

L'Chaim! Weekly



פרשת משפטים, א אדר א' תשפ"ד

PARSHAS MISHPATIM

9-10 February 2024 - 1 Adar 15784

TIMES FOR SYDNEY

Candle Lighting: 7.36 pm

Shabbat Ends: 8.33 pm



Living with the Rebbe



In last week's Torah portion, we learned about the Revelation on Mount Sinai. This week, in Mishpatim, the text begins by delineating some of the practical laws which the Torah contains. The first subject dealt with is a Hebrew servant. This pertains to a Jew who was sold into servitude by the courts in order to make restitution for stealing, or one who sells himself due to his great poverty.

At first glance, it seems odd that the Torah would begin with this subject first. After all, in the generation of Jews who left Egypt, there were no Hebrew servants! The Children of Israel had no poor people who had to sell themselves into slavery. And even if there were those who succumbed and actually stole something, they were all sufficiently wealthy to be able to pay back the rightful owner twice as prescribed by Torah law. Why then does the Torah choose precisely this subject to begin the portion dealing with practical commandments?

The section on the Hebrew servant, more than any other commandment, illustrates the effect the Revelation on Mount Sinai had on this world. With this mitzva, we see a direct cause and effect between the sin and its punishment. If a Hebrew slave does not desire to be freed after six years of servitude, his punishment is "and his master should bore his ear through with an awl."

The commentator Rashi explains that this ear, which heard the prohibition uttered on Mount Sinai against stealing and committed thievery anyway, deserves to be bored through. This ear, which heard G-d declare that the Jewish people are His servants alone--yet wants to remain a slave to a human master--deserves to be pierced.

In many instances of Torah law, we do not find such a direct cause and effect between a wrongdoing and its rectification. For example, the Torah promises that the reward for honoring one's parents is longevity, but we don't always perceive this connection. However, the penalty for a Hebrew slave who refuses to be set free is one instance in which the punishment is an obvious consequence of the actions.

When the Torah was given it enabled the spiritual and physical world to influence each other. Prior to that time, the spiritual and material realms each remained isolated and distinct. The Hebrew slave is an example to illustrate this innovation, for his spiritual defect found a physical expression, one which could be seen by all. Furthermore, Chasidic philosophy explains that the Hebrew bondsman also symbolizes man's obligation to subjugate his baser instincts and desires in the service of G-d. After the Revelation, the road to spirituality is paved by our properly utilizing physical reality in the service of holiness.

Adapted from the teachings of the Rebbe.

The Power of Kindness



Half a year ago, Yehuda, a devout Haredi man from Bnei Brak, encountered a secular family in need on Highway 1 to Jerusalem. Their car had run out of gas, leaving them stranded with hazard lights flashing. Yehuda, moved by compassion, stopped to assist. After offering to fetch gas from Motza, he returned promptly, refusing payment for his help, citing it as a mitzvah, a good deed.

The secular man, surprised by Yehuda's refusal to accept payment, felt compelled to share a personal revelation. He showed Yehuda an old bumper sticker on his car with a derogatory message towards religious individuals, expressing embarrassment and a desire to remove it. Yehuda reassured him, expressing understanding of such attitudes. Their interaction didn't end there.

Yehuda called the next day to ensure the family had reached their destination safely. This gesture of care marked the beginning of a weekly tradition where Yehuda shared meaningful stories for the secular man to pass on to his son during Shabbat.

As their friendship blossomed, Yehuda extended an unexpected invitation for the secular family to experience Shabbat in Bnei Brak. Despite initial hesitations, the family accepted, seeing it as an opportunity for cultural exchange. However, scheduling their visit posed challenges. Yehuda wanted to ensure their comfort and avoid inconveniencing his family or disrupting their traditions. Eventually, they settled on Shabbat Simchat Torah.

continued inside

SLICE OF LIFE

Fans, Players, and the WWII General

BY DOVID ZAKLIKOWSKI

The last trolley of the evening rolled by as a jolly young Shimshon Stock ushered a close acquaintance and his soon-to-be-Bar-Mitzvahed son into the synagogue at 770 Eastern Parkway.

Inside "770," as Lubavitch headquarters is known, was the study and office of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who a few years earlier had accepted the leadership of this small Chassidic community.

At the time, the Rebbe had only a handful of representatives scattered across Israel, America, Europe and North Africa; but he was already relentlessly and tirelessly building a global network of communities.

Shimshon introduced his friend and his friend's son to the Rebbe, who greeted them with his comforting and warm handshake, requesting them to please take a seat.

The Rebbe briefly blessed the boy that he should grow to become a source of pride to the Jewish people and to his family. As they turned to leave, The Rebbe surprised the three Americans with the question he addressed to the youngster: "Are you a baseball fan?"

The Bar-Mitzvah boy replied that he was. "Which team are you a fan of — the Yankees or the Dodgers?"

"The Dodgers", replied the boy. "Does your father have the same feeling for the Dodgers as you have?" "No."

"Does he take you out to games?" "Well, every once in a while my father takes me to a game. We were at a game a month ago." "How was the game?" "It was disappointing, the 13-year-old confessed. By the sixth inning, the Dodgers were losing nine-to-two, so we decided to leave."

"Did the players also leave the game when you left?" "Rabbi, the players can't leave in the middle of the game!"

"Why not?" asked the Rebbe. "Explain to me how this works." "There are players and fans", the baseball fan explained. "The fans can leave when they like — they're not part of the game and the game could, and does, continue after they leave. But the players need to stay and try to win until the game is over."

"That is the lesson I want to teach you in Judaism," said the Rebbe with a smile. "You can be either a fan or a player. Be a player."

Outside 770 father and son said goodbye to Shimshon, the three now sharing a new admiration of a pioneer in Jewish education.

GENERAL WALKS IN ON JEWISH SOLDIER

Shortly after World War II began, 18-year-old Mottel Chaiton was drafted into the Canadian army. During the next three years, he was stationed first in Halifax, Nova Scotia, then in Ottawa, Ontario.

Once the family heard he was sick and went to visit him. When they arrived at the army base and asked for Chaiton, the soldiers told them, "He is our rabbi," and proceeded to relate how he had earned the title.

On Sundays, the soldiers were required to attend church, and Mottel had asked that he and the other Jewish soldiers be excused, saying that he would arrange Jewish services for them.

When the clergyman objected that there was no Jewish chaplain, Mottel replied, "We don't need one. We can make our own."

From then on, Mottel organized Shabbat prayer whenever possible. He would lead the prayers and read from the Torah.

His brother Aaron Chaiton was the first boy in the family to attend a yeshiva



when, in 1941, the Lubavitch Yeshiva opened in Montreal. At the age of 12, Aaron went to New York to study at 770 Eastern Parkway, Chabad Headquarters. Mottel, who had then just begun his army service, requested leave to go to New York and help his younger brother get settled and purchase a pair of tefillin for him.

While there, Mottel had a private audience with Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneerson, the sixth Chabad Rebbe. He asked for a blessing that all his friends should remain safe and return unharmed from the war, and the Rebbe gave his blessing, adding that he should tell his friends not to do any unnecessary prohibited actions on the Shabbat, such as smoking and sewing.

Back at the base, Mottel was asked to be the assistant to the commanding officer, General Perterson. One of his duties was to wake the general each morning at a certain time, for which purpose he slept in a room close to the general's.

Mottel himself would wake up much earlier to put on tefillin and pray. Once, General Perterson woke up early, and, knocking on Mottel's door, strode into the room to find him in the middle of his prayers. Immediately, he turned and left without saying a word.

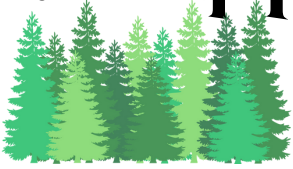
When he reported for duty that day at nine o'clock, the general asked him to come into his office and close the door behind him. Mottel walked in with a sinking heart, certain that he was about to be disciplined.

"Chaiton," the general said, "don't ever let me disturb your prayers again!"

"At that moment," Mottel said later, he saw what it says in the Talmud, "When the nations will see you with tefillin on your head, they will fear you."

Dovid Zaklikowski is an archivist, researcher and biographer, many of his books can be purchased at HasidicArchives.com or on Amazon. He can be reached at dovidzak@gmail.com

It Happened Once



In a small village in Poland there lived an unassuming and pious Jew named Meir. While he was by no means well-to-do, his family never wanted for their daily bread. Each day on his way home from the synagogue Meir passed through the farmers' market, buying produce and poultry which his wife sold from a small store attached to their house. The prices were always fair, and they earned a reputation for honesty.

Meir stood out from the other buyers at the market, for he would never haggle over prices. Meir had his one fair price, and that was that—he would never budge. Eventually the farmers came to respect him and would even seek him out when they had some special goods for sale, and he became known to everyone as "Honest Meir."

Meir had only one regret in life—his business took time away from his beloved Torah study. One day he decided that he would work only half as much, and spend the time saved learning Torah. His wife was worried by his decision, but he calmed her saying, "Don't you think that G-d can send us enough in those three days?" She wanted to reply that of course He could, but would He? But she stopped herself and decided to wait and see what would happen. As it turned out, their income was the same and her husband thrived on his Torah learning.

One day his wife came to Meir to discuss the marriage of their daughter, Mirele. "G-d has been good to us, and we must certainly be grateful, but our daughter isn't getting any younger, and the time has come for us to start saving for her dowry." Meir looked at his wife and replied, "G-d has taken care of us so far. Trust in Him and stop worrying." But his wife couldn't rest. "Meir, we aren't supposed to rely on miracles. Maybe you should go out and work like you used to."

Meir replied, "What you're saying may seem true, but don't forget my 'silent partner'—G-d. Haven't you seen with your own eyes that since I've spent extra time with my 'partner' we have lost nothing. I can not stop my Torah studies, especially now when we need Him even more." There was nothing more his wife could say except a heartfelt "Amen." A short time later a peasant showed up at the marketplace with a large honeycomb encased in a block of wood. Several prospective buyers will sell only to Honest Meir." And there he sat and waited until finally, late in the afternoon someone told him that Meir wouldn't be coming to market that day.

The peasant made his way to Meir's house where he was greeted by his wife. "My husband isn't at home now," she told him, but she asked him to wait while she ran to fetch her husband. Meir measured the honeycomb and lifted it; then he made his offer, "Judging by its size and weight, and even allowing for the wood, there should be a lot of

honey in it." The two men agreed on a figure which seemed fair to both. The only problem was that Meir didn't have such a large sum. Meir's wife interrupted, saying: "I will try to borrow the money from some of our neighbors." Meir served the peasant a cup of tea, and then he questioned the man: "Tell me, how did you come to have such a strange honeycomb?"

The peasant replied, "I was walking through the woods collecting fire-wood. When my cart was full, I got inside and fell asleep, but it seems that my mare wandered a bit, for when I awoke, I found myself in a different part of the woods, in front of a tree stump. Looking up, I noticed bees buzzing, and being something of a beekeeper myself, I hopped out of my cart and with a long thin twig I removed the queen bee from the hive. I tried to take out the honeycomb, but it was impossible to do so without breaking it. That's when I got the idea of sawing off the stump."

By the time the peasant had finished his tale, Meir's wife had returned with the money. Meir gave it to the happy peasant who went off feeling very pleased. Meir's wife began to extract the honey. She pulled out two and then three heavily laden honeycombs and reached in with a deep ladle for more, when she found there was nothing there but a deep, empty hole. The poor woman was horrified. They were now in debt, and for nothing but a bit of honey and a piece of wood!

She screamed for her husband, who was equally shocked at the find. "What will we do now?" his wife wailed. Meir was also at a loss, but not willing to give up he said, "Go fetch your longest cooking spoon and maybe we can salvage something from the bottom."

Meir dipped the spoon into the wooden cavity, and lo and behold, the spoon was filled with a pile of golden coins and jewels! His wife almost fainted from the shock, but when she recovered she asked her husband, "Do you think G-d had the bees produce this treasure for us?"

Her husband turned to her, smiling, "Possibly, but I think there's a simpler explanation. Probably someone hid this treasure years ago and had to abandon it for some reason. Then the bee colony settled in the trees stump and built their hive on top of the treasure. Now, it seems that G-d must have decided there was no longer any reason to leave it hidden since we need the money to marry off our children and do other good things. So, you see, the peasant was rewarded for his labor, and we were even more richly rewarded for our faith and trust in G-d."

Smile, it's Shabbos!



A climber fell off a cliff, and, as he tumbled down, he caught hold of a small branch.

"Help! Is there anybody up there?" he shouted.

A majestic voice boomed through the gorge: "I will help you, my son, but first you must prove your faith in me."

"Yes, yes, I trust you!", cried the man.

"Let go of the branch", boomed the voice.

There was a long pause, and the man shouted up again, "Is there anybody else up there?"

Silence is an Opportunity

By Rabbi Aron Moss

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

I am upset at my work colleagues. Ever since the atrocities on October 7, they have not said a word to me about it. They know I'm Jewish, and yet not one of them has reached out to acknowledge my pain. The silence hurts more than anything. How do I cope with this? Confront them or let it go?

ANSWER

Silence can have many meanings. It may be malicious. But more likely it's coming from cluelessness.

Your colleagues may genuinely have no idea what you are going through now. How can anyone else understand how personally we take events happening so far away? No other nation is interconnected the way Jews are.

If someone's grandparents were Irish, they don't necessarily feel a profound connection with events going on in Ireland. But a Jew who never lived in Israel will nevertheless feel the pain of events happening now in Israel, as if it's happening to your own family. Because it is.

The Jewish people are one family. Even deeper than that, the Jewish people are one soul. When one part hurts, the whole body feels it. This is one of the unique elements to being Jewish.

Another uniqueness of being Jewish is that we were born to lead. Israel is fighting a war against an evil ideology that aims to take over the world. Their hatred is aimed at Israel, but their sights are on global domination. Whether the world sees it or not, Israel is leading the fight for all good people.

Maybe you need to take the lead too. Don't wait for your work colleagues to come to you, rather you approach them. Their silence is an opportunity. The world is looking to the Jews for direction, not the other way around.

You are Israel's voice. Speak up. Share the truth. This is our moment.

Good Shabbos

continued from front

Their decision actually saved their lives. On that very day, the secular family's home in Kibbutz Be'eri was engulfed in flames, yet they were safe in Bnei Brak. This singular act of kindness, amidst broader conflict, underscored the transformative power of empathy and compassion.

As they reflected on their shared experience, it sparked a deeper understanding of the importance of kindness in the face of adversity. It served as a poignant reminder that amidst the turmoil of the world, small acts of compassion can make a profound difference.



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