

LAMPLIGHTER

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Parshas Mishpatim
Shabbos Mevarchim
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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

The conclusion of this week's Torah reading, Mishpatim, speaks about the Jews' acceptance of the Torah that G-d gave them. Last week's Torah reading spoke about the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people by G-d. Why is this repetition necessary?

There are two dimensions of the event at Sinai: G-d's perspective and ours. The previous portion, Yitro, relates that G-d gave the Torah, making it possible for man to relate to Him on His frequency. Until the Torah was given, there was an unbreachable chasm dividing man from G-d, for there is no other channel through which a finite man can relate to G-d in His infinity. By giving the Torah, G-d reached out to man and granted him the opportunity to connect himself to G-d on G-d's terms.

The portion of Mishpatim focuses on man's response to G-d's initiative. To what extent are we willing to commit ourselves to Him?

There are some who are prepared to do what G-d says when it makes sense. If there is a Divine commandment that they appreciate and feel a connection to, they will observe it. If, however, they do not understand, then they will pass.

Is there anything wrong with that approach? Well, such a person is not bad. He or she may indeed be quite refined and very pleasant company. Nevertheless, if the decision whether or not to follow a command is based on the person's logic or desires, he is not making a commitment to G-d; he is basically serving himself. He is his own man, not G-d's.

Ultimately, that can lead to a difficulty, for a person who is determining what is right or wrong on his own can easily err. Self-love is the most powerful bribe there is, and it is possible that it will warp a person's perception until he will confuse good and evil, defining values solely on the basis of his own self-interest.

Moreover, even when the person does not fall prey to such failings and is able to maintain exemplary standards of conduct, something is missing. The word mitzva (commandment) relates to the word tzavta, meaning "connection." When a person fulfills a mitzva only because of the dictates of mortal wisdom, his observance lacks the fundamental awareness of the bond with G-d that the mitzva establishes.

At Sinai, the Jews accepted the Torah by saying: "We will do and we will listen," expressing their commitment to follow G-d's will even before they heard - let alone understood - what He would command. By doing so, they adopted an objective standard of good and evil, for it would be the Torah's guidelines and not their own subjective feelings that would determine their values.

But more than that, giving such a spiritual blank check is the most appropriate way to respond to G-d's initiative. It implies that just as He is boundless and unlimited, we are prepared to open ourselves to Him in a boundless and infinite way. This enables the Torah to bring about a complete bond with Him, tying us not only to the dimensions of Him that we can comprehend, but to His infinite aspects which defy all human understanding.

Is God a Neat Freak?!

By Shmuel Kesselman

This week's Parshah is known as Mishpatim, meaning laws. Throughout the reading we learn about many nitty gritty rules and regulations regarding all areas of life, and that got me thinking:

Why does an infinite God care if I wait 59 minutes, instead of 60, between eating milk and eating meat? If he is beyond definition, description and intellect, why on earth would he care about such minute details of my life?

This question is quite a famous and common one that has puzzled many observers and newcomers to Orthodox Judaism. The attention to the minutest of details seems somewhat absurd, from the earliest days of Jewish law found in the Talmud all the way to modern Rabbinat. There is argument and debate over every single last detail, with the finest of margins holding the differing opinions apart. The finest example can be found in the writing of a Sefer Torah, in which the size of the letters can range between 2-4 millimeters on average, and yet there are at least 4 different schools of halachic thought as to how it should be done. The changes being so minor that only a trained eye would notice them. Now, honestly I ask you, God created a universe that is millions of light years big, it seems rather close minded and even selfish to believe that God might care about a round or square corner of a micro sized letter.

I could understand why God would probably want to get involved in the major events that happen in this world, and it's logical that he would want to control the grand-scale events, but the little stuff just doesn't seem to be his cup of tea.

In a Chassidic discourse entitled Vayiten Lecha (5666,1906), The Rebbe Rashab, Rabbi Sholom Dov Ber of Lubavitch, addressed this issue and offered an explanation:

Let's take a step back and examine the effect Torah and Mitzvos have on a Jew.

Our sages tell us in a Mishnah, "God's commandments were given, solely to refine the creatures". God does not gain much personally by having us fulfill his desires, he did not command us to do the Mitzvos for any personal plan or ulterior motive. Rather, He, with his Divine Understanding, decided to inform us that certain activities will refine and improve our beings, allowing us to be more spiritual, and thereby connect to him in a deeper fashion.

The reason why God so desired to have us mortals rectify ourselves, and travel beyond our own limitations and selfishness, is because he loves us.

Let's use an analogy of a father and son, the father symbolising God and the son symbolising the Jew. A father, who truly loves his son will obviously be perturbed and bothered if the child is unclean and dirty. The stronger the love that the father has for the child, the less he will be able to handle even the slightest speck of dirt on his son.

God loves each one of us so deeply, that it bothers him when we have even the slightest faults, just like a father and son. Therefore, God cares about the minutest detail of the laws of Torah, because that is how he cleans the tiny specks of dirt and selfishness off of us.

Slice of LIFE

The Unexpected Shabbat Guest from the Gown Boutique

By Chana Sharfstein

Everything seemed unreal, almost make believe.

Was I really here, in the middle of winter, wearing a light summer outfit, surrounded by palm trees and beautiful flowers? Friday afternoon I am generally busy as a bee with last minute chores, yet here I was leisurely strolling through the exclusive shopping center of Bal Harbor seemingly without a care in the world. This winter vacation was really different.

"How do you like this outfit?" asked Sharone, my hostess, showing me an elegant designer's gown for her son's Bar Mitzvah, 13th birthday party. A casual glance at my watch showed that it was time for us to return home, for it was after all the eve of Shabbat. "It's beautiful but it's getting late. Can't you come back another day to try it on?" I noticed Carol, the haughty-looking saleslady, approaching and knew she would try to convince Sharone to try the dress on, so I again reminded her, "Remember Shabbat."

The saleswoman halted and looked at us, somewhat startled. "What did you say?" she questioned me as she turned to Sharone; the cross around her neck swung back and forth on its thin gold chain.

In a very surprised voice she said to Sharone, "You aren't Jewish, are you?"

Her question and attitude were really not out of place. With her blond hair, her bluish-green eyes, and her tanned face with the slightly upturned nose, Sharone doesn't look typically Jewish. Hours of tennis and swimming, golfing and horseback riding gave her the added look of the all-American outdoor type.

"Of course I am Jewish," Sharone replied firmly, "not only am I Jewish, I am an observant Jew."

"I never would have believed it," the saleswoman muttered, "I guess you never thought I was Jewish either."

We were both totally shocked. If she was Jewish, why was she wearing that cross around her neck?

"My Jewish name is Sara," said Sharone, "what is yours?"

"I haven't thought of it for years, not since

I was a young girl, but my name is Shira," she said.

Well, now we knew she really was Jewish, but I felt her situation was too far gone and really no concern of mine. But Sharone, now that was another story.

"Tell me," she asked gently, "why are you wearing this necklace? It is a symbol of a religion that isn't yours. It might make people think you are not Jewish."

"That's the idea," responded the woman. "Jews have always been persecuted, second-class citizens." Almost defiantly, she added that she loved all people and had friends of different religions and nationalities. This necklace had been a gift from a very dear friend, and that was why she cherished it. Her experience with Jews had always been negative, and she gave us a lengthy lecture of how much better and finer all the others were and how Jews always had disappointed her.

As she began an animated discussion, it looked like Sharone had forgotten all about the rapid approach of the Shabbat, but then I knew she would never quit. She loves competitive sports and always believed in fair play and never quitting. And since she was introduced to Lubavitch, she has the feeling that each and every Jew is her very own responsibility.

"Sharone," I whispered after a few minutes, "Your arguments are really great and very convincing, but it will soon be Shabbat!"

"The core of the issue," Sharone was saying, "is that you can't deny your identity. I too have contacts with people of diverse backgrounds, but my own roots and heritage always take precedence. Your negative feelings about Judaism are based on the misrepresentations. If you encountered Judaism, I bet you wouldn't cast it aside so easily."

And then without seeming to have given it any thought, Sharone issued an invitation for that very Friday night dinner. I thought she was being foolish, but the saleswoman graciously said she would consider it. I suppose my face mirrored my doubts, for they both became rather uncomfortable and hesitant.

The saleswoman regained her composure first, "Maybe not tonight, but some other time. I do appreciate your kindness though," she added gently. And then suddenly, her hands reached up around her neck, unfastened the chain and put it in her pocket. "I feel naked without it," she added shyly, "but somehow I don't feel like wearing it anymore."

If Sharone had been able to influence her to do that, then surely there was hope. "Please do come," I said. "You'll have a very interesting experience."

Their surprised looks soon turned into cheerful smiles and within moments we were on the way to Sharone's home.

In the house, the members of the household were quietly told not to make any fuss about the unexpected guest.

"Come, let's prepare the candles," Sharone was very rushed for we had returned much later than we had planned. "Candles," said Carol. "I know about that. I remember that from my childhood. You light them for the dead."

I shivered in the warm summery air. How sad. Carol had confused "yahrtzeit candles," candles lit on the anniversary of the passing of a loved one, with our Shabbat candles, the lights of joy and warmth, of family unity and peace of rest.

I tried to explain the meaning of these candles and the concept of Shabbat, and she listened quite attentively. When it was time, she lit her own candle and repeated the blessing with us word by word.

From that time on, until we sat down at the table, she was rather subdued and deep in thought. Sharone's children wanted our attention and help with their prayers, besides a few odds and ends that still needed to be done, which may have contributed to her silence and aloofness, or maybe she had changed her mind about the whole thing.

During the meal she grew more animated, and seemed quite interested in the discussion about Joseph and his brethren, the theme of that week's Torah reading. She nodded in agreement when she heard how Joseph remained steadfast in his beliefs in the splendor of the royal court.

"I can't begin to tell you what this evening has meant to me," Carol said as she prepared to leave. Outwardly she looked exactly the same as when we had first met, minus that necklace of course. "Something happened to me tonight," she said. "I don't know what it is and I don't know where it will continue or how or if. All I can say is that I will never forget it."

The self-assured competent saleswoman looked kind of lost when she left. Had she found the way, perhaps, I wondered. I do know she left a business card with Sharone, and knowing competitive Sharone the way I do, I expect her to put up an honorable fight. She made me aware that our work is never done, and that we never know in what unlikely places and under what unbelievable situations we may encounter a fellow Jew whom it is our responsibility to help.

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B"H

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INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

Never to despair of God's mercies

Greetings and blessings,

I duly received your letter and the "pan" for your son, Mr. It is difficult for me to read the pan in its present form, because you write that if suffering has been decreed upon him, you are willing to accept [that suffering upon yourself]. It is self-understood that this is not at all a proper way of writing, nor is it correct. For you begin with a request to arouse abundant mercies — [and G-d's] abundant mercies will nullify all suffering. [As such,] it is not worthwhile to enter into a give-and-take, a judgment, and a reckoning involving the exchange of one person for another and that another person will accept, etc. Therefore, I will read the pan while omitting these lines. May it be G-d's will that you will soon be able to share good tidings concerning your son, Mr., regarding an improvement in his condition. If [blessings] that are above the natural order is necessary for that, doing so is not beyond G-d's capacity. Who will tell Him what to do?! In particular, this is true when [there is a possibility for him to be saved via] the natural order as well, for he has been imprisoned for some time. Although a sentence was already decreed, when [it will transpire] that the judgment [the court delivered] is no [longer accepted as] the judgment, the sentence that was given will be of no importance. What is of primary importance is, as stated above, that since [G-d's] abundant mercies are being aroused, there is no need [for us to] make accounts.

With regard to what you write about moving to Brazil and your question as to how to receive a visa from there: According to my information, they are very interested in expert ritual slaughterers there, in particular, in the capital city, Rio De Janeiro. Certainly, the address of Rabbi Zingerovitch can be found in our refugee office in Paris. (He is a wealthy merchant but also serves as a Rabbi there as an expression of respect [for his knowledge].) It would be worthwhile to communicate with him.

From one who awaits good news,

QUESTIONS FOR THE RABBI

With Rabbi Aron Moss

Heavenly Matches

Question: Is there truth to the rumor that if you make 3 successful shidduchim (i.e. match three people with their future spouse), you go to the highest level of heaven? What is the theory behind it? And is it true that you are completely absolved of any sins you may have committed to?

Answer: I have never heard of these promises before, but nevertheless bringing soul-mates together is one of the greatest things you can do. Here's why:

1) It's the first thing G-d did after He created the world - He introduced Adam and Eve. So you are doing G-d's work.

2) While we are single, we are only half a soul. By reuniting someone with their other half, you have made them complete. This not only benefits those two individuals, but also the entire world - another piece of fragmentation has been healed.

3) There are souls waiting to come down into this world; by introducing their parents to each other you have brought them closer to fulfilling their purpose.

So the matchmaker has done good for themselves, the couple, the future generations and the entire world!

But even if the couple you introduce don't hit it off, it's still did no harm. Because there is a tradition that we have to meet a certain number of people before we can meet our soul-mate. Even the "failed attempts" help, because it brings the real one that much closer.

So if you have an idea for someone - suggest it! I can't guarantee it will absolve all your sins, but the rewards are definitely worth it.

A WORD

from the Director

As this year is a leap year in the Jewish calendar, there are two months of Adar, known as Adar Rishon and Adar Sheini, or Adar I and Adar II. This Shabbat we bless the new month of Adar I.

Our Sages have taught that, just as when the month of Av begins (the month in which we commemorate the destruction of the Holy Temples in Jerusalem) we lessen our joy, so, too, when the month of Adar begins, we increase our simcha - joy and happiness.

In talks before and during the two months of Adar, 5752 (1992), the Rebbe emphasized the importance of simcha in turning the darkness of exile into the light of Redemption.

The Rebbe also stressed that, being as there are two months of Adar this year, there are 60 days during which we are to increase our simcha. More importantly, in Jewish law, the quantity of 60 has the ability to nullify an undesirable presence. This specifically concerns food; if a quantity of milk, for instance, has accidentally become mixed with meat, if the meat outnumbers the milk by a ratio of 1:60, the milk is nullified and we may eat the meat.

Similarly, explains the Rebbe, 60 days of simcha have the ability to nullify the darkness of the present exile, allowing us to actually turn the darkness into light.

Concerning the kind of things that should be done to arouse simcha, the Rebbe suggested that each person should proceed according to his level: a child, for instance, should be made happy by his parents; a wife by her husband, and vice versa.

The bottom line is, that the Rebbe did not let up on encouraging an increase of simcha in all permissible manners during the entire month.

We should hearken to the Rebbe's words and utilize simcha, especially during this month, to turn darkness into light, sadness into joy, and pain and tears into rejoicing with Moshiach in the Final Redemption, may it take place, as the Rebbe so fervently prayed, immediately, literally.

J. I. Gutterick

IT HAPPENED



The Mysterious Kiddush Sleep

By Yerachmiel Tilles

Shalom Aleichem and Eishet Chayil had already been sung. The candle flames reflected a yellow sun in the ruby wine of the decanter. A hush settled over the room as all edged closer to the Shabbat table to hear Father recite the kiddush. Father took a deep breath and . . . fell asleep in his seat!

"Tatteh! Tatteh! Father! Father!" the family called. No response. Mother put her hand on his shoulder and shook him, but that didn't help either. "Wake up! Wake up!" the children screamed frantically. Deciding he had fainted, the adults also began to worry, and someone ran to get the doctor. He came, but he too found it impossible to either arouse him from his deep slumber or to understand what had happened to him. He suggested to let him sleep it off. Someone else would have to make kiddush.

The head of the family, a miller by trade, didn't wake up until morning. He was astounded and embarrassed to hear what had happened. But the next Friday night it happened again. And again. And . . .

"Oh, no! Not again!" cried out the miller in frustration. He rose from his chair, where he had fallen asleep over the Shabbat table, and stretched his stiff limbs. "What is happening? Nothing helps! I can't go on like this. Tomorrow I'm going to the rebbe!"

The next day he went to Zichlin, to his rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel Abba, and told him the whole story. Bursting into tears, he begged to be cured from this bizarre affliction.

"It seems," said the rebbe, "that you have somehow violated the Shabbat, which is why you are being prevented from honoring her."

The chassid became even more upset. "I don't understand. I'm so careful with the laws of Shabbat. Violating the Shabbat? I can't imagine how that ever might have happened."

Brokenhearted, the Jew returned home. When he told his family all the rebbe had said, they were astonished. Everyone knew how careful he was about keeping Shabbat.

But then, one of his older sons spoke up. "Father, I have to tell you that the rebbe's words revealed genuine divine inspiration because, unfortunately, they are true. One Friday night, when I was up late, I saw you get up in the middle of the night. You were obviously still half asleep. I saw you light a candle so you could see your way to get a drink of water, and then you extinguished it when you were finished. The next morning it was clear that you had no recollection of what had happened, and not wanting to shame you or show disrespect, I never said anything. But now that the rebbe himself has referred to it, I realize I am obligated to divulge what I saw."

The man immediately set forth for Zichlin again. He told the rebbe what his son had reported, and the rebbe said, "That's it. How can a Jew allow himself to forget the holiness of Shabbat, under any circumstances? There are two primary obligations toward the Shabbat: to 'remember' it and to 'safeguard' it, both of which, our sages tell us, were declared by the Almighty 'in a single utterance.' 'Remember' is accomplished through speech, by expressing the holiness of Shabbat in the words of the kiddush. 'Safeguard' is for the mind and heart, to be continually aware of Shabbat's holiness throughout the entire day, that it not be transgressed. But you failed to 'safeguard' the Shabbat, so you have forfeited the right to 'remember' her."

"Please, Rebbe," sobbed the man, "tell me how to repent. Give me a remedy. Save me from this unbearable affliction!"

"There is nothing I can do for you. The only 'remedy' there is for you is if you are challenged by a test in Shabbat observance, and you stand up to it. Then the Shabbat will be appeased of your insult."

These final words made the chassid feel a little better. He trusted the rebbe, and resolved to stand up to the trial, no matter what it might be.

Shortly thereafter a summons came from his poritz, the nobleman from whom he leased his mill in exchange for an annual rent and a percentage of its income. The latter informed him that he planned to greatly expand the flour mill's capacity, and that in order to recoup the large amount of money that he would have to invest, it would be necessary for the mill to operate on Saturdays as well, starting now.

"That's impossible," the Jew declared firmly. "I only work six days, never on Shabbat."

"Oh, come on," said the nobleman, "I know you Jews. You can get around it if you want to. I heard that a rabbi can make some kind of contract where you can stay home, but the mill stays open and I don't lose the income."

"I've never employed such a leniency in relation to Shabbat, and I never will," the miller firmly declared.

The nobleman raised his voice. "Stubborn fool! I'll give you the two months it will take to complete the renovations to start to operate the mill on Saturday. If you don't, I'll throw you out."

The poritz carried out his threat, and evicted the miller. Bereft of his income, he and his family soon fell on to hard times. Even basic food for the children became hard to supply. What's more, his "Shabbat disease" still afflicted him. But the chassid persisted in his determination not to fail the Shabbat again.

Meanwhile, the mill's owner had completed the expansion of the mill, and had found a manager who was willing to work a seven-day week. But right from the start it didn't work out. Unusual accidents kept occurring, and all sorts of problems arose. Huge losses piled up. The situation was bizarre, and everyone realized it.

The nobleman was forced to admit to himself that his problems must be connected to his having ruined the livelihood of the Jewish miller. So he sent for his former tenant and, after revealing the mill's desperate situation, offered to lease it to him as before.

"And what about my Shabbat?" the chassid asked.

"Look," he answered, "after all the unusual problems and sharp losses, I realize that G-d is with you. Do however you see fit."

So the Jew returned to the mill, and was soon blessed with more success than he had ever had. Also, his affliction disappeared at the same time, just as the rebbe had said. But even with his new wealth, reciting kiddush on Shabbat night remained his greatest pleasure.

PARSHAH IN A NUTSHELL

Following the revelation at Sinai, G-d legislates a series of laws for the people of Israel. These include the laws of the indentured servant; the penalties for murder, kidnapping, assault and theft; civil laws pertaining to redress of damages, the granting of loans and the responsibilities of the "Four Guardians"; and the rules governing the conduct of justice by courts of law.

Also included are laws warning against mistreatment of foreigners; the observance of the seasonal festivals, and the agricultural gifts that are to be brought to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem; the prohibition against cooking meat with milk; and the mitzvah of prayer. Altogether, the Parshah of Mishpatim contains 53 mitzvot—23 imperative commandments and 30 prohibitions.

G-d promises to bring the people of Israel to the Holy Land, and warns them against assuming the pagan ways of its current inhabitants.

The people of Israel proclaim, "We will do and we will hear all that G-d commands us." Leaving Aaron and Hur in charge in the Israelite camp, Moses ascends Mount Sinai and remains there for forty days and forty nights to receive the Torah from G-d.

CANDLE LIGHTING



| | Shabbos 1 - 2 February | |
|------------|------------------------|------|
| | Begins | Ends |
| Melbourne | 8:16 | 9:16 |
| Adelaide | 8:05 | 9:04 |
| Brisbane | 6:24 | 7:19 |
| Darwin | 7:01 | 7:52 |
| Gold Coast | 6:24 | 7:19 |
| Perth | 7:01 | 7:57 |
| Sydney | 7:43 | 8:40 |
| Canberra | 7:54 | 8:52 |
| Launceston | 8:15 | 9:18 |
| Auckland | 8:15 | 9:14 |
| Wellington | 8:24 | 9:27 |
| Hobart | 8:18 | 9:22 |
| Byron Bay | 7:24 | 8:19 |

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| | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| FRIDAY NIGHT: | MINCHA | 8.20 PM |
| | KABBOLAS SHABBOS | 8.50 PM |
| SHABBOS DAY: | TEHILLIM | 8.30 AM |
| | LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA | 10.01 AM |
| | SHACHRIS (Followed by Farbrengen) | 10.00 AM |
| | MOLAD: MONDAY | 11.57 (15 chalakim) PM |
| | MINCHA | 8.10 PM |
| | SHABBOS ENDS | 9.16 PM |
| WEEKDAYS: | SHACHARIS | 8.00/9.15/10.00 AM |
| | MINCHA | 8.15 PM |
| | MARIV | 9.10 PM |