

Parshas Mishpatim

This week's Parsha, Mishpatim, presents the first new laws given to the Jews after the Ten Commandments. The laws begin with the topic of owning a Jewish slave and continue with various "Mishpatim" laws—those that can logically and sensibly be adapted by a functioning society. Although these laws may be easy to understand, they are conveyed to us by Hashem, as every law we follow derives from His command rather than being devised by humans. It is essential to recognize that since everything we do, especially the Mitzvos, is outlined in the Torah, we should ensure we fully immerse ourselves in understanding their significance. Chassidus and the Rebbe, in his Maamer "Kol Yisrael," explain that every Jew is rewarded for performing the deeds found in the Torah, even if they don't identify as Jewish. This is why the Torah's 248 positive and 365 negative commandments are likened to the body's sinews, muscles, and skeleton. The infusion of Mitzvos into our essence connects us to Hashem and vice versa. This power means that every action we take has the potential to change the world for the better, which it indeed does, even on a microscopic level. This is why the Torah is referred to as the lashon of Horaah, as mentioned toward the end of the Parsha in 24:12: "Hashem says to Moshe, come up to Me on the mountain and remain there; I will give you the tablets of stone, and the Torah and the commandments that I have written down to instruct the people..." The word instructs—LeHorasam—is the same as Horaah. This is because the Torah serves

as the guide and instruction manual for how to live in this world, making it a place of higher meaning and space for "La'asos Lo Dirah Bitachtonim," i.e., an abode for Hashem in the lower realm.

Interestingly, in posuk 23:12, the Torah gives the reason for stopping to work on the seventh day. "Six days you may do your work, but on the seventh day, you shall stop, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and you maidservant's son and the foreigner may be refreshed..." This is a source that a net benefit of keeping Shabbos is to rest, literally. But notice how the Posuk is stating what part of society may rest. Whereas a Yid, must keep Shabbos firstly because Hashem said so, secondly, because by doing so you recognize the supreme rulership of Hashem, which is critical, then there are all the Mitzvos of the day which one ought to keep. For a Yid, ideally, it isn't enough to sit back and "rest." There are actions which one must complete to make the day whole. But even if someone doesn't know enough or recognize the day, they "rest" and participate in the Mitzvah of Shabbos. But it is more important not to be an ox or donkey who gets a day off. Shabbos isn't simply a "day off"; it's a day to recognize Hashem, and there is a method by which we can perform this.

Another essential point of the Torah is that it serves as a blueprint for our world. With enough searching, we can uncover references to our lives, essentially acting as an instruction manual. In the Torah, posuk 23:2, Hashem tells us, "You must not follow after the majority to do evil, nor may you respond in a dispute according to the majority opinion to pervert justice..." As I've mentioned numerous times in my writings and weekly Dvar Torah, we can

observe how this law, as many others, is often violated and manifests negatively in our time. To be a hero means doing something courageous and going against all odds to complete a task. A heroic act bends the rules, and while the outcome may be beneficial, the 'hero' must fight against the odds and 'swim against the current,' likely being labelled as crazy and so forth. Due to groupthink, there are 'rules' defining the general population, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. Rashi explains the matter Halachically, in terms of judgments and edicts where disagreements arise among different bodies. There is a world out there that has a substantial volume of people who believe and vilify Jews, especially around Israel. They believe in the plight of terrorists and warmongers, and no matter the evil they perform, they somehow have cognitive dissonance and convince themselves of this evil. The Torah says this can happen in a society by warning us not to subscribe to this behaviour. This means that when we look at society and know something is wrong, even if everything says it's right, don't follow. How do we know what is right and wrong? We use the Torah, our instruction manual, to gauge right from wrong. Lead our lives with the Torah, see the world through the lens of the Torah, and you will know right from wrong and not be swayed by the majority.

This is another reason the Torah begins with seemingly ordinary Mitzvos, particularly the category of Mishpatim, which are viewed as normal in society. It is crucial to recognize that even these originate from Hashem.

Miracles occur every single day, even amidst the hardships and cruelty we face as Jews and alongside our brothers

and sisters in Israel. This past week has been particularly challenging; malevolent actors, intent on destroying every single Jew, publicly displayed their wicked behaviour that would impress even the devil himself with its malevolence. Yet, miracles persist. There were 15 bus bomb plots thwarted and numerous instances where Jews were saved. Each day we awaken, not worse off than we perceive ourselves to be, is a blessing. It offers us an opportunity to recognize the miracles. We are neither owed nor entitled to assume that things will always go our way or that evil will cease to exist. Instead, we must focus on the good we possess. More importantly, we must study the Torah and perform Mitzvot to actively dispel the darkness and reveal the inherent light in everything.

May we have the strength to continue our mission as Jews to dispel the darkness by doing more Mitzvos. May the neshamos of the lost hostages, the Bibas family and Oded Lifshitz, and the soldiers of Israel, men and women taken too early from the evil, be avenged. May those hostages who are alive be blessed with health, safety and security, and may we finally be delivered from this Golus.

Good Shabbos