

THE MEAT OF THE MEETING

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of Mishpatim. There are many different types of laws which the Torah commands us to follow. 'Chukim' are the laws which elude our understanding. They give us the opportunity to demonstrate our faith. We adhere to them because Hashem commanded us to do so. Period. Mishpatim are laws which make sense to us. Don't steal, don't murder, don't commit adultery. Our parsha, as indicated by its name, deals with mishpatim.

"V'aileh ha'mishpatim (21:1)" - and these are the mishpatim. Why does our parsha begin with the letter 'vuv' which means 'and'? According to Rashi it connects these mishpatim to last week's parsha. Teaching that, just as the previous parsha's commandments were from Sinai, so too, these mishpatim are from Sinai.

It's fascinating to note that these laws are sandwiched between the Torah's two accounts of Sinai. Last week's parsha, Yisro, concluded with the 'aseres hadivros' (the ten commandments). Our parsha, after delineating fifty three different mitzvos (commandments) concludes with, "V'el Moshe amar a'lay el Hashem (24:1)" - And Moshe was told to ascend (Sinai) to Hashem. According to Rashi, this actually took place on the fourth day of Sivan, before the 'aseres hadivros'!

Why were these mishpatim placed in the middle of the Torah's transmission of the events at Sinai?

Let's first attempt to understand another difficulty. We are a composite of two separate beings - a spiritual being contained within a physical being. Hashem, on the other hand, is totally removed from any trace of the physical. He exists in a domain and realm that is totally beyond us and our perception. How can we connect to Him?! That unlikely union was made possible only through the giving of the Torah. The Talmud reveals the essence of the revelation at Sinai by defining the first word of the 'aseres hadivros' using a method called 'notrikon'. Each letter of the word becomes a word in and of itself. The word 'anochi' - spelled 'aleph', 'nune', 'chaf' and 'yud' (meaning, I) is broken into four words, each beginning with one of those letters. 'Ana nafshai chasavis yahavis' - I, My essence, I have written and given. I have made Myself available. I'm accessible. Through the Torah given at Sinai, we have the meeting point. We can connect. (It's interesting to note that many of the different customs at Jewish weddings are based on events at Sinai - the wedding between Hashem and Klal Yisroel.)

It is clear that these mishpatim were placed in the midst of the Sinai events because they are 'the meat' of 'the meeting'. The 'Anochi Hashem Elokecha' (I am Hashem your G-d - the opening words

of the aseres hadivros) is an intrinsic part of the mishpatim and our observance of the mishpatim must reflect that 'Anochi Hashem Elokecha'. Both in the way that Hashem involves Himself down in our day-to-day events and in the way that we strive to elevate ourselves up to the heights of spirituality there is and must be this synthesis.

Let's deal with each of these links. The Talmud states that when three judges convene for judgment, the Shechina (Hashem's presence) is with them. Why is this necessary? The Nesivos Sholom quotes the Zohar which states: "Aileh ha'mishpatim - da hee raza d'gilgulta". Meaning, these are the judgments - in here is contained the secret of 'gilgul'. 'Gilgul' is the Hebrew term for reincarnation. The idea that after death, a persons neshama (soul) might return to this world in a new human body in order to accomplish something that had been neglected or to correct an error that had been done. How does this apply to the mishpatim - the laws?!

He tells a famous story involving the Baal Shem Tov - the founder of Chassidism. A person had been to a Rabbinical court which had decided against him, obligating him to pay the disputed sum of money. He approached the Baal Shem Tov with the following dilemma. I accept that any judgment reached by these judges is true as it reveals the will of the Torah and thereby, the will of Hashem Himself. At the same time, I know that I don't owe him the money! The judges based their decision on the testimony given before them, but I know the truth - I was there - I don't owe him money. How, he asked the Baal Shem Tov, can these two truths be resolved!

The Baal Shem Tov explained to him that in a previous 'gilgul' he had owed this person money. When one leaves this world owing another money, he must return in order to settle this debt. The judges were (I assume unawarely) obligating him to pay the sum of money which wasn't owed based on the present litigation but was, in fact, the epitome of an old debt.

Both were truths. He didn't owe and he did owe. Mishpatim contain the secret of 'gilgul'. The Shechina is with the judges. The 'Anochi Hashem Elokecha' is an intrinsic part of the mishpatim and all that transpires in our every day lives. Seemingly unfair and inexplicable events might be the very reason why we are presently here in this world and might be our ticket to the next. "V'aileh ha'mishpatim." The letter 'vuv' - 'and' - connects the two. Both are from Sinai. The mishpatim are smack in the middle of the events of Sinai. Together they produce the meeting point of heaven and earth, the marriage between us and Hashem.

Let's now see how our mishpatim must reflect the 'Anochi Hashem Elokecha'. After the 'aseres hadivros' we were told, "shuvu lachem la'o'ha'leichem" - return to your tents. In a practical sense, the show is over and there won't be an encore. In a halachic sense, we learn that the marital relations which had been forbidden for three days prior to the 'aseres hadivros' were once again permitted. The Kotzker Rebbe explains it in a different way. Return to your tents! Bring it back with you! It's easy to be on this level while hearing and seeing the word of Hashem. Now apply it and maintain it while back in your tents. Make it a part of your everyday life.

In truth, the way to maintain these mishpatim on a consistent basis is by keeping focused on 'Anochi Hashem Elokecha'. The passuk states: "Mi'd'var sheker tirchok (23:7)" - from falsehood distance yourself. The Talmud (Makkos 24A) states that Rav Safra fulfilled King David's words (Tehillim 15:2) that one must speak truth even in one's heart. Rashi relates the event through which Rav Safra earned this accolade. He had an item for sale and was approached by a potential buyer while he was reciting the Shema. Involved in his prayer and being unable to respond, Rav Safra seemed to be ignoring him. Thinking that the offer was too low, the buyer repeatedly raised his bid, only to be stonewalled again and again. After making his final exorbitant offer, which happened to coincide with the prayer's end, Rav Safra nodded in agreement. The buyer began to count out the money only to be told that the price would be original amount offered. Rav Safra explained to this astounded buyer that in his heart he had agreed to the original offer. Accepting any more money than that would be dishonest. He spoke truth in his heart.

Only a person with a firm, tangible feeling of 'Anochi Hashem Elokecha' would be able to live life accordingly. We all know on an intellectual level that we'll gain absolutely nothing through dishonest means. Why would Hashem reward a person and have him benefit through rebellion against His word? That's on an intellectual level... When the possibility of profit is before us, we tend to ignore that obvious fact and act somewhat differently. 'Return to your tents'... Apply it to every day life. Connect the 'Anochi' to the mishpatim.

Rav Shalom Shwadron zt"l would tell a story of a Mashgiach of his, Rav Elya HaCohen Dushnitzer. (He had previously been Mashgiach in the Chofetz Chaim's Yeshiva in Radin.) He owned an orchard which he wished to sell. His son had received it as a marriage dowry but it proved to be a very unfortunate venture (the orchard, that is, not the marriage). Rav Elya bought the orchard to help his son but soon saw that it wasn't worthwhile to keep it. The expenses far exceeded the income. He asked the students to pray that he'd successfully sell it as he was getting older and didn't want to leave this world being in debt.

One student had recently gone into real estate and was approached by a visiting American who was looking to purchase an orchard in Israel. He told him that he knew of one for sale and a meeting was set. On the bus ride to the orchard, Rav Elya tried his hand at 'sales'. "You should know that the Talmud states that if one wants to lose his money he should hire workers and not watch over them. If you'll be in America, it doesn't make sense to buy the orchard." The American nodded his head and didn't say anything. Rav Elya continued, telling him that a number of trees were bad and didn't produce any fruits. The buyer maintained that he was still interested in buying. "There is also an area surrounded by rocks which have stunted the growth of the oranges." The buyer just nodded his head.

Once they reached the orchard, Rav Elya, explaining that seeing was greater than hearing, immediately brought the buyer to see the bad trees. The buyer suddenly looked at his watch, pulled some pills from his pocket and swallowed one. "What is that for?", Rav Elya asked. "Oh it's nothing",

he replied. After several concerned inquiries, he explained to Rav Elya that he had a heart condition for which he needed to take this certain medication every few hours. "With your condition you shouldn't buy it. You won't be here to oversee it and it will cause you aggravation. There is no way that I can sell it to you." He took hold of his hands and gave him a heartfelt blessing for a full and speedy recovery. Despite the buyer's protests, Rav Elya refused to sell it to him.

A Torah-true version of 'sales'. Clarity. Anochi Hashem Elokecha. A case where we can judge Judaism by the Jews. You've got to love such a man.

Have a great Shabbos.

Yisroel Ciner

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The author teaches at [Neveh Tzion](#) in Telzstone (near Yerushalayim).
