

ב"ה

Torah Tidbits

ISSUE 1648

FEB. 14TH 2026
כ"ז שבט תשפ"ו

פרשת משפטים PARSHAT MISHPATIM

SHABBAT MEVARCHIM | SHABBAT SHEKALIM



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Rabbi Shmuel Goldin
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Dealing With Uncertainty
Michal Silverstein
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אם-כספי תלוה את-עמי שמות כ"ב:כ"ד

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT MISHPATIM ZMANIM:
CANDLES 4:48 PM • HAVDALA 6:02 PM • RABBEINU TAM 6:42 PM



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COVER PHOTO



Submitted by Daniel Santacruz

I made aliyah in 2011 and live in Maale Adumim. Every time I hold shekel bills or Israeli coins in my hand I'm connected with an unbroken chain of biblical history. The importance of assisting the poor with money, especially with a loan, is as valid today as it was in Israel thousands of years ago. The photo was taken in the Davidka flea market in Jerusalem and it shows an assortment of Israeli coins from different periods.



IMPORTANT REMINDERS

 **Rosh Chodesh** Adar is on Tuesday February 17th and Wednesday February 18th

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JERUSALEM

Ranges 11 days Wednesday - Shabbat
Feb. 11 - 21 / 24 Sh'vat- 4 Adar

Yerushalayim/Maale Adumim	4:48	6:02	4:54	6:08
Aza Area (Netivot, Sderot et al)	5:06	6:05	5:12	6:10
Beit Shemesh/RBS	5:07	6:03	5:13	6:09
Gush Etzion	5:04	6:03	5:10	6:08
Raanana/Tel Mond/Herzliya/K.Saba	5:04	6:03	5:10	6:09
Modiin/Chashmonaim	5:04	6:03	5:10	6:08
Netanya	5:04	6:03	5:10	6:09
Be'er Sheva	5:06	6:04	5:12	6:10
Rehovot	5:05	6:04	5:11	6:09
Petach Tikva	4:48	6:03	4:54	6:09
Ginot Shomron	5:03	6:02	5:09	6:08
Haifa / Zichron	4:53	6:02	4:59	6:08
Gush Shiloh	5:03	6:02	5:09	6:07
Tel Aviv / Givat Shmuel	5:05	6:04	5:11	6:09
Givat Zeev	5:08	6:02	5:13	6:08
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	5:04	6:03	5:10	6:08
Ashkelon	5:06	6:05	5:12	6:10
Yad Binyamin	5:05	6:04	5:11	6:09
Tzfat / Bikat HaYarden	4:55	6:00	5:01	6:06
Golan	5:01	6:00	5:07	6:06
Nahariya/Maalot	5:02	6:02	5:08	6:07
Afula	5:02	6:01	5:08	6:07

Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem): Mishpatim - 6:42 PM • Terumah - 6:47 PM

All Times According to MyZmanim (20 mins before Sunset in most Cities;
40 mins in Yerushalayim and Petach Tikva; 30 mins in Tzfat and Haifa)

Daf Yomi: Menachos 34



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DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OU ISRAEL
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Many families have the beautiful *minhag* of holding a Tu Bishvat seder, where they gather as many different types of fruits as possible, sing songs, and take the opportunity to give thanks to HaKadosh Baruch Hu for the great bounty we see in Eretz Yisrael. It is incredible to walk into the Machane Yehuda shuk and see the array of fruits that are growing in our Land that HaKadosh Baruch Hu gave us. It makes you wonder whether perhaps there are more fruits and trees growing in the Land of Israel now than has ever grown here in history.

Just about two weeks ago, as we have done for many years, my family and I sat down for our Tu Bishvat seder. As we thanked

HaKadosh Baruch Hu for all these different species of fruits and nuts that grow in the Land of Israel, it brought me back to a recent trip my wife and I took up north. Between Covid-19, and the war, and so much going on, it had been a long time since we were able to get away. So we took the opportunity.

The north is so breathtaking, so beautiful and stunning, but especially during those two days we were there. After several days of rain, the sun was shining through, and everything was so green. We were able to hike the Arbel and Nachal Tavor, and enjoy some of the Mehadrin Kosher cuisine up north. It was really spectacular. On the way home, I said to my wife that we couldn't pass by Moshav Sde Ilan in the Galil without going in and visiting my cousin.

Let me tell you about my cousin, Ira. Growing up, he was always the cousin we saw only a few times - usually at big family get-togethers - because he was in Florida and we were in New York. His family was not religious and ours was, so it meant seeing each other was not so common. However, several years after my family made aliyah, we found out that Ira was coming to learn in a yeshiva in Israel. I was pretty surprised. But as it turns out, he and his father had attended a couple of shiurim down in Florida, saw the beauty of Torah, and decided to reconnect. Ira joined the religious community and that is where he has been ever since.

He met a wonderful Beis Yaakov girl named Tamar, and they got married. When we heard that they had decided to make aliyah and live

**May the Torah Tidbits learned
in the month of Adar
be in memory of and
לעילוי נשמות**

Our sister, mother and grandmother

Judy Aronson a"h
הודית בת יצחק ע"ה
ר'ח אדר

**Our grandfather
and great grandfather**

Harry Messnick z"l
צבי בן אברהם משה ז"ל
ר' אדר

Our father and grandfather

Irving Posen z"l
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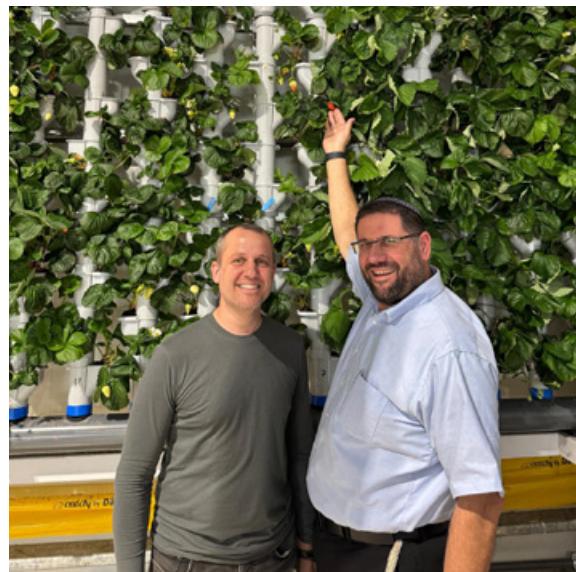
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Slonim and Riback families***

in Israel, it was a cause for celebration for my family and I. To have family join you in Israel is such a special and exciting thing. The even greater news was that Ira and Tamar decided to live in Maaleh Adumim in Mitzpe Nevo, which was amazing because it was so close to Yerushalayim. We would be able to see them often and make up for lost time.

Several years after this, Ira called me to tell me he had exciting news. They were selling their house, and buying a farm in Moshav Sde Ilan, not far from Tzomet Golani in the beautiful Galil. As many of you know, I'm not a man who holds back his words; I usually say what's on my mind. I said, "Are you nuts? You've got a beautiful place in Ma'ale Adumim. Why would you leave to go all the way up north? It's so far! It's a great place to go on vacation, but to live there?" Ira respectfully responded, "One day you'll come and see what we hope to build, and maybe you'll change your mind."

A couple of weeks later, I happened to be up north and called Ira. He said the house they bought wasn't quite ready yet, but I could see how it was going. So I drove over and he gave me the grand tour. His house was the last house in Sde Ilan, with incredible views. The scenery was stunning. But it was summer, and everything was dry, with a lot of weeds. The house was all shattered and the windows were broken. I wasn't yet convinced but I saw the potential.

About two years later, we went to celebrate the Bat Mitzvah of one of his daughters. And let me tell you, we saw the amazing house that he and Tamar built together. There's the famous saying about making the desert bloom.



Well, they made the Galil bloom. They put so much hard work into their home and their community, and it was truly remarkable to see their impact and influence, and the celebration of the community with them in their simcha.

This past time up north, when my wife and I decided to stop in for just a minute to give Ira and Tamar a hug, Ira said, "Come look what we're doing!" He first showed us their vacation rental properties (*tzimmers*) that they

**In loving memory of our husband,
father, grandfather
and great-grandfather**

Moshe Loshinsky z"l

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built. I've only seen pictures of the properties, since he advertises in Torah Tidbits (and we make sure the small English-speaking community there gets Torah Tidbits every week).

What we saw was absolutely amazing. We saw a huge greenhouse that Ira and his family built, which is full of crops they're growing now - strawberries, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, cucumbers, and cherry tomatoes of all different sorts. They're also raising fish. They built a system called Aquaponics where fish and plants live symbiotically sharing the same water: the fish waste becomes fertilizer for the plants and the plants clean the water for the fish. It's really such a remarkable place.

The *tzimmers* are stunning and beautiful. They rent out their luxurious accommodations and give tours to seminaries, yeshivot, and many different types of group tours - all about how important it is to build up the areas of Israel which need more Jews to move there, like the Galil. The Galil has so much to offer, with such a great climate and location, that it is a pity that people don't even think of it as a place for them. Ira is changing minds, one by one.

Another thing Ira and Tamar do is sell their produce at the local market on Thursdays. At first, they started their farming as something of a hobby. A few olive trees, some turkeys, chicken, and sheep, have grown into a real farm, which they take very seriously. These are people who take the time to learn Torah on a regular basis, and Ira did a course in kosher slaughter (*shechita*) so that he could provide kosher meat for his family. He learned all about the laws of *Shemitta* and *tithes*, and he makes sure everything is done properly and according to halacha.

When I was there, a father and son from Carmei Katif were visiting - real *moshavnikim*,

longtime Israelis who have worked the land their whole lives. They couldn't believe that somebody who came from Florida was building such incredible things. All I can say is that what Ira and Tamar have built is a testament to what is possible when Jews dedicate themselves to building up the Land of Israel, connecting to HaKadosh Baruch Hu through the mitzvot tied to the Land, and raising the next generation with love for Torah and for Eretz Yisrael.

This is real *Tziyonut*. This is understanding that we have to bring up our families to feel connected to the earth, to get in touch with this Holy Land, and to help build the bedrock of the agricultural economy of Israel. I encourage all you, dear readers, to take your connection to the Land to the next level. Try to go up north if you can, perhaps to volunteer, to participate in the local economy, to hike the beautiful land and see what HaKadosh Baruch Hu created for us. Tu Bishvat was the beginning of connection to the Land - let's keep going.

May we all be inspired by the incredible growth happening in our Land - both the physical trees and produce, and the spiritual growth of families like Ira and Tamar's who are planting themselves firmly in the soil of Eretz Yisrael and making the Galil bloom.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



Rabbi Avi Berman

Executive Director, OU Israel

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The Power to Serve

Powerful people exercise control over others that obscures their view of G-d. Good people employ kindness and respect and marshal their resources to highlight G-d's power and presence.

This correlation links the Torah's religious and social responsibilities, *bein adam laMakom u'bein adam lachaveiro*, symbolized by the twin *luchot* (tablets) given to Moshe at Sinai, and specifically informs the teachings that immediately followed the Sinai experience, the intricate interpersonal *mishpatim* (monetary laws) and the *mishkan* (Temple) building project.

Limits on interpersonal domination are the unifying theme of the laws in *Parshat Mishpatim*, beginning with the limitations on slavery and continuing with the responsibility to make whole anyone whom we may have economically harmed. The foundation of all these laws was established at Sinai where we were taught that we are subject solely to G-d and not to other men (see Rashi to 21:6). Then, in next week's parsha, we move on to the mitzvah of building G-d's home on earth, the *mishkan*. This is introduced as a funding project, using our resources to construct a home for G-d (Shemot 25:1-8).



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Taken together these two teachings combine to share this strong message: In a world where people can easily use personal and financial power to control or dominate others, we are to use it instead to humbly recognize the All-powerful. The most powerful members of our nation, the Jewish kings, were enjoined from amassing wealth that would serve to accentuate their personal mastery over their subjects and distract them from their submission to the King of Kings (Devarim 17:17-18). Instead, the kingdom of David was built upon his passion to build G-d a *mikdash*, leading the nation to join the king in positively deploying their resources for the purpose of building G-d's presence on earth.

This message lies at the heart of the mitzvah of *shekalim* that is the focus of our additional reading this Shabbat. The Talmud (Megillah 13b) teaches that the annual Rosh Chodesh Adar national campaign to fund the Temple service provided the antidote to Haman's scheme in the Purim story (see Tosafot Megillah 16a). Haman pledged 10,000 blocks of silver to buy the heads of the Jewish people. This was the ultimate power grab; one man using his money to dominate others. The antidote to that scheme was the Jewish national effort to pool their resources in a shared project, where the rich do not dominate the poor (Shemot 30:15), and where all join to build and service the home of the One who truly rules us all.

Every Purim, we deploy our resources to benefit others in fulfillment of the mandates of *mishloach manot u'matanot l'evyonim*. We provide each other with care and support,

following the example of Esther, that powerful Jewess who used her power to help her people and risked her own life for the sake of others. That obvious dedication to others and humble use of power would seed Esther's more hidden legacy to the Jewish people, as it was Esther's son, King Daryavesh (Vayikra Rabba 13:5), who would use his power to build the recognition of G-d by his role in the rebuilding of G-d's home on this earth, the Second Bait Hamikdash. Queen and king, mother and son, leveraged their unparalleled commanding positions to perform kindness and to build recognition of the Almighty.

This is a powerful lesson that can guide us forward with kindness and humility to the building of G-d's ultimate home on earth, the third and final Bait Hamikdash, soon in our days, Amein. ■

Lenny Davidman

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This year, Camp Dror is entering an exciting new chapter under the leadership of Rabbi Kenny Pollack, who is guiding the camp to even further heights. As part of that momentum, Camp Dror is hosting Open Houses where parents and campers can meet Rabbi Pollack, hear what's new, and ask questions directly. Registration for campers and staff (currently in grade 10 or older) is already open on the Camp Dror website.

New for this summer: Dror B'Ktana, giving campers entering 4th grade a chance to get a taste of the Camp Dror experience (July 26–30, on the respective boys and girls campuses, with extremely limited spots). The Manhigut program for campers entering 10th grade is also being updated toward a more CIT-style track, with regular interaction with younger campers and added leadership development.

Details and registration: www.campdror.com

To register contact Cindy +972502022085

Any questions about Dror? Contact Kenny +972586411355

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PARSHAT MISHPATIM

We begin a new era in the Torah, the mitzvah era. In the first 86 verses of the parsha, there are 53 mitzvot. The bulk of the parsha is civil law mitzvot. The end of the parsha resumes the narrative, describing the impending entry into the Land of Israel. Moshe ascends the mountain to receive the tablets.

To give some structure to these 53 mitzvot, I have introduced each section with a heading in bold, indicating the topic of the laws that follow.

1ST ALIYA (21:1-19)

 And these are the laws you are to instruct them in. ***The laws of slaves:*** a Jewish slave goes free after working 6 years. If he chooses, he may extend his slavery permanently. The owner or his son may marry a female slave. If they choose not to, she goes free upon puberty. ***Physical assault*** resulting in death is punishable by death; as is

**May the Torah learned
from this issue
be in memory of and
לע"נ
our beloved wife, mother,
daughter, sister, daughter-in-law,
granddaughter-in-law,
and sister-in-law**

**Efrat Polacheck z"l
אפרת בת יוסף ושותנה ז"ל
On her first yahrzeit ז"ל
כ"ה בשבט**

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assaulting a parent, kidnapping, cursing a parent. For bodily assault not resulting in death, payment is made for damage, unemployment and medical costs.

The juxtaposition of these civil laws coming on the heels of the pinnacle experience of the revelation at Sinai is striking. What a contrast; experiencing G-d's voice, then laws about slavery and assault.

Well, actually this is not the first juxtaposition of the dramatic narrative and the court system. Last week, Yitro advised concerning the court system. Then the story of Mt. Sinai. Now the long list of civil law. Then in the middle of our parsha, back to the narrative of the aftermath of Mt. Sinai. Court, Sinai, Court, Sinai.

The Court system sections are complementary; Yitro addressed procedural law, while Mishpatim is addressing substantive law. Yitro helped Moshe set up the *system*. Lower courts, higher courts. Judges need to be people of integrity who will not be bribed. That is procedural law, the system.

Our parsha fills in the content, the *substance* of the law. Judges are not to make up the law but rather to implement the law. For example, what to grant the victim when his property is damaged.

But why interrupt the narrative of leaving Egypt and the events at Sinai with the seemingly mundane topic of courts and justice?

It could be that we are viewing the narrative too narrowly. The narrow view would be that this is the story of leaving Egypt and arriving at Sinai. The Court system doesn't fit in

that story.

The larger story is the story of the Torah. The promise made to Avraham that the Jewish people will be slaves in a foreign land, leave and then journey to the Land of Israel. Our real destiny is to build a Jewish society in our Land.

And that society is going to be animated by 2 things: ethical monotheism. How we treat man and how we treat G-d.

Now that we are out of Egypt, our focus needs to turn to that great project of building the Land. And the first thing we know from our time in Egypt is: that society that we are going to build, don't make it like the one in Egypt. Leave Egyptian society behind. Our Jewish society is to be nothing like that society: we are building an anti-Egypt society. Well, much more than that, but certainly a society that rejects the rot of Egypt.

So much of that society was rotten. Slaves who had no one to turn to. It had abuse of slaves, or more accurately, of people. Its fliprant disregard for human life (babies in the river), its excessive use of physical force (the slave master). Its corrupt use of power.

No. Our Jewish society will respect life, respect others, delineate regard for the property of others and build a society of goodness and justice.

In that regard, it makes perfect sense to begin the description of the Jewish society in the very things that Egyptian society failed at: judges with authority circumscribed. And in our parsha, slavery, physical assault, property infringement.



2ND ALIYA (21:20-22:3)

Physical assault resulting in financial payment: assault of slaves, of a pregnant woman resulting in a lost pregnancy. Assault of a slave resulting in loss of

an eye or tooth grants the slave his freedom.

Damage caused by my property or actions: a goring ox resulting in death of a person, death of an animal as a result of a pit dug by me, or as a result of my ox goring another. **Theft** and sale or slaughter of animals requires restitution of 4 or 5 times the value of the loss. In clandestine theft, if the thief is killed, the perpetrator is deemed to have acted in self-defense. The punishment for theft is double the stolen object.

The theme of this aliya is protection of the victim, including women and slaves.

And the topic is not oxen goring oxen; it is people taking responsibility for their property. If my property damages yours, I take full responsibility. Our society protects people and their property.



3RD ALIYA (22:4-25)

Property damage by neighbors:

damage in your property must be compensated if done by either my grazing animals, or by a fire lit by me in my property; laws of compensation for loss of your property while being guarded or borrowed by me. Laws when **taking advantage of another**: seducing an unwed woman, sorcerers put to death. If one oppresses the stranger, widow or orphan and they call to Me, your wives will be widows, children orphans.

Returning to the theme of rejecting the norms of Egypt the superpower; power does not grant privilege. There are people with power. And people without. The foreigner, the widow and the orphan have no power – they are alone, with no one to champion their cause. Do not prey on their lack of power. I, says G-d, I am the Champion of those who have no power. They may have no person to turn to. But they always have Me. You, with power, who take advantage of those without;

you will have Me to reckon with.



4TH ALIYA (22:26-23:5)

Good citizens: do not curse judges or rulers, do not delay obligations, nor ally with tricksters to pervert justice, nor follow a bad crowd in disputes. **Helpful neighbors:** return a stray animal, help unburden a buckled animal even of your enemy.

The power imbalance of Egypt that bred resentment of those in power is not for us. We are them – respect those in power, for they are us. Our society is to be cooperative for the good of us all.

And bettering the lives of others is not the sole responsibility of the government: we all can make the lives of others better – initiate the return of lost items, unburdening the burdens of others.



5TH ALIYA (23:6-19)

Justice: do not pervert justice – of the poor and weak, through lies, through bribes and of the foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt. **Man's limits in G-d's world:** work the land 6 years, leave it for the poor in the 7th. Work 6 days, allow rest to your workers on the 7th. Observe the 3 pilgrimage festivals: Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot. Do not appear empty handed.

The Sabbatical year and the weekly Shabbat have dual meaning. Social engineering and religious principles. Workers get a break every 7 years and every 7 days. That is protection of the rights of the employees. This too is an anti-Egypt comment. We treat our workers with respect, not milking them, breaking them.

And in addition, Shabbat is man in relationship to his Creator. Shmita is ceding the field to its Owner, Shabbat day ceding this world to its Creator.

Our society in the Land of Israel will be built on ethical monotheism. Dignity of man

and deference to our Creator.



6TH ALIYA (23:20-25)

Journey to the Land: I am sending My angel to guide you to the Land of Israel. Loyalty to what I say will ensure your successful settling of the Land. Don't worship idols there; rather serve G-d and you will enjoy blessing and health in the Land.

The listing of the mitzvot concludes and the narrative picks back up. But not the narrative of what happened at Mt. Sinai. Rather, that we are on our way to the Land of Israel.

We have to remember that we know the story of the 40 years in the desert. But they don't. Reading the Torah in real time, Moshe was told by G-d that He was going to take the people out of Egypt, bring them to Mt. Sinai. And bring them to the Land of Israel. Sinai is a stop, a dramatic stop, but a stop on the way to the Land of Israel.

Now that they are out of Egypt, been at Sinai, they are ready to trek on to the Land of Israel. The list of the mitzvot that describes creating a just and kind society makes perfect sense. Because in just a few months they'll be setting up a new Jewish society in the Land of Israel.

After hearing those mitzvot, they now know in what way it will be a Jewish society – where power is limited, where people are respected and where the Divine is acknowledged.



7TH ALIYA (23:26-24:18)

Your opponents in the Land will cower. I will cause them to leave slowly over time so the land will not be desolate when you arrive. Do not make a pact with the people in the Land; they may not dwell with you lest you end up serving their gods. Moshe ascended the mountain, wrote the words of G-d. He built an altar at the foot of the mountain; offerings were brought. He

read the words of the covenant; the people responded that they will fulfill it all. Blood was sprinkled as a covenant. Moshe ascended with Aharon, Nadav and Avihu and the 70 elders; they perceived sapphire, the purity of the heavens. G-d called Moshe up the mountain to give him the luchot, the Torah and the Mitzvot. The cloud of G-d was on the mountain, the vision of G-d like a consuming fire. Moshe was there 40 days and 40 nights.

The covenant that we will be His people is sealed. Moshe will ascend the mountain to receive the fullness of the Torah and the inscription of the 10 Commandments on stone. With that, we will be ready to continue on our journey to the Land of Israel, building a society of relationship to G-d and ethical treatment of people. And leaving Egypt and its abuse of power and of people behind. ■

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STATS

18th of 54 sedras; 6th of 11 in Sh'mot
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118 p'sukim - ranks 22 (5th in Sh'mot)
1462 words - ranks 31 (7th in Sh'mot)
5313 letters - ranks 37 (8th in Sh'mot)
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BY RABBI CHANOCH YERES

RAV, BEIT KNESSET BEIT YISRAEL, YEMIN MOSHE

In memory of my father on his yarzheit - Rabbi Yitzchak Yeres zt"l - 28 Shevat

אם כסף תלה את עמי את העני עמך (כב:כד)

"If you lend money to My people, to the poor who are with you." (22:24)

What does it mean "the poor who are WITH you?

Rabbi Mordechai Benet (1763-1829, Nickolsburg), upon explaining this pasuk quotes the Talmud (Pesachim 8a). "If one gives money to a poor person and states that his intention in this act is in order for his son to be blessed with long life, such an act of charity is complete, and the giver is wholly righteous." Why according to this Talmud is the giver offering such a request? There is no mention that his son is even ill. The answer must lie in the fact that the giver wishes to avoid any embarrassment to the poor person for receiving this handout. It is the giver who is requesting assistance by asking for a blessing for his son. "You will do me a favor by receiving my gift to you." The Talmud attributes such a giver as "wholly righteous."

The Chatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer 1762-1839, Pressburg) continues this thought and suggests that the pasuk is teaching us the importance of helping the poor with sensitivity. One should give charity as if the poor is "WITH you", as if he is a part of you, a fellow member of the Jewish people, meaning, it should be done as if the poor individual is doing YOU the favor and not the reverse.

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Ad D'(lo) Yada: Facing Our World

No matter how you approach it, one specific Talmudic mandate about Purim remains remarkably strange.

Rava said: On Purim, a person is obligated to become intoxicated to the point of “*ad d’lo yada*”- where the distinction between “Cursed be Haman” and “Blessed be Mordechai” can no longer be perceived.

Much has been written about the practical application of this directive. Various potential paths have been suggested towards its safe fulfillment. Warnings have been issued concerning the damage that can be caused when it is followed too literally and assiduously.

In Loving Memory of
Allan Stephen Marcus z”l
אליהו בן יוסף
On his 1st Yahrzeit - כ”ז שבט

Beloved Husband,
Father, Grandfather

May the merit of the Torah learned
in this week’s Torah Tidbits
לעילוי נשמתו

*Greatly missed by us all,
Joan Marcus and family*

But I would like to raise a more basic question. *How could this mandate be issued in the first place?*

Fundamentally, Judaism is a reality-based religion. We are enjoined to find God in our own lives and world, with our feet firmly planted on the ground. While the consumption of alcoholic beverages is certainly permitted in Jewish law, inebriation is hardly seen as a goal. The entire idea of escape, particularly through the use of external substances, is antithetical to normative Jewish thought.

How then could Rava mandate that, on Purim, an individual should reach a point where the distinction between an enemy and an ally is indiscernible- so intoxicated that the difference between villain and hero in the Purim story disappears in a haze?

Before we proceed, it should be noted that, on a practical level, much halachic discussion surrounds Rava’s mandate. Basing his position on numerous earlier sources, for example, Rav Moshe Isserles (the Rema) rules that the obligation can be fulfilled by drinking slightly more than usual and falling asleep. In this way, the difference between Haman and Mordechai will cognitively disappear. Certainly, the dangerous excesses that mark the efforts of many to fulfill Rava’s instruction would not be sanctioned by Jewish Law.

And yet, the questions remain. Why does Rava fashion his ruling as he does? What meaningful goal will be achieved through this obligatory escape from reality?

The answer lies, I believe, in Purim’s unique place in Jewish history.

The Babylonian Exile has come to an end. Permission has been granted for a “return to Zion.”

Very few Jews, however, take advantage of this welcome edict. The vast majority, comfortable with their lives, opt to remain in Babylon.

The *exile of force* has become an *exile of choice*.

And, at this point, Hashem decides to show the Babylonian Jews the true import of their choice. He launches a series of events that will clearly reveal the nature of the world in which they have chosen to live.

It will be a world of *v'n'afoch hu* - of instantaneous change; a world in which your circumstances can, and will, change at a moment's notice. You can feast at the banquet of the Persian king; an instant later, confront the threat of total annihilation; an instant later, rise to defeat your enemies in battle. You will stand on shifting sands, never knowing what tomorrow will bring.

It will be a world of *hester panim* – Hashem's hiddenness. You will no longer be able to benefit from the words of prophets. God will be silent and, at times, even seem absent. You will experience travail without explanation. It will be your task to discern God's hand in your lives and in the world around you.

It will be a world in which you will be controlled by the whims of others. Subject to the erratic behavior of foreign despots and populations, your fate will be determined by their mood each day. Your lives will be their playthings.

Above all, it will be a world that will claim as its first victim-the truth.

Right and wrong will become so intertwined that each will no longer be discernible. Verbal attacks, outright lies, each more preposterous

than the last, will be hurled in your direction and accepted as truths by those around you. Villains will be fashioned as heroes; heroes will be denigrated and denounced. A lonely battle for the truth will fill your days, as you struggle to maintain your footing in surroundings that will become increasingly bizarre.

Of all the warnings conveyed by the Festival of Purim, it is the last which marks ground zero in our struggle for survival in an alien world. Perhaps that's why Rava insists that we must reach the point on Purim where we can no longer discern Haman from Mordechai.

To defeat our enemies, we first must understand the nature and depth of their attack. For one day, Rava maintains, we must enter the absurdity of lies that surround us -if only to fully see them for what they are. We must enter the world of *ad d'lo yada*, where truth is abandoned; where right becomes wrong and wrong becomes right; where terrorists are seen as victims and victims as colonizers; where Haman and Mordechai are indistinguishable.

And then, armed with new understanding, we will be better able to struggle to change that world... From a world of *ad d'lo yada* to a world of *ad d'yada*, a world in which truth reigns supreme. ■

Rabbi Goldin is the author of the OU Press volumes "Unlocking the Torah Text," and "Unlocking the Haggada."

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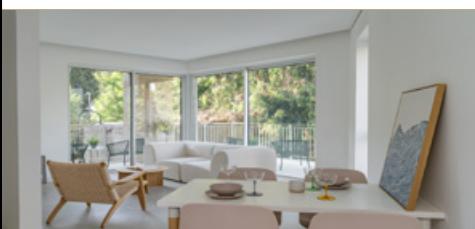
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COVENANT & CONVERSATION

THOUGHTS ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

FORMER CHIEF RABBI OF THE UNITED HEBREW
CONGREGATIONS OF THE COMMONWEALTH

לעליי נשמתה של דברי תורה
הרב יעקב צבי בן דוד אריה זצ"ל

לעליי נשמות

פנחס בן יעקב אשר וגולדה בת ישראל דוד איזע"ה ועזריאל בן אריה ליב ומעניה בת יצחק שרטר ע"ה

In the Details

On the opening phrase of Mishpatim: “And these are the laws you are to set before them,” (Shemot 21:1) Rashi comments:

“*And these* are the laws that you shall set before them.”

Wherever uses the word “*these*” it signals a discontinuity with what has been stated previously. Wherever it uses the term “and these” it signals a continuity. Just as the former commands were given at Sinai, so these were given at Sinai. Why then are the civil laws placed in juxtaposition to the laws concerning the altar? To tell you to place the Sanhedrin near to the Temple.

“*that you shall set before them.*”

You should not think, ‘I will teach them a section, or law, two or three times until they know the words verbatim, but I will not take the trouble to make them understand the reason and its significance.’ Therefore the Torah states “*that you shall set before them*” like a fully laid table with everything ready for eating. (Rashi on Shemot 21:1)

Three remarkable propositions are being set out here which have shaped the contours of Judaism ever since.

The first is that just as the general principles of Judaism (*Asseret HaDibrot* means not “Ten Commandments” but “Ten Utterances” or “Ten Overarching Principles”) are Divine, so are the details. In the 1960s the Danish architect Arne Jacobson designed a new college campus in Oxford. Not content with designing the building, he went on to design the cutlery and crockery to be used in the dining hall, and supervised the planting of every shrub in the college garden. When asked why, he replied in the words of another architect, Mies van der Rohe: ‘God is in the details.’

That is a Jewish sentiment. There are those who believe that what is holy in Judaism is its broad vision, never so compellingly expressed as in the Decalogue at Sinai. The truth however is that God is in the details: “*Just as the former were given at Sinai, so these were given at Sinai.*” The greatness of Judaism is not simply in its noble vision of a free, just, and compassionate society, but in the way it brings this vision down to earth in detailed legislation. Freedom is more than an abstract idea. It means (in an age in which slavery was taken for granted – it was not abolished in Britain or the United States until the nineteenth century) letting a slave go free after seven years, or immediately if his master has injured him. It means granting slaves complete rest and

freedom one day in seven. These laws do not abolish slavery, but they do create the conditions under which people will eventually learn to abolish it. No less importantly, they turn slavery from an existential fate to a temporary condition. Slavery is not what you are or how you were born, but something that has happened to you for a while, and from which you will one day be liberated. That is what these laws – especially the law of Shabbat – achieve, not in theory only, but in living practice. In this, as in virtually every other aspect of Judaism, God is in the details.

The second principle, no less fundamental, is that civil law is not secular law. We do not believe in the idea “render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what belongs to God”. We believe in the separation of powers but not in the secularisation of law or the spiritualisation of faith. The Sanhedrin or Supreme Court must be placed near the Temple to teach that law itself must be driven by a religious vision. The greatest of these visions, stated in this week’s sedra, is:

“Do not oppress a stranger. You know what it is to be a stranger, for you yourselves were strangers in Egypt.” (Shemot 23:9)

The Jewish vision of justice, given its detailed articulation here for the first time, is based not on expediency or pragmatism, nor even on abstract philosophical principles, but on the concrete historical memories of the Jewish people as “one nation under God.” Centuries earlier, God has chosen Abraham so that he would “teach his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, by doing what is right and just.” (Bereishit 18:19) Justice in Judaism flows from the experience of injustice at the hands of the Egyptians, and the God-given challenge to create a radically different form of society in Israel.



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This is already foreshadowed in the first chapter of the Torah with its statement of the equal and absolute dignity of the human person as the image of God. That is why society must be based on the rule of law, impartially administered, treating all alike – “Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favouritism to a poor man in his lawsuit.” (Shemot 23:2-3)

To be sure, at the highest levels of mysticism, God is to be found in the innermost depths of the human soul, but God is equally to be found in the public square and in the structures of society: the marketplace, the corridors of power, and courts of law. There must be no gap, no dissociation of sensibilities, between the court of justice (the meeting-place of man and man) and the Temple (the meeting-place of man and God).

The third principle - and the most remarkable of all - is the idea that law does not belong to lawyers. It is the heritage of every Jew. Rashi wrote “Do not think, I will teach them a section or law two or three times until they know the words verbatim, but I will not take the trouble to make them understand the reason and significance of the law. The Torah states ‘*that you shall set before them*’ like a fully laid table with everything ready for eating.”

לע”ג ו”ז
I. Stanley Mittman
ישראל זלמן בן יעקב זיל
on his 4th yahrzeit - ל' שבט
Cherished father, grandfather
and great grandfather
Arlene Anteby,
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This is the origin of the name of the most famous of all Jewish codes of law, Rabbi Joseph Karo’s *Shulchan Aruch*.

From earliest times, Judaism expected everyone to know and understand the law. Legal knowledge is not the closely guarded property of an elite. It is – in the famous phrase – “the heritage of the congregation of Jacob.” (Devarim 33:4) Already in the first century CE Josephus could write that “should any one of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name. The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls. Hence to break them is rare, and no one can evade punishment by the excuse of ignorance.”¹ That is why there are so many Jewish lawyers. Judaism is a religion of law – not because it does not believe in love (“You shall love the Lord your God”, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”) but because, without justice, neither love nor liberty nor human life itself can flourish. Love alone does not free a slave from his or her chains.

The sedra of Mishpatim, with its detailed rules and regulations, can sometimes seem a let-down after the breathtaking grandeur of the revelation at Sinai. It should not be. Yitro contains the vision, but God is in the details. Without vision, law is blind. But without the details, the vision floats in heaven. With them the Divine Presence is brought down to earth, where we need it most. ■

1. Contra Apionem, ii, 177-8

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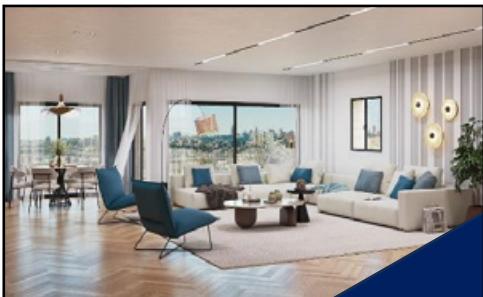
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Questions For The Past; Questions For The Future

The Shabbat of, or before, Rosh Chodesh Adar (the Adar which precedes Pesach) is designated by the G'mara in Megillah as the first of the "special" parshiot that herald the arrival of Pesach and require a special reading for the Maftir and, consequently, for the haftarah as well. The selection for this Shabbat Shekalim is taken from the twelfth perek of Melachim II and tells the story of the repair of the Bet HaMikdash in the days of King Yeho'ash.

As the special Maftir reading calls for the half-shekel head tax to be gathered from all of Israel, so the haftarah tells of the "fund-raising" campaign demanded by the king in order to restore and reinforce the Holy Temple. As the half-shekel tax was used for the purchase of communal sacrifices, thereby ensuring that the entire community had a share in these offerings, so the voluntary donations made by the entire nation in the days of Yeho'ash reinforced the idea that ALL of Israel had a share in the Bet HaMikdash.

It is, however, the entire story of King

Yeho'ash, a tragic story that is NOT found in Sefer Melachim—that should be learned as well. In Divrei HaYamim II 22-24, we learn the details of the life of King Yeho'ash. When his grandmother, the wicked Queen Atalya, killed off the royal family in order to consolidate her hold upon the throne of Yehuda. The infant Yeho'ash, the son of the former king Achazyahu, was the rightful heir to the throne and was saved from certain death through the courageous actions of his aunt Yehoshav'at, the wife of the Kohen Gadol, Yehoyada. This righteous couple hid the infant in the Bet HaMikdash until he was seven years old, at which time his existence was revealed to the nation. The population, most of whom reviled the "illegitimate" queen who had usurped the throne, quickly deposed her and placed the young child upon the throne. Yeho'ash was brought up, educated and trained by Yehoyada (note the opening words of our haftarah) and, throughout that time, followed the righteous ways of his mentor.

When Yehoyada died at the age of 130 the king fell under the influence of the corrupt Judean nobility who convinced him to abandon Temple worship and pray to the false gods of the surrounding nations. Hashem sent His prophets to admonish Yeho'ash, among them Zecharya (not to be confused with the prophet of the Second Temple), the son of Yehoyada,



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the very man who saved the king's life. Yeho'ash ignored the many kindnesses done for him by his mentors and he ordered that Yehoyada's son, Zecharya, be stoned to death! So ends the story of the once righteous king who restored the Bet HaMikdash.

I include the painful story of Yeho'ash - despite its omission from our haftarah - because, to a certain degree, this bittersweet story evokes parallels to the Purim story. The successful fund-raising campaign that the King led in order to repair and rebuild the Beit HaMikdash, did **not** succeed, however, in its essential purpose: to renew Temple worship and return the nation to G-d.

Likewise, one can argue that the story of the Purim has its own "bittersweet" epilogue. We celebrate the hidden miracles wrought by Hashem, that affected the survival of the Jewish community in Persia. But...what happened **then**? Like the story of Yeho'ash in Sefer M'lachim, the Megillah does not finish the saga! Did the Jews of Shushan realize how unstable life could be for Jews in the Diaspora? Did they join in a large return to Yerushalayim to worship, once again, in the newly-built Beit HaMikdash? Or did they remain in galut for over 2,000 years? Simply put: Were Hashem's Purim miracles meant only to save Persia's Jews or might there have been a more essential purpose?

This week's haftarah posed questions for the past. Purim's Megillah might very well be posing questions for the future!! ■

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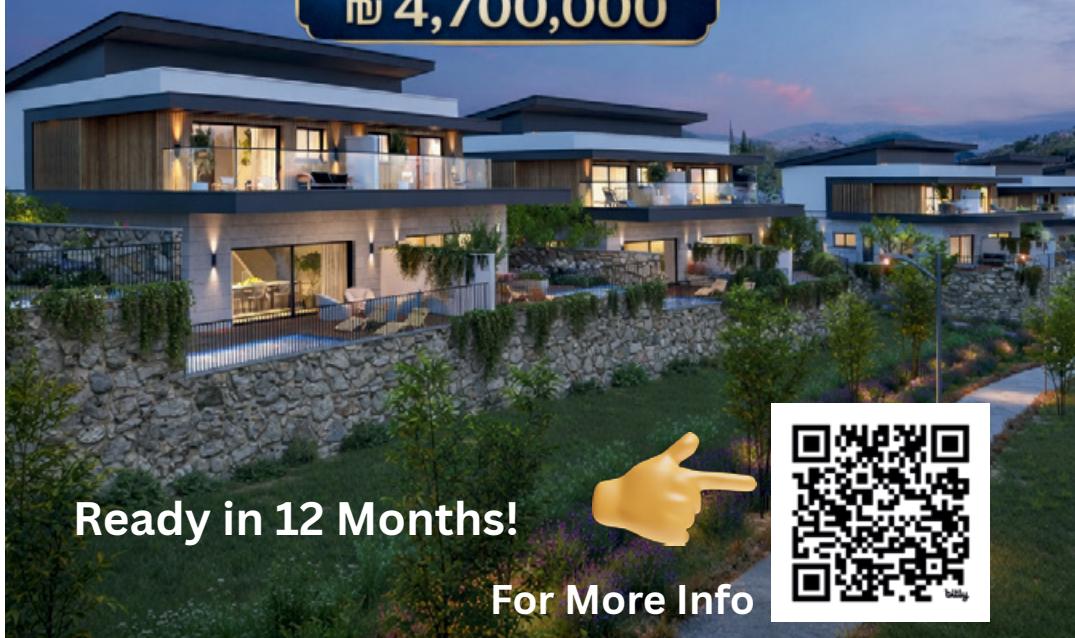
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Was the Torah Accepted Willingly or Forced Upon Us?

A BARREL OVER OUR HEAD

The Gemara in *Shabbat* (88a) tells us, based on the verse in *Shemot*:

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְּתִחְתִּית הַהָר אָרֶב אֲדִימִי בֶּן חַמְאָה בֶּן
חֶסֶא מַלְמֵד שְׁכִפָּה הַקָּבָ"ה עַלְיהֶם אֶת הַהָר כְּגִיאַת
וְאָמַר לָהֶם אִם אַתְּ מַקְבְּלִים הַתּוֹרָה מָוֶט וְאִם לֹא
שֶׁמֶת הָרָה קְבּוֹרְתֶּכָם

And they stood at the bottom of the mountain. Rabbi Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa teaches

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that God, blessed be He, forced the mountain upon them like a barrel. And he said to them, "If you accept the Torah, wonderful; if not, there will be your burial."

The Gemara describes Hashem holding a barrel over Am Yisrael and forcing them to accept the Torah. The Gemara continues, explaining that initially, the Jewish people could have said, "We were forced to accept the Torah," but later, at a more mature stage of history, they accepted it willingly.

NA'ASEH V'NISHMA

On the same daf, the Gemara analyzes the two most famous words B'nei Yisrael said together: *Na'aseh v'Nishma*—"We will do and we will listen." This depicts Am Yisrael's unequivocal willingness to accept the Torah. Tosafot asks: how do we reconcile the idea that they were forced to accept the Torah (*Kafa Aleihem Har K'gigit*) with the fact that


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they willingly said *Na'aseh v'Nishma*? Was it willingly accepted or forced upon them?

COMMITMENT TO TORAH

The Midrash (Tanhuma Noah) and the Hizkuni (Shemot 19:17) explain that HaKadosh Barukh Hu gave us both the written Torah (*Torah Sheb'ihtav*) and the Oral Torah (*Torah Sheb'al Peh*). Just accepting the written Torah is insufficient. Naase V'Nishma was on the Torah Sheb'ihtav, while *kafa aleihem har k'gigit* was on the Torah Sheb'al Peh.

The Ben Yehoyada (Shabbat 88a) asks why we have a description of God holding a barrel over the nation like a mountain. Why not just hold a mountain over them? What is the symbolism of a barrel? The mountain-as-barrel metaphor illustrates that the written Torah is just a vessel (barrel), but the Oral Torah is the depth, the countless droplets of knowledge that are necessary in order to properly fulfill the written Torah. A Torah lifestyle requires full commitment to both Torah Sheb'ihtav and Torah Sheb'al Peh. They are inseparable.

Our lives must be structured around Torah—not the other way around. As the Gemara in Shabbat(31a) states קבעת עיתים לתורה (*kavata itim laTorah*). We ought to fit the times to Torah (itim L'Torah), and not try to adapt the Torah to meet the times (Torah L'itim). We have to strengthen both facets of Torah. ■



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Torah's Transformation

We find two chapters that chronicle the events of *Matan Torah*; *parashat Yitro* describes the events leading up to the monumental event, and the actual giving of the Torah. *Parashat Mishpatim* then delineates various laws, particularly those that are *bein adam lachaveiro*—between man and his fellow man.

The last chapter in *parashat Mishpatim* then describes how Moshe Rabbeinu spoke the words of Hashem to the people, offered sacrifices, and sprinkled blood of the offering on the altar. It was at this juncture that Moshe Rabbeinu read parts of the Torah, and the Jews declared, “*kol asher diber Hashem na’aseh ve’nishma*—All that Hashem spoke, we will do and we will hear.” (*Shemot* 24:7) The commentators grapple here with the chronology, when exactly did this covenant take place? Was it before or after the giving of the Torah?

Rashi, true to his approach throughout his commentary, notes that there is no sequential, chronological order in Torah, and this event happened before *Am Yisrael* received

the Torah. The *Ketav V’haKabbalah* supports this view based on the expression, “*V’el Moshe amar*—and to Moshe [Hashem] said,” as opposed to, “*Vayomer el Moshe*—and He said to Moshe,” (*Shemot* 24:1) and thus understands the command had already been given in the past, and this section is just recounting what had already occurred.

The Ramban takes issue with this approach and maintains that the Torah is written in chronological order, and this event took place after the Torah was given. The *Tur* supports this view, noting that there was no time prior to *Matan Torah* to bring all of these sacrifices, and to build *matzeivot*. This gave the people time to pause, and to integrate the experience.

Rav Soloveitchik *zt”l* asks a fundamental question on the Ramban. If bringing sacrifices and casting the blood upon the people was part of the Jews’ conversion process, then how was it possible for them to receive the Torah before converting? According to the Ramban, they would only have gone through conversion the following day! The Rav offers a compelling idea. The experience of *ma’amat Har Sinai* was so powerful that it did not only affect the Jews cognitively, but it also transformed them spiritually.

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The message here is extremely relevant and impactful. When learning Torah, one must allow it to be a total spiritual experience, affecting every part of us. Torah cannot be solely an intellectual experience or mental acrobatics, rather, it must transform us to the core of our being and must be felt in our very nervous system. Let us heed the Ramban's advice in his letter to his son— when one gets up from his learning, he should find a way to implement some aspect of his learning into his practical life. Thus, we can live Torah, not only learn it. ■

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SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR
DIRECTOR, TORAH INITIATIVES,
OU ISRAEL

This *Shabbat*, we will read *Parshat Shekalim*, one of the four special *parshiyot* which link together the days of *Adar*—beginning this coming Tuesday and Wednesday, *Rosh Chodesh Adar*, with the days of *Nisan*, leading up to *Pesach*.

Each of these four special *parshiyot*, introduces us to important, eternally relevant messages.

Parshat Shekalim begins with these familiar verses:

This is what everyone who is entered in the records shall contribute; a half-shekel to the Mishkan by weight—twenty gerahs to the shekel—a half-shekel as an offering to Hashem.

Everyone who is entered in the records, from the age of twenty years of age and above, shall give an offering to Hashem:

The wealthy shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than half a shekel when giving the offering to Hashem as atonement for each of you.

The Chasidic Masters suggest many important messages inherent within this *mitzva*.

Rebbe Chanoch Henach of Aleksander *zy'a* offered a particularly beautiful

explanation of these verses. The word *shekel* alludes to the *neshama*. The word *shekel* is equal in *gematria* to the word *nefesh*. Each and everyone of us is given a proverbial half *shekel*, the *neshama* that is implanted within us, and each one of us must also offer up an equivalent "half *shekel*," in our *Avodat Hashem*, and *maasim tovim*.

The **Toldot Yaakov Yosef, Rebbe Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye** *zy'a*, explained that each person must give exactly a half *shekel* to instill within us that no one individual is truly complete or fulfilled as a lone individual, that it is only through coming together with others and helping one another, that we truly feel complete.

Similarly, the **Avodat Elazar of Kozhnicz** *zy'a*, points out that even one who has great wealth, must bring only the same half *shekel*, as one who is impoverished, as if to teach each of us, that no matter our means, none of us is truly complete, as an individual—we are only truly whole, when we join together with the rest of *KLAL YISRAEL*.

Taking this idea a step further, the **Birkat Avraham of Slonim**, *zy'a* points to a well known *Talmudic* teaching in *Masechet Kiddushin* 40b:

A person must always consider as if they are half meritorious and half liable. With one maase mitzva, they bring themselves and the

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entire world to the side of merit....:

The *Birkat Avraham*, explains that this *gemara* is teaching us the fundamental lesson of the *mitzva* of *machatzit hashekkel*. The Rebbe explains, that not only are we as individuals only truly whole when we join together and contribute to the enterprise of the *Mishkan*, but in doing so, we are simultaneously reminded of the capacity each and every one of us has to be a conduit for good, to grow and improve as individuals, and that in so doing each one of us is simultaneously contributing to the betterment of the entire world.

We can infer from each of these ideas that It is no mere coincidence that we read *Parshat Shekalim* on this *Shabbat* before *Rosh Chodesh Adar*. *Chazal* teach us *mishenichnas Adar marbin bismicha- when we enter Adar our joy increases-* The half-shekel represents a soul that recognizes it is incomplete on its own. True *simcha* emerges not by standing alone, but through connection— connection to one another and connection to *Hashem*.

Yehi Ratzon, on this *Shabbat Shekalim*, may we find *chizuk* in these powerful teachings from these great Chasidic Masters, and may we merit to experience true *simcha* as we give to one another, and elevate the entire world through our *mitzvot* and *maasim tovim*. *Chodesh Tov!* ■

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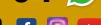
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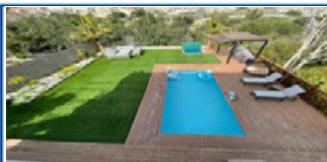
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Mishpatim: First Things First

The beloved Rebbe Zusha of Anipoli was a *tzadik* of great spiritual *ehrlichkeit* and sensitivity. Though he and his family lived in constant poverty, they constantly sought opportunities to assist others generously. Years had gone by since the last time the Rebbetzin had purchased anything for herself, so in advance of Yom Tov, Reb Zusha gathered *kopek* after *kopek*, finally collecting enough funds in order to purchase material for the construction of a new dress for his Rebbetzin.

A few days later, word was sent that the dress was ready and waiting at the tailor's shop. The Rebbetzin was thrilled. However, when she returned from the tailor, she appeared crestfallen. "What's the matter?" asked Reb Zusha. "Are you not pleased with the new dress?"

The Rebbetzin related the story: As the

tailor presented her with the finished garment, he seemed dejected, and let out an audible *krechitz*, a deep sigh. When she asked him what the cause of his *tzara* was, the tailor explained that when his future son-in-law had seen him toiling over the dress, he assumed it was for his bride-to-be. The poor tailor didn't have the heart to tell his daughter's *chatan* that it wasn't, and he was distressed over his ability to provide a dress. "So I took the dress" smiled the Rebbetzin, shyly, "and gave it to the tailor as a gift for the kallah. I'm truly happy that we could bring joy to a chosson and kallah... but now, I confess, I'm a bit disappointed that I won't have a dress for Yom Tov."

Reb Zusha thought for a moment and asked, "Tell me, my dear, did you pay the tailor for his work?"

"Pay him? I gave him the material you bought and gave them the whole dress as a gift!"

Reb Zusha explained to his wife: "My dear, all week long, this struggling tailor has been working for us, investing time and effort on *your* dress. He had no intention that it would be for his daughter. And no doubt he was counting on the *parnassah* once the job was finished; who knows what he needed that money for? What is this poor fellow going to do now? It's truly beautiful and generous that you gave your dress to his daughter... but I think we need to pay for his hard work, too..."

The Rebbetzin understood her husband's point, and Reb Zusha set out to find a way to compensate the tailor for his efforts.

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Bearing more than fifty mitzvos, our *sedra* launches a detailed system of interpersonal laws aimed at cultivating a just and compassionate society. In *Mishpatim*, the Torah lays the framework for our obligations toward employees, our civil regulations and labor laws, corporate ethics, and standards of *ehrlichkeit* in dealings with clients. This halachic expo forms the basis of related *mitzvos* throughout the Torah. For example...

“You shall not withhold the wages of a poor or destitute hired worker, (whether they are) your brothers or strangers who are in your land, within your cities. You shall give him his wage on his day and not let the sun set over it — for he is poor, and he risks his life for it — so that he should not cry out to Hashem against you, lest there should be sin upon you” (*Devarim*, 24:14-15)

The intricate *halachos* that flow from such sources in *Mishpatim* aim to ensure fair treatment and *kavod* for every member of our community and to protect the dignity and wellbeing of every member in our communal ecosystem. This includes protecting any unsavory characters who have degraded themselves and made unfortunate life choices, causing damage to themselves and others due to negligence or immorality, even murderers and thieves, *rachmana l'tzlan*.

Our *sedra* also includes a variety of laws that are *bein adam laMakom*, belonging to

the intimate relationship between a person and Hashem; for example, laws relating to the Kashrus of food. Torah issues a directive to not eat *neveilos* and *treifos*, flesh from wounded animals. The ‘reason’ given is Hashem desires that *ל' תרין קדש אנשי*, “you shall be people of holiness to Me” (22:30).

Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, zy'a, shared a novel interpretation of Hashem's command, expanding the principle beyond the dietary laws. Before the Torah instructs us to “be holy”, we are commanded to be “people” — the term *anshei* precedes the descriptive *kedesh*. As the Kotzker said, *Kodem a mench un nach dem heilig*, “First be a true human being, and only then strive for holiness.”

From properly treating employees and merchants and protecting the weakest elements of our society, to *halchos* relating to our personal relationship with Hashem, the goal and path outlined in this week's parsha, it can be argued, is *mentchlichkeit*.

May we take a lesson from Reb Zusha and live the lessons of our *sedra* as *anshei kodesh*, true *erliche mentchen*, holy to Hashem — and holy toward one another. ■

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Yoni thanks Hashem for having the opportunity of having Tziporah in his life, to learn of her caring, patience and happiness, to overcome her challenges. May Tziporah's Neshama be a light onto the world, in a time of darkness, and may her Neshama shine to Gan Eden. Yoni misses Tziporah with tears in his eyes, as Hashem gave him a gift, a crown jewel, now he returns her to Hashem.

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This Week's Inspirational

**SUNDAY
FEB 15**

7:30 PM

Men's Safrut (The Bais)

Rabbi Tzvi Mauner

7 Hartum Street,
2nd Floor

SPECIAL EVENT:

8:00 PM

ATID BAKA: Pre Purim Kickoff Event. Yissachar 3

**MONDAY
FEB 16**

8:30 PM

The Bais (for Men)

Semichat Chaver Program

Rav Elyada Goldwicht

@ Bet Knesset Ohel Yitzchak

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**TUESDAY
FEB 17**

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Classes @ Bet Knesset Nitzanim, 3 Asher Street, Bakaa

9:20 AM

Understanding Tefila
Rabbi Yossi Goldin

11:25 AM

P'shat in the Parsha
Rabbi Shmuel Goldin

10:15 AM

Rambam: Letters & Introductions
Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz

12:20 PM

Unlocking the Messages of Chazal
Rabbi Shai Finkelstein

TORAH TUESDAYS WITH THE WOMEN'S DIVISION

Classes @ Beit Knesset HaNassi, 24 Ussishkin St. Rechavia

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Rosh Chodesh Adar Women's Seminar: Beit Knesset HaNassi (Shira Smiles will be speaking as a part of this event)

9:00 AM -1:00 PM

Beit Shemesh Rosh Chodesh Adar Women's Seminar
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7:30 PM Men's Safrut in **BEIT SHEMESH** **Rabbi Elie Levi**

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**WEDNESDAY
FEB 18**

COMMUNITY BEIT MIDRASH IN RECHAVIA

@ Bet Knesset HaNassi,
24 Ussishkin St., Rechavia

9:15AM

Holy Poetry Rabbi Dr. Aharon Adler

10:20AM

Halachic and Hashkafic Issues in
Contemporary Society
Rabbi Anthony Manning

11:25 AM

Mussar and Self Improvement:
A study of Rav Kook's sefer
Midot HaRayah
Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

12:30 PM

Jews in the Middle Ages:
External Threats and Internal
Developments Dr. Deborah Polster

SPECIAL EVENT:

7:00PM

Nach Yomi Siyum
Nefesh B'Nefesh

**THURSDAY
FEB 19**

COMMUNITY BEIT MIDRASH IN ARNONA

@ Bet Knesset Shai Agnon,
11 Rechov Leib Yaffe, Arnona

9:15 AM

Parshat HaShavua Rabbi Ari Kahn

10:30AM

Parashat Hashavua
Rabbi Baruch Taub

11:25 AM

Trailblazing the Text of Tanach
Rabbi Neil Winkler

12:20 PM

Modern Masters Rabbi Sam Shor

BET KNESSET OHEL YITZCHAK

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Halachic Controversies
(the Bais) Rabbi Aschi Dick



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- **Yerushalayim** - **Baka** (Matnas) - Sun Feb 22
- **Beit Shemesh** (Menorat Hameor) - Sun Feb 22
- **Modiin** - (Darchei Tzion) - Sun Feb 22
- **Maaleh Adumim** - Location TBD - Sun Feb 22
- **YM - Ramot** (Ramatayim Tzefim) - Mon Feb 23
- **Rehovot** (Berman Shul) - Tues Feb 24
- **Pardes Chana** (Klal Yisrael) -Wed Feb 25
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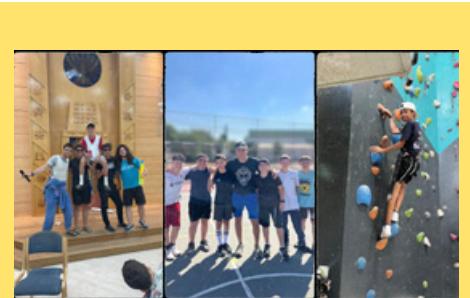
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The Table, the Ocean, and the Circle

Sometime in the early part of the sixteenth century, one of the greatest *talmidei chachamim* of our long *mesorah* made a dramatic decision—one that would permanently reshape the halachic landscape.

DISRUPTED MESORAH

The Jewish world had become fractured and unsettled. Decades earlier, 100,000-150,000 Jews had been expelled from Spain and scattered across Europe, the Balkans, and North Africa. That upheaval tore at the fabric of Jewish life and generated immense halachic confusion.

Spanish exiles carried their traditions into unfamiliar settings, where those practices often collided with established local *pesakim* and *minhagim*. The Inquisition uprooted families; children were orphaned or separated from their parents and never absorbed halachah as it was lived and modeled in the home. The continuity of halachic practice—once transmitted

naturally from generation to generation—was suddenly at risk.

As this fragile system of transmission weakened, a second force accelerated the instability. A few decades before the Spanish expulsion, in the mid-fifteenth century, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in Germany. Printing written material suddenly became dramatically cheaper. Until then, publishing books had been prohibitively expensive. In the Jewish world, this created a natural process of self-selection: only works of the highest caliber justified the enormous cost of manual copying.

With the advent of the printing press, that barrier fell. Printing was now accessible to almost anyone who wished to publish a book. Torah works proliferated, and the tables of the *beit midrash* were flooded with new *sefarim*. But progress came with a cost. It became increasingly difficult to determine which works were authoritative and which were less so.

RESTORING ORDER

Confronted by these two threats to halachic stability—the upheaval caused by exile and the confusion created by unchecked proliferation—Rav Yosef Karo, himself expelled from Spain and later resettled in Tzefat, made a bold decision: to create a standard and reliable framework for halachic decision-making. He proposed that halachah be determined by

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the consensus of the three greatest authorities of the preceding centuries—the Rif, the Rambam, and the Rosh. When all three agreed, the ruling was clear. When they disagreed, halachah would follow the majority opinion.

Rav Yosef Karo believed that this method, articulated systematically in his *sefer*, could restore order and clarity to a fractured halachic world. He called the work *Beit Yosef*—both because his name was Yosef and because, like Yosef in Egypt who sustained an entire region during famine, he hoped his *sefer* would nourish the Jewish people with halachic clarity in a time of confusion.

Toward the end of his life, he realized that his encyclopedic work was too extensive and demanding for the average person to master. He therefore composed a concise summary—almost a set of halachic “cliff notes”—to distill that larger work. He called this abridged code the *Shulchan Aruch*, which went on to become the gold standard for halachic rulings to this day.

He chose the name *Shulchan Aruch* by drawing upon the opening Rashi in Parashat Mishpatim. Moshe is instructed to present the Torah in a clear and orderly manner. Although Moshe himself heard the Torah directly from HaKadosh Baruch Hu, the rest of the people did not. They required careful and deliberate explanation.

Rashi explains that Hashem commanded Moshe to arrange the Torah *ke-shulchan aruch*—like a table that is set and organized before a person, ready for use. The image is precise and deliberate. It evokes the *Shulchan* of the Mikdash, perhaps the most carefully structured of all the Mikdash vessels: symmetrically built, supported by frames and rods, with trays designed to hold the *lechem hapanim*, baked and arranged according to exact

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The image of a *shulchan aruch*, an organized table, thus became a metaphor for clarity—ideas laid out systematically, accessible, and usable. Borrowing from this Rashi, Rav Yosef Karo named his highly organized system of halachic decision-making the *Shulchan Aruch*: a table set before the Jewish people, offering halachah in a form that is ordered and intelligible.

A TABLE OR AN OCEAN

Not everyone agreed with this decision. Among the most forceful opponents was Rav Shlomo Luria (the Maharshal), who lived in Poland and penned a sharp critique of any attempt to standardize halachah. Torah, he argued, cannot—and should not—be reduced to a formula. There cannot be a single, uniform truth, even in halachic practice. Each competent rav must study the relevant sources and arrive at his own considered conclusion.

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To package Torah into one system and assume a single authoritative outcome, Rav Shlomo Luria warned, strips Torah of its breadth and its infinity. In this spirit, he named his own *sefer Yam Shel Shlomo*, invoking the massive mikveh constructed by Shlomo HaMelech in the Mikdash—so vast that it resembled an ocean. Torah, in his vision, is not an orderly table set with clear divisions. It is an endless sea—expansive, deep, and resistant to being confined to a single, definitive conclusion.

Who was right in this debate? In truth, both were—and it depends on what question we are asking.

Ideally, Torah is expansive and inexhaustible. It resists being flattened into a single formula. Most disputes in the Gemara are not the result of a broken *mesorah* or a failure to remember one lost, absolute truth. Each position recorded in Shas contains a kernel of divine truth. Torah truth is not always binary.

MULTIPLE "PROFOUND TRUTHS"

Chazal teach that Hashem showed Moshe Rabbeinu at Har Sinai that a particular element could be *tamei*, and also that the very same element could be *tahor*. Our human minds struggle with this. We live in a world of either/or. For us, it is either day or night, but not both. Hashem, however, is not bound by binary categories. He is described as יצר אור ובורא חושך, עושה שלום ובורא את הכל—the One who forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates all.

Niels Bohr, a Danish physicist once observed that the opposite of a true statement is a false statement, but the opposite of a profound statement may be another profound statement. Human beings think in terms of true and false, on and off, zero and one. We are confined to binaries. Hashem is not. He

deals in layered, overlapping truths.

This is why, when we study Gemara, we do not seek only a final ruling. We seek to uncover the divine logic embedded in each position. Torah, at its core, is not a problem to be solved, but a depth of divine logic to be entered.

Prior to the forces that destabilized the halachic world, halachah itself was far more flexible. A rabbi in one city of Spain might follow the traditions of the Ramban, while another rabbi—perhaps only a few miles to the south—would rule in accordance with the Rambam. Each approach was seen as legitimate, because each emerged from a different, profound expression of Hashem's will.

Of course, in the realm of practical halachic observance—which is necessarily binary—no individual can live out multiple truths at once. That complexity belongs to the abstract arena of Gemara learning. In lived experience, a person must act in one concrete way. But on a collective level, the coexistence of differing halachic rulings reflected multiple authentic pathways of divine truth. Torah was unified not through uniformity, but through depth.

Rav Yosef Karo believed that the halachic landscape had become too fragile to sustain that level of pluralism. At that moment in history, he felt, halachah required stabilization through standardization. Rav Shlomo Luria disagreed. In his view, halachah should remain fluid and flexible, resistant to being fixed into a single authoritative form.

In practice, the Jewish people ultimately aligned with the *Shulchan Aruch*, relying on a unified code—augmented by the Rema for Ashkenazic practice—to guide halachic observance across communities.

Yet this entire debate unfolded within the boundaries of practical halachah. Even Rav

Yosef Karo believed that, in theory, Hashem's infinite word contains multiple truths. In lived halachic practice, we must confine ourselves to a shared framework in order to preserve communal coherence and unity. But in the world of thought—in learning, in reflection, in grappling with the eternal will of Hashem—we strive, as best we can, to move beyond binary thinking and to recognize the many shades and colors through which Hashem's Torah is revealed.

MULTIPLE HASHKAFOT

Recognizing multiple truths within Torah should train us to appreciate multiplicity in *hashkafah* as well. *Hashkafah* is not Torah itself. It is the lens—the outer layer—through which we process Torah and interpret the world we inhabit. In the next world there will be no *hashkafah*, only Torah. *Hashkafah* belongs to the human condition, to life lived within history and culture.

Just as divine wisdom yields multiple truths in the realm of Torah facts, it can also yield multiple authentic *hashkafot*. There is no single, exclusive pathway to Hashem or to His Torah. Claims to the contrary are not expressions of religious strength; they diminish Hashem by confining Him within human categories and constructs.

This impulse risks framing Hashem in human terms. Limiting His transcendence, even subtly, distorts faith.

THE CIRCLE

The final Gemara in Ta'anit depicts the end of days, when Hashem gathers all the righteous into a circle. He stands at the center, and the *tzaddikim*, arrayed along the circumference, point inward and declare: “זה ה קניינו לו—נעגילה והשמחה בישעיהו.”

Why is this final alignment of the righteous described as a circle, rather than any other

geometric form?

A circle contains infinitely many radii, each equidistant from the center. Every point along the circumference stands at the same distance from the middle. Two Jews can occupy positions that appear opposite—180 degrees apart—seeing the center from entirely different vantage points. Each believes he is facing Hashem from his own direction, with his own orientation. And yet, each is seeing Hashem equally. Neither perspective is closer. Neither vision is more accurate.

When we practice halachah, we commit ourselves to an organized and unified framework—what Rav Yosef Karo sought to achieve through the *Beit Yosef* and the *Shulchan Aruch*. Practice demands coherence and shared action.

But when we seek to understand Hashem's will, when we form *hashkafic* lenses through which to encounter Him, we enter a different realm. There, multiple perspectives can coexist. Different positions may stand far apart, yet all face the same center. In that space, truth is not singular and linear, but layered, expansive, and infinitely divine. ■



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From Half a Shekel to Shared Responsibility

Shabbat Shekalim introduces one of the Torah's most deceptively simple mitzvot: everyone gives the same half-shekel. Not more if you are wealthy, not less if you are struggling. The Mishkan, and later the Beit HaMikdash, is sustained not by a few benefactors, but by collective participation. Sacred space is built through shared responsibility.

The Haftorah from Melachim II, chapter 12 brings that principle to life. King Yoash ascends the throne at a fragile moment of renewal. The Beit HaMikdash still stands, but years of neglect have taken their toll. Funds are collected - obligatory gifts, vowed offerings, voluntary donations, yet nothing is repaired. That gap - between contribution and impact - lies at the heart of the story.

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The half-shekel establishes equality, but the Haftorah presses further. Equality alone does not sustain sacred space. When Yoash places a collection box in the Beit Hamikdash, responsibility shifts. The people give not only because they must, but because they understand that the future of the Mikdash depends on them.

This is unity at its strongest: not uniformity, but shared ownership. No one assumes the work belongs to someone else. The Beit HaMikdash is sustained by "us." The funds are not used for ornamentation, but for beams and walls - the work that keeps the Mikdash standing. Repairing what is broken is not secondary to avodah; it is avodah.

Shabbat Shekalim asks us to think beyond how much we give. Do we show up only for

moments of inspiration or also for the steady work that keeps something standing?

This is not only the story of the Mikdash. It is the story of every sacred space we build together.

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a structure rises. When we gather for a siyum, we are not marking an ending, but celebrating what shared commitment can build.

This, too, is a kind of Mikdash.

The half-shekel reminds us that no one builds alone.

The Haftorah reminds us that holiness endures when everyone takes responsibility.

Shekalim leaves us with one question:

What are we helping to sustain? ■



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RABBI AARON GOLDSCHIEDER

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Rav Kook: Healthy Honor and Robust Pride

(*Midot HaRa'aya: Kavod, piska #5 and #6*)

The dangers of honor are duly noted and often emphasized throughout the writings of the Sages. One well-known example states, "... the pursuit of honor removes a person from the world" (*Avot 4:21*). Not only is chasing honor unhealthy in that it indulges the ego, it also reflects a lack of appreciation for one's inherent worth. If a person truly recognized their own value, they would not be dependent on the approval of others.

The negative trappings of pursuing honor are fairly obvious. However, there is also a positive dimension to accepting honor. Rav Kook, in *Midot HaRa'aya*, reminds us that honor has its place and can be used constructively to encourage and uplift a person's spirit.

In this regard, Rav Kook writes:

"When a person is honored in the world, and he is concerned because the world erred in its esteem for him, let him put aside that concern and invoke it at a time when he is visited by some insult." (*Midot HaRa'aya, Kavod, piska #5*)

In other words, a person should store away some of the positive and uplifting feelings that accompany being honored—even if they slightly inflate the ego—for times when one

may face rejection or ridicule. In this way, feelings of confidence can be used constructively rather than destructively.

In a similar vein, Rav Kook suggests that every person needs some measure of honor and affirmation from others, as it energizes and inspires one to rise to the spiritual heights by which they are perceived. "At times it is fitting to accept honor and to enjoy it, in order to strengthen one's spiritual energies for noble accomplishments..." (*ibid, piska #6*)



Shmuel Yosef Agnon

AGNON: TWO WAYS TO RESPOND TO KAVOD

The following memorable anecdote brings this idea to life. The renowned Israeli novelist S.Y. Agnon—who, incidentally, shared a close relationship with Rav Kook—wrote that there are two ways people respond to honor. Some hear words of praise and ignore them entirely. Others hear words of honor and choose to learn from them.

Agnon describes the contrasting practices of two towering rabbinic figures of the nineteenth century. Rabbi Akiva Eiger, upon receiving a letter, would immediately fold over the top portion where the writer lavished him with honorifics and lofty titles. He refused

even to see them, lest they lead to feelings of haughtiness or an inflated ego.

By contrast, the great sage known as the *Chacham Zvi*, Rav Zvi Ashkenazi, would deliberately unfold the letter and read all the honorifics attached to his name (*tzaddik, gaon, gadol hador*, etc.). He did so not for self-gratification, but to be inspired by the expectations others had of him and to know what he must strive to become. If the letter referred to him as a *tzaddik*, he would say to himself, “Then I must be even more involved in acts of righteousness, so that it will truly be justified for others to see me as a *tzaddik...*” (S.Y. Agnon, *Me’atzmi el Atzmi*, p. 33, cited in *Midot Ha-Ra’aya*, ed. Zev Soltanovich, p. 302)

RAV AKIVA EIGER’S ASTOUNDING HUMILITY

To fully appreciate the exquisite humility of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, the following story is worth noting.

Rabbi Yosef Yoizel Horowitz, the Alter of Novardok, recounts an astounding episode in his classic work *Madreigas Ha’Adam* (*Cheshbon HaTzedek*, ch. 6). When Rabbi Akiva Eiger first visited his future father-in-law, townspeople approached him to discuss Torah, having heard of his brilliance as a *talmid chacham*. Yet he deliberately pretended to be unlearned, to the point that his reputation was ruined. His future father-in-law even regretted agreeing to the *shidduch* and asked him to leave town.

“Wait one week,” Rabbi Akiva Eiger replied.

At that time, a newly married *chassan* was staying in town and had greatly impressed the townspeople with his learning. Rabbi Akiva Eiger realized that if he revealed his own Torah mastery, he would eclipse the other *chassan*, making him appear insignificant. Since the *chassan* was scheduled to leave within the week, Rabbi Akiva Eiger chose to conceal his

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abilities temporarily. Only after the *chassan* departed did he reveal his true scholarship, astonishing the town and fully restoring his standing—and his father-in-law’s confidence. (*Olam HaMiddot*, Kestenbaum, *Artscroll*, p. 151)

What is astounding is not merely Rabbi Akiva Eiger’s sensitivity to avoiding another’s embarrassment. Even as a young man, he was deeply concerned with preserving his friend’s honor, scrupulously fulfilling the Mishnah’s teaching: “The honor of your fellow should be as dear to you as your own” (Avot 2:10).

PRAYING DAILY FOR SELF-CONFIDENCE

Rav Kook (*Midot HaRa’aya*, *Kavod*, piska #5) cites the Talmudic teaching that a righteous person is able to remain silent and

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unresponsive in the face of ridicule and insult (Shabbat 88b).

Each day, at the conclusion of the Amidah, we pray: “To those who curse me, let my soul be silent...” (*Elokai netzor*). Rav Kook explains that the soul is deeply affected by derision and curse, as these strike at the core of a person’s life force. However, when the soul recognizes that its source is Divine, it remains unaffected by mockery or denigration. When God’s will is one’s clear and defining goal, the taunts of others lose their power. (*Siddur Olat Re’iyah*, vol. 1, pp. 291–292)

RAV KOK UNDER HARASSMENT

Rav Kook embodied this teaching in his own life. He was frequently harassed by students and followers of prominent rabbis who opposed him. These attacks often crossed the line into mockery, defamatory posters, and even physical violence.

On one occasion, Rav Aryeh Levin’s daughter witnessed zealots knocking Rav Kook’s fur hat from his head. Disturbed by the incident, Rav Aryeh Levin felt compelled to offer his support. To avoid disturbing Rav Kook’s learning, he visited late at night. When Rav Kook finally lifted his eyes from his Gemara and noticed Rav Aryeh’s presence, he told him that he understood why he had come and thanked him warmly.

Rav Kook then said: “It is specifically during these trying times that I merit an increase of Divine assistance in my learning and *chidushim*. I see the words of *Kohelet* come alive: ‘God seeks those who are persecuted’” (*Kohelet* 3:15). (*Tzaddik for Eternity*, pp. 259–261)

Rav Kook not only endured mistreatment, but transformed it into an opportunity to experience closeness to God, elevating moments of turmoil into profound service of the Divine. (*Torah United*, vol. 1, Goldscheider, pp. xxxix–xl)

DISCOVER YOUR MISSION

Immediately following this teaching in *Ain Ayah*, Rav Kook offers a related and deeply beautiful insight.

The Talmud records a sage’s prayer at the conclusion of the Amidah:

“*Elohai*—before I was formed, I was unworthy; now that I have been formed, it is as if I had not been formed.”

Traditionally, these words are understood as an expression of humility and self-effacement: *I was nothing before creation, and I remain nothing afterward*. Rav Kook rejected this interpretation and offered a strikingly different reading:

“Before I was formed, I was unworthy; and now that I have been formed—I live as if I had not been formed.”

That is, although I have been created and endowed with unique strengths and potential, I have failed to live up to my mission. I have neglected my talents, avoided my calling, and tragically continued to live *as if I had never been formed*.

Rav Kook teaches that when we recite these words—now said throughout Yom Kippur at the conclusion of the Amidah—we acknowledge that something has obstructed our fulfillment of life’s ultimate purpose. By living passively, we fail to see ourselves as *sheluchim*, emissaries entrusted with a unique mission in the world. (*Ain Ayah, Berachot* vol. 1, pp. 81–82, *piska* #46)

RAV CHAIM VOLOZHIN: THE ENORMOUS IMPACT OF EVERY ACTION

Rav Chaim of Volozhin offers a powerful teaching in his commentary to Pirkei Avot (2:1) that underscores human greatness and responsibility. The Mishnah states: *Da mah lema’alah mimcha*—“Know what is above you.” The conventional interpretation is an

exhortation to be mindful of God.

Rav Chaim offers a novel reading: “Know that what is above—is from you.” In other words, human actions generate changes in the spiritual realms.

The implications are profound. Our words, actions, and even thoughts ripple outward, shaping the world around us and beyond. The more aware we are of our greatness and potential, the more we are called to rise to the challenge of actualizing our best selves.

Rav Kook expresses this idea in his own lyrical language:

“Every person has the ability to change the world. It all lies within one’s spiritual resources. It depends on whether one has the power to reveal them. This is true not only of the sophisticated and learned, but even of the simplest person. There is no limit to the power of the soul—it is a candle of the Divine in this world.” (*Shemonah Kevatzim* 1:846; trans. Schwartz, *Spiritual Revolution*, p. 17)

A SPIRITUALLY ENERGIZED

START TO THE DAY

Each day begins with *Modeh Ani*, thanking God for life and renewal. Yet the phrase *Rabbah emunatecha*—“Great is Your faithfulness”—is puzzling. We place our faith in God, not the other way around. In whom, then, is

God expressing faith?

Rav Kook offers a brilliant explanation. By granting a person life and the opportunity to begin a new day, God demonstrates His faith in humanity. Waking up itself testifies that God believes we still have something meaningful to accomplish. (*Olat Re’iyah*, vol. 1, p. 3)

A Jew is thus taught to awaken inspired, aware of the greatness and profound potential God has embedded within every soul.

LIFE LESSONS

- We realize our potential most fully when we recognize that God has placed our soul in this world to fulfill a unique mission.
- Clarify your long-term goals and identify the steps that will lead you toward them.
- Be someone others can rely on. Strive to be dependable, remembering that many people count on you. ■



Rabbi Goldscheider’s most recent OU Press Publication, “Torah United” on the weekly Parsha, can be ordered directly from Rabbi Goldscheider at aarong@ouisrael.org at a special price for Torah Tidbits readers.

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Witness Complication at a Wedding

Question: I was a witness at a wedding years ago and have been unsure if I did the right thing. After the *chupa*, the *kalla*'s father (=*kf*), a learned but somewhat erratic person, came over and told me that he too had in mind to serve as a witness. I did not know if he was serious and ignored him. Could this have compromised the *kiddushin*, and should I do something now?

Answer: Before explaining, we assure you that you should do nothing now.

A *mishna* (Makkot 5b) derives that if one of the members of a group of witnesses (=*eidim*) is *pasul* (invalid to serve), so is the testimony of its kosher members. The *gemara* (ibid. 6a)

is bothered by the implication that events at which kosher and *pasul* (including relatives) *eidim* are together could not be halachically confirmed. The *gemara* provides a guideline: we ask if the people "came to see or to testify." In other words, if they came to testify, there would be no testimony. *Kf* was apparently aware of this concept and was suggesting that your testimony, which was needed to effectuate the *kiddushin* (Kiddushin 65b), was *pasul*.

However, it is highly unlikely that this was a problem. *Rishonim* ask that if the presence of relatives *pasuls* kosher witnesses, what do we do at weddings? *Tosafot* (ad loc.) posits that just seeing an event does not turn an observer into an *eid*, which would happen only if he testified in *beit din*. Since this did not happen in your case, *Tosafot* would justify your inaction. The *Shulchan Aruch* (Choshen Mishpat 36:4) cites two opinions, with a preference toward the opinion that argues on *Tosafot*.

The *Rosh* (Makkot 1:11) says that even when *pasul eidim* would invalidate the function of kosher witnesses at the point of observation, if the kosher witnesses were appointed *eidim*, their status is unaffected by others. (A critical question, subject to *machloket*, is when one of the appointed *eidim* was *pasul*, whether kosher observers at the wedding can effectuate the *kiddushin*. This is beyond our scope – see *Otzar Haposkim*, Even Haezer 42:31.) Since here too, you and your co-witness were appointed (as is standard), the *Rosh* would also have you ignore *kf*'s provocation.

Another approach in *Tosafot* (ibid.) is that the *gemara*'s asking about the *eidim*'s

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intention refers not to the *pasul eidim* but to the kosher ones. Specifically, we ask the kosher *eidim* whether they intended to join a witness group with the *pasul* ones or to remain separate. Since you did not intend to be *eidim* with *kf*, what he intended is irrelevant.

There is an approach that explains that we are not concerned at weddings because we assume that relatives do not intend to be witnesses (see Shach, CM 36:8). *Kf* seems to say that this wedding was a problematic exception. Apparently, though, even one who relies somewhat on the *pasul* observer's intention also accepts at least one of the previous distinctions (see *ibid.*), which do help in your case.

It is also not clear that we should trust *kf* that he intended to be an *eid* when there are no indications other than his word (and after all he is *pasul* for this too) that this is the case (see Ramban, Makkot 6a; Shach, CM 36:5). It is also difficult to understand exactly what he was saying about his intention and to put it in halachic perspective – did he actually plan to testify, did he just mean to cause a problem, and would that amorphous idea qualify? Did he have a real reason to disqualify the wedding? If he did, wouldn't he have sat down with the *mesader kiddushin* or the couple and explained himself? It is far more likely that he was trying to be “cute” or trying to get under your skin.

In summary, even if *kf* tried to disqualify the *kiddushin*, he almost definitely did not and could not do so. If it were so easy, any of the many relative guests at anyone's wedding

could, and Halacha does not want us to start worrying about that. While *kf* did say something unusual, a passing comment to you is definitely not enough for us to start worrying about it. Now, when the marriage is an established fact, it would be a big mistake to sow doubt about it. ■

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From Revelation to Responsibility: Parshat Mishpatim as a Call to Action

Parshat Mishpatim opens with a quiet word that is easy to miss: “*Ve’eleh hamishpatim asher tasim lifneihem*” — “And these are the laws that you shall place before them.” After the thunder, lightning, shofar blasts, and earth-shattering revelation of Sinai, the Torah shifts abruptly into legal detail. Oxen that gore. Property damage. Slavery. Loans. Court systems. At first glance, it feels almost anticlimactic.

But Mishpatim is not a descent from inspiration. It is the point.

We love moments of spiritual intensity — the awe, the uplift, the feeling that something big just happened. But Torah does not measure spirituality by how moved we feel. It measures it by what we do next. Mishpatim is the Torah’s insistence that revelation must translate into responsibility.

Every experience we have in life is tailor-made for us. If I saw it, heard it, or lived it, then it was meant for me. Otherwise, it wouldn’t have crossed my path. The question Torah keeps asking is: what are you doing with that?

Am Yisrael has just experienced the most overwhelming revelation in human history at Har Sinai. G-d spoke. The nation heard. So

what’s their call to action?

Not meditation. Not poetry. Not lingering at the mountain.

Mishpatim.

The laws that govern how we treat workers, strangers, the vulnerable, our neighbors, and our enemies. The Torah’s answer to Sinai is not “feel holy,” but “act holy.”

The first law in the parsha sets the tone: the laws of the *eved ivri*, the Jewish servant. Freedom has barely been tasted, and the Torah already insists that power be limited, dignity preserved, and human beings never be reduced to property. A nation freshly redeemed from slavery is told: your suffering obligates you. What you endured now defines how you must behave.

Again and again, Mishpatim grounds lofty ideals in daily behavior. Justice is not theoretical; it’s procedural. Compassion is not emotional; it’s structural. Faith in G-d is tested not in moments of ecstasy but in how honestly you handle money, how carefully you speak, how responsibly you resolve conflict.

This is where inspiration is either honored or wasted.

It’s easy to be moved by a powerful shiur, a meaningful Shabbat, a life-altering event. Much harder is to ask: What changed because

of it? Did I speak differently afterward? Treat people differently? Make different choices?

Torah assumes that inspiration without action is incomplete — even dangerous. It creates the illusion of growth without the substance of it. Mishpatim refuses to allow Sinai to remain a spiritual high with no practical consequences.

The haftorah sharpens this message painfully.

In Yirmiyahu chapter 34, the prophet rebukes the people of Jerusalem for freeing their Jewish slaves — and then taking them back. Under pressure, they did the right thing. They followed the law. They were inspired... briefly. But when it became inconvenient, they reversed course.

G-d's response is chilling. You proclaimed freedom with your mouths, but not with your lives. So I will proclaim a different kind of "freedom" — freedom for the sword, the famine, and the plague.

The haftorah exposes a truth Mishpatim already taught: doing the right thing temporarily is not the same as being transformed by it. A moment of moral clarity that doesn't endure is not redemption — it's performance.

Inspiration is meant to bind us to action, not excuse us from it.

This reframes how we understand our own lives. If I encountered an idea that moved me, a moment that shook me, a truth that unsettled me — it wasn't random. It was given to me because I am capable of responding to it. If I do nothing, it's not neutral. It's a missed obligation.

At our Binyamin's funeral, I had asked people to take upon themselves a mitzvah or act of kindness to help bring about the complete Redemption. Following the "revelation" of October 7th, our nation was charged. Shaken. Awake. Ready to take on the world. And I

was afraid of losing that moment. At the shiva house and months following, there was a notebook with a sign: write down your personal Kabbalah. People filled that notebook. And another. And then Google Docs. And messages sent directly to me.

Large and small commitments poured in. Learning one mishna a day, saying Shema at night, dressing more modestly, learning the laws of Shmirat haLashon, only listening to Jewish music, davening maariv, saying Modeh Ani, bentsching from a bentcher, working intentionally on parent-child relationships, and dozens and dozens more.

Still now, over two years later, I still receive messages from people saying that they are still keeping to their commitments. More than a few people made Aliyah after being inspired by Binyamin and his passion for the Land of Israel. That is Mishpatim in real time: revelation becoming responsibility and inspiration becoming action.

Judaism does not ask us to live on spiritual mountaintops. It asks us to bring Sinai into the courtroom, the workplace, the kitchen, the WhatsApp message, the way we speak and the way we choose.

So the next time we feel inspired — by Torah, by an experience, by something we "happened" to see or hear — Mishpatim whispers its challenge: That wasn't random. That wasn't for nothing. What will you do with it?

Because in Torah, the truest measure of inspiration is not how high it lifts us — but how deeply it changes the way we live. ■

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Michal Silverstein, MS

Dealing With Uncertainty

Dear OU Parenting,

My 10 year old daughter tends to worry a lot. When we go out together, she worries about every possible scenario that can go wrong like what if her brother will get lost or kidnapped. Or any other bad thing that can happen to us. I keep trying to reassure her but she's still anxious. What can I do to help her calm down?

M.R.

Dear M.R.,

Dealing with an anxious child can be very draining. Parents tend to respond to their kids by saying things like "it's not going to happen" or "just relax, we're all ok". These words of reassurance don't usually lower the child's anxiety. Why? Because when a child is asking these questions and catastrophizing she's not

just looking for an answer, she's looking for connection.

The anxiety is coming from a place of fear and uncertainty. In addition, a parent can't guarantee that everything is or will be OK. A child especially living in Israel has heard and seen things happen that seem highly improbable, but still happen. So what can a parent do to calm their child? First, know that there's no quick fix. It's not about giving one answer of reassurance. It's a process of accepting the fear and uncertainty and learning coping skills to deal with it. Part of teaching those skills is modeling healthy ways that you, as a parent, cope with uncertainty and fear.

The first step is to validate your child's fear and anxiety. Feelings can get pretty intense and you want to show your kids that you aren't afraid of their big, sometimes scary feelings. This means being curious, validating their feelings and empathizing with them. Go with them on their imaginary journey of what ifs. It's ok to enter their world of chaos with them and just listen. Showing them again and again that they aren't alone in their fear is calming.

The next thing you can do to a degree, is to



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share your feelings of fear and uncertainty and what helps you manage when those feelings come up for you. Sharing makes the child feel less isolated and alone and makes the parent more relatable. Explore with the child what things have made them feel safe or calm in the past. Playing with a specific toy, resting on the couch, reading a book or holding an object they like such as a soft blanket, can help a child cope in times of uncertainty. Keep in mind that children need something immediate, so physical contact with a parent such as holding your child's hand, giving them a hug or letting them sit on your lap is a quick anxiety reducer.

Kids also enjoy connections, such as talking to a friend, or engaging in activities like drawing a picture, listening to their favorite music or dancing around. Plan ahead to have safe objects available when needed, and go through ways to access them. Lastly, explain that your job as a parent is to keep your child safe and protected and you take practical measures to ensure that as best as you can.

There are no guarantees and the Israeli lifestyle requires one to sit with uncertainty. As Jews we can also use emuna and tefilla, prayer, to keep ourselves calm, balanced and connected to others. ■

Michal Silverstein has a MS in educational psychology and counseling. She facilitates parenting workshops in and around Jerusalem and maintains a private practice.

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The "Too Nice" Guy

Lori asks:

Hi Aleeza, My candidate is seriously dating a guy, and she came to me with a strange problem: this guy is too nice to her. She has dated very toxic guys in the past, and now with this mensch, sweet guy who respects her and treats her like a queen, she feels like "it's not it". How can I help her?

Aleeza answers:

As we know: "He's too nice" is not about him. It's about what feels familiar to her.

When someone has dated unhealthy or toxic partners, their emotional compass can get a little scrambled. Chaos starts to feel like chemistry. Tension feels like passion. So when a real mentch walks in who is steady, respectful, and consistent, her system doesn't always

recognize it as romantic right away. It recognizes it as... unfamiliar, simple and perhaps too boring.

Even if it were her person she would not recognize or feel like "this is it!"

Before you try to solve anything, help her get curious about her own experience. You might ask, "When you say he's too nice, do you mean you feel bored, or do you mean you feel safe but this is too easy?"

I often tell singles: don't confuse peace with lack of attraction. A slow growth is actually better than fireworks even if it doesn't feel that way. Healthy relationships usually start softer. They don't spike your anxiety, they lower it. And for someone used to emotional highs and lows, that calm can feel almost flat at first.

That said, being a mensch doesn't automatically make someone the right match. Kindness is a foundation, not the whole building. She still needs emotional connection, admiration, and a sense that she's growing in the relationship. He needs to be more than a good guy. He needs to be a good guy for her.

So how do you help her?

Slow her down.

Instead of asking, "Is he the one?" encourage her to ask, "What happens when you spend time with him? Do you feel more like yourself, or less?" Attraction isn't fireworks, sometimes it's a quiet pull that builds when there's consistency.

You can also normalize that her system may need time to recalibrate. If every past relationship trained her to expect drama,

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then stability might feel strange before it feels good. That doesn't mean she's broken, it means she's learning a new emotional language.

And here's a gentle reframe you can offer her: maybe the question isn't "Why is he too nice?" Maybe the question is, "What happens to you when you're around a nice guy?"

If she's open, encourage her to stay present a little longer, not forever, not against her instincts, just long enough to see whether warmth can grow where chaos used to live.

Your job isn't to convince her to choose him. Your job is to help her separate old patterns from present reality.

Sometimes the biggest shift happens when someone realizes: calm doesn't mean empty. Calm can mean safe enough to finally build something real.

May she recognize who she becomes when she's around a nice guy and be open to the possibility that a nice guy can also be a great choice.

Blessings,

Aleeza ■

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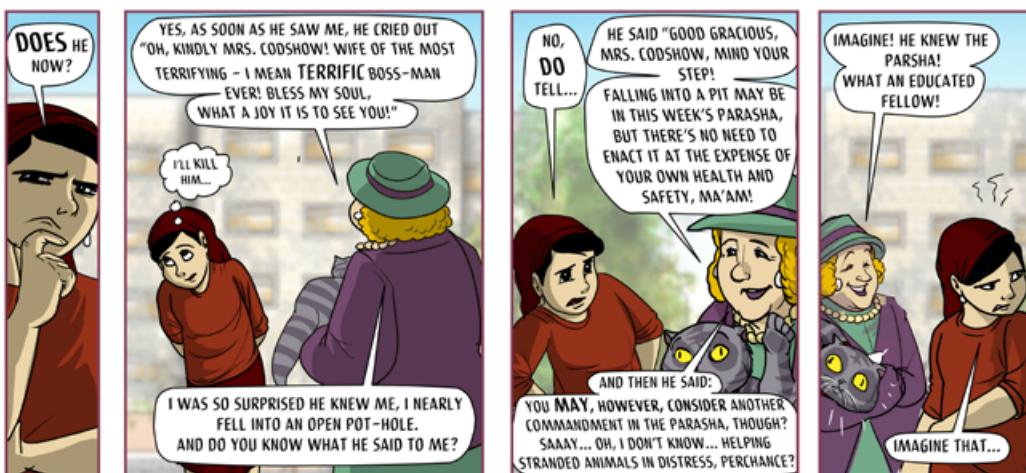
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YACHAD



The Pursuit of True Happiness

This Dvar Torah was written by **Akiva and Dassie Jablon**, Yachad volunteers and **Yehuda and Chana Weinberger**, participants of Yachad's Married Couples program. In loving memory of Ellen Polisky A" H, Chana's late mother.

In Parashat Mishpatim, we are greeted with many new rules and laws. A person's natural instinct may be to feel confined by a set of rules. One might think that breaking free from such boundaries will bring him closer to true happiness and joy. However, we know that is not the case. After all, would Hashem give us so many commandments if they were not able to bring us true happiness? How do mitzvot enhance our joy and fulfillment in life?

In his book *Ein Ayah* (Brachot Aleph), Rav Kook teaches us how to achieve contentment and genuine joy. He writes that there are two paths to happiness. The first way is to temporarily take one's mind off his problems, for

example, running to your phone or hanging out with friends. But while this may distract from the hardship for a few hours or days, the sadness then returns with the realization that one cannot run from their challenges. In other words, taking a break from problems allows for temporary relief but not lasting happiness.

Rav Kook explains, however, that if one recognizes that everything he has – even his challenges – are from Hashem, he will be better able to face and overcome his struggles and find true long-lasting happiness. To take this a step further, since true happiness comes from acknowledging that everything is from Hashem, it follows logically that Hashem's mitzvot and laws can guide us to happiness.

At Yachad, the goal is to help every person reach their full potential and the highest level of happiness. We understand that every human being faces challenges, whether big or small. So whether it's offering fun and meaningful learning opportunities through Shabbatons or other programs, we do everything in our power to enhance each person's sense of personal fulfillment and joy. Yachad means together in every sense: we as an organization – and as a nation – are happier and stronger together. ■

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• **שלום עליכם!** I'm already in his seventy-eighth year, a single father and grandfather who still travels the Land and collects **שבת** invitations from old friends and new, like fellow **עלים** along with Jews here forever. I'm here because somewhere back in the last century Aliza Begin—the Prime Minister's wife—gave me a verbal left hook I never saw coming.

Picture her there in the Waldorf Presidential Suite when the New York Daily News was America's largest paper and I was sent to write her up for the Women's Page tucked between recipes and coupons. We hadn't even traded pleasantries when she fixed me with a gaze that could straighten a crooked mezuzah and landed her punch: *"What are you doing in New York? Why don't you come live in Israel?"* I was 'Sheldon' then and had never spent one heartbeat dreaming of living in Israel and now I've got to say why not; my interview notes might as well have blown out the window. But she wasn't through with me yet—this time she aimed at what she thought was my soft spot. She said, *"We'll have you over for Shabbat!"* like she was offering me lokshen soup. And I nodded impatiently.

Only years later when I found myself writing for Rabbi Riskin did it sink in—**שבת** with the Begins!—I missed my chance to sit at a table where history itself broke bread. By the time I took up her challenge and crossed the sea forty years later to make my home in **ירושלים**, the hosts were long gone, their table set somewhere beyond reach. But you need not be a Prime Minister nor his wife to invite this wandering Jew for **קידוש** and **המצויא**, a Torah tidbit or two, as well as songs and stories that'll bring us together, God willing, wherever in Israel you make **שבת**. So act now before it's too late. Invitations accepted only **עד מאה ועשרים**.



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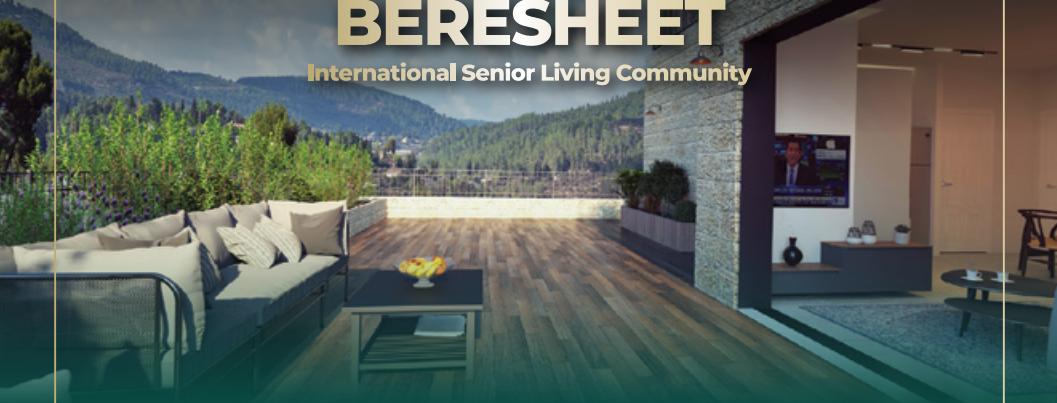
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