

LAW BRINGS HOLINESS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Judaism is primarily a society of laws and not of men. It is possibly the first society in human history that stressed the primacy of law over the rule of humans, no matter how righteous and benign that rule may be. In Jewish life, law reigns supreme. Judaism is a religion of halacha. Within that field of halacha there is room for opinion and innovation, but there is no possibility to leave that field and decide matters on the basis of personal whim or set agenda.

The parsha of Mishpatim follows immediately after the parsha that described the giving of the Torah to Israel on Mount Sinai. This juxtaposition is to reinforce this idea of the supremacy of the law in a Torah society. There is no absolute freedom for leaders and rulers to do as they wish, to institute norms that are contrary to the laws and values of the Torah itself. The law of the Torah reigns supreme in Jewish life. There may unfortunately be lawbreakers in Jewish life, just as there are in all societies. But that in no way diminishes the supremacy of Torah law and its discipline on Jews.

It has been this adherence to law instead of to charismatic and even scholastic human leaders, over the ages, that has kept Judaism rooted in its eternal values and able to weather all of the changing vagaries of fashion and current "political correctness." The halacha in all of its divinity from Sinai is the framework for all Jewish existence and survival. Stepping outside the framework of halacha and attempting thereby to create new norms in Jewish life has always led to disappointment and eventually disappearance and disaster, both on a personal and national level.

Mishpatim also teaches us, through the wide variety of subject matter covered in the parsha, that there is no area of human life or society that is not governed and shaped by halacha. Judaism is not restricted to the confines of the synagogue or the study hall. It is rather all-pervasive, touching on all aspects of the human condition, physical moral, societal and spiritual. There is no place in life that is empty of Torah, its laws, wisdom and guidance. Its presence therefore in every nook and cranny of our lives is itself what enables us to enjoy and live a truly *Jewish life*.

The Torah guarantees our right to privacy and our absolute freedom of choice at any given moment and circumstance in our life. Yet the realization that Torah has something to say about this particular circumstance and situation facing us now, itself serves as a background enabling us to make wise and holy choices. God commanded us to "choose life." In that statement is the implicit instruction to follow halacha and to be truly a people of the book -- the law book that halacha represents.

In our Torah blessing we state that the Torah plants within us eternal life. Anyone who follows its

precepts and lives a life in accordance with Torah values and practices will certainly sense that serene sense of eternity present in halacha and Jewish law. Law brings stability to Sinai. Halacha (Jewish law) brings holiness on its wings.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

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