

מִשְׁפָּטִים

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Our *Parashah* opens: "And these are the *Mishpatim* / ordinances that you shall place before them." R' Moshe David Valle z"l (Italy; 1697-1777) writes: This *Parashah* follows from the preceding one in that the *Aseret Ha'dibrot* / Ten Commandments are the generalities while the *Mishpatim* are the particulars. That is why, writes R' Valle, our *Parashah* begins with the letter "Vav," meaning "and"--indicating the connection between the generalities in last week's *Parashah* and the particulars in this week's *Parashah*. After *Bnei Yisrael* heard the commandments in general, the Master of Prophets (Moshe Rabbeinu) was instructed to place the particulars before them.

R' Valle continues: Every detail of *Halachah* parallels in some way the manner in which *Hashem* runs the world. Thus, the *Gemara* (*Niddah* 73a) teaches: "If one studies *Halachah* every day, he is guaranteed to be at home in *Olam Ha'ba* / the World-to-Come, as it is written (*Chabakuk* 3:6), '*Halichot Olam* / The ways of the world are his.' Do not read, '*Halichot*,'" says the *Gemara*, "but rather, '*Halachot*.'" [Until here from the *Gemara*] What, asks R' Valle, is the connection between "*Halichot*" / "the ways of the world" and "*Halachah*"? The answer, as stated, is that the *Halachot* in this world parallel the ways that *Hashem* runs the world [though the parallel is mostly beyond us] and therefore have the power to influence all of existence. (*Brit Olam*)

Shabbat

R' Yosef Karo z"l (1488-1575; Greece and Eretz Yisrael) writes: Even if a person has a large household staff, he should make an effort to prepare something for *Shabbat* himself in order to honor the day--for example: the Talmudic sage Rav Chisda would chop vegetables very fine; Rabbah and Rav Yosef would chop wood; Rabbi Zera would light the fire; and Rav Nachman would clean the house, put away the weekday dishes, and take out the *Shabbat* dishes. Every person should learn from these sages not to say that such activities are beneath his dignity. To the contrary, a person is honored when he honors *Shabbat*. (*Shulchan Aruch: O.C.* 250:1)

R' Betzalel ben Shlomo z"l (1640-1691; *Darshan* in Slutsk and Przemyśl) asks: In general, a person may perform a *Mitzvah* through a *Shaliach* / proxy. Why, in the case of preparing for *Shabbat*, do we say that it is preferable to perform the *Mitzvah* in person? He explains:

The *Gemara* (*Kiddushin* 41a) teaches that although a man could, technically speaking, betroth a wife via a proxy, it is *Mitzvah* for a groom to perform the betrothal personally. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

Midrash Rabbah teaches that *Shabbat* said to *Hashem*, "Every day has a mate: Sunday has Monday, Tuesday has Wednesday, and Thursday has Friday. Only I do not have a mate." *Hashem* answered, says the *Midrash*: "The Jewish People will be your mate." [Until here from the *Midrash*]

As such, concludes R' Betzalel, since *Shabbat* is our bride, we should take part personally in preparing for her. (*Korban Shabbat* 1:5)

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"I shall not drive them away from you in a single year, lest the Land become desolate and the wildlife of the field multiply against you. Little by little shall I drive them away from you, until you become fruitful and make the Land your heritage." (23:29-30)

Midrash Tanchuma mentions our verse when it describes the reward *Hashem* promised Avraham Avinu for hosting the three angels. Specifically, commenting on Avraham's words (*Bereishit* 18:4), "Let a little water be taken," the *Midrash* relates that *Hashem* said to Avraham: "Because you said, 'Let [there] be taken,' I will give your descendants the *Mitzvah* of *Korban Pesach*, about which it says (*Shmot* 12:3), 'They shall take for themselves -- each man -- a lamb or kid . . .' Because you said, 'A little,' I will drive out your descendants' enemies little-by-little [so that *Bnei Yisrael* can settle the Land as they conquer it and wild animals will not take it over, as promised in our verse]. Because you said, 'Water,' I will give your descendants water in the desert." [Until here from the *Midrash*]

Why is Avraham rewarded for saying that he will bring "a little" water? R' Uri Weisblum *shlita* (*Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshivat Nachalat Ha'levi'im in Haifa, Israel) explains:

The *Gemara* (*Bava Metzia* 87a) derives from Avraham's interactions with the angels that "The righteous say little and do a lot." Avraham offered the angels bread, but he brought them an entire meal. In contrast, "The wicked say a lot and do not do even a little"--like Efron, who first offered to give away the *Me'arat Ha'machpelah* for free, and then demanded an exorbitant price for it. R' Weisblum writes: The above *Midrash* is teaching us that "*Tzadikim* say little" does not mean only that they say few words; it also means that they downplay their own words. He explains: If Avraham had said, "Let water be taken" (without "a little"), it would have meant "unlimited water." And, certainly, Avraham would have given his guests as much water as they wanted. However, by saying "a little" water, Avraham was modestly downplaying his kindness. For that proper use of speech, he certainly deserved a reward! (*He'arat Ha'derech* p.319)

"Hashem said to Moshe, 'Ascend to Me to the mountain and remain there, and I shall give you the stone *Luchot* / Tablets and the teaching and the commandment that I have written, to teach them'." (24:12)

R' Asher Yeshayah Rubin *z"l* (1777-1845; *Ropshitzer Rebbe*) said in the name of R' Menachem Mendel of Rymanow *z"l* (1745-1815; early *Chassidic Rebbe*): "At *Har Sinai*, *Bnei Yisrael* heard '*Kamatz Aleph*'."

Obviously this is not meant to be taken literally--that they heard the sound of the letter *Aleph* vowelized with a "*Kamatz*." Rather, R' Asher Yeshayah explains: The verb "*Kamatz*" (קָמַץ) means to constrict or tighten. "*Aleph*" (אֵלֶף) is an acronym of the Hebrew words "*Ozen, Lev, Peh*" / "ear, heart, mouth." Together, the *Gematria* of "*Ozen, Lev, Peh*" equals the *Gematria* of "*Einayim*" / "eyes." As such, R' Menachem Mendel is teaching that the key to successfully aligning one's behavior with the Torah is to "constrict"--limit or control--the types of thoughts that go into one's heart, the sights and sounds that go into one's eyes and ears, and the types of speech that come out of one's mouth. Guarding the eyes is most important, as hinted by the fact that the *Gematria* of *Einayim* is equal to the other three combined. (*Dvash Ha'sadeh* #168)

"If you buy an *Eved Ivri* / Jewish slave . . ." (21:2)

In last week's *Parashah*, the *Aseret Ha'dibrot* / Ten Commandments were given, and now the Torah begins to spell out the laws in detail. Why does the Torah choose to begin with the laws of an *Eved Ivri*?

R' Yitzchak Arieli *z"l* (1896-1974; *Mashgiach* of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of *Einayim La'mishpat*) explains: [The *Gemara* (*Kiddushin* 20a) teaches: "One who acquires an *Eved Ivri* acquires a master for himself." For example, the master may not sleep on a more comfortable bed than the slave is given, nor may he eat better food than the slave is fed. Thus,] by beginning the Torah's detailed laws with the laws of *Eved Ivri*, the Torah is teaching us how different the Torah's laws are from the laws of other nations. Placing these laws first also teaches the degree to which a person must perfect his own *Middot* / character traits--in particular, how he must treat another human being--as a prerequisite to Torah study.

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Shirat Ha'geulah* p.42)

"You shall not cook a kid in its mother's milk." (23:19)

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Midrash Mechilta teaches: Why was this commandment taught three times? Because *Hashem* made three covenants with *Yisrael*: one at *Har Sinai* (*Shmot* 24:7-8 -- in our *Parashah*), one on the plains of Moav (*Devarim* 29:11), and one at *Har Gerizim* and *Har Eival* (*Devarim* ch.27; *Yehoshua* 4:30-35). [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Tzvi Abba Gorelick *z"l* (*Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshiva Gedolah Zichron Moshe in South Fallsburg, N.Y.; died 2010) asks: Why is the prohibition of mixing meat and milk an appropriate reminder of *Hashem*'s covenants with the Jewish People?

He explains: *Midrash Tehilim* (ch.8) relates that when *Bnei Yisrael* made the Golden Calf, the angels rejoiced, saying, "Now *Hashem* will return the Torah to the Heavens." When Moshe then ascended to receive the second *Luchot*, the angels said to *Hashem*, "Master of the World! A short time ago, they [made a Golden Calf and thus] transgressed the Torah, which says (*Shmot* 20:3), 'You shall not have other gods in My presence!'"

The *Midrash* continues: *Hashem* replied to the angels, "When you visited Avraham, did you not eat meat and milk together, as we read (*Bereishit* 18:8), 'He took cream and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed these before them; he stood over them beneath the tree and they ate?' When a Jewish child comes home from school to eat lunch, he already knows not to eat meat and milk together!" [Until here from the *Midrash*]

It emerges, concludes R' Gorelick, that *Bnei Yisrael* received the Torah specifically because of the prohibition of mixing meat and milk.

(*Pirkei Mikra*)