

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG

Unity

"When you will lend money to a poor person who is with you" (Shemos 22:24). "Look at yourself as if you are the poor person" (Rashi).

One cannot properly fulfill the mitzvos of tzedaka and chesed unless one establishes a strong sense of unity with the recipient. If one looks down on the poor, or is emotionally detached, the mere giving of money is only an incomplete mitzvah.

"Any gazing (hashkafa) in Scripture produces bad results, except for 'gaze from your holy abode', for great is the power of gifts to the poor" (Rashi Breishis 18:16). Why is hashkafa negative, and how does tzedaka transform it into a positive force?

The targum of the word "chabura—bruise" (Shemos 21:25) is mashkofi, an expression of beating. Similarly, the Hebrew word for lintel is mashkof, because the door beats against it (Rashi). Hashkafa (gazing), which is etymologically related to mashkofi, indicates an adversarial relationship; one gazes upon another, not upon himself. When we look at others as adversaries, "looks can kill", just as a physical blow can cause a bruise.

The only antidote to the hostility inherent in gazing is the unity of tzedaka. If we look at ourselves as if we are the poor person, if we overcome the adversarial relationship that typically exists between two people, Hashem's gaze upon us is transformed into a blessing.

"Do not take revenge nor bear a grudge against a member of your people, love your friend as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18). If one cut his left hand with his right, would he take revenge by then cutting his right hand? So, too, if you love your friend as yourself, as a part of you, you will not take revenge" (Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4, cited by Netziv).

Just as we must look at ourselves as if we are the poor person, so too must we relate to our friend as if he is a part of us. This unity is the true fulfillment of tzedaka and ahavas Yisroel.

When kohanim complete the Birchas Kohanim (Priestly blessings) they say, "Master of the world, we have done what You have decreed, now may You also do as You have promised us: Gaze from your holy abode and bless Your people." A kohein must bless

those present with love (be'ahava). This love, like proper tzedaka, results in the unity which transforms hashkafa, which is usually adversarial, into a heavenly blessing.

In a world of adversarial relationships, of banging and bruising, of looks which can kill, we are commanded to achieve unity between donor and recipient, blesser and blessed. By viewing and loving others as part of ourselves, we can transform negative forces into positive ones, and merit Hashem's bracha.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As the Jews stood at Mt. Sinai receiving the Torah, they "ate and drank." (Exodus 24:11) Isn't this inappropriate, especially when considering the holiness of the moment?

Rashi, in fact, maintains that the people acted improperly. It can be suggested that only because of divine mercy were the Jews spared a punishment. So, at the very moment of revelation, God manifests Himself as loving and forgiving.

Unlike Rashi, Targum insists the Jews did not literally eat and drink - for it would never enter their minds to do so at such a powerful time. Still, he suggests that the moment of revelation was so exalting, it was as if they ate and drank.

Although Rashi and Targum disagree as to whether the Jews actually ate or drank, both maintain that it is wrong to do so during a moment of deep spiritual experience.

Ramban sees it differently. He maintains that while the Jews did eat and drink, it was not inappropriate. They ate the peace offerings, and drank, making it "an occasion for rejoicing and festival...Such is one's duty to rejoice at the receiving of the Torah."

Here, Ramban offers a critical insight. While some insist that the pathway to spirituality is the suppression of the body, others maintain that the pathway to Godliness is to sanctify the physical. In fact, the very essence of halakha is to take every moment of human existence and give it spiritual meaning.

For most faith communities, a moment of revelation could never involve eating and drinking. Ramban points out that for the Jewish people, physical enjoyment may not contradict Divine revelation. After all, the goal of Torah is to connect heaven and earth.

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Once, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch decided to vacation. He was asked by his followers how he could indulge himself in such frivolity. Rabbi Hirsch responded that when, after death, he would come before God, God would ask him, "Shimshon, why didn't you see my Alps?" R. Hirsch said that he wanted to have what to answer. For Hirsch, the Alps are manifestations of God's creative power. Through an experience of pleasure, he was able to experience the Divine.

And at the moment of revelation, we are taught a similar message. Torah is not meant to separate us from the real world of physical needs and desires. Even eating and drinking can enhance the most holy of moments. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd he (Moses) took the book of the covenant and he read it into the ears of the nation; and they said, 'Everything which the Lord has spoken, we shall do and we shall listen.' And Moses took the blood (of the sacrifices just offered) and he sprinkled it on the nation; he said, 'Here is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has entered into with you on the basis of all these words'" (Exodus 24:7,8).

Why is it only now, after the major legal portion of the Torah has been communicated to the Israelites, that G-d enters into His covenant with them, His special relationship with them? Would it not have been more logical for the establishment of the covenant to have occurred at the initial Revelation at Sinai, at the momentous event of the giving of the Ten Commandments by the Almighty Himself (as it were) in the midst of thunder, lightning and smoke-filled mysterium tremendum? Or even at the awesome miracle of the splitting of the Reed Sea, at the very

instant when the Israelites triumphantly emerge from dry land while the chasing Egyptians just behind them are inundated by Tsunami-like violent and virulent waves?

Does not the establishment of the covenant at this point in time, at the conclusion of three chapters and exactly one-hundred verses of dry legalism from how we must treat our slaves to the boundaries of the Promised Land, seem somewhat anti-climatic—especially after the two major miraculous events of the splitting of the Sea and the Revelation at the Mount which all of Israel witnessed with their own eyes? After all, the "book of the covenant" over which the covenant is established consists of the portions of Torah given until this point—from the story of the Creation to the giving away of the Torah, the Noahide laws of morality and the laws given at Marah including the legal code of Mishpatim (Rashi 24:3,4,7) -- was written by Moses alone, while the splitting of the Sea and the Revelation took place before the eyes of an entire nation!

Yes, the Israelites saw the splitting of the Reed Sea, "Israel saw the great hand with which the Lord performed against Egypt; the nation feared the Lord, and believed in the Lord and in Moses His servant" (Exodus 14:31). Yes, seeing is even believing, as the Torah text testifies. But seeing is not yet understanding, is still not internalizing. We see only the externals, the event as it occurs, the individual how he acts. We do not necessarily understand what lies behind the event, what caused the individual to do what he did, and what that particular event or action has to do with us and our subsequent thoughts, activities and commitments. We look out in order to see; after having seen, the impression with which we are left is superficial and external. And external impressions fade from consciousness only too quickly. Hence shortly after the Splitting of the Sea, indeed, but three days and two verses after the Song at the Sea, the Israelites once again bitterly complain and kvetch against Moses at Marah because the waters are bitter (Exodus 15:23,24).

And then the Almighty reveals the secret: "If only you would listen, surely listen to the voice of the Lord your G-d and do what is righteous in His eyes...then all the malaise I inflicted upon Egypt would not fall upon you" (Exodus 15:26).

G-d is not satisfied with our seeing; G-d is waiting for our listening!

In His introduction to the Revelation at Sinai, G-d tells the Israelites, "You have seen what I have done to Egypt"—but seeing is not sufficient. "And now if you will listen, surely listen, to My voice..., then you will be to Me a Kingdom of Priest-teachers and a holy people." (Exodus 19:14).

But alas, even during the Revelation, the Israelites merely "saw the sounds and the sound of the shofar; the nation saw and trembled and stood from far" (Exodus 19:15). When one sees, one may become awestruck and even frightened, but one remains

distant, removed, far away; the sight quickly dissipates, fades from consciousness. And so only forty days after the Revelation, the Israelites worship the Golden Calf. Apparently it is only when one listens that one is drawn close, that one becomes truly changed by the experience.

What does it mean to listen? The watch-word of our faith is "Hear oh Israel the Lord our G-d the Lord is One." What is the meaning of the introductory word, shema, hear? B.T. Berakhot 15a gives three explanations: the first is to let one's ear hear what one's mouth is saying, an audial function of hearing the words; the second goes one step further, suggesting cognitive appreciation, insisting that one recite the words in any language one understands; the third expresses the deepest meaning of hearing, to accept the yoke of the Kingship of G-d, to internalize the implications of the words, to listen in a way which one enlists one's commitment to the ramifications of the words! To internalize the truth that G-d is the one unity of the universe, the ground of all being and the purpose of our existence, means to commit ourselves to His will body and soul. This is what it means to listen and thereby enlist oneself—wholly and lovingly.

We are not the people of the sights; we are rather the people of the Book. And the Book consists of words which are spoken and speak out (dibbur, daber) to us, the Book is read and calls out (Kara, Mikra) to us—to change. A book must be read, heard, listened to, enlisted for, internalized within our very gut until our personalities are changed by its words from our insides out (Rabbi S.R. Hirsch says that the root of shema is ma, intestines). Sights are open to the interpretation of each viewer—and the Israelites apparently interpreted the sights as what G-d was doing for them; the Book of laws told Israel what G-d wanted them to do for Him; the Book explained G-d's purpose behind the events, His desire for every individual to be free, His demand that every individual be moral. The sights impressed the generation of the Exodus; the Book is a legacy for all generations.

Hence the Almighty must wait to enter into the covenant until we cry out "we shall do and we shall listen," we shall not merely see but we shall hear, internalize and change in accordance with the Divine words. And this pledge only comes at the end of this week's Torah reading, with Moses' presentation of the Book of the Covenant to Israel. © 2005 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

With Parashas Mishpatim being primarily a conglomerate of Jewish Laws, the commentators provide much insight as to why seemingly disparate topics are placed next to each other. There are occasions where it is not just the sequence and placement of particular laws that demand

explanation, but why contiguous topics seem to be interrupted. This is the case when Moshe was told to teach about keeping the Sabbath and the Holidays (Shemos 23:12-17), where we are taught about things other than the holy days of the Jewish calendar in between the obligation to rest on Shabbos and observing the Yomim Tovim .

"And all that I have said to you shall you keep, and the names of other gods should not be uttered; they shall not be heard [coming out of] your mouth" (23:13). Very important concepts for sure, but why are they placed between keeping the Sabbath and the Holidays? Especially since the prohibition of idol worship was previously mentioned in our Parasha (22:19), and extending it to include even mentioning other deities (and any comparison to keeping all the laws) would seem to more appropriate there.

Inserting idol worship in between the Sabbath - whose observance is a testimony that there is a Creator, and the Holidays - which remind us that the Creator didn't abandon His creation, but is still involved in it (as evidenced by His taking us out of Egypt on Pesach, the public revelation and giving of the Torah on Shevuos, and providing all of our needs - including the protective Clouds in the desert - on Succos) is logical, as they negate it. If there is One Creator, and He hasn't given the reins over to His subordinates, there is no reason to worship them. Nevertheless, if this was the point of the "interruption," it would have been more effective if the need to keep all the laws wasn't inserted with it.

The commentators point out that (one of) the intention(s) of the reminder to "keep all of the things I have said" is to instruct us to "keep" or "watch over" the commandments by creating protective layers around the laws, i.e. the rabbinical decrees that create a fence around the biblical prohibitions. It is interesting to note that the Torah contrasts the need to provide more than just "lip service" to the commandments (but actually "keep" them, even observing the protective layers around the prohibition) with the prohibition against even giving just "lip service" to other belief systems, i.e. even mentioning, or causing the mention of, other gods. However, the Torah itself mentions some of those other gods (as being the gods of other nations, and warning us not to follow them), and we are therefore permitted to mention those names (although derogatorily). If the Torah mentions other gods, how could the rabbis have decreed that we shouldn't? It is therefore possible that the Torah itself created this particular fence, knowing that it would not have been "built" by those entrusted with the responsibility of putting all of them up.

When did Jews from all over gather to learn from the Torah leaders - the Kohanim whose lives were dedicated to studying and teaching Torah? On the Holidays, when we were all obligated to come to Jerusalem. This might be why the Torah put the need to create the protective fences right before the obligation

to observe the Holidays, as that is when we would be instructed how to best avoid violating any biblical prohibitions, and which new layers needed to be added. The personal contact with the Kohain that brought one's offering allowed for personal instruction regarding continued spiritual growth, and the gathering of the entire nation provided the setting to disseminate any needed information.

Shabbos, when we are not distracted by the daily grind, also provides the setting for spiritual reflection and growth, and has allows us to attend shiurim (lectures) and to converse with our Torah leaders more than any other day. Perhaps the reason the Torah inserted the need to have protective rabbinical decrees in between Shabbos and the Yomim Tovim is precisely because these are the times that we can best learn how to grow spiritually and ensure the proper observance of the commandments. By putting this need here, we are being told to take advantage of the opportunity that these holy days provide, by using the time (and access) properly. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Having just heard the exalted message of the Ten Commandments, the Jewish people were undoubtedly inspired and committed to do great things in their lives. Yet, the Ten Commandments, upon close inspection and analysis, are pretty much generalities. What is the definition of murder, of stealing, of coveting? How is one to remember the Sabbath day and to keep it holy? How is one to honor one's father and mother? What does it mean to take God's name in vain? None of this is spelled out for us in the Ten Commandments, as inspiring and demanding as these words are. The words of the Ten Commandments are too vague to implement, too lofty to translate into practical everyday human life. That is why the Torah immediately follows the section detailing the Ten Commandments with this week's parsha section of Mishpatim with its laws and details - the nitty-gritty of Jewish observance and tradition. And, since the written Torah itself does not communicate to us all of the necessary details and instructions, it is the Oral Law that provides the final interpretation and explanation that transforms the lofty ideals of the Ten Commandments into concrete actions and established behavior patterns of everyday human life. People tend to pay lip service to lofty goals and great ideals, but rarely are able to translate these goals and ideals into their own behavior without specific instructions and detailed guidelines.

We have seen in the world how great ideals like love, peace, tolerance, etc. fall by the wayside unless laws and judicial systems are put into place to define and safeguard them. The Torah does not leave these matters to chance or human vagaries. Judaism is a

faith of details. I learned long ago in law school and later in actual legal practice that the devil is truly in the details. This week's parsha is the springboard for five or six major tractates of the Talmud, for many hundreds of pages of discussions and for the opinions of countless scholars over the ages - all to establish the details of Sinai and translate them into everyday life. Jewish life as we know it is an outgrowth of these discussions, opinions, explanations and minute details. Those who relegate details to unimportance are doomed to lose the ideals as well over time.

There is a story that ruefully illustrates this point. A rabbi is sitting next to a Jewish astrophysicist on a plane. The professor leans over and sees the rabbi studying Talmud and upon being told what Talmud is - the details of Jewish life - the professor loftily remarks: "I don't need any of that. All religion can be summed up in one sentence - love your fellow man. That is all there is to it." The rabbi upon learning that his traveling companion is a professor of astrophysics, sweetly retorts: "Well, I can sum up all of astrophysics in one sentence - twinkle, twinkle little star!" Life, Judaism, and astrophysics are all too complex to be summed up in one sentence, no matter how lofty the ideals expressed. That is why Mishpatim is such an important part of Torah learning. © 2005 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

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Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi David Lister, Muswell Hill Synagogue

Mitsubishi Electric Research Laboratories are conducting research into computerised facial scanning and recognition. Their website reports: We will measure several aspects of a subject's face including 3D geometry, smallscale mesostructure (e.g. wrinkles, bumps, etc.) and surface reflectance in a variety of expressions and for the subject pronouncing different words. Each subject will also be asked about their lifestyle and age.

So many factors affect our faces! The spacing of eyes, the jut or curve of a nose or jaw, the texture, shade and sheen of the skin, the words we speak, the expression we wear at a given moment, lifestyle, age— all mould the face as a dynamic, shifting entity.

The Midrash Tanchuma (Pinchas, 10) states, "Just as their faces are dissimilar, so their souls are dissimilar." Our faces mirror our souls. A face can remain recognisably the same over decades, but it is constantly evolving and altering. Similarly, our souls have the same basic ingredients, but are engaged in an ongoing metamorphosis which plays out, second by second, over a lifetime.

How complex, then, is the Jewish nation! There are around thirteen million Jews in the world. Millions of different Jewish faces, all in a constant flux of smile, grimace, shout, concentration, shifting, growing, changing, an endless spiritual kaleidoscope.

However, the Torah seems to ignore this vast diversity. Certainly, some rules just apply to women, to Cohanim or to Levites. But the majority are uniform—Shabbat, kashrut, niddah, returning lost objects. How can this work?

Three times a year, in Biblical times, the Jewish people were summoned to the Temple, celebrating Pesach, Shavuot and Succot. Evidently, this was a mechanism to recharge the people spiritually and to keep them in touch with their Creator. Nowadays, without our Temple, we still have the festivals as Temples in time, when we can stand with G-d.

This week's Sidrah states: "Three times, you will celebrate for Me in the year." (Shemot 23:14) Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch remarks that the root of the word for "celebrate"—tachog—stems from the Hebrew chug, meaning circle. On festivals, the Almighty invites us not to queue up to see Him, but to "encircle Him". Just as people in a circle will see something in its centre from their own unique perspective, so each of us can and should view G-d from our own standpoint, according to the strengths and weaknesses, the likes and dislikes in our own developing souls.

Just as faces alter in so many different ways, so we will probably occupy a different place in the circle each time. Our relationship with G-d will be different every festival, every year.

The Torah recognises this, encouraging us to celebrate our own unique connection with G-d. We can use where we are at the festivals as a personalised motif that will direct and pervade everything we do over the next few months, so that each mitzvah will be proudly stamped with our own spiritual image.

Conflict Resolution

by Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks

Judaism is not known for its power of conflict resolution. So often and so deeply do Jews tend to argue ("two Jews—three opinions") that it sometimes seems more like a system of conflict creation. However, Judaism does contain one of the most powerful conflict resolution techniques ever conceived. It is called "argument for the sake of Heaven."

Judaism is the only religion in history whose key texts are anthologies of argument. In Tenakh, Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah and Job all argue with G-d Himself. The Mishnah is full of disagreements between the sages: Rabbi X says this, Rabbi Y says that. These are amplified rather than resolved in the Talmud. Midrash offers a whole series of different interpretations of almost every verse and phrase of the Torah.

Classic editions of the Torah, Talmud and codes of Jewish law are surrounded by commentary

and counter-commentary. The one exception proves the rule. In his Mishneh Torah, Maimonides attempted to present only the conclusions of the Talmud, not its arguments. In the eight centuries since, the Mishneh Torah has become one of the most debated of all Rabbinic texts. Argument is part of the text and texture of Judaism.

However, the Sages (Avot 5:20) coined the phrase machloket le-shem shamayim, "argument for the sake of Heaven," to signal that disagreement is not always a negative phenomenon. As an example, they cited the arguments between Hillel and Shammai. The opposite—an argument not for the sake of Heaven—was typified by Korach and his followers when they challenged Moses and Aaron's leadership.

What is the difference between them? The thirteenth century Provençal scholar Menachem ha-Meiri said that an argument for the sake of Heaven is one pursued for the sake of truth. An argument not for the sake of Heaven is undertaken for the sake of victory.

An argument for the sake of victory is ad hominem. What matters is that I win and you lose. The result is that we both suffer. If I lose, I lose. But if I win, I also lose—because by diminishing you, I diminish myself. There is no happy outcome. Instead there is bitterness and acrimony.

An argument for the sake of truth is the opposite. If I win, I win. But if I lose, I also win, because being defeated by the truth is the only defeat that is also a victory. Scientists know that the refutation of a hypothesis is an advance of knowledge. Artists, too, know that we learn most by our mistakes.

When truth matters more than who wins the argument, conflict is turned into a learning experience. If we are prepared to argue our case, and listen to and respect the views of those who disagree, argument becomes an exercise in honesty and understanding. That is Judaism's great insight into conflict resolution—and it works. © 2005 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

Transcribed by David Twersky

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman

Among the many civil and monetary laws in this week's parsha is the Torah's first mention of the prohibition against taking interest: "When you lend money to My people (ki tilveh es ami), to the poor person who is with you, do not act toward him as a creditor; do not lay interest upon him." [Shmos 22:24]

Homiletically, the Kotzker Rebbe offers an insight into this pasuk [verse] that differs from the p'shuto shel mikra [simple interpretation].

We learn in Pirkei Avos [Ethics of the Fathers]: "When a person dies he is not accompanied by his

wealth or by his jewelry or by his precious stones, only by his Torah and his good deeds" [Avos 6:9]. This Mishnah expresses a truth with which we are all familiar—"You can't take it with you." This idea is one of the recurring themes of the Book of Koheles, which deals at length with the futilities of this world. With that in mind, the Kotzker Rebbe gives a Chassidic insight into this pasuk.

The word 'Tilveh' which means 'lend' can also (by changing the vowels) be read 'Tilaveh' which means escort. The reading then is "If there is any type of money that will escort My people (to the World to Come) it is the money given to the poor person with you (as charity and kindness). That is the only type of money that will accompany a person to the next world.

Saying Is Not Believing

The pasuk in this week's parsha teaches that certain "wicked" people are ineligible to be witnesses [Shmos 24:21]. The Gemara [Sanhedrin 29a] discusses the instructions given to witnesses in a monetary trial in order to encourage them to tell the truth. Rabbi Yehudah states that we quote to them the pasuk from Mishlei, "Like clouds and wind without rain, so is one who lauds himself for a false gift" [25:14]. This means that just as abundant and seasonable rain is promised as a reward for faithfully keeping the commandments, so too rain is withheld as a punishment for people's sins. Thus the witnesses are warned that by their false testimony they may bring drought and famine.

Rava objects that this type of threat will only scare farmers. If the witnesses are accountants, this will not frighten them. Therefore, Rava suggests that we tell the witnesses that for false testimony *dever* [pestilence] comes to the land.

Rav Ashi in turn objects to Rava's threat because the witnesses may take the fatalistic attitude that "when our time is up, we will die," and not be scared by the threat of illness or plague. Rather, Rav Ashi suggests, based on the teaching of Nosson Bar Mar Zutra, we tell them false witnesses are despised even by the people who bought them off, as it is written (quoting Izevel's plan for her husband Achav to hire false witnesses) "Then seat two unscrupulous people (benei bli'ya-al) opposite him..." [Melachim I 21:10].

According to the Gemara, this portrayal of being a nothing, even in the eyes of the people who hired them to buy their testimony, is the most inhibiting threat that the Court can use to scare the witnesses into telling the truth. In the first place, people attempting to buy off others as false witnesses are not the most upstanding people in the community. If witnesses who agree to be bought off are perceived as worthless members of society even in the eyes of those who hired them, that is really significant.

This Gemara underscores one of the major themes of the Slabodka school of mussar. The way to appeal to a person, to influence him to improve and to

want to be an upright Jew is to appeal to his sense of greatness. "You are a son of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. You are a Jew. How can you allow yourself to be sold, to cheapen yourself even in the eyes of the corrupt members of society?" This concept of 'Gadlus haAdam'—emphasizing what a person is and what a person can become—is the most effective way of improving a person.

Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi says that if Nosson Bar Mar Zutra's approach is correct—that their fear of appearing as low-lives in the eyes of their employers makes the witnesses tell the truth—then how is it ever possible for us to do something wrong? If the L-rd is in front of my eyes constantly, if He is standing 'right here' and He is watching me and He sees what I am doing, how can I ever do something wrong? I certainly would not want the Master of the Universe to think I am a low-life! How could a person talk in the middle of davening? It states "I have set Hashem before me always" [Tehillim 16:8]?

The answer is that "I have set Hashem before me always" is lip service. We say it. We say that we believe it. But it could not be real, because if it was real then the restraining power of G-d thinking we were "base men" would certainly inhibit us from doing any wrong.

Emunah [belief] is theory, but not practice. This helps us to better understand the Gemara at the end of Tractate Makkos [24a]. The Gemara cites different Tanach personalities who tried to synopsize the Torah, reducing the 613 commandments to their fundamental components. Chabakuk [2:4] finally came and reduced them to a single principle: The righteous person will live through his faith. Every mitzvah and every sin boils down to one thing. If Emunah was real, if the words "I have set Hashem before me always" were real, we would be different people. The further we are from this reality, the further we are from the goal of true Torah observance.

If there is one single concept that a person should try to internalize, it is these words: "I have set Hashem before me always." This determines how real the Almighty is in a person's life. This will make the difference in the type of Jew and the type of person he will be. © 2005 Rabbi Y. Frand & www.torah.org

RABBI BARUCH LEDERMAN

Shul Week

A man once asked Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel answered, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your friend. The rest is explanation. Go learn." Rebbi Akiva once made a similar statement: "Love your neighbor like yourself. This is the great rule of the Torah."

Parshas Mishpatim, and indeed the entire Torah, teaches us many detailed laws of theft, damage, proper treatment of servants, guarding other peoples

property responsibly, tale bearing, honest business practices—the list goes on and on. The great sages Hillel and Rabbi Akiva are teaching us that if we appreciate the other person's point of view with compassion and understanding, we will not come to commit any of these trespasses in the first place, as the following true story illustrates:

A woman was walking with her friend. They witnessed a mother berating her young daughter in a brutal manner. The little girl was cringing and you could see the terror on her face. The woman approached the mother. She said with sincere concern and respect, "I can see that you care about your child, and it's obvious that she has done things to get you angry. I also have children and sometimes lose my temper. I have some ideas that have helped me. You know your child better than I do, but perhaps my experiences can be helpful for you also."

Amazingly, the mother, who seemed just moments ago to be a terrible evil person, calmed down right before their eyes. "I thank you for your offer. I feel at a total loss. I hate losing my temper. But I do it over and over again. I would love it if you could give me some tips." Indeed, the frustrated mother, with a little help from her friends, went on to make great strides, becoming a more fair and effective parent.

The friend, who had observed this whole scene, later asked privately, "All I wanted to do was tell off that horrible mother. I was fuming. No child should ever be treated like that. But if I did tell her off, it probably would have accomplished nothing—maybe even made things worse. You on the other hand treated her with kindness and compassion, and brought about such an incredible turn-around. How did you know to do what you did?"

"I never would have had a clue what to do or to think," replied the woman, "But some time ago, I heard a story about the Chofetz Chaim ztz"l that changed my entire perspective. This amazing story has guided and inspired me ever since."

Once, a burly, gruff looking, man who had served in the Russian army, entered a Jewish Inn and ordered a meal. When Jewish boys were drafted, it was usually the end of yiddishkeit for them. The army brainwashed them to worship Mother Russia rather than G-d. He plopped himself down and ate in a most disgusting manner—stuffing an entire chicken down his mouth. It was revolting that this man, a Jew, could conduct himself in so repulsive a manner, not to mention the fact that he did not recite a bracha (blessing) or wear a yarmulke (ritual skullcap) while he ate.

The innkeeper and the others present were sickened and embarrassed by this display; though none dared say anything. The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan) happened to be a guest at that Inn. He saw the young man and slowly approached him. Everyone wondered, what would the Chofetz Chaim possibly say

to this man. What could he say? Surely this oaf would not listen to any rebuke, even from such a holy man.

The Chofetz Chaim asked the man, "Is it true that you served in the Russian army?" "Yes," snorted the man, bracing his defenses for the oncoming tongue-lashing he was fully expecting.

"Tell me," began the Chofetz Chaim, "How did you manage to keep your Jewish identity in those circumstances? So many Jewish boys entered the army, only to eventually give up their Judaism. They are forced to serve for 25 years without any kosher food, Jewish holidays, or any other vestige of Judaism. Yet, when you could have easily gone to any Inn, you chose a Jewish one. You still identify as a Jew. I don't know if I could have done what you did. You are an inspiration. Where did you find the strength?"

The soldier, caught off guard and clearly moved, looked straight at the Chofetz Chaim, "It was so hard, they did everything to pound it out of us—to make us denounce and forget that we were Jews."

"It is a miracle that you made it through. Now you can begin to learn the Torah and mitzvos that you were deprived of all these years."

"But Rabbi, how can I possibly do that," the soldier, now sobbing bitterly, responded. He continued through his tears, "I want to return to my heritage, but I am so far removed. Surely it isn't possible for someone like me to learn."

"No," said the Chofetz Chaim, "It is still possible. It is always possible. I can show you how." As the soldier spoke to the Chofetz Chaim, the stones on his heart began to melt. Had the Chofetz Chaim not understood and appreciated this man's perspective, this amazing episode never would have occurred. What did happen was: from that day on, the former soldier began a path to repentance and as the years went by, developed into an observant, well learned Jew. © 2005 Rabbi B. Lederman & Congregation Kehillas Torah

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

This week's Torah portion, which has many diverse mitzvot, has many places where the simple meaning of a verse is different from the halacha as it is derived by the Midrash. There are dozens of examples in the portion where the commentators note that the sages interpreted a verse for the purpose of halacha in a different way than the simple meaning. One interesting example where this happens is with respect to the law requiring that an object taken as collateral for a loan must be returned to the borrower: "If you take the garment of a colleague as collateral, return it to him before sundown. For this is his only cover, it is the clothing on his skin, in what will he lie down?" [Shemot 22:25-26]. The straightforward interpretation (see Chizkuni and Tanchuma, Mishpatim 10) is that this refers to clothing that is meant for use during the night

(the sages call this a "night garment"). The Torah allows the lender to keep the garment during the day, but he must return it to the borrower at night for his use. This law is repeated in Devarim: "If he is a poor man, do not lie down with his deposit. Give the deposit back to him when the sun sets, and he will lie in his garment and bless you." [24:12-13].

However, Rashi quotes the Midrash (see Bava Metzia 114b): "During the whole day, you shall return it to him, until the sun sets, and afterwards you can take it back until the next morning comes. The verse is referring to a daytime garment, which is not needed at night." That is, the verse refers to the opposite case—a daytime garment, which must be returned during the day and can be retaken during the night, until morning. This appears to be far from the simple meaning of the verse, and it has been questioned by the Tosafot Ri" d in the Talmud: "This is hard to understand, since it is written, 'this is his only cover, it is the clothing on his skin, in what will he lie down?'" That is, the verse clearly seems to refer to a night garment. Why did the sages ignore the simple interpretation and take the verse to be referring to a daytime garment?

It seems that this is a specific example of a general phenomenon, where the Midrash expands a principle explicitly stated in a verse. Based only on the simple meaning of these verses in Shemot and in Devarim, we might have thought that the prohibition only concerns keeping a night garment, since it is used for lying down, while a daytime garment, which is not used for this purpose, can be kept during the day. The Midrash teaches us that the fact that the Torah mentions only night garments is not meant to restrict the prohibition to such clothing but is rather because the Torah prefers to use "examples from common experience." That is, a night garment is simply a convenient example of the prohibition. Halachically, there is no difference between a night garment and a daytime garment, and both must be returned to the owner during the time when they are normally in use.

This shows how to understand the common situation where there is an apparent contradiction between the simple interpretation of a passage and the explanation of the Midrash. The intention is not to present the literal interpretation of the verse, but rather to show how to apply the law, usually by hinting at a broader halacha than what appears in the verse itself.

RABBI ZVI MILLER

Parsha Insights

Transcribed by David Twersky

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman

If one person sees someone intentionally commit a reprehensible act, he is not allowed to testify against him because the court does not accept the testimony

of a lone witness. Yet, our Sages (Pesachim 113) tell us that the witness is permitted to abhor that person for his lowly act until he repents.

Nevertheless, the Talmud (based on Shemos 23:5) tells us that if you happen upon two people at the same time: one is your friend, who is unloading his overburdened donkey; and the other is the same person that you are permitted to abhor, who is loading his donkey—you should assist the person that you abhor. The reason that you should help him is to remove the negative feelings from your heart.

On one hand, the Torah tells us we should abhor the person who acted immorally. On the other hand, the Torah tells us to offer him assistance and soften our feelings towards him. Moreover, we are directed to help him at the expense of our friend—who has not sinned—and is struggling to unload his burdened donkey.

The Torah is concerned that the negative feelings that we are allowed to feel towards the perpetrator, will spiral from an intellectual perspective into personal hatred.

The entire purpose of the Torah is to purify us from any impurities in our heart. Therefore, sometimes we are instructed to abrogate Mitzvos (i.e., abhorring the perpetrator, helping his righteous friend unload, bringing relief to a suffering animal) and perform Mitzvos that we were not originally obliged to do (i.e., show love and kindness to someone we should abhor) - in order to rectify our negative impulse.

Since the Mitzvos were given in order to purify us, the Mitzvos that are more likely to purify us, take precedence over other Mitzvos. May we embrace all the Mitzvoth "in their proper time and place" so that our hearts be as pure as water from a fresh, mountain stream.

Implement: Do a favor for a person that you are not particularly fond of. [Based on *Ohr HaZafon*, by Rav Nosson Zvi Finkel, B153] © 2005 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salant Foundation

