

Session 82

Mishpatim – The Quest For Truth

30 January 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZIG21W52pA8>

Ari

Shalom my friends! I've been waiting to hear those first words out of my mouth to see how they come out. I have to admit, I'm pretty grateful. This is the best my voice has been so far. And you know, the fact that we're meeting today is really a testimony to how much I miss all of you and love all of you because I mean the truth is, I'm actually feeling ok right now. A little bit weak, but really fine. But it does hurt to talk and depending on the last time that I sneeze or cough, my voice can go anywhere from being totally gone to actually being decent, like just raspy, but ok. Although, I'll say that within the last hour, my self-trials have been at their best. But I'm wasting all of my words talking about my words which is a big waste of time. So anyway, so I prayed that HaShem would really give me the ability to speak and share my heart with you. And I said that despite not having my full focus or energy, I'm going to prepare for this fellowship with all that I have and if I'm blessed to deliver it then great. And if not, I'll accept that, too. But I'm just going to do my part and I'm grateful because I think I'm going to get through this thing.

Hi Cal, hi Ardelle, Judy, Nancy, Rhonda, Joanne, Rick, oy, I've really missed you guys. I really, really have. I can't wait for the next fellowship connection. But anyways, before we go into anything, I want to start with that which is really on the front and center in my mind and that is Jeremy. Because in the 20 plus years of friendship that we've had, I've never seen him this sick. I'm really concerned. It's scary to see him like this. I know we talk about fear being idolatry and that everything's in HaShem's hands and that's true, but what can I say? You know, we're still people and it's scary to see him like this. And while Tehila, she's strong as a rock, especially when she needs to be, I can tell she's concerned as well. You know, we all are. And he says that it's not all in his lungs, but it's in his body, and we're not really sure what "it" even is. Maybe a different variant? He said that his entire body has excruciating waves of pain and chills and sweats. Tehila said he's changing his clothes like every hour. They're just drenched in sweat. Anyways, I'm going into too many details. But I thought we could start off with a prayer for Jeremy, as well as a couple others. I know so many of you have sent in your prayer requests and forgive me that we're not going to get to all of them right now, this fellowship.

But I just found out this morning that our beloved friend and our greatest secret weapon here, Tabitha, without her we can't do any of this. Well, we just found that she has Corona as well. Her whole family does. She does have symptoms, but thank you, HaShem, they are not anything like Jeremy's. And may they stay that way. But despite all of that, she is actually running the show right now. So, thank you, Tabitha. And we'll pray for Tabitha as well. And one more and again, I'm just sorry we're not going into everybody, but we just learned that our

beloved friend, Harold from Germany was diagnosed with cancer. And he's such a righteous and holy and beloved friend. And he just had an operation, really, it was quite a quick operation to have. And he'll have another one next week, but Bridgett just told us that you know, their updates and please God, the hand of the surgeon will remove the cancerous tissue with a laser-like precision. And he'll be fully healed. So let's just pray for all of them. And for all those sick people in this fellowship and your families and all the Jewish people and really the world.

HaShem, Abba, You blessed our ancestors, Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leia. Bless and heal Yirmeyahu Benyamin ben Liora; Channah bat Miriam Channah, that's Tabitha; Harold the son of Christa Chanak; and all the other sick people in Israel and in this fellowship. HaShem, may You be filled with compassion and restore their health and their strength fully. May You give them a complete and full recovery of body and of spirit. Please heal them and heal the sick of Israel and of this fellowship and all of mankind. The world needs a healing right now, Hashem. Please shine Your light of love and blessing and healing on all of us and bring us Mashiach Tzadekeinu. Please, HaShem, let it be soon. Amen.

Forgive me, I'm going to be drinking a lot during this fellowship. This is some hot tea someone in the fellowship sent me the recipe, ginger and honey. Anyways, thank you for praying with me. And you know, I wanted to start that way just in case my voice ran out because I don't know how long my voice is going to last. And I wanted to make sure that we all prayed together. And I want to apologize for not responding to all those messages that have been sent to me. I'm so sorry, it really weighs on me and you all deserve responses and I really wish I was better and I won't stop trying to be. But please know that I read them all and I pray for every single one of you right there and then on the spot. So yeah, I didn't know how long the voice thing would last. I didn't know that I'd be struggling like this until now, but it's been challenging. But you guys know me, I'm a talker and my voice is my vehicle of expression and I'm like a soldier without a weapon here. Abramowitz's are known as talkers so not being able to speak has been a real challenge.

But you know, like with everything in our lives, when we recognize that it's not by an accident and that there's no such thing as coincidence and everything is for our good and our benefit, then we're able to look within at that which we're experiencing and enduring and see. And try to figure out, you know, what Hashem may be telling us and try to understand it intellectually that whatever Hashem, that whatever ideas we may have, to try to understand it in our brains of why this is happening to us and then we run those ideas by our hearts and see whether it resonates as true and whether it feels right on the deepest level. And so, I approached this fellowship not knowing how many words I would have and really trying to prioritize what I really, really wanted to say.

And I realized that that was part of the message I believe Hashem is telling me. That we have limited words in this world and what are we going to say with those words? And what ideas do we want to express? And which are less important, which could we leave out? Which are maybe filled with some negativity that don't need to be expressed, there's enough negativity out there. Because this is a finite world. We have finite time and finite words and we don't know when that time of those words will end. So we should give serious consideration with how we want to spend those time and use those words.

And so that being said, with limited words, I want to try to share what I believe is the essence of this Torah portion of Mishpatim. But before I do, allow me to introduce one of our greatest sources of wisdom and inspiration from the fellowship. Someone who would be quite reasonable to assume would not be sharing with us right now because you know, she's nursing her holy husband back to health. But even with all the challenges, she rose to the occasion and she's here with us to share her very special and uplifting wisdom. So here you are, Tehila Gimpel.

Tehila

Hey everyone. So this week, we're making a sharp turn into the law. So, up until now we've received some mitzvot, some commandments, but always in the context of the story of the Torah. We learned about circumcision from the story of Abraham, we learned about commemorating the exodus while it was happening on the first night of the seder in Egypt. We received commandments in the story of the revelation of Sinai but now, boom! Just straight up laws. No story, no context, laws. And a lot of them. Ten percent of all the laws of the Torah are concentrated in this one portion. And certainly since many of the laws in the Torah are about the Temple service and the holidays. In the social commandments department and the interpersonal commandments? We are really, really concentrated here in the portion of Mishpatim.

So, the fact that we're moving to this kind of text is really interesting. I think it shows a maturation process of Israel. You know, a child needs laws and rules in story form. I was trying to study the Torah portion on Friday night with our son Noam, who's six. It was really much harder than teaching him the stories of the past portions, with the plagues and the splitting of the seas. Now, I need to turn each verse into a story for him to understand it. You know, when it says, don't take bribes, I like have to make up a story about a bribe so that he can even understand what that means. It's a higher level of maturity to be able to be able to understand abstract rules separate from any kind of narrative context. So now as a free people, the Israelites are expected to be more mature. Not just getting ad hoc commandments as the story unfolds, but you're establishing a free society, here are the rules.

Now what's really interesting is that they were slaves and now they've just been freed. They're getting the laws as free people, pretty much for the first time, set out for them after the big

revelation of the Ten Commandments, and the actual law book of day-to-day life. What is the first rule that these free people get? The laws of slavery. Well that's kind of hilarious. It's like, hey, you're free. Here's what to do if you become a slave. Now what's super interesting is that...and you would probably only notice this if you read the Haftara, the portion from the book of the prophets that the sages said should be read after reading the Torah portion, you see that the law of slavery was not only the opening of the Jewish story as a free people, it was actually the closing. The last law discussed and ultimately broken by the Jewish people in the Land during the first Temple period, during our first commonwealth before the exile, you can see in Jeremiah chapter 34.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, after King Zedekiah made a covenant with the people who were in Jerusalem to proclaim freedom to them that every man should let his manservant and every man his maidservant, a Jew and a Jewess go free and none should hold his Jewish brother as a slave.

So, we're in the end of the First Temple. The Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians are starting to fight against Jerusalem, and it would seem that the king is encouraging people to repent, to free their slaves. Meaning they hadn't been following the Torah law of periodically freeing your slaves and now he says, "Free your slaves." In verse 10 in chapter 34 it says, "Now all the princes and all the people who had entered into the covenant hearkened. That everyone should let his manservant and everyone let his maidservant go free. No longer holding them in slavery and they obeyed and let them go."

So, there's this beautiful moment in the end of the 2nd Temple where they feel like the end is near and the King says, "Let your slaves go. HaShem doesn't want you to be holding on to your slaves." And they do it. That could be a really nice story right? But it's not. Because then comes verse 11, "afterwards they turn and brought back the manservants and the maidservants whom they had let free and forcibly made them into manservants and maidservants."

So people had like this moment of awakening to follow the laws of the Torah and free their slaves. But then they were like, "oh no, we don't have our slaves anymore." It's kind of Pharaoh-like, right? Like their hearts got re-hardened and they forced their slaves back into slavery. So they had this like moment of repenting and they broke it. So this is like the last story of the Jewish people living in the Land, is that they couldn't manage to follow this first rule that was given to them in their first moments of freedom. And how does HaShem respond to that? In verse 12 it says, "The Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, 'So says the Lord God of Israel. I made a covenant with your fathers. On the day I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves. Say, at the end of seven years, you shall let go every man his brother. Every Jew who has been sold to you and when he has served you for six years, you shall let him go free.'"

It's so interesting, HaShem through Jeremiah is saying this law that was your first law that I gave you right when you came out of Egypt, that's not just any other law. That was a covenant. That was really fundamental. And then he says, "But your forefathers did not obey me, nor did they incline their ears and now this day, you turned and did what was right in My sight by proclaiming liberty, every man to his neighbor. And you made a covenant before Me in the house upon which My Name is called." He goes, "I was so happy. Your forefathers didn't follow this first law that I gave them in the Torah in the parshah of Mishpatim. They didn't follow it, but you started to follow it. I was so happy."

And then verse 16, "But you turned and profaned My Name and you took back each man his manservant and each man his maidservant whom you had let free to themselves and forced them to be your manservants and maidservants to you. You didn't keep up with that repentance that you had done."

And so what is HaShem's response to that? How does HaShem respond to them breaking this rule? In verse 22 He says, "Behold I command," says the Lord, "I will return them to this city and they shall fight against it and capture it," meaning He had taken Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians and started to send them away. They had stopped attacking Jerusalem. He goes, "You stopped repenting. They're going to come back. They will fight against it and recapture it. They will capture it and burn it with fire in the cities of Judah. I will make desolate without an inhabitant." Meaning the final decision by Hashem to send us into exile, that last bit of credit line that we still had with HaShem, when we took back those slaves and we didn't keep that first rule, that sealed our destruction.

So this rule isn't just a rule, it is so fundamental, it is the first thing and it is the last thing. Like if you looked at our first commonwealth, the opening rule, let's say you started at Sinai, we get the commandments, now we're a people, the first rule that we get is to keep the laws of freeing our slaves and the last rule we break, it ends with our destruction. So, it's like these two bookends that seems to indicate that there's something really deep hidden in these laws. So, on the first level, I would suggest that the primary message here in the laws of slavery. The primary message is the primacy of freedom. The Torah says, you know, it's a funny thing, it seems funny to teach people the law of slavery as the first rule as free people when stop being slaves, but if you look closely at the laws, it's actually ironic to even call them the laws of slavery. They would probably be more aptly called the laws of freedom. Because the Torah says the slave is freed after six years, that's not really a slave, is it? And throughout the laws here and elsewhere in the Torah, you see you can't hurt your slave, you can't beat your slave, you can't torture them, you can't make them do difficult work, degrading work. Once you get into the Oral Law, it almost gets to the point of absurdity. In the Talmud and the Tractate of Kadushi, it says that someone who buys his brother as a slave, it is as if he bought himself a master. Because the laws are so exacting that it sounds more exhausting to properly have a slave than to not have a slave. If you read the first chapter of Maimonides summarizing the

laws of having a slave, you're not even allowed to see yourself into slavery unless you like seriously having nothing to eat or if the court sold you due to you know, having stolen and you developed a debt because you know, you were a thief.

And even if you are sold into slavery, it's temporary and it's really more like rehabilitation than anything else. You take a criminal instead of the modern system of putting somebody in jail where they just spend time with other criminals learning to be better criminals, the Torah puts the criminal with a normative Torah-observant family to actually become a better person, to have good examples and even then the slave owner isn't allowed to give himself even better accommodations than his slave. The rules are that if you have a comfy bed, the slave has to get an equally comfy bed.

So the real message here that the Torah is teaching us is not about how to have a slave, but how it's not really possible to have a slave. The Torah makes slavery so "unslavery" that you will internalize that freedom is paramount because freedom is the prerequisite to actually being able to choose to be a servant of HaShem.

So that's pretty cool. But here's the thing. As I was reading these verses and pondering just how awesome the Torah is, I wanted to see like just how cool it is. I want to know like, is it really that cool? So there's something that I like to do and I know this isn't so Orthodox or traditional, but I do think it's so important, is to compare the laws of the Torah to the laws and other ancient legal codes. Now I know it's not Orthodox and some people shift kind of uncomfortably in their chairs when they hear similarities between the Torah and other ancient legal codes in the Mesopotamian world. Jeremy's always like, isn't there enough Talmud for you to learn that you need to go learning ancient Babylonian legal codes, Tehila?

But here's the thing. The Israelites that received the Torah, they were real people and they lived in a real reality and in that reality, they were surely aware of the accepted norms in society around them. So the Torah, while it's of course eternal wisdom that speaks to us, it was also given in a real time trying to teach them, trying to change a perspective of how people looked at things. It would be like if in a thousand years somebody would watch all of our fellowship videos without knowing anything about what secular life is like in the year 2022. You wouldn't understand what we're dealing with. What are the influences that our families are up against in the outside world? And if you don't understand that, then you might not really understand what we're talking about and what we're trying to change in ourselves and in our families and in our communities. So, I think it's critical to understand the context that the Torah was given in. In order to understand what the Torah was adding and bringing new into the world.

So now, I went to check the Laws of Hammurabi on slaves. Now Hammurabi was the ancient Babylonian king who wrote his law code that was then copied in different forms all over the

ancient world. And Mesopotamia in the near east and even down to Egypt. So anyone living in the ancient world, anywhere in the fertile crescent and even throughout Egypt, anybody living then would have had a certain baseline of what they considered to be normative, accepted law. What was like the general framework of the default of what would be normal law. So that's really interesting to know because when the Torah is giving us laws, it's speaking to people who grew up with that, you know, existing background of what is normal law.

So I opened up and I'm ready to think, oh, that idolatrous world, oh, it's going to be bad. And we're going to see what the Bible did and we're going to just see how the Torah gave people so much freedom. And then I open it up and I see Law 117 Hammurabi, if a man is in debt and sells his wife's son or daughter or binds them over to service, for three years they shall work in the house of their purchaser or master and in the 4th year they shall be given their freedom. Hold on! I literally rubbed my eyes when I read that. The ancient idolaters were freeing slaves after three years and the Torah waits six years? Now of course the Hammurabi Laws don't give all the protection to slaves. On the contrary, you are allowed to abuse your slave, but still, how could it be that they get their freedom sooner than a slave according to the Torah? It really bothered me. How could it be that the Torah is less kind, less progressive?

I went to sleep and I don't know if this happens to you guys, but this happens to me sometimes. When something is pestering me, my brain kind of works it out while I was sleeping. In my dream, I'm reading and re-reading this. And I realized, "Oh my God, the interesting part is not the end of law in 117 where it says that the slave is freed after three years. It's in the beginning." I'll read it again. It says, "if a man is in debt and sells his wife or son or daughter, for three years they shall work." Meaning, the premise is so different. The premise in the ancient world is that if you had a debt, your go-to plan, your first assumption is that you would sell your wife or child to pay back the debt. So, the first principle that the Torah gives us is that if you are in debt, even if you have to stay in slavery twice as long, six years instead of three, maybe you can get a better price for your daughter, a better price for your wife, a better price for your son. The first principle is that you take responsibility for what you've done wrong. You stole, you got into debt, you pay the price. You don't see your child, you don't see your wife.

The very next verse of the Torah says, that if he comes into slavery with a wife and children, they go out with him. Meaning if you didn't get the point, the Torah is emphasizing that the buyer has no right to keep the wife and children of the slave that he buys. And furthermore, you don't stop being a husband and stop being a father when you're a slave. Your family comes with you and maybe that is the new idea that the Torah is bringing into the world.

I shared this idea with Ari and Shaena on Shabbat. And then Ari asked me, "Well what about the next verse after that that talks about selling your daughter?" I said, "Yes, that is true, but you have to look at it carefully. Verse 7 in chapter 21 specifically says you do not treat a girl that you sell as a slave. You're only allowed to give your daughter as a wife. So someone who's

in debt can marry off his daughter in return for help with his debt. But the Torah goes out of its way to clarify that she will not be treated as a slave, but as a full-fledged wife with all the rights that come with being a wife. And if she is not treated like a proper wife, but like a slave, that she automatically goes free. Meaning you cannot sell your child into actual slavery in order to pay back your debts. And you cannot sell your wife.

Maimonides in a Summary of the Law of Slaves clarifies this is really fundamental. Only the guilty person who created his debt, you know, through some sort of crime like theft, can be sold into slavery for his debt. No one else instead of him. So, if you look at this law closely, not only does the Torah Law teach us about the fundamental importance of the freedom of every individual, but something even deeper. That the first characteristic of being a free person is taking personal responsibility. And this is so important because the Israelites are coming as slaves. When you're a victim, there are two ways of approaching life. Everyone knows that victims are often the future abusers. People who are abused as children are at the highest risk of abusing their own children. But on the other hand, some of the most amazing people I know are the people who've been through horrible things and they turned around and because of what they experienced, they built off of their own suffering to be extraordinarily caring and empathetic, specifically because of what they experienced.

So the Israelites came out of the torture of Egypt and the Torah recognizes that they are high risk people of becoming tyrannizers themselves. We might tyrannize our own slaves and we might tyrannize our spouses and our children and sell them into slavery. We might live in a way that shirks responsibility for our actions instead of taking responsibility for them. So the Torah preempts and starts by teaching us the first principle and going over again and again in the parsha. It says that you have to be kind to the stranger because you were a stranger in Egypt. You had to take your experience. Don't become a tyrannizer because you were tyrannized, but become a kind person who takes responsibility and worries about the freedom of others because you were tyrannized in Egypt. And if we can keep that in mind, then we deserve to be a free people. And if we lose sight of that, like what happened in the book of Jeremiah, then we lose our privilege to be a free people in our Land.

So with that, I wish everybody a beautiful, inspired week. Bye everyone.

Ari

How great was that? She's just so good, thank you so much, Tehila. You know, if you could, it's really best to watch Tehila on at least, on .5 speed. You know, at least like for most moral people. You know, I was actually discussing with her over Shabbat and Tehila was telling Shaena and I about the comparison that she was doing to the Hammurabi Code and by the way you have to understand, Tehila isn't only a lawyer professionally, she's like a lawyer in her very essence. I don't think in over 20 years of being friends with Tehila, that I've ever once beaten her in an argument. I mean the proof is that I'm paying for her chickens that she really should

have kept in a chicken coop. but she destroyed me in that whole argument. Anyways, we're not going to get into that whole battle parsha again.

But I encountered a different concept about the Code of Hammurabi that was also connected to the parsha that I think would a little bit further on what Tehila was saying. So the Code of Hammurabi, right, it says, "An eye for an eye," but it talks about when someone gouges out the eye of someone else. So if you gouge out the eyes of a commoner, according to the Code of Hammurabi, that was punished with a financial fine. But if you gouged out the eyes of a nobleman, well that was different. That was punished with the financial fine in addition to a small detail. And what was the small detail? That the person that did the gouging would also have their eye gouged out too. Not just a fine. But only for a nobleman. Right? For the commoner, just a fine was ok.

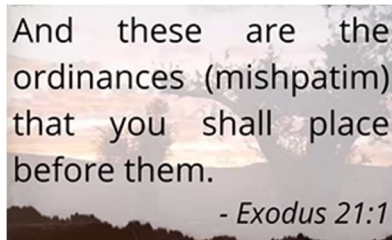
And that's what you would expect from a code of law written by man. Probably the noble man, right? And in that way, the Torah was the exact opposite...is the exact opposite from any other code of law. That the Torah recognized that every human being was created in HaShem's image, regardless of the class or the strata or the status or whatever. And as we'll see in the Torah portion that we're in and the Torah in general and throughout the prophets, it's not the privileged and powerful noblemen that are protected. But it's the widows and the orphans. Those that have no power. Those that have no recourse. They're the ones that are protected in the Torah. But in a world of survival of the fittest, they're at the bottom. But HaShem says what? "No, no, they're at the top. They're the most protected."

And when you wrong those that have no recourse. That's when Hashem's wrath flares. But you know, we'll elaborate a little bit more on that soon. Because I want to get into the parsha a little bit deeper and talk about that very essence that I wanted to share with you. Because you know I remember, Mishpatim, this parsha when we learned it in school. I was always a little bit sad when we arrived at this Torah portion because to me it represented the end of an era, the end of a narrative, right? The end of this ongoing story that started with the creation of the world and Abraham and Sarah and the forefathers, the foremothers and all the drama from the Garden of Eden, to Avimelech, to the establishment of the nation and the story of Joseph and his brothers in slavery, in Egypt, the 10 plagues...all of it, right? It's just one story. And it's just gripping and riveting and then? The laws. Like this is where they begin, the laws.

I've actually heard some Christians tell me before that the Jews are "under the law." And while I never really understood or realized that that was meant in a sort of critical type of way, it did feel like when we got to these Torah portions, that the "under the law" part actually really began. But that's why you don't stop reading the Torah when you're in the 8th grade, right? We don't read the Torah for entertainment. We read the Torah really to get into the mind of God. If you could even say such a thing. So, we're trying...when we say to get into the mind of God, the reason I'm like reluctant and hesitant there is because God is one undifferentiated

unity. He doesn't have a mind. But if we had to understand in an anthropomorphic way that God does have a mind, well that mind is expressed in the Torah. And when we read the Torah, we meet, we merge our mind with the mind of God, if such a thing could be possible. And so, as we mature in our quest for truth, well then some of the parts that were the most mundane in the Torah, actually become the most beautiful when added dimension and understanding is revealed. And this week's Torah portion is a perfect example of that.

So the Torah portion begins with this verse:



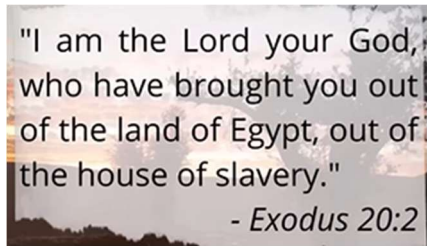
And these are the ordinances (mishpatim) that you shall place before them.
- Exodus 21:1

Now perhaps the most important part of this Torah portion, if you could say such a thing, that there's something more important or less, if you could say such a thing, is the first letter. Not the first word, but the first letter, right? The letter vav (ו). V'elah. Because in the Torah, particularly in the beginning of a parsha, the letter vav is used to convey that whatever is about to be discussed is a continuation, even an elaboration of what was just discussed.

And so the vav here, it speaks volumes. I appreciate your patience with me, with my voice, I'm trying here. It tells us that these laws and ordinances are not part of some disconnected, dry, arbitrary, legal code. God forbid. God forbid. These are an elaboration of the Ten Commandments we just received from God at Mount Sinai. They're a continuation. They're a continuation of the greatest revelation in world history. And as we know, the Ten Commandments were given on two tablets. And each of those two tablets is really its own primary category into which every single one of the 619 commandments falls into. One category is beyn Adam la'makom, and that's the first five commandments, meaning between man and Hashem. The first five commandments fall into that category which begins with, "I am the Lord your God," and ends with "Guard the Sabbath and keep it holy." Those first five commandments are between man and God.

And the last five you know, murder, stealing, adultery, coveting, false testimony...those are beyn adam l'chaverot – between man and man. Have you guys heard this concept before? These two divisions? Most of you are with me.

So our sages go on to teach that while the entire Torah is really an encapsulation of the Ten Commandments, well the Ten Commandments, which are in a way, like they're like chapter heads from which everything else can be unpacked and extrapolated. Well, they're all an expansion of the very first of the Ten Commandments. What's the first of the Ten Commandments?

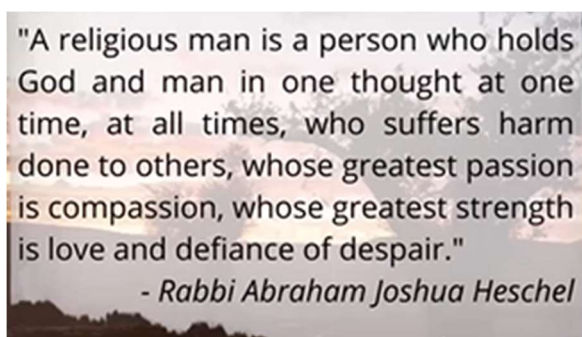


"I am the Lord your God, who have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."
- Exodus 20:2

I am HaShem, right? Thank God for the past Torah portions. We don't need to go into the names of HaShem again, we really went into it deeply. I am HaShem. What does Hashem mean? The Name, the tetragrammaton. The Yud, Hey, Vav, Hey – the past, and the present and the future. I am Hashem who is your God, Hashem who is your God. Not just who created the world, but who took you out of the land of Egypt. Who isn't just the Creator of the universe who stepped away, God forbid, and just lets things run and maybe intervenes every now and then. But is perpetually recreating the world at every moment. I am God, and there's nothing other than me. That's the 1st Commandment. And so, if we take that we can sort of understand, right? If we think about it, it's clear why this is the core genetic code. Because HaShem goes on to say, He says these next commandments are how I want to be related to, between me and you, individually, personally, directly. Right? These are my love languages. These first five commandments express the boundaries and the parameters and the greatest expression of our direct relationship.

And then Hashem give us the 2nd five commandments in which he conveys the boundaries and rules for the most beautiful expression of our relationship with Him THROUGH our fellow man. But it's still a relationship with Him, but it's through or fellow man. Notice, it's our...it's like Abraham, right? When he was at the tent and he left that prophecy to greet these, who he thought were pagan idolaters because he understood that the more beautiful and potent way, the satisfying way to HaShem of connecting and loving Hashem is through our fellow man. That Hashem wants us to love Him through how we treat others.

So, we've you know, we've quoted before Rabbi Heschel. But it's such a beautiful idea that you really can't quote it enough. It's part of something that I say almost every day, I think. What does Rabbi Heschel say here? He says:



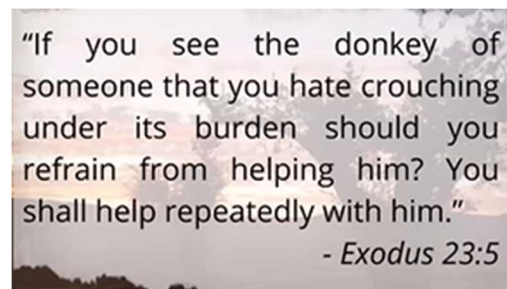
"A religious man is a person who holds God and man in one thought at one time, at all times, who suffers harm done to others, whose greatest passion is compassion, whose greatest strength is love and defiance of despair."
- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Right? In one thought at one time, that is the 2nd Tablet. That is the heart of all of the commandments that are governing our relationship with our fellow man.

And then we get into this Torah portion which begins, v'elah..."AND these" ordinances. It's a continuation of those Ten Commandments further broken down on how we can come close and nurture our relationship through the rest of creation. And because these laws and the justice that really they impart because they're Divine, they'll of course express a far different

and more profound truth than any laws that have been expressed up until that time. And really very different even in the laws in the west today. Because a lot of times we think the laws are built on the Judeo-Christian system, whatever that means. But even in the West today, where justice is very much built around the idea that your right to swing your fist ends where my face begins, right? Live and let live, let's not hurt each other.

But in the Torah, we have an obligation to proactively help each other, an obligation, right? If you find a lost object, it is a mitzvah to return it. I remember learning all these laws in grade school. How you go about advertising and you have to request, special signs that are unique to the object to make sure that the person claiming it, it's his, he's the authentic owner. If you stumble on a lost object, you return it. It's a sin not to. Or even the donkey of your enemy, right? You know, you've read the Torah portion, you know where this is going. Donkey of your enemy that is burdened, right? Let's go to the verse, Chapter 23, verse 5:



The word used is azov t'azov (עָזַב תְּעִיב), repeated twice to express really the importance of it. Whenever the verbs are conjugated like that, azov t'azov, it shows how important it is. It's stressing it and that if such a situation happens, time and time again, you should help every single time.

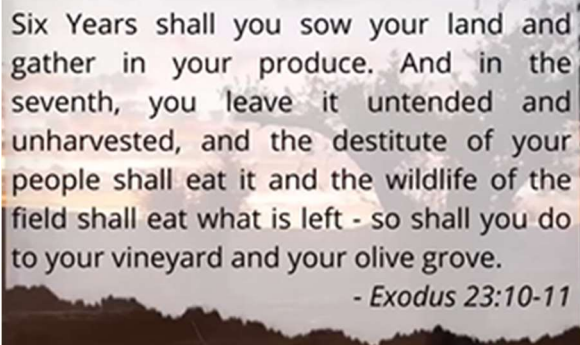
And now the sages and the Talmud explain further that if you see the donkey of your friend falling under its burden at the same time as the donkey of your enemy, right? The donkey of your friend and the donkey of your enemy at the same time...who are you supposed to help intuitively? Who do you think you're suppose to help? The donkey of your enemy. And so you've heard of Onkelos, he's one of the greatest commentators. It's him and Rashi that are pretty much in every Chumash and every Pentateuch, I think it's called. He has a beautiful reading of this. He reads the words "struggling under its burden and you should unload its burden" as you should unload "YOUR" emotional burden, your emotional baggage that you carry in your heart against him. That you can unload it with him. And so, why is this so important? Because when we have hatred between each other, even if we have divisions that are separating us from each other, we now understand from this Torah portion that those divisions that are separating us from each other are really in truth, they're separating us from Hashem.

And so Rav Nagen points out that we see in this parsha that our love and fear of HaShem does not just manifest itself in our direct relationship with Him, and it doesn't just manifest itself in our relationship with our fellow man, right? As we see in the Ten Commandments, but it manifests itself in our relationship with all of creation.

Now there are many examples which in this portion explain this, which you know range from the inclusion and the laws of Shabbat, not to work your animals, right? So that your ox and your donkey can rest. That's part of the laws of the Sabbath. So the laws of your ox and your donkey can rest, which we see in chapter 23, verse 12. Or another example is not to sacrifice an animal younger than seven days old so it can spend the time with its mother. The laws of the moral treatment of animals, which by the way the Gimpel's have really taught me a tremendous amount about. Not only do Jeremy and Tehila have it, but their children have this very amplified compassion for animals. That they really teach us about. They're derived from this portion as well because you know, I wasn't raised with pets. Like I told you, my grandparents, my grandmother said dogs are meant to hunt down Jews. Pets just weren't a thing. I had a goldfish that was pretty much it. Actually I had a rabbit, but whatever, I don't need to go into my whole pet history. But it doesn't come naturally to me. It's been a process, but nonetheless, whether you feel a natural connection with animals or not, you treat them with care and compassion because the Torah tells us to. And ultimately because they are Hashem's creation and it's truth to treat them that way.

It's to the degree that on Shabbat night, as we return from the synagogue, sometimes I forget and right before I bless Dvash at the table, I have to get up and walk outside and feed Menchie and Shuggie, right? Our two dogs. Before we even feed ourselves. We need to think of them first. These laws sensitize us. I remember years ago, way before the farm, when I asked Jeremy to help me understand why he loved dogs and really animals so much. His answer was really, was memorable. He told me it's because when you look at an animal, you're seeing a direct expression of ratzon Hashem, of the will of God. Right? They don't have free will. They're operating purely and totally on the instincts that Hashem programmed within them. And that knowledge of when he would watch animals and see them, whatever they were doing, it was a complete, pure expression of what Hashem put within them. And that knowledge made him love them even more. And so that's animals.

But Rav Nagen points out that it's true of all of creation, right? All of creation. That we express our love for HaShem, even the plant kingdom is part of the unity within HaShem. Particularly, especially the Land of Israel, right? A commandment which we're keeping at this very moment, from this week's Torah portion, chapter 23, verse 10:



Six Years shall you sow your land and gather in your produce. And in the seventh, you leave it untended and unharvested, and the destitute of your people shall eat it and the wildlife of the field shall eat what is left - so shall you do to your vineyard and your olive grove.
- Exodus 23:10-11

And that's we do. We do that here at the farm. Everybody that comes out. I say, you don't even need to ask my permission, take whatever you want. It doesn't even belong to me, it belongs to God. This is the Sabbatical year. And why do we keep the Sabbatical year, right? Why do we keep the Sabbatical year for the Land? To give rest to the Land itself. The Land is living, too. The Land is living and breathing. I've come to understand

that more since coming out here and trying to be a farmer than ever before.

Ok, so seeing this underlying theme that connects the laws laid out in our portion, let's go back to the first verse because so far, you know, in the fellowship, we've really only gotten to the first letter, the letter vav. That's where we're at. So the first verse, and (vav) these are the ordinances that you shall place before them, that's the first verse.

Now, with what we've discussed up until now, we can perhaps understand the words of Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, who's heard of him here? He was actually the founder of the Chabad movement. He was the author of the Tanya. We should really study it together sometime. It's so profound, it's so deep, it's Chassidic philosophy at its core. Anyways, to understand what he said you have to understand the original Hebrew. So, he explained that the word, lifnehem (לפניהם), right? These are the ordinances that you shall place "lifnehem" (before them), which is translated in most places as "set before them." He's really saying, "set to their inner most selves," lifnehem – lif ne hem. Lifnim shelahem. Lifnim, what is inside.

He said that these laws of the Torah aren't supposed to just be followed dryly and robotically adhered to. But they're to be internalized, right? Tehila shared about the Haftarah, about the portion of the prophets. When you perform the commandments robotically and dryly, that's what happens. You can just take a few steps back and regret it all because you don't really internalize them into your heart. They aren't brought into our p'nim, into your heart, into your very essence. Which by the way, that's really what I believe, we're really all doing here together, right? That's what this fellowship is about. It's a service of the heart, a quest to find the truth together and to internalize it into our very essence because when the laws are disconnected and they're just isolated and atomized, very much like I felt like they were in the exile, it's very easy to lose the forest within the trees, is that what they say? Is that the saying? You know what I mean. But when they're woven together within the tapestry of a deeper truth and a deeper truth when each and every one of the laws is an expression of our love for HaShem. And an internalization of His unity in the world, then we don't only follow them and observe them, but they give us chayut, right? They light up our life force. They light up the source of our souls. They give us energy and they invigorate us.

So when we understand that everything in the Torah is a manifestation of our love for HaShem, then we can get to the level in which we're invigorated by laws that make absolutely no sense to us with the exact same passion as the most logical and rational laws and honestly possibly even more. Sometimes those irrational laws can light us up even more because of the fact we're adhering to them with the same vigilance as we do the ones that make sense to us. Because there are actually three types of mitzvot. There are the mishpatim (מִשְׁפָּטִים), which is our Torah portion, which is the second word of the parsha, v'elah mishpatim, and these are the mishpatim. And they're described, I guess you could translate them as ordinances, they're laws which are correlated to reason and logic, that we can understand at least on the most surface of levels.

And then there are edot (עֲדוֹת), the testimonies, which we can rationally understand, but they're not really inherently logical. It's nothing we would invent on our own if the Torah wasn't there. An example of that would be the mezuzah on our door or the tefillin, you know the phylacteries we put on in the morning. They're often correlated with the rituals of the Torah. I really...there's so much more to dive in to about this, I'm going through it faster than I would like and perhaps we can delve into it further another time.

But the third one, they're the chukim (חֻקִּים), right, the decrees. And these are laws that make absolutely no rational sense. We cannot understand them with our rational minds and we're not really supposed to even try. And the greatest example that they say, even King Solomon, the wisest of all men, that he didn't understand, that he couldn't understand is the law of the red heifer and how the person sprinkling the ashes purifies others while he himself becomes impure. There's just no way to understand that with our rational minds. Another one is shatnez. I remember teaching about shatnez before. Do you remember this one? Not to mix wool and linen in a garment or mix them at all, but in particular in a garment. And so there are reasons that are given for these laws, but they're really imposed upon the law to give it more beauty and meaning, but there's nothing inherently logical to it at all.

That's one of those things I remember just being so enthralled by when I made aliyah, like the kosher McDonalds. Kosher McDonald's, it was just so crazy. So in America when I bought a suit, we would often have to bring that to the Rabbi. And the Rabbi would look at it and make sure that there were no linen threads. For example in a woolen suit. But in Israel, many suits have labels in them. That was just so crazy to me. Tabitha, could you put up a picture, one of the labels, I found the label I wanted to show you guys.

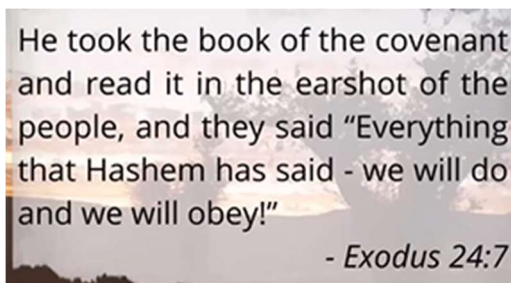


This is a label that is on the suit that says it's shatnez-free. There's no danger of shatnez on it. And they're actually full-time laboratories where that's what they do full time. This is a shatnez laboratory that I've gone to before. Where that's what they do full time. It opens in the morning till it closes at night. They check for shatnez to see if a garment has wool and linen mixed into it.



The point though is that when we internalize into our hearts that the laws and the ordinances and the testimonies and the decrees are all from HaShem, then as my third-grade rabbi used to say, "The correct answer for why we don't steal is not because it's wrong, but it's because Hashem told us not to steal. And not stealing should have the same gravity to us as not mixing wool and linen."

So, that's how we follow the word of HaShem in the simplest, purest way, right? Without the need to understand the "why." And that brings us back to one of the highest points in Jewish history, one of the closest moments that we as a nation have to Hashem. And it's in this week's Torah portion, right towards the end. Think about it, what is that moment? It's in chapter 24, verse 7:



Before having any idea what the commandments were or having any understanding of them, we declared, "We will do them and we will obey them." And why is that so beautiful? Because it is the ultimate demonstration of trust.

I remember a teaching from the sages. You know, I remember clearly, although I don't think I've encountered it since I was a boy. That before the giving of the Torah to the nation of Israel, HaShem offered it to everyone else. Have you heard this? I just remember the visual in my head of different countries and different nations. And the French and the Italians, and they all had their turn up where they went up to Mount Sinai. This is how I visualized it. And each nation had a problem with the different commandments. Right? Thou shalt not steal and they said, "Come on, not steal? That's our thing, right? We love to steal, it's in our culture. We're good at it and that's how we get by." I can actually think of cultures I've encountered where

that really is the case. I envisioned them, but I don't want to go here. Or "Thou shalt not kill." Like, really? Not even a little murder, here and there? That doesn't seem right. Everybody has something that they refused to abide by.

But the nation of Israel said, "We will do and we will obey." Right? There were no conditions, there were no prenuptial agreements. We will do and we will obey. And in many ways, that really is our national motto. And when we as a nation declared those words, well the way I sort of think about it, that's sort of when the relationship on a national level really began. You know, in some ways, I guess that moment could be seen as our national bar mitzvah, right? When we became adults. Because if there's no trust, then there really is no real relationship. A real relationship is impossible if there's no trust. And when you look at the Torah up until now through that prism, right? As a gradual growth of a trusting relationship with Hashem, starting with Abraham, really perhaps Noah, maybe Adam and Eve, we could go back. You know, Isaac to Jacob, and then the tribes of Israel, all the way to the portions that we just completed, where we were in the desert, which is...what was the desert? Right? It was really this sort of biosphere. It was like an isolated, sandy, cocoon in which a nation and their God established the foundations of a trusting relationship, right? Just think about the manna. To me that's the perfect example, right? You could only collect for that day, and if you collected any more, it was a sin. It would rot and it would be filled worms. So every day you just had to trust that your food would again just fall out of the sky. You had no choice.

You know ever since that episode a few weeks ago where the government was going to uproot our vineyards, you remember this whole parsha, this whole drama, and the decree was annulled, or more accurately it was sort of like indefinitely delayed. It was under 24 hours before it was supposed to happen. We were all prepared, ready to go there. Six buses booked, and then it was indefinitely delayed. And a number of people have asked me since then, you know, does it feel terrible like having that sword hanging over your head, knowing that they can any day now, come and just destroy everything without any warning? And I tell them, "Not really. Because that really is just the truth of life." Right? That's the truth of all of life. That we're always hanging, we always have a sword hanging right over our head, every moment of every day.

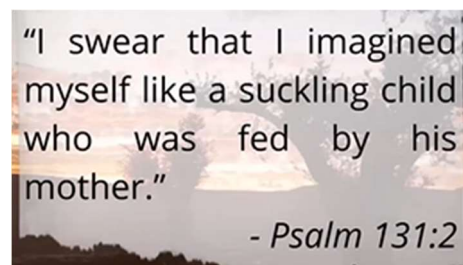
And that's just the reality of the world we live in. And this life we're living and our journey through this world with God. The only difference is that in our situation, we know we have a sword hanging over our head. We know that we have a thousand swords hanging over our head. It's been like this since we came out here. Really, think about the State of Israel. We're surrounded by 23 Arab States, 57 Arab and Muslim States, weapons, missiles pointed at us at every moment, at this very moment, that's the reality. And we can be happy and content and sort of a really happy and content. And not necessarily...I guess because of that reality that's so clear to us that we live in, we can live lives that are not riddled with fear and anxiety. Because we've just been trained that in the Land of Israel in general and really at our farm, this is our

existence. And while we're aware of the dangling swords, we know that we have the ultimate shield protecting us from above. And sheltering us from these swords right under the wings of the Shechinah, the impenetrable wings that are protecting us, of HaShem. This whole lifetime is just one great opportunity to build that trust in HaShem and by trusting Him, really to walk with Him.

You know Rav Biederman quotes Rav Shimshon Pincus and I was sort of conflicted about this idea because there's parts of it that don't really fully connect with me, but the deeper truth really spoke to my heart. So Rav Pincus pointed out that parents take care of their infant children with the utmost care, right? Constantly, vigilantly, guarding everything, giving them what they need, often before they even ask for it. But that changes, right? Rav Pincus points out that as children mature, the parents tend not to be as vigilant and don't take care of every single detail. And why does that change? Because when the children feel totally dependent on their parents, the parents are totally devoted to their children. But when children start believing that they can really handle things themselves, parents feel less obligated to care for their every need with the same vigilance, right? It makes sense.

So Rav Pincus explains that this is the same regarding our relationship with HaShem. Just understand this from this specific facet that he's explaining it. He says, "If we feel totally in need of HaShem's help and recognize that we are constantly totally helpless without Him, then His orchestration over our lives and His vigilance over helping us and protecting us is more intense than if we think that we can really manage this whole thing on our own. Because when we believe we can manage it on our own, then maybe to some degree, He interacts with us in that way as well."

So in the book of Tehilim, just building on this, King David says in chapter 131, verse 2:



But King David said that. King David, the warrior poet, that went out to battle against Goliath, totally in HaShem's hands. My friends, may we be blessed with such trust. May we all be blessed to be able to live lives that are invigorated with purpose and meaning in following the words of Hashem. Lives that are really fortified with faith and trust in which we can literally walk through the valley

of the shadow of death and not fear evil. Really not fear evil. Because we know that Hashem is with us. And thank you, HaShem for giving me the voice to get through this fellowship. I really...I didn't think that I would. I did not think I would get this far and I'm so grateful to you, Hashem, that you allowed me the voice to do that.

And so, with the rest of my voice my friends, I want to bless all of you. And then, just again, unfortunately this fellowship is not going to be followed by the Fellowship Connection because

I just know that Jeremy would really not want to miss out on that. And that just didn't seem fair. But with HaShem's help, we'll be together next week, all of us and healthy and happy and we could begin yet again to connect on the Fellowship Connection. I'm so excited about that. So allow me the great honor of blessing you with the Kohanic prayer.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

May HaShem bless and protect you. May HaShem make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May HaShem lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.

I love you my friends, shalom, shalom. Please stay connected, WhatsApp, email, anything. Be in touch, stay strong, stay healthy. Shalom, Shalom.