

MISHPAT

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

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

The word mishpat means judgment. In Israeli society, a courthouse is called a Bait Mishpat, and any decision rendered there is called a mishpat. In a civilized society, mishpatim are the backbone of everyday life, allowing it to be orderly so that it can also be productive. It is mishpat that keeps the inherent chaos of Creation at bay.

Historically, mishpat has been evolving, at least from a Kabbalistic perspective. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, the Ramchal, wrote in his sefer, Da'as Tevunos:

The first level . . . was the first 2,000 years of chaos, and specifically the exile in Egypt. During that time the Master, may He be blessed, was completely hidden from the world, as if, God forbid, He left the land, and does not see or hear the actions of man. This was considered to be a time when the trait of mishpat did not function in the world at all . . .

That's why, if you look in the Chumash, people got away with murder, literally, for the first 1,656 years of history. By 1656, however, God apparently had had enough of man's abusive behavior, as the Torah testifies, and He lowered the boom with the Great Flood, resetting history.

Still, after the Flood, mankind went back to his erring ways. And after the Jewish people found themselves enslaved in Egypt by 2332 (1429 BCE), they suffered tremendously with no one to protect or save them. Their Egyptian masters, in the meantime, acted with impunity.

The Ramchal continued:

The second level . . . is like current times during which, though there are no prophets or signs and wonders that force a person to acknowledge the greatness and power of God, may He be blessed, there has been revelation and there is some idea of His greatness in the world. There has not been a period of darkness for the Jewish people as there was in Egypt, not before or after it, during which the Jewish people served and there was no Torah. [During that time] the Jewish people had yet to become a distinct nation with their laws and mitzvos, as they are today, and people did not understand the Name of the Master, may He be blessed. Today there is Torah, and therefore, even though we are in exile, it is not considered to be a period of chaos like the first 2,000 years. Torah has already been given from Heaven and we have it now forever, praise the Almighty, may He be blessed, and His Name is known among the nations.

For thousands of year now we have been waiting for the Messianic Era to begin. We have gone through thousands of years of extreme anti-Semitism, and exile, not to mention terrible assimilation and intermarriage. We have even lost 6,000,000 Jews in the most inhumane of ways.

Still, since leaving Egypt, there has been advantage, at least from a historical perspective. The Jewish people have since become a unique nation with Torah and its own laws and commandments. Not only this, the world at large has become aware of God in one way or another, even though it is often in His Name that they persecute and murder His own children.

The third level . . . is when God takes control over the world through miracles and wonders, revealing to the whole world that there is a God among the Jewish people, such as during the periods of the first and second temples. You must know that even this revelation is considered to be an external revelation since it is the result of obvious miracles, without which there would be no faith . . .

In other words, as the Hebrew word for miracle, *neis*, implies, such wonders make known the existence of God in the world and His participation in human history. Even Pharaoh in Egypt, because of the plagues, was forced to acquiesce to a level of Divine Providence that he had previously rejected and to bow to Moshe Rabbeinu's demands of freedom.

When wonders are the basis of *emunah*, or faith in God, it is not real *emunah*. Any *emunah* that is based on wonders will only remain *emunah* as long as the wonders remain as well. Once the wonders cease, even if only momentarily, then the *emunah* ends as well, or it certainly becomes shaky.

Thus though this level of existence is closer to the ideal reality it is by no means the ultimate reality yet. The fourth level, however, is another step closer to what God has in mind for Creation, because it is when:

. . . The Holy One, Blessed is He, reveals Himself to all of His creations intellectually and through Providence, and not through wonders. They will see His Glory, may He be blessed, and grasp it as a function of knowledge and wisdom, as it says, "The land will be filled with knowledge of God like water covers the sea" (Chavakuk 2:14). At that time, it will not be necessary for signs to cause people to have faith . . . there will be no doubt at all.

This, of course, is talking about *Yemos HaMoshiach*, the Messianic Era. As long as belief in God is based upon miracles and wonders, there is room for the *yetzer hara* to rationalize that it is neither, as many scientists, atheists, and agnostics have done. There is room for free will.

However, once the land is filled with knowledge of God, the *yetzer hara* becomes history (Succah 52a). Who will be able to listen to his *yetzer hara* in the Messianic Era, no matter how smart he sounds or how logically he argues? At such a time to follow the *yetzer hara* will seem like suicide, and will be, so, becoming purposeless it will "die," and with it, free will as well.

But that will only be a problem for those who didn't use it well while it was still relevant. Having lost it, they will feel extreme regret at having not used it to better prepare themselves for the worlds coming up, which they will have no choice but to accept as existing. The first flood that eliminated the evil people of history was one of water. This one will be one of knowledge, leading to the fifth and highest level:

... The entire time that His running of Creation and His rulership was not revealed on any other level in a clear intellectual manner, as a function of His Providence, it was considered to be as if His mishpat was not revealed, and His rulership was not established as intended. However, it occurred even a single time when the mishpat becomes known, and from that point onward it is only a matter of adding to it and the elevation of the reality of man and his understanding. These subsequent elevations follow the first revelation because The Holy One, Blessed is He, refines the reality of man, the level of additional revelation of His Glory and greatness, may He be blessed, being based upon the amount of refinement. (Da'as Tevunos, 142, 146, 140-146)

This refers to the next period of history during which the world will undergo tremendous elevation, to an even higher level than it was when man walked the Garden of Eden prior to his sin. As the Talmud says:

The world will exist for 6,000 years, and be destroyed for 1,000 years. (Sanhedrin 97a)

Though this sounds more negative than positive, indeed, like global nuclear destruction, Kabbalah reveals that it is not referring to that. Rather, it is talking about the tremendous spiritual transformation that will occur at 6000 from Creation, 226 years away, causing the physical world as we have known it to become elevated to the point that what existed prior to that time will cease to exist, as if it has been destroyed.

Ever since Creation was first made it has been undergoing refinement. However, until Yemos HaMoshiach, much of that refinement will have been behind the scenes giving the impression on many occasions that just the opposite was occurring.

From Yemos HaMoshiach onward the refinement reveals itself to the whole world. Henceforth, everyday life becomes a process of refinement after refinement as anything associated with falsehood, on any level, is either rectified or eliminated, which depending upon the depth of the attachment to the falsehood.

And, with each new level of spiritual refinement that Creation reaches will come a whole new level of Divine revelation. Whereas Divine revelation on this side of history provides limited pleasure, at that time onward the pleasure of knowing God will become incredible, so overwhelming, Kabbalah explains, that God will have to increase our capacity to enjoy it.

According to the Talmud, the period of Tohu, or chaos, officially came to an end in 2000 (1760 BCE) from Creation. That is when Avraham Avinu turned 52 years of age and began to bring the world under the wings of the Divine Presence.

Four hundred and eighty years later, his descendants, the Jewish people, stood at Mt. Sinai and received Torah, God's mishpat, the greatest game changer of all of history. It transformed the Jewish people into a Mamleches Kohanim, a Kingdom of Priests, and eventually civilized much of the world with paganism giving way to closer versions of monotheism, a big step in the direction of complete world rectification.

All that remains is for God to pull the veil off completely, as the prophet has said He will, in fact, do:

And it shall come to pass on that day that spring water shall come forth from Jerusalem; half of it to the eastern sea, and half of it to the western sea; in summer and in winter it will be. And the Lord will become King over all the earth; on that day will the Lord be One, and His Name One.
(Zechariah 14:9)

Text

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