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Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

Sponsored in memory of Mr. Michael Winokur, Meshulem Zalman ben Yitzchak Leib who passed away on ט"ו טבת

Parsha Summary

In this week's parsha, Parshat Mishpatim, Bnei Yisrael are given many laws in great detail. Many of these laws include topics about slaves, personal injury, loans, and property damage. Towards the end of the parsha, the Torah discusses the preparations Bnei Yisrael made to receive the Torah at Har Sinai.

Rabbi Binyamin Brodman
Rivka Reich ('24)
Amir Rindsberg ('24)
Vicky Tacher ('25)
Gilad Aron ('25)

Great Power, Even Greater Responsibility

Rabbi Binyamin Brodman

This week's parsha is full of mitzvot that relate to civil law and a functioning society. However, the parsha starts with the *sugya* (topic) of *eved ivri*, a Jewish slave. The obvious question is, why would the first mitzvah start with such a strange and archaic concept such as a Jewish slave?

There are many approaches to answering this question, but there is one approach that is life changing. The Sefer HaChinuch says that the root of this mitzvah is really a lesson in how to treat others in their most vulnerable state.

When one has power and influence over others, that power is not a privilege but a responsibility. This in essence is why *eved ivri* is the starting point of civil-law mitzvot. If we internalize this message, the rest of civil law is smooth sailing.

Good Shabbos!

Guarding With Godliness

Rivka Reich ('24)

Parshat Mishpatim is filled with mitzvot and halachot that are in the category of *bein adam l'chavero*, interpersonal. One topic discussed is the halachot of borrowing or paying for someone else's property—specifically the consequences of property being lost or stolen. Using the laws in the pesukim, the Lubavitcher Rebbe offered a model of the "four guardians" as a guide to various approaches to building a relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

The Rebbe used the laws given in the parsha and applied them metaphorically to our *neshama* and its relationship with Hashem. Similar to being the guardian of property, the Rebbe explains we are the guardians of our lives and of this world. It is the role of humans, given by Hashem in creation, to be these guardians:

וַיִּקַּח ה׳ אֱלֹקים אֶת הָאָדָם וַיַּנִּחֵהוּ בְּגַן עֵדֶן לְעָבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ

"Hashem took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it" Bereishit (2:15).

The "four guardians" represent four approaches to life and therefore different relationships with Hashem. If we have the ability to pick how we relate to God, then that means God will respond to us with the same behaviors.

We understand this from the concept of "מידה כנגד מידה", "measure for measure." It is up to us to choose what we want our relationship with God to look like.

The first law mentioned refers to the unpaid guardian, which entails watching or taking care of someone else's property without any compensation or responsibility. This is the idealistic approach, exemplifying the principle of, "I was only created to serve my Creator" (Gemara Kiddushin 82b). In response to this person serving God without any compensation, Hashem will take full responsibility for his life.

Another, less appealing, approach is the borrower, held to the utmost level of responsibility, that must pay for any damages done to the borrowed property. This reflects the approach of acknowledging Hashem is the Creator, yet the borrower's purpose is based on his self interests rather than obligations to God. As a result, his relationship with Hashen will be like a borrower, in which he takes everything for free, but then has to deal with the consequences of taking full responsibility.

Within these two extremes, the paid guardian and the renter occupy the middle of the spectrum. They both feel indebted to God and don't need or want to go through the troubles of life alone. Similar to the unpaid guardian, the paid guardian feels the purpose of life is Hashem's will; however, unlike the unpaid one, he feels deserving of a small portion for his self-interest in return. The renter, similar to the borrower, believes that life is about self-fulfillment, but unlike the borrower, feels he must earn it by correspondingly serving God.

We have the power in each of us to choose what our relationship with Hashem looks like, which also means, scarily, that we choose how Hashem interacts with us. This provides us the great lesson of the importance of self-awareness and knowing what type of relationship is good for us.

Just Do It!

Amir Rindsberg ('24)

This week's parsha, Parshat Mishpatim, is full of *mishpatim*, laws, as the name suggests. It is interesting to note that the Ten Commandments come right before this week's parsha. This seems to imply that before Bnei Yisrael could receive

all the rest of the mitzvot, they had to first receive those ten. Taking it a step further, it can be said that the very first commandment to accept Hashem as our God had to be taken to heart before we could receive any more commandments. So, the question is, why do we need to accept Hashem as God before we can accept any of His commandments? This might seem obvious, but it doesn't really go without saying. When your teacher tells you to do a worksheet, you don't need to accept them as an omnipotent being before you do it. It is just the natural, if not logical, thing to do. However, Hashem doesn't just want us to do what He says; He wants us to do mitzvot out of our love and belief for Him. It is clear that the Jewish People understood this, as they exclaimed, "נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע" – "we will do and we will listen" (Shmot 24:7), meaning that they would not only do what Hashem said, but they would also hear it and try to understand why it is so important.

The question is, do we understand this? How often in our lives do we truly think about Hashem when we, say, turn off our phones before Shabbat? Do we just view this as a natural way of life, or do we understand how incredible it is that God Himself came down to personally tell us to rest for a day and come closer to Him? Good Shabbos!

Holy Humans

Vicky Tacher ('25)

וְאַנְשֵׁי קֹדֶשׁ תִּהְיוּן לִי...

"You shall be holy people to Me…" (Shmot 22:30).

When reading this small quotation from this week's parsha, many questions come to mind. Does the Torah expect more from an individual than they can offer? Does the Torah not take into consideration human nature? Is it possible for us to ever really live up to the lofty expectations and ideals of the Torah? Rabbi Menacham Mendel of Kotzk reflects on these words and gives his explanation. He says that God does not need or want us to be as holy as angels, he wants the holiness of mankind.

Now that we know that God doesn't expect us to be angels, we have to figure out what the holiness of mankind is. One aspect to a person's holiness is their uniqueness and ability to be uplifted. To achieve these goals, one must have control over their life while also having a healthy amount of fun. The Torah never forbade us from enjoying the material world, as long as we use the physical world to get closer to God. The issue begins when we become fully dependent on the material world. This is when we lower ourselves and lose control of our lives. If we have a higher goal, and use not only our spirituality but our physicality to reach it, we have reached holiness.

This week's parsha contains a lot about the laws for physical things: lending money, responsibilities toward the poor, responsibilities of renters and borrowers, damages, personal injury, and many more. This just further proves what we have been talking about. We need to use our physicality for a higher purpose, as a means to an end.

So as you can see, keeping the Torah is not out of reach because God doesn't expect us to be angels. He expects us to be holy humans. By learning with the intent to grow and become better, we can fulfill God's words: " You shall be holy people to Me…."

Matan Torah X2

Gilad Aron ('25)

The events of Matan Torah are described in back-to-back parshiyot, Yitro and Mishpatim. Obviously, this is for a reason, but what is that reason? The giving of the Torah at Har Sinai accomplished two things: First, Hashem gave His commandments and laws to the Jewish people. Second, the Jews now had a covenant with Hashem and were now subjugated towards God.

This is where we can note the differences between the aspect of Matan Torah described in Parshat Yitro and the aspect of Matan Torah described in Parshat Mishpatim.

Parshat Yitro focuses mainly on Hashem giving us the *aseret hadibrot*. This is why the Jewish peoples' preparation for Matan Torah stems from obeying the commands Hashem gave them. However, Parshat Mishpatim is dealing with the covenant and servitude the Jews have with and for Hashem. This came about through the events described in this parsha: the Jewish people's acceptance of the Torah and their writing of the "Book of the Covenant."

There is one more profound approach to the differences between these two aspects of Matan Torah. Matan Torah accomplished two things: those from above descended below and those below ascended above. The difference between these two aspects of Matan Torah is this: the tremendous degree of Divine revelation that descended from above at the time of Matan Torah was temporary; the ascent of the Jewish people, however, and becoming God's servants and thereby becoming spiritually elevated are permanent.



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