

LampLighter

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Mishpatim
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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

"What exactly is morality?" asks this week's Torah portion, Mishpatim. What are we Jews supposed to do with the Torah we received at Mount Sinai with so much fanfare in last week's Torah reading? What are the Torah's commandments really about?

First of all, let's look at the name of the portion itself—Mishpatim—which means "statutes." The 613 commandments in the Torah are generally divided up into three categories: "chukim," laws which are entirely beyond our comprehension; "eydut," laws which human intellect alone would never have reached, yet once the Torah legislated them, we can understand their necessity; and "mishpatim," simple and uncomplicated laws which are logical and easily understood. In other words, mishpatim are those laws which mankind would have instituted to govern the world (such as the prohibition against stealing, murder, etc.), even without the Torah having been given. In fact, most of this week's Torah portion deals with those types of laws that govern man's relationship to his fellow man.

At first glance, the fact that an entire portion is dedicated to these simple laws is surprising. One would think that the Torah would be distinguished by those special and unique laws which differentiate it from all other systems of law established by the nations. Why did G-d have to personally give His Torah on Mount Sinai, only to inform us that we should not kill? Would we not have reached the same conclusion without Divine revelation?

The fact of the matter, however, is that by giving preeminence to these rational statutes, the Torah means to teach us how we should relate to all of Torah law in its entirety. A Jew does not obey even laws which are readily understood by the human intellect simply because our reasoning compels us to; rather, all mitzvot must be performed with the same measure of faith in G-d and desire to do His will. In other words, a Jew refrains from stealing only because G-d has commanded him not to, and not because his intellect has decided that stealing is immoral and unethical.

A Jew does not base his morality on what his limited wisdom can understand. Human logic is intrinsically flawed as it is subject to the whims of the individual's will. History proves how just about any action can be justified and rationalized, and even turned into a "mitzva!" As people also differ from one another in their intellectual capacity, logic alone would dictate a different code of behavior for each person if it were the only criterion. The foundation of a Torah way of life, however, is the belief that all the Torah's commandments were given to us by G-d at Mount Sinai and thus are equally binding as the will of G-d.

Furthermore, G-d is not limited by our understanding of Him, as even the simplest mitzvot have deeper significance than we can ever hope to understand. Performing a mitzva only because it makes sense to us misses the whole point.

Morality, then, is based on our acceptance of the Torah's commandments as G-d's will, which is the Jewish definition of true ethics.

(Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

No Deposit, No Return

By Yossy Goldman

Once upon a time, Yiddish speaking Jews coined the phrase *luftmentsh* to describe that incurable dreamer type who is always building castles in the sky. *Luft* means air and someone who lives in the air with pie-in-the-sky fantasies qualifies for this title of dubious distinction. "If only this deal comes off, I'll be set for life!" "When I win the lottery..." etc., etc. The money has been spent before he has even bought the ticket. He's always anticipating the big breakthrough and then, in the end, explaining why it didn't quite happen. This is the life story of our *luftmentsh*.

There is a line in the beginning of this week's *parshah* concerning the Jewish bondsman which sums up this phenomenon. *Im b'gapo yavo, b'gapo yeitzei* – if he came in alone, he goes out alone. Simply speaking, this tells us that if he entered his period of service unmarried, he must leave unmarried and his master may not exploit him to father children who would be born into servitude. But this Torah phrase has become a traditional way of expressing one of life's basic home truths, i.e. *no deposit, no return*. No effort, no reward. No risk, no profit.

Whether in business, relationships, the social intercourse of communities and nations, or in raising our children, the principle holds true. "The only place success comes before work is in the dictionary." Or, in the words of the Psalmist, "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy."

There is the old story told of Shmerel, a poor man who once walked by the home of the richest man in the shtetl. There was an aroma wafting out of the dining room where the wealthy man was enjoying his favourite dish, cheese blintzes. Shmerel took one whiff and was overcome with temptation. He just had to taste those blintzes. As soon as he came home, he begged his good wife, Chasha, to make him some of those blintzes. Chasha says, "I'd love to make you blintzes, Shmerel, but I have no cheese." "Nu, my dear, so make it without the cheese." "But we've got no eggs either." "Chasha," says Shmerel, "you are a woman of great ingenuity. I'm sure you can make a plan." So Chasha sets out to do the very best she can under the circumstances. Her work done, she sets the plate of blintzes in front of her dear husband. Shmerel takes one taste, crooks his nose and says, "You know Chasha, for the life of me, I cannot understand what those rich people see in blintzes."

Clearly, you cannot make good blintzes without using the right ingredients. Just as clearly, we cannot have *nachas* from our children without putting in the necessary ingredients of a good Jewish education, a solid upbringing at home, quality family time, and above all, by setting a good example.

Too many parents assume that *nachas* is a democratic right, almost a genetic certainty. If parents are good, successful people and committed Jews, then surely their children will turn out the same. But there are no such guarantees; especially in today's complex, confusing and very troubled society.

A hundred years ago Rabbi Sholom Ber of Lubavitch said, "Just as it is a Biblical commandment to put on *tefillin* every day, so is it obligatory to spend a half hour daily thinking about our children and to do whatever possible to ensure that they follow the path in which they are being guided."

So don't be a *luftmentsh*. Put in the effort, and please G-d, you will see the rewards. Whether it's our work or our children, may we enjoy the fruit of our labours.



Ode to Ramon

By Tzvi Freeman

Ilan Ramon was not the first Jew to travel outside the earth's atmosphere, but his voyage was certainly the most special for us. He was the first to go not as an individual, but as the representative of the entire Jewish people. That is why, although he did not identify as an observant Jew, he insisted that NASA provide him only kosher food. He hung a mezuzah on one of the portals of his capsule. In his bag was a book of Psalms and a dollar bill from the Lubavitcher Rebbe. As he passed over Jerusalem, he said the Shma Yisrael. And the whole world watched as he lifted a small Torah scroll that had miraculously survived Auschwitz.

Why the Almighty took him and the other six astronauts from us as He did, I will not even venture to know. But I must admit that in so many ways I envy him. Sure, I envy all those who get to travel to outer space — but nobody ever carried anything like his kind of baggage. You could say that he took an entire nation — 3400 years of history included — to the heavens. Proving that none of us, no matter how far we may journey, ever goes alone.

Ode to Ramon

February 3, 2003

He was all of us
And he knew he was all of us.
He felt it to the bone.

As Colonel Ramon pierced the firmament of planet earth
reaching yet higher, past his home, upward to enter the endless heavens
he held his mother's hand,
and his father's
and his grandparents'.
All their memories and memorabilia, their suffering and their victory.

He held my hand, too, and the hand of every one of us that ever was
and he held all the millennia of our people as living objects in his capsule

Not Sefardi, not Ashkenazi
Not secular, not ultra-orthodox
Not north, not south, not West Bank, not Diaspora
Not Ramon

A Jew.

And in that final moment of a space pilot's glory
as the Unfathomable One stretched forth his arm in embrace
as the stars made room for him in the heavens

In that ultimate moment of supreme oneness, in awe, through his lips the Eternal Jew uttered, "Listen, Israel, the Source of Being, our G-d, the Source of Being is One."

And the vast emptiness beyond
echoed an awesome voice,
"Who is like Your people, Israel! A nation of oneness
upon the earth."

There is hope, for we are one.
There is hope for all our planet earth.

The Suddenness of Life

By Yeruchem Eilfort

February 3, 2003

This past Shabbat another profound tragedy struck the United States and Israel simultaneously. The *Columbia*, the first built and oldest space shuttle, disintegrated upon re-entry at the tail-end of its mission, only minutes before the planned conclusion of its flight.

When the news spread in our community, it left many feeling as though a personal tragedy had occurred. The services were sombre and downcast. How could such a thing happen? Had NASA not made the progress necessary to preclude another shuttle catastrophe since the destruction of the Challenger almost 17 years ago to the day? Adding to the tragedy is the terrible admission that many of us immediately thought that this, too, was some sort of terrorist attack. The mere fact that this possibility was considered shows us how sickly today's reality has become.

This time, the feelings of sadness were compounded by the fact that the first Israeli astronaut, Ilan Ramon, was amongst the dead. If such a thing were possible, our grief became even deeper. Ilan Ramon was not just a Jewish Israeli who happened to be an astronaut. He was a proud Jew. His father fought in Israel's War of Independence. His mother was a survivor of the Holocaust, as was the Torah he had taken along with him on this flight.

Ramon himself was a military hero for his beloved Israel. He had fought in the Yom Kippur War. He was one of the eight fighter pilots who had destroyed the French-built Iraqi nuclear facility in the early 80's. He was a husband and the father of four children. He was the first Israeli astronaut, and the first to mark Shabbat and request Kosher meals for his mission.

The sermon of the day had to be discarded. At such times people ask, "Why?" and a discussion of the events, and perhaps a life-

lesson, had to be found. What can we learn from this tragedy?

The first question that formed in many people's minds was, "Why does this tragedy seem to strike a deeper chord within us than the nearly continuous catastrophes that seem to be happening with unnerving regularity in the world today (and specifically in the Jewish world)?"

There are several possible answers to this question. The Challenger accident notwithstanding, we have come to take space shuttle missions for granted. In the same way that we have come to take life itself for granted. We forget the millions of details that go into a successful space flight. Nothing is too small or inconsequential when one deals with an endeavour of this complexity. There is no room for error, mechanical or human; there are no second chances. We have come to expect that everything will go smoothly. We forget the risks.

Of course, there are those whose entire job is to seek out weaknesses in the system and envision every possible scenario to avoid this type of occurrence. But at the end of the day we are only human. Even the incredible machines we build have flaws in them. They must, for they are conceived and built by human beings who are by definition flawed. This realization is invaluable. Grasping our own fallible nature is the first and most important step to humility. Humility is a key component of a wholesome human being.

What else can we learn from this event? We see that a human's grasp on life is tenuous. None of us know when our time is up. We can take every conceivable precaution, but even such an approach does not negate the possibility of a sudden death at any time. This reinforces the fact that we must make optimal use of every moment of every day. We must approach every day as though it were our last.

This is not a new concept. In the *Ethics of the Fathers* we are taught that a person should "repent one day before your death." The obvious question is asked: but how does one know which day he or she is to die? And the answer is: that is why we must repent every day, because indeed we do not know the day we are destined to die.

President Bush put it succinctly and beautifully when he quoted the Prophet Isaiah: "Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these? He who brings out the starry hosts one by one and calls them each by name. Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing." President Bush continued in his own words, "The same Creator who names the stars also knows the names of the seven souls we mourn today. The crew of the shuttle Columbia did not return safely to Earth; yet we can pray that all are safely home. May G-d bless the grieving families, and may G-d continue to bless America."

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MOSHIACH MATTERS

If one asks, "Who am I that I should pray for Jerusalem, etc...Will the exiles be gathered and the Redemption come because of my prayer?" His answer is in the Talmud: "Man was created individually so that each person should say, 'The world was created for my sake.'" It is G-d's pleasure that His children desire and pray for the Redemption. We see, then, that we are duty-bound in this respect. We cannot exempt ourselves because of our inadequate strength, for we are taught, "The work is not yours to complete, but you are not free to abstain from it." (*Mesilat Yesharim* by Rabbi Chaim Luzzato)

INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE



JUDAISM AND THE MILITARY

Thank you very much for your letter in which you write in detail about the visit of our Lubavitch emissaries to the Jewish community of Wiesbaden, Germany. I was most gratified to read about the highly inspiring and lasting impression which they made on both the American Jewish military personnel and the civilian Jewish community, not least their impact on the children.

Since "the essential thing is the deed," I am confident that the impressions you describe will be translated into actual deeds, in terms of Torah and mitzvot in the daily life of each and all who shared in this experience.

I had occasion to share some thoughts with Jewish chaplains, and these may not be new to you, but they are always timely and worth repeating. For the mitzva of v'ahavta l-re'acha kamocho makes it the constant duty and privilege of every Jew to promote Torah and mitzvot to the fullest extent of one's ability. This includes, moreover, the duty also to promote the observance of the so-called Seven Precepts [the Noahide Laws] (with all their ramifications) which are incumbent upon all mankind, in accordance with the Torah, which is called the Torah of Life.

A military chaplain is in an especially favorable position to achieve a great deal in the above areas, because of the conducive conditions prevailing in military life.

What makes servicemen particularly receptive to the basic approach of Torah-true Judaism is, first of all, the very basic principle on which the military depends, namely obedience and discipline in the execution of an order by the commanding officer. Even though, in civilian life, a private may be superior to his commanding officer, the order must be executed promptly, whether or not the soldier understands its significance. This, of course, corresponds to the principle of na'aseh v'nishma [we will hear and then we will understand], the condition on which Jews accepted the Torah and mitzvot from the Supreme Commander and Giver of the Torah and mitzvot.

A further basic point in military life is the fact that a soldier cannot argue that his personal conduct and whether or not he obeys an order is his private affair, and he is prepared to suffer the consequences, etc. Whether he realizes it or not, his conduct has implications for his entire unit and all the military. In case of an emergency of war, the personal conduct of a single soldier could very seriously affect his platoon, brigade, division and the entire military operation, the whole army and country. Thus, it is not just a question of one soldier's personal moral attitude; his attitude and behaviour are of vital importance to the whole army, and that even in times of peace.

Applying the analogy to Jewish life, it becomes quite evident how vitally important is every Jew's commitment to Torah and mitzvot in his personal life and in spreading Judaism to the fullest extent of his influence. It may be added that the Jewish people live in a state of emergency, what with the general atmosphere of trends and ideas which are inimical to the Torah way. A Jew has to fight to overcome all and sundry alien forces which tend to undermine his spiritual, hence also physical existence.

In other words, every Jew must consider himself a "soldier" in G-d's Army (Tzivot HaShem). He must be on a constant alert to spread the Light of the Torah and mitzvot, until the time when "G-d's Glory will be revealed, and all flesh shall see," and "all the earth will be full of the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea". This will come to pass with the appearance of Moshiach-tzidkeinu—our righteous Moshiach, may he come speedily in our time.

A WORD from the Director

There are four special Torah readings read on the Sabbaths before the month of Nisan — Shekalim, Zachor, Para and HaChodesh.

This week we read the additional portion of Shekalim. Since Shekalim is the first of the four, it has special significance over the other three. Its lesson is of general significance and conveys the fundamental and primary principles which should guide our G-dly service.

The half-shekel was a donation by every Jew to help pay for the communal sacrifice. Regardless of one's financial status, whether rich or poor, each person gave no more and no less than a half-shekel toward this sacrifice. Thus, the basic idea of giving half-shekels is that of tzedaka (charity).

This is particularly true today after the Holy Temple has been destroyed, and the mitzva of giving shekalim in its original form is no longer possible. Today this mitzva is commemorated through giving a coin worth half of the standard currency to charity on the Fast of Esther — the day preceding Purim.

Tzedaka represents all the mitzvot — "outweighs" them all — and is called THE mitzva by the Jerusalem Talmud.

In addition, tzedaka must be done constantly, for two reasons:

- 1. G-d created a world order in which there is giving and receiving. This is the reason that 'need' and 'want' are present in the world — in order that there be the possibility of performing tzedaka and kindness. Tzedaka, therefore, is an intrinsic part of creation. Since tzedaka is an essential feature of the nature of the world, it is present as long as the world exists, i.e. constantly.*
- 2. Everything G-d gives to the world is similar to His "tzedaka." His gracious endowment of our very life and sustenance is clear proof of His great kindness. Nevertheless, this kindness is granted midda k'neged midda (measure for measure) — commensurate to our actions. We must therefore involve ourselves in charitable acts in order to merit G-d's "tzedaka."*

And since we are constantly dependent upon His tzedaka, our charitable acts must also be constant.

This explains the fundamental importance of the portion of Shekalim over the other three special portions. It is connected with charity, which is constant, and applies in all places and situations.

J. I. Gutnick

Parshat Shekalim

This special section of the Torah (Exodus 30:11-16) is read on the Shabbat before the month of Adar. Or, if Rosh Chodesh Adar is on Shabbat, Parshat Shekalim is read on that day. Parshat Shekalim discusses the Biblical obligation of Machatzit Hashekel, or Half shekel, which was a required annual tax to be given by every adult man during the times of the Holy Temple.

This tax was primarily used to purchase the animals which were used for the communal sacrifices. The leftover funds were used for a variety of communal purposes, including providing salaries for the

judges and maintenance of the Temple, its vessels, and the city walls.

The Half Shekel was due annually on the 1st of Nissan, and the courts would post reminders regarding this tax a month earlier, on the 1st of Adar. We commemorate this on the Shabbat beforehand by reading the portion in the Torah which discusses this commandment.

CUSTOMS CORNER

It Happened Once...



In the small Russian township of Batchaikov lived a kindly old squire. The squire owned many villages and forests, inhabited mostly by the employees of his holdings. The squire was exceptionally generous. He would exempt people from their obligations to him if they were poor, and offered special discounts for the local rabbi, ritual slaughterer, schoolteachers and cantors. Most Jews in and around Batchaikov made their livelihood off the squire's estate.

Being old and frail and in poor health, the squire often visited a renowned medical specialist of the time, Dr. Berthenson. Also, he gradually entrusted the administration of his estate to his anti-Semitic chief manager, who quickly began implementing his prejudices. Gone were the exemptions for the poor and the communal employees. In less than two years, the Jewish community was impoverished.

Many of the members of the Jewish community of Batchaikov were followers of Rabbi Shmuel, the "Rebbe Maharash," the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe (1834-1882). Mostly simple folk, they would visit their Rebbe for a Shabbat or holiday, hear a Chassidic discourse, be received for a private audience and head home, confident that G-d would surely bless them materially and spiritually. No one ever thought to trouble the Rebbe with the details of the painful situation.

One long-time Batchaikov resident whose family had maintained close contact with the squire and his ancestors was Reb Shmuel. This Reb Shmuel was visiting the Rebbe when, during a private audience, the Rebbe began questioning him about the state of affairs in Batchaikov. Reb Shmuel told him everything.

After admonishing Reb Shmuel for not informing him of the situation earlier, the Rebbe gave Reb Shmuel explicit instructions. "Your squire's life is in danger. Travel home. Tell him in my name that I know he is critically ill and the doctors have just about despaired of his life. Let him help the Jewish families who live on his properties; for every Jewish family he helps, I promise him one month of life and health."

After returning home, Reb Shmuel tried to visit the squire but was refused admittance. Since it was a pleasant summer day, the doctor requested that the squire be taken outside for a ride. As Reb Shmuel stood from a distance and watched the old, broken gentleman get into the carriage, his heart was pained. The moment the squire saw Reb Shmuel on the road, he invited him into his carriage.

Reb Shmuel climbed aboard the coach and immediately passed on the Rebbe's message. The squire asked Reb Shmuel to draw up a complete list of every Jewish family in Batchaikov and the neighbouring areas that could earn a living from his estate. In total, Reb Shmuel compiled a list of over 160 families.

So it was that over 160 families, plus a few dozen more from the surrounding area, were once again able to make a living. And the squire recovered.

About fourteen years later, Reb Shmuel was once again visiting Lubavitch, though the Rebbe Maharash had passed away some eleven years earlier.

Reb Shmuel related this story to his fellow Chassidim and then revealed the reason behind his visit: though the squire was exceedingly old, for the past fourteen years he had felt robust. Recently, however, he began feeling ill. He asked Reb Shmuel to visit the resting place of the Rebbe to inform him that according to the squire's tally, he was owed another fourteen months of life...

Reb Shmuel visited the Rebbe's grave and relayed the message. Needless to say, the Rebbe kept his promise.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

If you lend money—kesef. (Ex. 22:24)

The Tzemach Tzedek, the third Chabad-Lubavitch Rebbe, explained that the Hebrew word for "money,"—kesef—comes from the root word meaning "longing and yearning." The soul, he explained, always yearns to go upward, attaining higher and higher levels of spirituality. "If you lend money"—G-d "lends" the eternal soul to each of us for a certain period of time, to dwell in a physical body in this world. It is up to the individual to utilize that loan to the fullest, taking advantage of every day that is granted on earth. (*Hayom Yom*)

One of the reasons the Jews were commanded to donate a half-shekel to the Sanctuary was to atone for the sin of the golden calf. The fact that the sum was a half coin teaches that no matter how sinful a Jew may be, only half of his being can become tainted by his misdeeds. The other half, his G-dly soul, exists on a higher plane and is a veritable part of G-d Himself, and can never become impure. All a Jew has to do is seek atonement for the half that went astray, and then all of him is whole! (*Book of Our Heritage*)

If a man digs a pit... the owner of the pit shall make it good, and return money (kesef) to the owner (Ex. 21:34)

Every person "digs a pit" with his sins into which other people fall and get hurt. The way we correct this situation, and "make it good", is by "returning kesef (related to the word kisuf - longing and yearning) to the owner"; with a sincere desire to return to the "Owner" of the world in repentance. (*Likutei Sefat Emet*)

The appearance of the glory of G-d was like a devouring fire (Ex. 24:17)

The litmus test to determine if our service is indeed acceptable before G-d is whether or not we feel a fiery enthusiasm and zeal in our worship. The excitement and ardour we experience is proof that G-d approves of the path we are embarked upon.

Conversely, a cold and indifferent attitude in our service signals that we still have far to go... (*Kedushat Levi*)

If fire breaks out and finds thorns, and shocks of corn are consumed, or the standing corn, or the field (Ex. 22:5)

It states in the Talmud: "Punishment comes to the world only on account of the wicked, yet begins with the righteous." When G-d brings punishment ("fire") into the world, it is directed primarily against the wicked ("thorns"). However, as long as righteous people exist, their merit protects everyone. Therefore, if G-d determines that punishment is absolutely necessary, the righteous are often the first to be stricken, so that their merit can no longer shield others. (*Pardes Yosef*)

If you afflict them in any way, and they cry out to Me, I will surely hear their cry (Ex. 22:22)

It is forbidden to chastise anyone too harshly, even if one's intentions are good. Because Penina inadvertently caused pain to Chana (the mother of Samuel) in trying to influence her to pray to G-d for children, we find that she was punished. One must be very careful not to cause someone to "cry out" to G-d, for He will "surely hear their cry." (*The Vilna Gaon*)

CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH		
PARSHAS MISHPATIM		
29 SHEVAT • 13 FEBRUARY		
FRIDAY NIGHT:	CANDLE LIGHTING:	8:05 PM
	MINCHA:	8:10 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS :	8:45 PM
SHABBOS MORNING:	SHACHARIS:	10:00 AM
	LAST TIME TO SAY SHEMA:	10:10 AM
	MINCHA:	8:00 PM
	SHABBOS ENDS:	9:04 PM
WEEKDAYS:	SHACHARIS: SUN- FRI:	9:15 AM
	MINCHA:	8:05 PM
	MAARIV:	8:55 PM

CANDLE LIGHTING: 12 FEBRUARY 2010		
Begins		Ends
8:05	MELBOURNE	9:04
7:56	ADELAIDE	8:53
6:18	BRISBANE	7:11
6:59	DARWIN	7:49
6:16	GOLD COAST	7:09
6:53	PERTH	7:48
7:34	SYDNEY	8:30
7:45	CANBERRA	8:42
8:03	LAUNCESTON	9:04
8:05	AUCKLAND	9:03
8:12	WELLINGTON	9:13

Dedicated to the beloved, revered leader of World Jewry
The Lubavitcher Rebbe
 זצוקללה"ה נב"מ זי"ע
 May he succeed in imploring the Almighty
 to redeem His people speedily in our days.