just say "on the day I brought you out of Egypt" but adds in "from the house of bondage". On the day I took you out from being slaves, I told you to treat your own slaves in the right manner. Once a person walks out of a certain experience, he himself has to be extra careful to learn from that. If he is a victim of something he must ensure to not be a person who victimizes others.

Sometimes this is very challenging. But it is an important lesson for a person to know that your experiences have to teach you what to be extra careful about in the future. If you experienced mistreatment, you should take it to heart, you should understand that the suffering you endured is real, and not G-d forbid make someone else suffer from that very same thing.

● Edited by Yehuda Kaufold and Josh Harris.

Do your pets know when it is Shabbat?



Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

I find it fascinating how often over the years people have actually said to me that they genuinely believe that in one form or another their pets know when it is Shabbat.

In fact our sages in the Psikta Rabbah tell us that on one occasion Rabbi Yochanan sold his ox to a non-Jewish farmer. After a while the farmer came to Rabbi Yochanan to complain to him:

That ox which you sold me, he said, refuses to work on Saturdays!

Such a phenomenon can be understood in the context of Parshat Mishpatim.

In our parsha the Torah yet again gives us the mitzvah to keep Shabbat and this is how the mitzvah is worded (Shemot 23:12):

“Uvayom hashvii tishbot,” – “And on the seventh day you must have a sabbath,” – “Leman yanoach shurcha vechamorecha,” – “in order that your ox and your donkey should rest.”

Now surely the Torah should have said, every seventh day you, your ox and your donkey should rest? Why is it presented in this fashion?



It's so important that we should be enthusiastic and passionate about Shabbat and if we are, by keeping to the spirit of the day, we'll have the capacity to pass on that enthusiasm to the generations to come.

The Rebbe of Gur explains beautifully. He said, ‘uvayom hashvii tishbot’ – if every seventh day you have a true Shabbat, that is to say you don't just keep the letter of the law but in addition you keep to the spirit of the day, if your day is filled with ruach, spiritually uplifting experiences, the result is that you will have a great impact on your surroundings so much so that even your ox and your donkey will know that this is a special day.

I believe that this teaching is of enormous significance today at a time when there is so much out there competing with our requirement to keep Shabbat. And what applies to Shabbat applies to all of

the mitzvot. The prophet Isaiah (58:13) declared,

“Vekarata l'Shabbat oneg” – “You will discover that the Sabbath is a day of true delight.”

If on this day you stop doing what we call ‘vochadig’ activities, weekday activities, and instead you add on to your ‘Shabbos-dig’ activities the result is that you will discover what a delight Shabbat is.

In fact it's an extraordinary gift from Hashem that every seven days we can have an opportunity for a life-shaping and life-enhancing experience. But that only happens when we keep the spirit of the day. It's so important that we should be enthusiastic and passionate about Shabbat and if we are, by keeping to the spirit of the day, we'll have the capacity to pass on that enthusiasm to the generations to come.

It's only when we keep to the spirit of Shabbat that it becomes what we describe in our zemirot, our songs of the day, a true ‘me'ein olam haba' – Shabbat can indeed be the closest thing to Heaven while still being here on earth.

Avoid Stubbornness



Rabbi Shalom Rosner
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

לֹא תִשָּׂא שְׁמֵעַ שָׂוָא (שמות כג:א)

You shall not accept a false report (Shemot 23:1)

The gemara in Sanhedrin (7b) derives from this passuk that a judge should not hear testimony from one party in a dispute, absent the other party. The Rambam (*Sefer Hamitzvot Lo Ta'ase* 281), explains that the reasoning behind this prohibition is to prevent a judge from being persuaded by one party, without providing the adversarial party to present their case.

Rav Chaim Shmulovitz (*Sichat Musar*) posits that after a judge hears a person's testimony it is more easily accepted and at a later date when the other party presents their position, it is an uphill battle to convince the judge what he had initially heard was in fact incorrect. In other words, we do all we can to prevent a judge from forming an early, and perhaps immature opinion based on half a story (one side's testimony). Even with respect to judges, we fear human nature, which tends to lead us to form opinions which are later difficult to change.

This is not only true with respect to judges but affects individuals as well. First impressions often form one's opinion and it is then difficult to persuade one to recognize the truth in a differing view. The gemara in Sanhedrin (88b) declares "who is worthy of Olam Haba? A modest person and one who bows" איזהו בן העולם הבא ענותן ושפל ברכך. What does bowing add to one who is modest? The Masoret Hashas interprets this to refer to an individual

that is able to change his mind. To constantly re-evaluate and not stubbornly follow his earlier decision if it is flawed. The term "bow" relates to bowing to his mistakes, he is not afraid to change course when proven wrong.

Stubbornness is a self-defeating character trait. It is often difficult for someone to admit that their initial reaction or understanding was erroneous. They continue to justify their position, notwithstanding that a neutral observer can clearly decipher their false pretense.

In Sefer Yirmiyahu, (28:15-17) Yirmiyahu warns a false prophet Hanania ben Azor that he will die within the year, which in fact occurs. Chazal tell us that he died on Erev Rosh Hashanah (the last day of the year), but with his last breath pleaded with his children not to inform anyone of his death until the next day to disprove Yirmiyahu's prophecy, since they would think he died during the following year. Imagine, until the very end deceiving oneself and trying to deceive others, out of stubbornness! Rather than repent he wasted his last words on falsity.

A similar scenario occurs in Sefer Melachim Alef (17:34). After conquering and destroying Jericho, Yehoshua warns the nation: "cursed be the man before Hashem that rises up and builds this city, Jericho; with (the loss of) his first-born shall he lay its foundation, and with (the loss of) his youngest son shall he erect its gates." (Yehoshua 6:26). Yet

in Sefer Melachim, we are told of an individual named Chiel who in fact attempts to rebuild Jericho. Notwithstanding that his eldest son dies as he lays the foundation, he continues to build the city, and his children continue to perish. Why would someone attempt to challenge this decree? Moreover, once inflicted in accordance with the decree and losing a son, one would expect such an individual to admit his mistake and cease his activity immediately. Yet, his unfortunate stubbornness led to his demise.

The passuk we cited earlier may have been addressed to a judge, but it relates to each individual as well. We should take particular care to not quickly formulate opinions and relate to them as the ultimate truth. To try to defend a position that we know is false to avoid embarrassment. We need to be open minded and flexible and be able to hear and consider differing views and *hashkofot*. Like Waze at times suggests, we should not be afraid to recalculate our path to ensure that we are in fact heading in the proper direction and acting correctly.

Parshas Mishpatim: A Nation of Compassion



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In *Parshas Mishpatim*, the narrative of *Matan Torah* continues. In contrast to the Revelation at Sinai – the thunder, lightning, smoke, and shofar blast which accompanied the *Aseres Ha'Dibros* – as related to us in last week's *parsha*, *Mishpatim* is a *parsha* with law after law detailing intricate and complex interaction between man and fellow man.

Amongst the many laws regarding damages (*neizikin*), there are a number of *mitzvos* concerning our treatment of others, particularly those who may be more vulnerable. Hence, the Torah says: *And a stranger you shall not mistreat or oppress, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt* (Shemos 22:20).

We are commanded further: *Any widow or orphan you shall not oppress; for if you shall persecute him, for if he will cry out to Me, I shall surely hear his cry* (Shemos 22:21-22).

Rashi teaches: Every widow or orphan you shall not oppress – the same law applies to (not) persecuting *any person*, but the Torah speaks of that which is more prevalent, since they are weak and it is common to find that they are persecuted.

While we are forbidden to oppress or persecute others, we must be especially vigilant in our interactions with those who are weaker.

R' S.R. Hirsch comments, “אֲלֵמָה derives from אָלַם, to be mute... By the death of her husband, the widow has lost her voice; she no longer has someone to speak for her. By the death of his father, the orphan remains powerless; he no longer has someone to depend on, someone to guide him.

עֵנָה (derived from) לֹא תַעֲבֹר (to make someone feel his עוֹנֵי (poverty), his dependent position, to exploit his weakness and lack of protection.

“It says here בְּלֹא־אֶלְמָנָה וְיָתוּם, every widow and orphan, because not only poor widows and poor orphans, but even rich ones are exposed to exploitation and maltreatment.

“In most countries, aliens are discriminated against and deprived of their rights – by law. For this reason, the address in the preceding verse (22:20, quoted above) is in the singular, to warn the Jewish state against this practice. By contrast, it is hard to find a legal system that discriminates against widows and orphans. However, in social relations and dealings *between people*, they have no one to stand up for them, to support them, to guide them, and so are subject to discrimination and humiliation. Hence in their case the Torah addresses primarily the members of society: לֹא תַעֲבֹר, do not exploit their weakness; do not make them feel the weakness of their position!

אִם-עֵנָה תַעֲבֹר, אִתּוֹ-כִּי אִם-צָעַק יִצְעַק אֵלַי, Woe unto you, state leaders, if the state too ill-treats them and makes them feel the pain of having lost their defender and supporter! Woe to the state whose widows and orphans suffer among the people, where even the official public representatives do not stand up for them and uphold their rights... Woe unto you, if their only resort is to cry out to Me; for I will assuredly hear their cry; I will make the state and society pay dearly for it, if their weakest members must appeal (only) to Me to find justice.”

Amongst the myriad of *mitzvos* given to us at Har Sinai – both the Written and Oral Law – are many *mitzvos* that govern our interaction with fellow man. The Torah does not assume that we will be compassionate, loving, empathetic and caring towards others. We are *commanded* to be so!

The Kli Yakar teaches that all *mitzvos* in the Torah fall into one of two categories: *bein adam la'Makom* (*mitzvos* between man and G-d), and *bein adam la'chavairo* (*mitzvos* that govern interaction between man and his fellow). And in regard to those *mitzvos bein adam la'chavairo*, יסוד לכלם פסוק ואהבת לרעך, כמורך – the foundation of all of them is “love for your fellow what you love for yourself” (Vayikra 19:18 and Kli Yakar there).

While the thunder and lightning, the smoke and trembling mountain, the shofar blast and Divine Voice that emanated from Sinai, were surely awe-inspiring and nation altering, *Parshas Mishpatim* and its everyday laws teach us how to *live* as Jews.

When there is someone more vulnerable amongst us, it is our duty, our calling, and our charge to ensure that they are not oppressed, that they have a voice, and that their needs and wants are taken into consideration, as are ours.

The following was posted two years on FaceBook (shared with me by my son) by a resident of Jerusalem, and it is typed verbatim here as it was posted:

“On the light rail tonight, a woman, probably in her upper 50s, is looking sad. I ask her if she's okay. She replies that she had a lonely Shabbat; her husband died a number of months ago. Her only child could not make it in this week. She

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A 'Base' and a 'Crown'



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

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This week, after the reading of Mishpatim, we read the first of the four parshiot read during the month of Adar. The maftir, this week, Shabbat Mevarchim Rosh Chodesh Adar, is Parshat Shekalim.

What did Bnei Yisrael do with the money collected for the “machatzit hashekel”? From the commandment at the beginning of Parshat Ki-tisa it is not very clear, for it simply states that it should be given: “l’avodat OHEL MOED” – for the needs of the Tabernacle (see 30:16)

Ramban enters into a lengthy discussion in regard to whether this “parshia” discusses the yearly obligation that each Jew give a “machatzit hashekel” for the “korbanot tzibur”, or if it is only a specific mitzvah for Bnei Yisrael in the desert who now prepare to build the Mishkan. However, no matter how we understand this parshia in Parshat Ki-tisa, from the opening pesukim in Parshat Pekudei it is clear that there was indeed a special donation of the “machatzit hashekel” for the specific purpose of BUILDING the Mishkan. Even though those details appear to be a bit technical, if we read ‘between the lines’, we can find a very significant message.

In Parshat Pekudei we learn that Bnei Yisrael were permitted to donate as much gold and copper [“zahav” and “nechoshet”] as they chose. The primary use of the gold was to make the keilim of the Mishkan (aron, shulchan, menorah etc.), while the copper was used to make the “keilim” of the “chatzer” (i.e. the mizbach nechoshet and kiyor).

Silver, was a different story. The only silver collected was from the “machatzit hashekel”, where each member of the male population age 20 (and up) gave a half a shekel (see 38:26). Since the census totaled 603,550, the total silver came to 301,775 shekel. Since every 3,000 shekel is a “kikar”, this resulted in 100 “kikar” and a remainder of 1,775 shekel. What did they do with this silver? Actually, it was quite simple. The primary use of the silver was to make “adanim” [weighted base sockets] to support the “kerashim” [wooden planks] of the Mishkan. Since there were a total of 48 “kerashim” which formed the support walls of the Mishkan [20+20+8], and each “keresh” required TWO “adanim”, a total of 96 “adanim” were needed. Plus, four additional “kerashim” were needed to support the “parochet”, but each of these “kerashim” stood on only one “eden”, so a grand total of 100 [96+4] “adanim” were needed to form the base support of the “kerashim” of the Mishkan. Therefore, from this 100 “kikar” of silver they made 100 “adanim”, each one weighing 1 “kikar” (about 30 kilograms), and thus forming a very solid base for the Mishkan. With the leftover 1775 shekels of silver, they made clips to connect the curtains to the poles of the outer courtyard [“chatzer”], and a silver plating for the heads of those poles as well.

So why is this important? It is significant that the very BASE of the Mishkan, the silver “adanim” that SUPPORT the entire structure is made from the material donated EQUALLY by every member of Am Yisrael. On top of that base, we find “keilim” and materials which were made from the wide range of the donated

gold and copper, but the base itself was different.

Similarly, from the outside of the Mishkan, the silver coating on the very top of each of the poles of the courtyard [“amudei ha’chatzer”] formed a silver like crown surrounding the Mishkan. This too, was made from the ‘equal from all’ donation of the silver of the “machatzit hashekel”. Therefore, the very base at the bottom, as well as the shiny crown at the top, reflect the joint donation where each member of Am Yisrael is equal. However, in between them, we find the “keilim” made from the extra donations of gold and copper from private individuals. This may reflect the proper balance between the need on the one hand for everyone to be equal and work together at the very base level of Judaism, yet at the same time allowing for each individual to make his own personal contribution in any additional realm that he may choose. Yet, all said and done, when one looks from the outside, the ‘finishing touches’ [the silver crown surrounding the Mishkan] must still reflect the very same unity which forms its base.

In later generations, after the Mishkan was built, the “machatzit ha’shekel” was used to buy the “korbanot tzibur”. Again we find that the very basic “korbanot TAMID” offered daily on the MIZBEACH reflected the unity and collective nature of Am Yisrael. In addition to that korban TAMID, each individual was permitted to offer an add additional “korban nedava” [voluntary offering], but once again, at the base level, we all stand in front of G-d as “knesset Yisrael” – one collective unit.

The Special Joy of Anticipating Redemption



Rabbi Eli Mansour

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The Shabbat preceding Rosh Hodesh Adar – or the Shabbat on which Rosh Hodesh Adar falls – is called “Shabbat Shekalim,” because after reading the weekly Torah portion, we read a special section, Parashat Shekalim, which speaks of the Misva of “Mahasit Ha’shekel.” This was a tax that each adult male was required to pay to the Bet Ha’mikdash each year, in order to cover the various expenses involved in the Bet Ha’mikdash’s operations. It was on Rosh Hodesh Adar when the officials would begin collecting this money from the people, and so in commemoration, we read Parashat Shekalim each year just before or on Rosh Hodesh Adar.

The Gemara in Masechet Megilla (13) points to the special significance of the Misva of “Mahasit Ha’shekel” in regard to the celebration of Purim. When Haman brought to Ahashverosh his plan to exterminate the Jews, he offered, “Aseret Alafim Kikar Kesef Eshkol” – he would pay, out of his own pocket, the astronomical sum of 10,000 silver talents. The Gemara teaches that when G-d heard Haman’s offer to Ahashverosh, He responded, “Their Shekalim already preceded yours” – meaning, the merit of the Jews’ donation of a half-shekel of silver preceded Haman’s willingness to pay 10,000 silver talents, and in that merit, they would be saved. The simple meaning of the Gemara’s remark is that the Jews paid the “Mahasit Ha’shekel” during the month of Adar, before Haman devised his plan during the month of Nissan, and in this merit, Haman’s plot was foiled and the Jews were saved.

We must ask, however, why would specifically this Misva give the Jews the merit

to be saved from Haman, more than any other Misva?

In truth, an even more difficult question arises from the Gemara’s discussion. Why were the Jews donating the “Mahasit Ha’shekel” at that time? This donation is made only when the Bet Ha’mikdash stands. During the time of the Purim story, the second Bet Ha’mikdash was in the process of being built. In fact, Ahashverosh had ordered the halting of the construction. Seemingly, then, the Misva of “Mahasit Ha’shekel” did not apply. How can the Gemara say that the merit of this Misva saved the Jews from Haman’s plan to eradicate them, if this Misva was not even relevant at this time?

Rav Yehonatan Eibshutz (1690-1764), in his Ye’arot Debash, offers a fascinating explanation. Elsewhere in Masechet Megilla (12a), the Gemara comments that the Jews of that time were deemed worthy of annihilation because they participated in Ahashverosh’s lavish feast. Rav Eibshutz writes that, as the Gemara describes, Ahashverosh made this feast to celebrate what he mistakenly thought was the indication of the permanence of the Jews’ exile. He knew of the tradition that the Jews would remain in exile for seventy years, but he miscalculated, and wrongly concluded that this period had ended with the Jews still in exile. He therefore held a special feast, and he even wore the clothing of the Kohen Gadol and used the utensils of the Bet Ha’mikdash, celebrating the fact that the Jews would never rebuild their Temple again. The Jews, Rav Eibshutz explains, fully participated in this celebration. They, too, despaired of returning to Israel and rebuilding the Bet Ha’mikdash, and resolved that they would forever live in exile, among gentile

nations. For this they were threatened with annihilation.

They were saved, however, because they repented and rectified this mistake. Rav Eibshutz writes that Mordechai, the leading Rabbi at the time, urged the Jews to repent by making the “Mahasit Ha’shekel” donation. Although there was no Bet Ha’mikdash to which to donate this money, Mordechai instructed the people to donate to a special fund in anticipation of the Bet Ha’mikdash’s restoration. This anticipation rectified the despair into which they had fallen years earlier, when they enthusiastically participated in Ahashverosh’s feast. Therefore, it was through the “Mahasit Ha’shekel” donation that they earned their salvation – as it reversed the mistake on account of which the decree was issued in the first place.

As we all sing this time of year, “Mi’she’nichas Adar Marbim Be’simha” – we are required to increase our joy when Adar begins. With the onset of the month of the “Mahasit Ha’shekel,” we joyously celebrate our eager anticipation of the rebuilding of the Bet Ha’mikdash. We move from the negativity of despair to the festivity of hope and optimism. The special joy of Adar is the joy of overcoming despair, of firmly believing that our current troubles and our current state of exile are not permanent. It is the joy of confidently anticipating our redemption, and looking forward to the time when we will exuberantly serve G-d in the rebuilt Bet Ha’mikdash, speedily and in our times, Amen.

Connecting to Our Higher Self



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger
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This Shabbos we read about the mitzva to give a half Shekel to the Beis Hamikdash to support the community korbanos throughout the year. There are a number of questions on the mitzva of the half Shekel. This is the only mitzva where we find a command like (Shmos 30:15) “The rich shall give no more and the poor shall give no less...” Usually, there is a minimum level a person must do to fulfill a mitzva but each person can do more if he wants to and that is encouraged. Why must every Jew be exactly the same with respect to the half Shekel? What is the connection between the mitzva of the half Shekel and the sanctity of Shabbos such that chazal instituted a special Shabbos called “Shabbos Shekalim?”

The Sfas Emes wrote “Chazal said (Rashi on Shmos 13:13) that [Hashem] showed him a coin of fire and said ‘Like this shall they give,’ meaning that the Jewish people have a portion in heaven and a portion given to them in this world and they must cleave to the heavenly portion.” Each person has an image above which personifies his essence and shows what he can become. That aspect of the person is never diminished by anything he does or fails to do in this world. However, the only aspect of the person which is visible in this world is a diminished version, a mere spark of that great potential self. Hashem showed Moshe the true potential of man and how each person must work to make his half Shekel on earth more like its fiery counterpart above.

We can now understand the requirement that the rich and the poor must all give the same half Shekel. Divisions, differences, and disputes between people here on earth only exist because of our limited vision. We only see the distinctions between people. We see that some are

rich and some are poor, some are more frum, some are less frum, some are more intelligent and some less, and so on. But the half Shekel, which is the same for everyone and corresponds to the fiery coin above, demonstrates that in their spiritual essence, all Jews are equally part of ישראל, the unified soul of the Jewish nation. From that perspective, no one’s essence is blemished or corrupted. There is no concept of rich and poor or any other distinction. When true tzadikim look at Jews, they see their true essence, their מטבע של אש, the fiery coin of their true essence. The more a Jew is connected to the source, the more he loves peace and unity between Jews and hates dispute and rivalry. At the source, everything is one.

This is why the korbanos of the צבור, the whole community, had to be purchased using the half Shekel. The Hebrew word for community, “צבור,” is an acronym for the words “צדיקים, בינונים, רשעים,” Jews who are righteous, mediocre, or wicked. Moreover, the Jewish community, as a whole community, never dies because the community is the נשמת ישראל, the unified soul of the Jewish nation. As chazal say (Temura 15b), “שאינן הצבור מתים,” “The congregation cannot die.” Korbanos are used to bridge the gap between a Jew’s half Shekel below with his fiery coin above. As the Gemara (Bava Basra 74a) says the Beis Hamikdash is the place “where heaven and earth kiss.” The korbanos brought by the community are the meeting point between heaven and earth because they bridge the gap between our frail human reality and our noble potential in the essence of our being.

This is also the connection between the half Shekel and Shabbos Shekalim. The Zohar (Introduction, 5b) asks why the pasuk (Vayikra 19:30) says “אַתָּה-שֹׁבֵתְךָ תִּשְׁמֹר” “You shall observe my Shabbosim,” in

the plural, instead of saying “you shall keep Shabbos?” Among other explanations, it answers that the word is plural to refer to the two aspects of Shabbos, the “Shabbos above and the Shabbos below.” On Shabbos, we receive a “נשמה יתירה,” “an additional soul,” meaning that Shabbos gives us an additional capacity to connect the Shabbos below to the Shabbos above, the cold half Shekel of this world to the fiery coin above. That is why we say “Shabbos Shalom,” since (Zohar 176b) Shabbos is the essence of peace. It also shows why chazal (Shabbos 23b) instituted Shabbos candles “for the sake of peace in the home.”

The more a person connects to the source above, the more he attains peace because he feels connected to every Jew below in the way of “The rich shall give no more and the poor shall give no less...” All distinctions between Jews exist during the week because we usually only look at a person’s half Shekel of this world. This is also why the Torah reiterates the mitzva of Shabbos following the mitzva of the half Shekel and other mitzvos relating to the Beis Hamikdash. This is also why chazal say that the mitzva of the half Shekel is a rectification of the sin of the עגל הזהב, the Golden Calf (Yerushalmi Shekalim 9b). In order to atone for the sin which threatened to sever the Jewish people’s connection with the fiery coin above, they perform the mitzva of the half Shekel to reconnect them with their essence above.

May Hashem help us internalize the meaning of the mitzva of the half Shekel and look at the inner greatness of our own and others’ spiritual source above and in doing so, may we merit to reach our potential and see what we share in common rather than our superficial differences.

How to Deal with Challenging Emotions



Rabbi YY Jacobson
TheYeshiva.net

The emotional constipation that has afflicted our parents and grandparents has been healed all too successfully.

Gone are the days when ‘closure’ was a term used for zippers and when ‘denial’ was only a river in Egypt. Welcome to the new age of anxiety where “bad habits have been turned into diseases, foibles are afflictions and sins are syndromes,” as explained by Jon Winokur in his “Encyclopedia Neurotica,” an irreverent guide to the world of neuroses and phobias. In it, Winokur takes issue with the psychobabble that has turned juvenile delinquents into kids suffering from “conduct disorder” and gluttons into “compulsive over-eaters.”

A psychoanalyst once remarked that during the first 20 years of his career in the ‘50s and ‘60s, every patient was convinced that he or she loved his or her parents. “It took me five years to demonstrate to them that buried beneath the love and tenderness lay some unresolved resentment.”

During the second 20-year period of his work, during the ‘70s and ‘80s, the psychoanalyst observed the reversal of this. Most patients now came into his office swearing that they hated their parents vehemently, that their fathers were careless beasts and their mothers dysfunctional nuts. “It took me five years to demonstrate to them that beneath the hate and anger lurked a little child that craved to love its mom and dad.”

In this climate, affecting all of us to one degree or another, it is worthwhile to lend an ear to a simple verse transcribed more than three thousand years ago, in this week’s portion, Mishpatim.

“If you see the donkey of someone you hate crouching under its burden, and you might refrain from helping him—you shall surely help him.”

The language seems superfluous. Why was it necessary to discuss the possible thought that you may not wish to help your enemy -- “and you might refrain from helping him?” rather than stating the law succinctly: “If you see the donkey of someone you hate crouching under its burden, you shall surely help him!”

The answer is simple. The Bible is making a point of acknowledging the instinct to refrain from helping one’s enemy’s donkey as legitimate and human. It is perfectly normal to feel that you care not to assist the person you loathe, even if his animal is suffering.

Yet notwithstanding this natural emotion, the Bible is calling on us to challenge our instinct and assist our enemy’s donkey regardless. This perfectly human instinct of loathing an enemy, need not dictate our actions.

There are two significant lessons here, pertinent particularly for an age dedicated to the dissecting of one’s emotional persona. For one, the Torah does not believe in denying and repressing negative emotions; to make believe that they do not exist. Simultaneous with its insistence that we assist the animal of the one we hate, the Torah makes a special point of mentioning the fact that we may harbor a feeling to desist from extending a hand to the burdened donkey of our enemy.

The fact that our emotions are not always in sync with our ideals and values does not reduce us to moral failures. 850 years ago, Rambam captured this truth in his code of Jewish law: “When one person wrongs another, the latter should not suppress

his resentment and remain silent... rather he is commanded to let him know [his feelings] and ask him: ‘Why did you do this to me? Why did you wrong me regarding this matter?’... The Torah warns us against hating in our hearts.”

On the other hand, the Bible is informing us that not every emotion is holy. When somebody’s animal is suffering you must extend your hand, notwithstanding your negative emotions toward the owner of the donkey.

One of the problems unique to our age is that for many of us emotions have become the sole barometers that determine right from wrong. We have turned our emotions into deities, worshiping them as though they embodied absolute, timeless truths—a new G-d. To suggest to somebody that they might overlook an emotion, subdue a feeling, disregard a mood is a form of heresy. Our emotions have become gods and we must obey them at all costs, even if this may be detrimental for our relationships, our marriages, our children, and our long-term visions. In the Biblical ethos, there is a critical distinction that must be made between acknowledging your emotions vs. allowing them to dictate your behavior.

In the Kabbalistic literature, our faculties of cognition are commonly referred to as “parents,” while our faculties of emotions are described as “children.” The significance of this metaphor is vital: The relationship between the mind and the heart, it suggests, must reflect a healthy relationship between parents and children. When your child begins to holler, you must acknowledge his or her predicament, and examine the cause of their outburst. Yet you cannot run to call the ambulance based on the screams of a

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Mishpatim: Dive In!



Rabbi Judah Mischel

Executive Director, Camp HASC; Mashpiah, OU-NCSY

Rabbi Irving Levy was a wise and respected *talmid chacham* and businessman, who together with his wonderful wife, Shirley A”H, were legendary *baalei chesed*, and of the earliest founders of the Torah community in Monsey, New York. As the first chairman of the board of education of Hebrew Institute of Rockland County (HIRC), which was later rededicated and renamed ASHAR, he was directly responsible for children receiving a broad and balanced Torah education. Rabbi Levy could often be found with a Gemara and cigar in hand, dispensing advice, sharing a good *vort* or witticism.

Late one night, a young father and family man in the community, a new-ish *baal teshuvah*, knocked at the Levy’s door. Though well-read and educated, this Harvard graduate and analyst on Wall Street did not have the privilege of formal yeshivah education. He felt overwhelmed by his challenges in navigating the *frum* community day to day, and especially in terms of *limud haTorah*. There was just so much to learn, and endless amounts to process. Sitting down in the Rabbi Levy’s office, surrounded by countless well worn *sefarim* that the Rav had learned, he shrugged and asked with earnestness, “Where do I even start?”

Rabbi Levy puffed on his cigar, and smiled empathetically. “Torah is a vast ocean... just jump in and you’ll learn to swim!” Putting a reassuring arm around the young man, he then opened a Chumash and turned to Parshas Mishpatim. “Here, this is a great place to dive in. Come, let’s begin together; ready? *Veileh ha-mishpatim...*”



וְאֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׂיֵם לִפְנֵיהֶם

“And these are the laws that you shall place before them...” (21:1)

As a follow up to the awesome revelation at Sinai, our sedra introduces us to a broad cross section of civil laws and intricate halachic detail, forming the foundation of so many mitzvos bein adam la-chaveiro, laws that govern our interaction with one another.

Much of our Parsha finds elucidation in the Gemara; particularly in the tractates of Bava Kama and Bava Metziah. Laws of personal damages, borrowing and lending, damages and injury as well as financial structures and Torah economic policy are extrapolated from Parshas Mishpatim. In fact, after learning some Gemara, many a student in a yeshivah geared toward *baalei teshuvah* has jokingly exclaimed, “Parshas Mishpatim is basically the Kitzur Bava Kama!”

בֵּין כָּל דִּבְרוֹר וְדִבְרוֹר דִּדְרוּקִיָּה וְאוֹתוֹתֶיהָ
מִמּוֹלָאִים בְּתַרְשִׁישׁ כִּימָא רַבָּא

“Between every commandment and the next, were the details and the letters of the Torah written, ‘filled with turquoise like the Great Sea’.

(Talmud Yerushalmi, Sotah, 8:3)

Just as there are tiny waves between the great waves of the sea, so there are minute details found within the general laws of the Torah — innumerable teachings, each more precious than pure turquoise sapphire, conveyed by every stroke of every letter of every word.

In his beautiful introduction to Sefer Menoras haMa’or, Rebbe Yitzchak Abuhav, zy’a, of Tzfat compared the rich and beautiful teachings of the Gemara — the ‘Yam haTalmud’ — to “precious pearls that lie

in the depths of the sea”. With more than fifty mitzvos that form the basis of a civil society, Parshas Mishpatim can indeed be seen as the beachfront of a vast ocean of Jewish life and learning.



This Shabbos is Mevarchim Chodesh Adar. The Me’or Einayim, Reb Mordechai, the Maggid of Chernobyl, zy’a, interprets the inner meaning of the word Adar: אל-ף-דר, אלופו של עולם דר, “Adar is spelled Alef-Dar, teaching us that the ‘Alufo’ shel Olam, the Master of the World, is dar, ‘dwelling’ within the natural events of this month. The miracles which we celebrate in this month are encloded and revealed in the normal functioning of the physical world, even woven into the fabric of political drama. As a result, our celebration of Purim in this month is very much within the physical world: *mishteh v’simchah*, drinking wine and feasting, giving gifts of food and money.

Furthermore, in advance of Rosh Chodesh Adar, we read Parshas Shekalim, narrating a collection of coins which went to the physical construction and upkeep of the Mishkan.

Directing our attention to the reality of Hashem’s Presence in this world, our sedra also enumerates agricultural laws, the festivals, as well as dietary laws. We are instructed to create a just culture and ensure fair treatment of foreigners and slaves. We are commanded to drive out the seven nations who inhabit Eretz C’naan, and are issued a warning regarding being influenced by their practices and values. The physical borders of Eretz Yisrael are also defined. The theme of the parsha is Alef Dar, ensuring a community, homeland and nation in which we can

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Covenant Cemented

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

The great moment of the Jews proclaiming “na’aseh v’nishma” was accompanied by a ceremony referred to as “kritat brit”. Moshe Rabbeinu offered sacrifices, he then sprinkled half the blood on the mizbeach and half on the people. Chazal note that the division of the blood had to be so precise that an angel came down to help Moshe Rabbeinu to split the blood exactly in half. What is the significance of this event and what can we learn from the angel’s assistance to Moshe?

The Siftei Re’em sees this ceremony as a paradigm of a Jew’s dedication to the service of Hashem. Dividing the blood symbolizes the need for a person to allocate his day and time evenly between service of Hashem and his own personal needs. How can a person be sure that he is measuring his time equally? One needs Divine help, symbolized by the angel’s support. When a person desires to live spiritually, Hashem

assists him in his quest. It is this desire that affirms our loyalty to this covenant.

The Oszherover Rebbe in Be’er Moshe understands this ceremony as an initiation of the Jewish people into their exalted mission. Splitting the blood symbolizes a core element of creation, the dynamic of giving and taking reflected in Adam’s original form of male and female. At the occasion of Matan Torah and kritat brit, Klal Yisrael entered a higher dimension becoming the givers and takers that would affect all of creation. A Jew’s actions not only influence this world but the higher worlds as well. The angel’s involvement in this process symbolizes this uplifted reality. Infused with this elevated mission, Am Yisrael were then worthy of saying “na’aseh v’nishma”, reaching further angelic heights.

Following the midrash, the Shem MiShmuel learns that the blood Moshe

sprinkled on the people was sprinkled on the altar as well. This illustrated the loyalty of Hashem towards His people and the people’s loyalty towards Hashem. To cement the covenant and strengthen their commitment, both parts of the blood were directed to the mizbeach creating a double link with Hashem.

The deep symbolism displayed with blood here is reminiscent of the blood of brit milah. Both these experiences characterize a Jew’s willingness to be moser nefesh for the will of Hashem, notes the Bechor Shor. A Jew must be ready at a moment’s notice to shed his blood for kiddush shem Shamayim. Moreover, blood represents our life force. Sprinkling both parts of blood on the mizbeach reminds us to live al kiddush Hashem; to devote our focus and passion to the mission of serving Hashem wholeheartedly.

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was speaking loudly. Others heard our conversation. Literally, within a minute, she received eight invitations for Shabbat, whenever she needed one. She received, not just invitations in principle, but also phone numbers to call

when she just wants someone with whom to speak. She managed to smile by the time she got off the train.”

In the merit of our acts of loving-kindness done to others, and in the merit of

opening our hearts and minds to the plight of our suffering brethren, may the RS”O open His storehouses of blessing and do kindness with us.

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child alone without examining the situation on your own first.

A clear distinction must be made between de-legitimizing your child’s tears, which is cruel, to allowing these tears to dictate your home and life, which would result in chaos.

A similar relationship must exist between the mind and the heart. Emotions, instincts, moods and feelings are ‘children.’ They are cute, spontaneous, vibrant, immature and wild. Sometimes they are on to something very real and serious, other times they exaggerate or distort reality. We ought not to de-legitimize, suppress or deny them. We must

be keenly aware of their existence within us. Just like children, we must attempt to educate and refine them. Yet we ought not to worship them and allow them the exclusive right to define our life.

As valuable as emotions are, the moral sense of right and wrong must be given precedence over “I do not feel up to it.”

I Have No Words



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

When Chazal instruct the comforters who come to the mourners, they command them to be silent until the mourner himself opens his mouth. This instruction is humane and wonderful: often people come with a sermon they have prepared in advance, and simply tell the mourner that he must be strong/accept Heaven's judgment/understand that he has been chosen for this mission. ... Listen first, Chazal advise, then speak.

At the shiva this week, with the noble Palay family who lost two of their sons, there were no words anyway. The sight was more powerful than anything, even for someone who has seen a lot in his life. We saw two tears. Two tears in the shirt of the mother, Devorah, two tears in the clothes of her daughters, and suddenly someone whispered to me from behind, "This is what our country looks like now, torn in two."

No words.

May this Shabbat, Shabbat Shekalim, give us all comfort for the mourning (Hebrew: shekulim) Shabbats we have experienced this month. Two attacks on Erev Shabbat. This Shabbat reminds us that even in a great dichotomy, we must acknowledge the need for the other half, for that is the

only way we will survive the upheavals this nation is going through.

I live across the street from the Knesset, and this week my youngest son Moishi and grandson Akiva stood transfixed at the big demonstration. "What is this march for?" They asked me, and when I tried to answer, I was at a loss for words. How to say "reform?" How to say "democracy", why does it say "dictatorship"? There are no words in Hebrew.

In Parshat Shekalim, the phrase "Shekel HaKodesh" appears and in an almost mystical interpretation, the Ramban explains that like this shekel dedicated to one cause, so is the "Sacred Language." "Now the Rabbi [Moshe ben Maimon] has written in the Moreh Nebuchim: 'Do not think that our language is called the Sacred Language just as a matter of our pride, or it be an error on our part, but it is perfectly justified; for this holy language has no special names for the organs of generation in male or female...'" Wow. There are things that have no words in the holy language. And not just.

When there are no words, when it is impossible to describe a certain state or action, it is probably procreation.

I want to hope that something will be born now. I want to believe that when

one half of a people hates the other half, or at least is afraid of it, we will remember in our hearts, in a place where there are no words and shouts and slaps and accusations, that we are the same (shekulim in Hebrew), that we are half shekels.

"Shall I not lose you both in one day?" Rivka asks when talking about sibling rivalry, maybe there is another way? Maybe we go a little further, "until your brother's anger subsides"? Maybe a little less words, a little quieter.

Parshat HaShekel is a repair. We have sinned. Moshe hears the voice of his people and does not know its soul. He hears the voice of obedience. Therefore, right now, in this discord, he will come and carry the head of the children of Israel and say to them, "This is the time to become brothers and sisters. This is the time to become brother to brother and sister to sister." After the crown of our head has fallen, "and the children of Israel have laid aside their ornaments from Mount Horeb," you can give a donation to the common house. From all of us. The rich will not increase and the poor will not decrease. Come, each with half in his hand, a ransom for us all.

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live a G-d-centered life and reveal Divinity through our everyday activities.



Parshas Mishpatim invites us to "dive in", and immerse ourselves in the life-giving

waters of Torah study. For myself and my family, this Shabbos is an opportune time to express our gratitude for Rabbi Levy zt'l's advice to my father so many years ago. It is a day that we recommit ourselves to the extraordinary choices our parents

made to live a life of observance and joyful engagement with Yidishkeit. And it is a day in which all of us are blessed to swim ever deeper into the vast ocean of Torah.

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