

Parshas Mishpatim Shabbos Shekalim

For the week ending 27 Shevat 5756
16 & 17 February 1996

This issue is dedicated to the memories of Moshe Ben Yakov Baruch (Michael Leigh) Z'L 22nd Shevat
and Yetta Freida Bat Avraham Gutman (Nettie Leigh) Z'L 26th Shevat

Summary

The Jewish People receive a series of laws concerning social justice. Topics include: Proper treatment of Jewish servants; a husband's obligations to his wife; penalties for hitting people and cursing parents, judges, and leaders; financial responsibilities for physically damaging someone or their property, either by oneself or by one's animate or inanimate property, or by pitfalls that one created; payments for theft; not returning an object that one accepted responsibility to guard; the right to self-defense for a person being robbed. Other topics include: Prohibitions against seduction; practicing witchcraft, bestiality and sacrifices to idols. The Torah warns us to treat the convert, widow and orphan with dignity, and to avoid lying. Lending and usury is forbidden, and the rights over collateral are limited. Payment of obligations to the Temple should not be delayed, and the Jewish People must be Holy, even concerning food. The Torah teaches the proper conduct for judges in court proceedings. The commandments of Shabbos and the Sabbatical year are outlined. Three times a year—Pesach, Shavuot and Succot—we are told to come to the Temple. The Torah concludes this listing of Laws with a Law of kashrus—not to mix milk and meat. Hashem promises that He will lead the Jewish People to Israel, helping them conquer the nations that live there, and tells them that by fulfilling His commandments they will bring blessings to their nation. The people promise to do and listen to everything that Hashem says. Moshe writes the Book of the Covenant, and reads it to the people. Moshe ascends the mountain for 40 days in order to receive the two Tablets of the Covenant.

Commentaries

RETURN TO SENDER

“If you encounter an ox of your enemy or his donkey wandering, you shall return it to him repeatedly.” (23:4)

We live in an era when it's hard to find a real atheist. Once, there was a young Jew from the *shtetl* (village) who had set his heart on being an *apikorus* (atheist). He traveled to the city of Odessa in the hope of meeting Yosel the apikorus - a famous atheist. On his arrival in the big city, he asked to be directed to the house of Yosel the apikorus, and he soon found himself standing before the door of the famous man. Wafting through the door came the familiar lilting tune of someone learning *gemara*. He knocked on the door, and the tune abruptly stopped. “Come in!” called a voice. He gingerly pushed the door open, and there, seated in front of him, was an old Jew with a long flowing white beard and peyos. “Excuse me for disturbing you. I'm looking for Yosel the apikorus.” The old Jew paused, looked at him, and said “You've found him. I am Yosel the apikorus.” “But...but...” he spluttered, “But, but the beard, the peyos. The gemara!” Yosel replied to him “I'm Yosel the apikorus, not Yosel the ignoramus.” Nowadays it's difficult to find an authentic card-carrying atheist. They're an endangered species, because most of us don't really know what it is that we *don't* believe in. Our doubts are not based on knowledge; rather we have become strangers in a strange land, unlettered in our own heritage. Mohammed called us “The People of The Book.” The problem is that most of us can't read The Book anymore, let alone understand it. We are like sheep who have strayed so far from home that **we have forgotten that a home even exists.**

“If you encounter an ox of your enemy or his donkey wandering, you shall return it to him repeatedly.” If the Torah shows such concern for the welfare of someone's property, commanding us to go out of our way to return his animal to him even a hundred times over, surely all the more so must we be concerned **to return a person to himself**, to try and reach out to our brothers and sisters who have lost their identity as Jews, to show them the beauty and depth of the Torah.

In our times, when so many of us are like sheep lost in a spiritual wilderness, when we have no idea how to get back home, or even that there is a home, it is a tremendous mitzva for those who can be shepherds to guide the lost and the benighted on the path that leads home to the light of Jewish self-awareness.

(Based on the Chafetz Chaim and Il"t Rabbi Nota Schiller)

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Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

972-2-810-315

fax: 972-2-812-890

ohr@jer1.co.il

38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

1-212-213-3100

fax: 1-212-213-8717

RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Gramercy.ios.com

613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

1-905-886-5730

fax: 1-905-886-6065

avram.rothman@canrem.com

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HONOR AMONGST THIEVES

“If a man shall steal an ox or a sheep or goat, and slaughter it or sell it, he shall pay five cattle in place of the ox, and four in place of the sheep.” (21:37)

Man is a deeply sensitive creature, very easily hurt and embarrassed. Unconsciously, he can cause himself deep, self-inflicted emotional wounds. Ironically, however, exactly that which he thinks is the cure for his ills, can be the emotional poison which is damaging him... In this week's Parsha there is a halacha which, on the surface, is very puzzling: Someone who steals an ox has to pay back five oxen, but someone who steals a sheep only has to pay back four sheep. Our Sages teach us that the Torah shows concern even for the self-respect of a thief: Stealing a sheep requires the thief to carry the animal upon his shoulders, which is most undignified, and so if he is caught, he has to pay only four sheep, whereas one who steals an ox merely leads the animal by a rope, which isn't embarrassing, and so his penalty is greater - five oxen. So, in reality, a sheep-stealer should *also* pay back five sheep, but in view of the fact that he has already suffered severe humiliation, the Torah considers that he has already paid part of his penalty. It must be then, that his humiliation is not something abstract, but it is so great as to be quantifiable in money. This is rather strange, for if in fact a thief does feel such tremendous embarrassment, why would he steal in the first place? And also, if we were to approach the thief at the scene of the crime and suggest to him that he must be experiencing the most terrible humiliation, he would almost certainly reply: "You must be joking! I'm getting away with a sheep! You know what this is worth?!" And yet the Torah, which sees to the very deepest levels of a person's psyche, tells us that the thief is in point of fact suffering terrible

humiliation - equivalent to the payment of money - otherwise how could his penalty have been thus reduced? The fact of the matter is that at the moment of the theft, the thief *does* feel a tremendous sense of depression and disgrace. He feels cheap. He experiences deep emotional trauma, yet he has no idea why he feels this way. And thus, he carries on stealing and causes himself more and more emotional angst, thinking that another 'job' will get him out of his emotional slump. And so the vicious circle spirals ever downward. Only by observing the Torah can one be truly happy in this world, because only the Designer understands the true nature of His creations, and only He knows what makes one happy and sad. Only Hashem knows which actions a person should stay away from and which he should embrace in order to live a rich, happy and fulfilled life.

(Adapted from Chidushei Halev)

FEELINGS

“The appearance of the glory of Hashem was like a consuming fire...” (24:17)

How do I know if Hashem is pleased with me? How do I know if what I'm doing in my service of the Creator is as He wishes it to be? From this verse we can discern a powerful indicator of how Hashem views our service to Him. To test whether the "appearance of the glory of Hashem" exists in our service of the Creator, one should know that the feeling of wanting to serve Hashem "like a consuming fire," with powerful enthusiasm and a deep love, indicates that Hashem accepts our service - since these feelings are planted in our hearts from heaven, this is a certain sign that our service is received with favor. (Kedushas Levi)

Haftorah for Parshas Shekalim: Melachim II Chapter 11

In the months of Adar and Nisan, we read four special passages of the Torah. Each is accompanied by its own special Haftorah. The Torah portions are to help us prepare for Purim and ultimately Pesach. The four Parshios are: *Parshas Shekalim* which deals with the collection of the compulsory half-shekel for offerings in the Beis Hamikdash; *Parshas Zachor*, the mitzvah to wipe out the memory of Amalek who attacked the Jewish People after the Exodus from Egypt; *Parshas Parah*, which details the laws of how a person can purify himself from the spiritual impurity that results from contact with the dead; and finally *Parshas Hachodesh*, the mitzvah of the sanctification of the new moon.

WHEN 1/2 > 10,000

Hashem is beyond any concept of time. Events which to us are separated by thousands of years, are seen by Hashem in a state of constant 'now'. The Midrash (Eliahu Rabba, Megilla 13b) tells us that Hashem knew that in the month of Adar, Haman would offer Achashverosh, king of Persia, 10,000 *kikar* of silver if he would agree to the genocide of the Jewish People. Thus, in 'anticipation' of Haman's plan, Hashem gave the Jewish People the merit of the mitzvah of the half-shekel donation to the Beis Hamikdash a thousand years *before* Haman's plot. It was this half-shekel, given in the service of the Creator, which outweighed all of Haman's 10,000 *kikar* of silver, and led to the salvation of the Jewish People in the time of Purim.



Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Hamavdil Bein Kodesh LeChol
לְיָ קָדְשׁ וְלַחֹל
“He who makes a distinction between the sacred and the secular...”

“Who gives zemiros in the night” הנותן זמירות בלילה

When something happens which is not what we hoped for we are often tempted to think of it as evil to complain about when in truth it is for our benefit and deserves to be sung about. "Night" is an allusion to those situations which seem so dark and evil. With the departure of the Shabbos, when we enjoyed a taste of the perfect joy of the World to Come, we return to the difficulties of the world we now live in. We therefore draw courage for facing the challenges of the week ahead by reminding ourselves that even those events which appear like the night will eventually be appreciated by us as something to sing about because they have been orchestrated by the Merciful One "Who gives zemiros in the night." After singing zemiros during the three meals of Shabbos we make the transition to the weekdays by this singing " zemiros in the night" which separates the sacred from the routine.

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