

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Mishpatim

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READING THE PREFACE

Kotzker Rebbe

"And these are the ordinances that you shall set before them." (21:1)

Why does the Torah speak about the Mitzvos between man and his fellow man immediately after relating the actual giving of the Torah on Har Sinai?

Chazal teach us דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה - "Good manners are a prerequisite to Torah."

The same way that one learns about the contents of a book by reading the preface, so can we tell how much Torah a person has within him by observing how he behaves towards his fellow man.

EVALUATING OUR DEEDS

Rebbe Nachman

"And these are the ordinances that you shall set before them." (21:1)

Tasim (תשים, you shall set) alludes to Tashum (תשום, you shall evaluate).

One must always evaluate his deeds to ensure that he is acting correctly, and to rectify his shortcomings. (See Likutey Moharan I, 15:2)

PROPER PREP

Sassover Rebbe

"And these are the ordinances that you shall set before them." (21:1)

Like a table that is set and prepared to be eaten from, that is placed before a person. (Rashi)

This implies that a person should make the same concentrated effort to perform mitzvos and observe the laws as he does to prepare a table for a meal.

SACRED COMMANDMENTS

Avnei Ezel

"And these are the ordinances that you shall set before them." (21:1)

Why is this section dealing with civil law placed immediately after the passage that deals with arrangements for the altar? To tell you that you should position the Sanhedrin near the Bais HaMikdash. (Rashi)

Other nations regard the laws pertaining to the relations between one person and another not as religious observances but as social or civic duties that must be performed to preserve order in the land. The Jewish people, however, regard these civil ordinances as Divine commandments with a sanctity all their own.

Just as the ritual of sacrifices constitutes the worship in the Bais HaMikdash, the observance of Jewish civil law represents a Jew's service of G-d in everyday life outside. For this reason, it was only fitting that the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court of Law, should be situated near the holy Bais Hamikdash.

ALL FROM SINAI

Chiddushei HaRim

"And these are the ordinances that you shall set before them." (21:1)

Rashi commented: "It adds on to that which has been stated previously; just as those which have been stated previously [the Ten Commandments] are from Sinai, so too, these are from Sinai."

There are two types of laws. One group inherently contains logical reasons that can be grasped by man. The other laws are not fathomable to him. Therefore, the Torah tells us that just as all the other laws were given by Hashem, so too, are the laws that may not be understood were also given at Sinai, and they are to be obeyed because they were also commanded by Hashem.

PEACEFUL JUDGEMENTS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And these are the ordinances that you shall set before them." (21:1)

The Medrash on the first pasuk in the parshah states: "'And these are the laws' as it says, 'You founded fairness.' (Tehillim 99:4). You founded fairness for Your loved ones. By the judgments You gave them, they create arguments with one another; they come for judgment and make peace." This is surely an unusual terminology for the Medrash. It appears as if to say that the judgments of Hashem are the cause of discord amongst the Jewish People. These laws then necessitate the need for a beis din to adjudicate the matter. How can this be? Surely the whole purpose of the laws is to foster peace!

The Gerrer Rebbe, R' Avraham Mordechai Alter zt'l (Imrei Emes), answers by way of an incident that occurred with one of his chassidim. The man came to the rebbe and complained, "I was sued by one of my fellow businessmen. Before we went to beis din, though, I carefully reviewed all the necessary parts of the Shulchan Aruch and I was sure without a doubt that I would win. Yet the judges ruled against me. How can this be?"

The Imrei Emes smiled and replied, "The Medrash in Parshas Mishpatim says that the laws lead to disputes. This always bothered me, for how can it be so? It took some time but now I understand. In making the laws accessible to every Jew, Hashem enabled each person to prepare his own case. The problem is that everyone will inevitably conclude that he is right, because one isn't objective when it comes to his personal situation. Therefore, this familiarity with the laws leads to greater disputes, which eventually creates the need to go to beis din. But the power of the Torah is such that after the judges rule, the litigants accept it and make peace amongst themselves."

COMPASSION FOR THE CRIMINAL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If you acquire a Jewish bondman..." (21:2)

This case is quite rare, and moreover, it reflects negatively on the Jewish people, focusing our attention on the sinners among them. It is nevertheless chosen to open the Torah's presentation of civil law.

We might consider the criminal discussed in this case to be unworthy of our respect. After all, by stealing, he has clearly placed the materialistic desires of his body above the higher calling of his soul. Therefore, the Torah begins its laws specifically with this person's case, immediately informing us that even this blatant sinner must be treated with respect and compassion.

This compassionate approach to justice is the very heart of the system of Jewish civil law, whose goal is the refinement and elevation of our physical and material day-to-day lives. (Hitva'aduyot 5747, vol. 2, pp. 481-482)

SHABBAT FREEDOM

Reb Noson of Breslov

"If you acquire a Jewish bondman, he will serve for six years. In the seventh year, he will go free, without payment." (21:2)

The six years of slavery correspond to the six days of the week. The seventh year, in which the slave must be set free, corresponds to Shabbat.

Conceptually, slavery is like the weekdays because then one toils for one's livelihood. A person who lacks faith that G-d will provide for him "sells himself" to earn an income.

One who binds himself to Shabbat is considered a "free" man, for he is bound to the eternal world, the World to Come. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 79a)

ULTIMATE FREEDOM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If you acquire a Jewish bondman, he will serve for six years. In the seventh year, he will go free, without payment." (21:2)

"Six years" symbolizes the six thousand years of the world's existence; "Shall he serve" refers to our mission to learn Torah and perform the mitzvos.

"In the seventh" refers to the seventh millennium, when "he shall go free" - Mashiach will come and set the Jewish People free!

WHATEVER IS TAKES

Sassover Rebbe

"...but if there be a fatality, then you shall give a life in place of a life." (21:23)

If a tragedy occurs to a fellow Jew, there is an obligation to do all that is necessary to save that person.

REPAID WITH YEARNING

Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk

"When a man will open a pit, or when a man will dig a pit and not cover it, and an ox or a donkey fall into it, the owner of the pit shall make restitution; he shall return money to its owner." (21:33)

The word "kesef" which means "money" can also be read "kosef" - "longing."

Thus, the pasuk teaches that if a Tzaddik tries to reach the hard-hearted by "digging" an opening in their hearts and continues his efforts until they withdraw from materialistic thoughts - kesef - then Hashem, who has endowed the Tzaddik with the power to influence, will grant him his reward.

Hashem will repay the Tzaddik by increasing his longing - kosef - and devotion to G-d.

BEYOND LOGIC

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"When a man will open a pit, or when a man will dig a pit..." (21:33)

The laws of damages are among the most comprehensible laws in the Torah, since they are seemingly based on human logic. However, G-d provides us with several reminders that this part of the Torah, too, reflects G-d's often unfathomable will. This law is one such reminder. Logically, there would seem to be no reason to differentiate between different types of damage caused by the same pit. Nevertheless, the person who dug or uncovered the pit is only liable for certain damages and not for others.

This demonstrates that even the Torah's civil laws are not just another man-made legal system that suffers from the imperfections of all such systems, even the most advanced. They are G-d's will, which is by definition beyond our ability to fully comprehend.

This awareness helps us see these laws in their true light - as the means G-d provides us with to refine and elevate our physical and material lives - and serves to inspire us to pursue these goals enthusiastically. (Hitva'aduyot 5747, vol. 1, pp. 487-488) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

OVERCOMING THE BUTCHER

Reb Noson of Breslov

"If a man steals an ox or a sheep and butchers it or sells it, he must pay back five cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep." (21:37)

The thief represents the forces of evil which try to overcome the Jewish people. Sometimes they try to "butcher" our faith, persuading us to give up our faith altogether. At other times they try to convince us to "sell" our religion for monetary gain.

But we should know that the "ox" and "sheep" also represent the tzaddikim, who have the strength to combat evil and redeem us from sin. Ultimately, the "butcher" and the "seller" will pay dearly for their deeds. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 208b)

RETURNING THE STOLEN

Chasam Sofer

"If a man delivers to his friend money or objects to safeguard and it is stolen out of the man's house, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. If the thief is not found, then the master of the house shall approach G-d." (22:6-7)

The term "a man," as used in this pasuk, may refer not only to a man but even to G-d (as in, "G-d is a man of war" - Shemos 15:3).

Accordingly, the pasuk may be interpreted as follows:

If G-d has given "to His friend" (lit., "friend"); i.e., to a Jew (for every Jew is His friend) "money or objects" - all the material and physical requirements he needs in order to live, "to safeguard" - so that he may keep them holy, "and it is stolen out of his house" - and if the Jewish man is wicked, abusing his body and squandering his money and thus desecrating them; "if the thief is found" - if, at the time of reckoning, that man, having failed to repent, is still found guilty, "he shall pay double" - he will receive a double punishment according to his crime (as it is written: "...that she has received from the hand of G-d double for all her sins" - Yeshayahu 40:2).

But "if the thief is not found" - if he is found innocent because he has repented, "then the master of the house shall come near to G-d" - the man will come closer to G-d, even closer than he had been before he had committed the transgression, for "even completely righteous men are not fit to stand in the place where repentant sinners may stand."

SPIRITUAL GUARDIANS

Reb Noson of Breslov

"If the thief is not found, then the master of the house shall approach the judges that he did not put his hand on his friend's property." (22:7)

The unpaid guardian is exempt from all damages, except for those he causes intentionally. The paid guardian is responsible for damages such as theft but is exempt from damages caused by accident (Rashi on Shemos 22:9).

The two types of guardians discussed in these verses represent different approaches to serving G-d.

The "unpaid guardian" represents one who serves G-d with such great joy that he does not seek any reward for his good deeds - he finds his own fulfillment in doing them.

A person can attain this lofty level only by cleansing his mind and heart from evil thoughts and desires, and striving for pure fear of G-d.

Such a person attains daat. Therefore, he represents one who is exempt from paying damages because he is rooted in the highest of levels, and on that plane, there are no harmful causes or agents.

The "paid guardian," in contrast, desires to know that he will receive a reward for his mitzvot in the World to Come. Though he has fear of G-d and serves Him, he is distant from the greatest of levels. Such a person lacks perfected daat.

Therefore, he faces the dangers of his responsibilities from loss or theft - since such damages occur only when one lacks full knowledge of what he is in charge of. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 340)

DIVINE JUDGES

Reb Noson of Breslov

"...the claims of both parties will be brought to the judges..." (22:8)

"HaElokim" - these are the judges. (Sanhedrin 56a)

Judges are called Elokim because they must seek the truth. Truth is the light of G-d. When a judge adjudicates a true judgment, he is enveloped in G-dliness. (Likutey Halakhot, VII, p. 2a)

Judges are also called Elokim because they reveal G-dliness in the world. Therefore, it is written, "On everything... on an ox, a donkey, a sheep, a garment - on everything," for judges and rabbis reveal that G-d can be found with each and every single thing. (ibid., VII, p. 10a)

IN THE PRESENCE OF THE OWNER

Reb Simcha Bunim of Pschischa

"If a man will borrow from his fellow... If its owner is with him, he shall not pay." (22:13-14)

Every person has a soul on loan on the condition that it is put to good use. We know that a borrower is culpable and must pay even if there is an accident. If this is the case, then how can one be absolved from sin caused by accident or intent?

The answer is: "If its owner is with him" - if his Master is with him, as Dovid HaMelech prayed: "That I dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life" (Tehillim 27:4) - then he will be absolved from his sin. Only if he remembers Hashem and accepts his spiritual responsibilities, then "he shall not pay."

PLEA FOR HELP

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"You shall not persecute any widow or orphan." (22:21)

Master of the Universe, You are very careful to obey every letter in the Torah. Then why, Hashem, do You permit the nations to persecute us, for we are like orphans without a father? Why do You not take us out of the Diaspora?

HEIGHTENED SENSITIVITY

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"You shall not persecute any widow or orphan." (22:21)

The Torah in Parshas Mishpatim (22:21) forbids causing distress to widows and orphans: כל אלמנה ויתום לא תענון.

Rashi comments that, needless to say, it is forbidden to cause distress to anybody, and not only to widows and orphans. However, Rashi explains לפי דבר הכתוב בהווה, לפי שהם תשושי כח ודבר מצוי לענותם - the Torah speaks of widows and orphans because they are especially vulnerable, and easily pained and anguished.

Rav Shmuel Berenbaum writes that Rashi's comments teach us of the special obligation we bear to exercise care when dealing with תשושי כח - "those weak in strength," people who are frail and fragile. Of course, we all have our share of problems and hardships. Some people, however, are תשושי כח - physically and emotionally drained, overwhelmed by grief and anxiety. We must be especially sensitive and attuned to their fragile condition and take special care to avoid causing them any sort of additional pain.

Rav Berenbaum adds that conversely, it is a precious mitzvah to uplift and encourage the despondent. If the Torah warns of grave punishment for causing anguish to the תשושי כח, then certainly, we will receive great reward for doing what we can to help alleviate their pain and lift their spirits.

The story is told of the Vizhnitzer Rebbe, who was once invited to the wedding of a child of a man whose wife had, unfortunately, passed away. Late that night, at around 1 or 2am, the Rebbe asked his gabbai to drive him to this father's home.

The gabbai noted the time, but the Rebbe insisted that he needed to go to this man's house. Having no choice, the gabbai complied. When they arrived at the man's home, the Rebbe sat and asked the father about what he felt of the wedding - the food, the décor, the guests, the music, and everything else.

On the way back, the gabbai asked the Rebbe about the reason for this visit. Why was it so important to go to this man's home late at night, after his child's wedding, just to talk about what happened at the event?

The Rebbe explained that normally, after a wedding, the parents go home and talk about the experience. They share their feelings, what they liked, which friends and relatives they saw and spoke with, and so on. This father, the Rebbe said, had nobody to talk to, nobody to share his feelings with after such an emotional evening. And so, the Rebbe decided to go to the man's house and allow him the opportunity to talk and share his feelings. What an inspiring example this is of sensitivity to the תשושי כח, to those feeling emotionally drained.

Today, our brothers and sisters in Israel are all, to one extent or another, תשושי כח. So many families have an immediate family member or close relative serving in the military and are worried about his safety and wellbeing. Virtually everybody in Israel knows somebody who has lost a family member either on Simchas Torah or during the current war. And almost everybody in Israel has been impacted in some way by the situation, either emotionally, financially, or practically. They are all תשושי כח, drained and overwhelmed.

We must show care and sensitivity and do what we can to help. We need to reach out, and express our support, solidarity and love. As they continue to struggle, we must show them that we care, and assist them in every way we can.

PROPORTIONATE WEALTH

Reb Shmelke of Nikolsburg

“When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you...” (22:24)

Sometimes a person might establish a specific amount of money that he gives to charity, and even as his wealth increases, the amount he gives remains the same. But the Torah says, “The poor person with you” - telling us that as we become enriched, the poor should be enriched with us.

ESCORTED BY CHARITY

Kotzker Rebbe

“When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you...” (22:24)

Chazal teach us that when one departs this world, he is escorted not with important personages or precious gems, but with the Torah and good deeds that he has accumulated on this world (Avos 6:9).

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. Thus, the “money” that escorts him is the tzedakah that he donated to the “poor people in his midst.”

TRULY CARING

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you, do not act towards him as a creditor; do not impose interest upon him.” (22:24)

Rashi comments that this pasuk is one of three places where the word “im,” which is traditionally translated as “if,” is to be understood as “when” in order to convey that it is an obligation to lend money to a Jew in need. The Torah does not mean to suggest that this mitzvah is optional.

The Maharal (Gur Aryeh) asks why the Torah employs the word “im” - “if.” That implies that we are being given the option to lend money when we are in fact obligated to do so.

The Maharal explains that while it is true that we are obligated to lend money, the Torah is communicating to us, by using the word “im” - “if,” that we should perform this mitzvah as though we want to do it and not just because we have to do it. We should feel the responsibility to take care of each other and not just lend money to a fellow Jew because we are obligated to do so.

The Maharal is teaching us a powerful lesson that can be applied to all areas of chesed. Whether we are hosting guests, visiting someone who is sick or giving tzedakah, our attitude towards helping someone else must be one of genuine care and concern for them and their needs. This approach will undoubtedly result in a deeper sense of ahavas Yisrael, which will surely help to bring about Mashiach’s arrival.

GOOD FAITH LENDING

Reb Noson of Breslov

“When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you, do not act towards him as a creditor; do not impose interest upon him.” (22:24)

Do not demand repayment if you know he doesn't have the money to repay you now. Behave towards him as if he doesn't owe you anything. Don't embarrass him. (Rashi)

G-d provides for every person. One who is forced to borrow money does have income coming to him from G-d, but the time is not yet ripe for him to receive it.

By treating him with care and kindness (meaning, not pressing him for repayment), we acknowledge that G-d will soon bless him and that the money being lent is an “exchange” - a trade of future income for current income. If we press him for repayment, we show our own lack of faith in G-d. (Likutey Halakhos IV, p. 380)

STAY IN YOUR LANE

Radziminer Rebbe

“When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you, do not act towards him as a creditor...” (22:24)

There are instructions in the Torah that are applicable to everyone. For example, the lender should obey the dictum to be patient with the borrower - and the borrower must pay back immediately, as it says: “When a man will borrow from his fellow... he shall surely pay” (22:13).

However, it is improper for one to bear in mind the pasuk that is meant for another. For instance, the borrower should not remind the lender that the latter is commanded to be patient. On the other hand, the lender should not remind the borrower that it is wrong not to repay promptly.

RESPECTFUL CHARITY

Reb Yisrael Friedman of Ruzhin

“When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you...” (22:24)

The word kesef (money) can also mean “desire” (kosef) and the word talveh (lend) can mean “to associate.”

Based on this, the meaning of the pasuk is that it is not enough just to give money to the poor. You must also associate with him and treat him as a human being and not as someone below you. It is true that he is poor, but he is also an associate.

MITIGATING JUDGEMENTS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“For this alone is his covering; it is the garment for his skin. What will he wear to sleep? If he cries out to Me, I will listen, because I am compassionate.” (22:26)

Charity mitigates harsh decrees in this world. When a poor man cries out to G-d about the injustice of his suffering, those cries arouse judgments - “Why isn't anyone helping this poor man?” - and kindle Divine anger and judgments (Zohar III, 9a).

But when a person gives charity, not only does he push off the decrees, but he actually transforms the judgments into compassion. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 226)

RESPECT THE LEADER

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

“You shall not revile G-d or curse a ruler of your people.” (22:27)

Unfortunately, people habitually find fault with their leaders and suspect their motives. Indeed, some of the Jews even suspected Moshe of the most heinous crimes.

Hence, there is an explicit prohibition in the Torah against insulting or criticizing the leader or ruler who stands at the head of the people.

WILLING TO OVERLOOK

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And you must not eat flesh of a mutilated animal in the field; throw it to the dog.” (22:30)

The Daas Zekeinim notes that the mauled animal which should be given to the dog was actually part of the flock of sheep that it was trying to protect.

The Torah is therefore teaching us, explains the Daas Zekeinim, that although the dog was not successful in its duties this time, nevertheless, it should still be given the carcass in appreciation for every time it was successful in the past, as well as for its competency in protecting the other members of the flock in this instance.

This is an incredible lesson. One would have thought that specifically now would not be the time to reward the dog - after all, the predator was only able to snatch the sheep because the dog failed to protect it. Yet, the Torah is teaching us not to focus on a single mistake when the bigger picture contains an overwhelming number of successes.

We can apply this message to so many areas in our life, especially relationships. Everyone makes mistakes. Our role, when it comes to dealing with those around us is at least to put this mistake in the wider context of the entire relationship, and at best, to realize that this mistake, too, most probably came from good intentions or a small lapse of judgment.

The Orchos Tzaddikim (Shaar HaRatzon, Shaar 13) writes that someone who possesses such a pleasant attitude is truly “rich” - for not only does he find favor among his peers, but he is especially cherished by Hashem, so much so, that his prayers will always be answered. Therefore, although it may seem that we are “losing out” in some respects by overlooking someone's mistakes or failures, ultimately, the benefit we receive is far greater than what we lost!

HOLY MEN, NOT ANGELS

Kotzker Rebbe

“And you shall be holy men to Me...” (22:30)

You shall be holy, but as men. You are to sanctify your human conduct, for that is the main holiness required of people. G-d of the Universe has no lack of angels in Heaven.

WHEN MAJORITY MATTERS

Chasam Sofer

“...to turn according to a multitude...” (23:2)

In a case where the appropriate ruling is not clear cut and can be “turned” or viewed from various angles, the decision must be by majority vote. But in cases where there is no room for doubt, the decision is not subject to a vote. Therefore, the Jews will never defer to the will or custom of the majority in matters of faith and religious observance.

ELIMINATING ANIMOSITY

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“If you see your enemy's donkey lying under its load... you shall surely help along with him.” (23:5)

According to Rashi, this verse is telling us that it is a mitzvah to help an enemy unload his overburdened donkey. Targum Onkelos, however, translates the end of the verse differently: “You must abandon any enmity that is in your heart toward him and help him” - meaning that the mitzvah is not simply to physically help an enemy, but to use the opportunity of helping him as a means to removing the hatred from our hearts. For, by sensitizing ourselves to the struggles of our enemies, we loosen the shackles of hatred that weigh us down and allow ourselves to overcome feelings of animosity toward them. Once we then actively help them, any remnants of resentment will disappear.

This lesson was behind Rav Yisrael Salanter's extraordinary behavior toward a man with less than sterling character traits who sat next to him on a train as Rav Yisrael journeyed to his son-in-law - the Rav of a nearby city. Throughout the journey, this man was rude and offensive to Rav Yisrael, not knowing his identity. Yet Rav Yisrael did not respond.

The following day the man came to the home of the Rabbi of the town to be tested and receive certification on becoming a shochet in his hometown. Sitting next to the Rabbi was his father-in-law - Rav Yisrael. The color from the man's face drained as he realized that he had squandered any opportunity of receiving the Rav's approbation. Yet Rav Yisrael did not say anything to his son-in-law who proceeded to test the man.

Within minutes, however, it became obvious that the man was wholly unprepared, and he left the Rav's home distraught.

Rav Yisrael caught up to him whereby the man confessed that his life is ruined. He felt that his only hope for a livelihood was by becoming a shochet, and he feared that his wife would leave him if he returned empty-handed.

Rav Yisrael told the man not to tell his wife that he had failed the test, rather, that he had decided to stay in the city for some time to review the laws once again. From his own money, Rav Yisrael then paid for a tutor to sit with this man day and night until he knew the material and was able to pass the test. Not only that, but he then went to great effort to ensure that this man had a position waiting for him shortly after he returned home.

To his students who did not know the man in question, Rav Yisrael revealed the story and the lengths that he went to for him. Basing his actions on Targum Onkelos' translation of the verse, he admitted that deep down he harbored ill feelings toward him for the way that he had been treated on the train and felt that the only way he could successfully rid himself of these feelings was to help him in such an extreme way.

FORGIVENESS AND ACCEPTANCE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"If you see your enemy's donkey lying under its load... you shall surely help along with him." (23:5)

"Your enemy" - this is a person who has sinned. (Pesachim 13b)

"You must surely help him" - azov ta'azov literally means "you should leave behind" (i.e., forget) what you have in your heart regarding him. (Targum Onkelos)

Chamor (חמור, donkey) is similar to Chumriyut (חומריות, materialism). This verse teaches that if you see a sinner struggling with his material desires, you should forget your ill feelings towards him. Forget all that you thought was wrong and evil about him and judge him favorably. In this way, you can lead him back into the realm of good.

If the Torah is referring to an actual enemy, then the Targum's explanation "Forget what you have in your heart regarding him" makes sense. But if the Torah is referring to a sinner, how can we forget that he is a sinner?

We can - by judging him favorably. This elevates him to the scale of merit and relieves him of his heavy burden of sin. We must forget everything that we hold against him, or else he will never be able to shirk his burden. (ibid., VIII, p. 60b-61a)

The mitzvah of helping another person - even an enemy - is aimed at creating unity and friendship. You must leave behind any remnant of strife and grudge that you bear to your enemy and nurture only love. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 61b)

CONDITIONING OUR BODIES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If you see your enemy's donkey lying under its load... you shall surely help along with him." (23:5)

G-d gave us the Torah and its commandments for the benefit of our bodies as well as our souls. Nonetheless, since the body (our beast of burden, or "donkey") naturally seeks its own comfort, it is likely to consider the study of G-d's Torah and the fulfillment of His commandments a burden. It may rebel ("crouch"), positioning itself as the soul's "enemy."

Therefore, since for most of us, our body's voice is louder than our soul's, we are likely to initially view the Torah as an oppressive burden.

This only means, however, that we have not yet integrated the Torah into our lives.

Rabbi Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidism, taught that we should not despise the body because of its natural attitude. Rather, we should work with it, strengthening its health while "educating" it to realize that accepting the Torah's dictates is in its own best interest.

Once we realize that G-d's Torah and His commandments are the truest source of life, our bodies will view them as a gift, joining our souls enthusiastically in their fulfillment. (Hitva'aduyot 5710, pp. 111-112) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

DISTANCING FROM HATRED

Tosafos

"If you see your enemy's donkey lying under its load... you shall surely help along with him." (23:5)

The good deed carries all the more weight if the donkey belongs to an enemy, because then the deed involves not only kindness to an animal but also the suppression of the evil impulse to hate.

But the enemy referred to in this pasuk cannot be construed as one whom one hates for personal reasons. After all, we know that it is forbidden to hate other Jews. Some people think that it is permitted to hate other Jews - particularly if one has seen another transgress a law of the Torah because it is a commandment to hate such a person. However, in such cases there is always the danger that a hatred based on that commandment may eventually turn into a dislike motivated by personal considerations. For if I hate another though with no sinful intent but solely in accordance with the commandment to hate the violator of the Torah, he will come to hate me in return. This person's hatred for me, then, will be motivated not by the desire to fulfill a commandment but simply by personal dislike. In return, my own hatred for this person will take on a personal character and the commandment will be forgotten.

Therefore, the Torah - intending to make sure that hatred based on a commandment should not degenerate into a personal dislike - specified that one must give help to such enemies when they are in trouble.

KEEPING A DISTANCE

Kosover Rebbe

"Distance yourself from a false word." (23:6)

It is impossible to say that there is someone who speaks the truth at all times. Some are closer to falsehood and others are further away.

CLOSING THE GAP

Reb Avraham Radamsker

"Distance yourself from a false word." (23:6)

One of the reasons Mashiach will come is to bring those who are far closer, and those who are close farther apart.

According to the aleph bet, the letters of the word emes (truth) are far apart: aleph at the beginning, mem in the middle, and sof at the end. The letters of the word sheker (falsehood) are in sequence: shin-koof-resh.

When Mashiach comes, all will be truth. He will make that which is far close and that which is close far.

FAITHFUL SPEECH

Rebbe Nachman

"Do not mention the names of other G-ds; they should not be heard in your mouth." (23:13)

The main vehicle that transmits faith is the mouth, as in "I will make known Your faith with my mouth" (Tehillim 89:2). (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 502)

Just by speaking words of faith, one can strengthen his faith. Conversely, voicing atheistic opinions damages one's faith. (See Likutey Moharan II, 44)

SPIRITUAL SEEDS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"You must celebrate a pilgrim festival for Me three times a year." (23:14)

The pilgrim festivals mark the three significant milestones in the agricultural cycle: Pesach (Passover) occurs in the spring, when the produce begins to ripen; Shavuot occurs in the early summer, when the wheat is harvested; and Sukkot occurs in the fall, when all of the produce is gathered in from the fields (see Rabbeinu Bachye on Shemos 13:4).

Allegorically, the Jewish people are G-d's "produce" (Yermiyahu 2:3; Hoshea 2:25). Just as one sows grain in the hope of reaping a much greater return, G-d "plants" souls in the physical world in order for them to accomplish much more than they can in their native, heavenly abode.

When we plant a seed, it does not begin to grow immediately. Growth can begin only once the outer, protective coating of the seed disintegrates. Once the original seed per se no longer exists, the new growth is not restricted by the limitations of the original form of the seed.

The same is true of human growth: ego is its greatest hindrance. Only when we overcome and negate the ego can the soul reach its full potential. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 36, pp. 82-85) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

UNITED GATHERING

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Also, the festival of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your work from the field." (23:16)

Sukkot is called chag ha'asif (festival of ingathering), since on this holiday, the Jews are gathered together by their leaders to reconnect to G-d. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 44a)

All Jews are worthy of sitting in the same sukkah. (Sukkah 27b)

This unity results from the efforts of the true leaders who gather the Jewish people together. For it is known that the Seven Shepherds (Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef, and Dovid) enter each Jew's sukkah (Zohar III, 103b). These leaders unite the Jews together. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 43a)

OUR FIRST FRUITS

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Bring the first fruits of your land to the House of G-d your Lord." (23:19)

"Your land" refers to the human body, which was created from the earth. A person's "first fruits" are the devotions and service that he offers to G-d at the beginning of each day. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 109a)

FORBIDDING CRUELTY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"You must not eat a young animal cooked in its mother's milk." (23:19)

Cooking a young animal in its mother's milk is an act of consummate cruelty. The Torah therefore forbids us not only to cook a young animal in its mother's milk, but to cook any animal in any other animal's milk, to eat such a mixture, or even to derive any other benefit from it.

We see here what extremes the Torah goes to in forbidding cruelty towards animals. The precautions the Torah takes to distance us from causing suffering to an animal demonstrate how much care we must take to avoid causing suffering to a fellow human being. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 6, p. 151)

HEALING PRAYERS

Rebbe Nachman

"And you shall serve Hashem, your G-d, and He will bless your bread and your water, and I will remove illness from your midst." (23:25)

"Serve G-d" - this refers to prayer, which is the "service of the heart." (Taanis 2a)

When a person prays properly, G-d blesses him so that even the bread and water that he consumes can heal his illnesses. (See Likutey Moharan II, 1:9)

HEALING POWERS

Dzikover Rebbe

"And you shall serve Hashem, your G-d, and He will bless your bread and your water, and I will remove illness from your midst." (23:25)

When one gets sick, he will obtain all sorts of medicine or go somewhere for mineral waters. However, what shall a poor person do when an illness strikes?

It is to them that Hashem speaks, saying, "Serve Me, and I will cause your bread and water to contain the healing powers of medicines and mineral water."

COLLECTIVE SERVICE

Kotzker Rebbe

"And you shall serve Hashem, your G-d, and He will bless your bread and your water..." (23:25)

Why does the text use the plural (ועבדתם) with reference to the Divine service ("and you shall serve"), but the singular (מימיך ... לחמך) with reference to the food ("...and He will bless your bread and your water...")?

When we worship G-d, each individual may pray alone and on his own behalf, yet the prayers of the worshippers join together and become one public act of Divine service.

But when we eat, even in company with a great many others, each individual still eats only for himself.

SUPERNATURAL NATURE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And you shall serve Hashem, your G-d." (23:25)

G-d established the laws of nature when He created the world; sometimes He acts within these laws and sometimes He overrides them. The two names of G-d used in this verse refer to these two ways in which G-d relates to the laws of nature. The first name (יְהוָה) refers to Him when He ignores the limitations of nature; the second (אלקים) refers to Him when He works within the laws of nature.

Thus, in this verse, G-d is telling us to spiritually refine ourselves ("to serve") until the supernatural becomes natural for us, becoming our "second nature." When we rise to this level of consciousness, we view everything in life from G-d's perspective and see everything that happens as part of His all-encompassing providence. (Torah Ohr, pp. 78d-79a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

LITTLE BY LITTLE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"I will drive them away from you little by little, until you increase in size and inherit the land." (23:30)

The strategy of "little by little" is a lesson for us in our spiritual battles, as well. In our struggle to banish our spiritual enemies from within, patience is the greatest virtue. Tackling all our obstacles at once will almost certainly end in failure; the methodical and gradual line of attack has much greater hope for success. We must begin with the easier steps, banishing first the most obvious forms of evil, and only then advance to subtler struggles.

Similarly, we should first attempt to avoid whatever is bad before striving for perfection in doing all that is good. First, we must subdue our animal soul; only after this should we begin boosting our G-dly soul to the spiritual pinnacles to which it aspires. Such is the method of attack in all battles of the spirit: through advancing little by little, we can indeed "conquer the land." (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5745, p. 133; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5746, pp. 59-60. Igrot Kodesh, vol. 11, pp. 82, 116) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

A STEP AT A TIME

Reb Noson of Breslov

"I will drive them away from you little by little, until you increase in size and inherit the land." (23:30)

A person cannot overcome the forces of evil all at once. It takes time and patience to rid himself of evil completely. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 92a)

One must have patience and move steadily in the right direction, “until he grows and [then] inherits the land.” (ibid.. IV, p. 122a)

BOTH FAR AND NEAR

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“You shall prostrate yourselves from a distance.” (24:1)

There are two aspects to G-d, so to speak, that is, regarding how He relates to creation: distant and close, that is, transcendent and immanent.

He is distant, for, as we believe, the light of Ein Sof (the Infinite One) is primordial, preceding all other forms of existence. For this reason, no creature can comprehend Him. It is impossible for the faculty of thought to grasp Him, since thought itself is a creation and the Almighty preceded all of creation. No celestial angel, no ofan or seraph, can even comprehend Him, since He is beyond understanding. This is what we mean when we say that He is distant: He is distant and removed from comprehension.

On the other hand, G-d is close, for, as we believe, G-d fills all worlds (Tikkunei Zohar 5a) - is found within all the worlds, surrounds all the worlds, and no place is vacant of Him - for “all the land is full of His glory” (Yeshayahu 6:3). This is His immanent aspect.

The Jewish people are required to believe in both aspects: that He is both distant and close. This is the deeper meaning of the verse (Yeshayahu 57:19) “Peace be to those that are far and to those that are close; says G-d.” It refers to those righteous people who believe that G-d is both distant and close, and in response to these people who evince this proper belief in G-d, G-d bestows all sorts of goodness on this world.

Now, there are two basic emotions - fear and love. We fear only something that is beyond us. In response to G-d's transcendence we feel fear or awe. But in response to the closeness of G-d, we feel love. On this basis, the verse says, “You shall prostrate yourselves” - since the Jewish people feared G-d - “from a distance.” The word “from” can be interpreted to mean “on account of”: On account of their awareness of G-d's distance, the Jewish people attained the fear of G-d.

Alternatively, we might explain the verse as follows: The Arizal writes (Pri Eitz Chaim) that when saying the words in the Aleinu prayer that state, “And we prostrate ourselves,” we should be mindful that by prostrating ourselves we are drawing into the world abundant bounty from the Infinite One. This is the deeper meaning of our verse, “You shall prostrate yourselves,” meaning - since prostration alludes to lowering something - the Jewish people were told to draw down abundant bounty “from afar,” i.e., on account of their awareness of the transcendent dimension of G-d, which causes them to fear Him. Contemplate and analyze this well.

SELF-SACRIFICE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And Moshe alone shall approach Hashem, but they [the Elders] shall not approach and the people shall not go up with him.” (24:2)

When Moshe was told to ascend Mount Sinai, Hashem also instructed Aharon, Nadav, Avihu and the Elders of the Nation to follow Moshe up the mountain (Shemos 24:1). The Torah describes that as they were about to approach the top where Hashem would speak “face to face” to them (see Bamidbar 12:8), Hashem commanded them to not go any further because only Moshe was permitted to ascend to the summit.

The Medrash Hagadol explains that the Elders were confused at having been asked to ascend the mountain only to be told not to continue on their way. For what reason did they not merit to accompany Moshe the entire way? Hashem clarified matters by telling them that this was measure for measure for their actions in Egypt; for when Moshe and Aharon were commanded to order Pharaoh to release the Jewish People; the Elders were also told to accompany them to the king's palace (Shemos 3:16). However, as they got closer and closer to the palace, fear gripped them and slowly, they dropped out of the entourage, until only Aharon and Moshe were left to face Pharaoh. Hashem therefore responded to the Elders that if only they would have had the courage to face Pharaoh, a king who only rules over a single land, then they would have merited facing the King of Kings who rules over the entire world. But since they refused to escort Moshe all the way to the palace, it was only fitting that they were to be held back from accompanying him to the top of Mount Sinai.

According to this explanation, asks the Medrash, Aharon should have also been permitted to approach the top of Sinai with Moshe; after all, he went with Moshe all the way into Pharaoh's throne room?

The Medrash explains that Aharon was in fact permitted to join Moshe, but because he did not want the Elders to become disheartened at the fact that they were left behind, Aharon did not go all the way to the top of the mountain even though it meant forgoing the ultimate level of prophecy that anyone was ever able to achieve.

From this Medrash we can see the greatness of our Torah leaders. Certainly, no one today could match Aharon's self-sacrifice, whom the Mishna testifies was someone who truly loved peace and pursued it (Pirkei Avos 1:12), and regarding whom the Torah declares that all of the Jewish People cried for thirty days when they found out that he had died (Bamidbar 20:29). (Whereas when Moshe died, the length and intensity of the mourning was less than that accorded to Aharon - see Rashi, Devarim 34:8) Nevertheless, even today it is well known that our Torah leaders sacrifice their own learning in order to speak with people, give blessings and even pose for pictures.

How much time is spent answering basic questions when instead they could be locked in a room delving into the deepest depths of the hardest Gemara? Following the example set by Aharon, it is this self-sacrifice that makes our Torah scholars into Torah leaders.

JOY OF THE MITZVAH

Rebbe Nachman

"They said, 'Everything that G-d has said, we will do, and we will hear.'" (24:7)

At Mount Sinai, when the Jews proclaimed, "We will do and we will hear," 600,000 angels descended and placed two crowns upon each of their heads, one for "we will do" and one for "we will hear." (Shabbat 88a)

In particular, these crowns represent the joy of the Future Redemption. (See Likutey Moharan I, 22:9)

Every time that a person strives for and attains joy, it is as if he accepts the Torah anew. (See *ibid.*, I, 65:4)

UNCONDITIONAL COMMITMENT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"They said, 'Everything that G-d has said, we will do, and we will hear.'" (24:7)

By saying "we will do" before "we will listen," the Jewish people declared that they were prepared to fulfill G-d's will unconditionally - accepting His commandments even before they knew what they were. It is still on the condition of this commitment that G-d continues to "give us the Torah" today - i.e., revealing Himself and His will to us as we study the Torah and perform its commandments.

Conventional thinking may deem it irrational to commit oneself to a contract before the terms of the contract are spelled out. And we can indeed connect to G-d as He reveals Himself within creation without first committing ourselves to do whatever He wants. But the only way we can connect to G-d Himself - i.e., as He is beyond creation and rationality - is by likewise rising above the limits of rationality. Therefore, nowadays, just as when the Torah was first given, the way we connect with G-d Himself is by devoting ourselves to His Torah unconditionally. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 23, p. 92; Sichot Kodesh 5739, vol. 3, pp. 295-297; Igrot Kodesh, vol. 7, p. 28; Hitva'aduyot 5748, vol. 3 pp. 234-235- Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky)

SIMPLE SUBSERVIENCE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"They said, 'Everything that G-d has said, we will do, and we will hear.'" (24:7)

At Mount Sinai, when the Jews proclaimed, "We will do and we will hear," 600,000 angels descended and placed two crowns upon each of their heads, one for "we will do" and one for "we will hear." (Shabbat 88a)

But how could they do without knowing what was expected of them? The answer lies in their earlier words: "Everything that G-d has said" - meaning, "We have heard what G-d expects of us."

If that is the case, what was so special about saying: "Na'aseh v'nishma - We will do and we will hear," if they already knew what G-d wanted from them? The answer is that the Jews were willing to accept G-d's word without questioning Him. They would not demand to know the deepest meanings of the Torah and mitzvot, nor ask why G-d acts the way He does according to His knowledge and reasoning. They were willing to accept G-d with simple faith and perform the mitzvot accordingly, with true simplicity.

Only afterwards, when they had grown in spirituality and had more time to study the deeper meanings of the commandments, would they listen to and understand the reasons behind the mitzvot. Thus, the angels adorned them with crowns. Crowns allude to the Keter, the power to compose and order one's mind, not to go beyond one's ability, and to attain - with time and patience - an understanding of one's actions. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 205a)

First we must perform the mitzvot, drawing G-d's holiness upon us. Then we merit to understand the mitzvot, creating a strong yearning for even greater levels of G-dliness. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 201a)

"Doing" refers to what a person is able to do. "Hearing" refers to what a person aspires to do. One must always study Torah and seek greater understanding. Even if he is not capable of attaining new Torah insights on his own, he can reach higher levels of devotion through his Torah study and prayers. As long as he continually refreshes his approach and strives to serve G-d with new vigor and vitality, he will always be able to attain greater levels. (*ibid.*, I, p. 55a)

GLORIFYING OTHERS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"The glory of Hashem rested on Mount Sinai... The appearance of the glory of Hashem was like a consuming fire at the top of the mountain." (24:16-17)

The word "kavod" - glory, or honor, is derived from the word "kaveid" - heavy. In this case, it means worth or value, for when one weighs valuables on a scale, that which is heavier is worth more. Kavod habriyos can be understood to mean the value of people. Sometimes one has a very precious object in his possession, but he doesn't treat it properly as he doesn't realize its value. Kavod means understanding the inherent value of every person and treating him accordingly.

The "kavod Hashem" was manifested clearly on Har Sinai when Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael the Torah. We know that we must give honor and respect to the Almighty.

But how much respect are we expected to show another human being? How careful must we be not to shame or harm a fellow Jew?

If we are to honor others according to their value, then we must acknowledge the incredible importance of a Jew.

Firstly, one is commanded to transgress almost every sin in the Torah to save a Jew's life. Secondly, "Saving one life is equivalent to saving an entire world." Thirdly, every Jew's worth is so great that Hashem infuses a holy element of Himself into each one, and personally oversees every single action and thought process from the moment one is born until his neshamah is returned to Heaven.

Surely every Jew is deserving of tremendous honor, for we are called sons of Hashem: "Banim Atem laHashem" - what noble lineage we possess! Who would not sufficiently respect the royal ancestry and character of a prince, a son of the king? We must focus on the glorious yichus, the closeness to Hashem, the potential for greatness and the spark of kedushah inherent in every single Jew.

FIRE OF HASHEM

Rebbe Nachman

"And the appearance of the glory of Hashem was like consuming fire." (24:17)

Just as fire can be either beneficial or destructive, so too, the manifestation of G-d's glory either brings a person good or - if he is unworthy - consumes him. (See Likutey Moharan I, 67:8)

FIERY PASSION

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"And the appearance of the glory of Hashem was like consuming fire." (24:17)

When a person serves G-d by observing Torah and mitzvos, it gives G-d tremendous pleasure. How can a person tell if G-d is indeed receiving pleasure from his service?

The test is whether the person sees that his heart is burning like fire and that he is always yearning to serve Him. If he possesses tremendous longing and desire in his Divine service, then certainly this proves that G-d gets tremendous pleasure from it. That is why such a person is helped from Heaven, and he is sent holy thoughts.

This is the meaning of the verse "The appearance of the glory of G-d..." This serves as a sign for when a person wants to know whether he is seeing the glory of G-d, and that G-d is satisfied with him. The sign is that it is "like a consuming fire" - that his heart burns within him like fire.

HAFTORAH

SUSTAINING THE WORLD

Talmud, Sanhedrin

"Thus says Hashem, 'If My covenant is not with day and night, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth.'" (Yirmiyahu 33:25)

An alternative rendering of this passage is: "Thus says G-d, 'If it were not for My covenant (that is studied) day and night, I would not have appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth.'" "

Were it not for the Torah that the scholars study day and night, it would not be possible for nature ("the ordinances of heaven and earth") to survive.

Thus, those Jews who are constantly engaged in Torah study and seem to contribute nothing to worldly affairs actually do much more to ensure the world's survival than it appears.

BEYOND COMPREHENSION

Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch

"Thus says Hashem, 'If My covenant is not with day and night, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth.'" (Yirmiyahu 33:25)

The laws of nature are universally accepted as facts that are not subject to debate even if they are beyond the grasp and understanding of man. Science seeks to shed light on the laws of nature and their mysteries, but no one will presume to say that they do not exist simply because one does not happen to understand them.

We must take the same attitude toward the Torah's laws. They must be accepted as established truths not subject to doubt or debate even if they are beyond our understanding. We must make every effort to understand them, but our regard for them must not be dependent on whether or not we succeed in understanding them.

The Torah - "My covenant (that is studied) day and night" - must be accepted like "the ordinances of heaven and earth," whose truth is not determined by whether or not they can be readily understood, but which are accepted as facts that it is the mind's task to try to understand, not to decide whether or not to accept them.

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