

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Mishpatim

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לע"נ פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

TELLTALE SIGNS

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.

CIVIL SACREDNESS

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 *Beis 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 *Beis 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 *Beis 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 *parashah* 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."

MEANINGFUL ACTIONS

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

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

Rashi comments that Moshe should not think that he could discharge his duty by teaching the people a chapter or a *halachah* two or three times until they know it well in the form in which they heard it, and that he would not have to take the trouble to explain the reasons for the *halachah*.

In a way, we can understand this passage as teaching us about a person who knows all the Torah's laws very well, but is nonetheless not considered a *talmid chacham* because his knowledge is only superficial. Such a person treats the Torah he knows as something that does not affect him, as the Sages (Sanhedrin 106ba) described the Torah knowledge of Dovid HaMelech's contemporary Doeg: "from his lips outward."

To be considered a genuine *talmid chacham*, one must work through every statement he learns so deeply and thoroughly that he truly understands it as clearly as if he had originated that particular *halachah* himself.

While we are on this subject, let us try to understand why it is wrong for a teacher to teach his students simply to recite *halachos* by rote. If a person does not understand why he is doing something, it inevitably degenerates into a tedious and boring burden.

By analogy, a man who works for himself does not complain about the long and hard days he labors because he realizes that the more effort he puts into his work, the more he earns. But if he works for someone else, like the Jews who were forced to serve in the Czar's army in Russia, then he has reason to complain bitterly about his lot, because he never sees any fruit from all the long hours he is made to work.

Similarly, those who do not understand the reasons behind the *halachos* they learn can find their studies unbearably burdensome, but when they also study the reasons, their learning can be so enjoyable that the more they toil over it, the happier they are. In this vein the Sages explained that the verse (Koheles 5:9), "He who loves money will not be sated with money," also means that someone who loves doing *mitzvos* will not be sated with the *mitzvos* he does but will always want to do more.

SHABBAT FREEDOM

Reb Noson of Breslov

"If you acquire a Hebrew servant, 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)

PROCESS OF REDEMPTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If you acquire a Hebrew servant, 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!

COMPASSION TOWARDS ALL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If you acquire a Hebrew servant, he will serve for six years. In the seventh year, he will go free, without payment." (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) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

TEMPORARY INSANITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If he did not lie in wait, and G-d brought about to his hand, I will provide you a place to which he can flee." (21:13)

Allegorically, going against G-d's will is a form of murder, for in both cases the soul is ripped away from its spiritual source of life.

However, since we are all intrinsically connected to G-d, it is totally "unnatural" for us to do anything He would disapprove of. Doing so is therefore the result of "temporary insanity," a sudden, fleeting attack of folly that convinces us that our connection to G-d will not suffer as a result of improper behavior.

Therefore, G-d considers the "murder" unintentional, and provides us with a "city of refuge" where we may recover and renew our connection to Him. This "city of refuge" is the study of the Torah and the prayers we recite with a sincere and humble heart. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 9, pp. 297-300) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

WHATEVER IT 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.

EMOTIONAL HEALING

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot." (21:24)

Our *parashah* mentions the methodology used to apply justice for several varieties of damages: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot" (21:24). The Gemara and many commentators explain that this isn't meant to be a law of retaliation. The court system doesn't physically remove the assailant's limbs but instead compensates the victim for their loss. Why does the Torah describe this law in a way that can be easily misunderstood?

The Rambam (Chovel U'Mazik 5:9) proposes that material damage differs from physical damage in that damage to an item can easily be repaid monetarily whereas damage to one's person isn't considered repaid until the assailant pleads for forgiveness. Asking for forgiveness addresses the self-esteem of the victim who has been injured and acknowledges the unintended pain that the victim has endured. Rabbi Yochanan Zweig explains that when someone is injured, the emotional injury must be addressed as well. Being aware of and tending to each other's needs includes not merely physical needs but requires a more holistic focus on their emotional needs as well.

SPIRITUAL RESTITUTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot." (21:24)

When we resolve to use a specific limb or faculty of our mind or body only for holy purposes, we "sanctify" that limb or faculty, making it a vehicle for Divinity. For example, when we resolve not to look at things we are not supposed to look at and to use our eyes only for holy purposes - the study of the Torah, prayer, seeing how we can help others, etc. - our eyes serve vicariously as G-d's "eyes."

This is why the Torah obligates someone who harms another person to recompense him so thoroughly - paying for the depreciation, pain, medical fees, incapacitation, and embarrassment that he caused. We presume that the victim has at least somewhat sanctified the limb that was harmed, and that the assailant therefore damaged not only the victim's limb, but, so to speak, G-d's limb as well. The "value" of the harmed limb is thus much greater than it would be were it merely the limb of a private person.

This teaches us both how great is our potential to sanctify our own lives, and in what great esteem we should hold others, regardless of what external appearances might indicate. (Keter Shem Tov 319) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

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 "*keseף*" which means "money" can also be read "*koseף*" - "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 - *keseף* - 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 - *koseף* - 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

BEWARE OF 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 Halachot 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 the judges...." (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 [with the claim] that he did not put his hand on his fellow'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.

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)

SPIRITUAL CONSIGNMENT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“If it was stolen from him, he shall make restitution to its owner.” (22:11)

[G-d continued with the laws governing damages and the responsibilities of the four types of consignees: the “borrower,” who borrows an item from his fellow; the “hirer” who rents an item from his fellow; the “paid consignee,” who is paid to guard over his fellow’s item; and the “unpaid consignee,” who guards over his fellow’s item for no compensation.]

Spiritually, we are all consignees. G-d has entrusted us with the care of our Divine soul, our fellow human beings, and the world at large.

On our worst days, we are borrowers: We enjoy the use of our soul, our fellows, and our world without reciprocating. At times we do better and act like hirers: We recognize that true physical and spiritual pleasures can only be experienced when we give, so we give in order to receive. Sometimes we rise above the world of hirer and borrower, the world of the self, and advance to the level of the paid consignee: We are caretakers, seeking to use G-d’s gifts for His purposes. Perhaps, as paid consignees, we are not beyond looking forward to the reward, but at least that is not our focus.

On our best days - and ultimately all our days will be such - we are unpaid consignees. We are oblivious to physical and spiritual rewards; in Maimonides words (Mishneh Torah, Teshuvah 10:2), we “serve G-d out of love... not because of anything in the world... not to inherit the good, but as one who does the truth simply because it is the truth.” - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

ABSOLVED BY THE OWNER

Reb Simcha Bunim of Pshischa

“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.”

EXPRESSING OUR LOVE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

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

Among the laws discussed in Mishpatim is the mandate not to oppress a widow or an orphan (22:21). The Torah continues that if a person oppresses them, G-d’s wrath will be kindled, G-d will kill the culprit, and the culprit’s family will then be widows and orphans (22:23). Why would the family be punished for just one person’s actions?

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig suggests that someone’s insensitivity to a widow or orphan is an indication that a person’s family dynamics have suffered a downward spiral and that the family is therefore partially responsible for the breakdown of the support network. Failing to understand the valuable role each person plays in a family may lead that person to be insensitive to someone who has lost a family member. Expressing how important our loved ones are to us helps them build proper self-esteem and shows them how essential they are not only to their family but to their community and to the Jewish people.

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 דבר הכתוב בהווה לפי - 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.

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 *keseif* (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.

GENUINE 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.

HASHEM'S FUND MANAGER

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"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)

This *pasuk* introduces the prohibition of ריבית, which forbids charging a fellow Jew interest. Although there is nothing inherently wrong about charging interest, as the lender forfeits the opportunity to use and invest the funds during the period of the loan, nevertheless, the Torah forbids lending fellow Jews on interest because we are to see one another as family. If a family member needs a loan, we would happily lend the money without asking for interest. And this is how we are to treat each of our fellow Jews.

Rashi, commenting on the phrase את העני עמך, cites the Midrash as explaining it to mean הוי מסתכל בעצמך כאילו אתה העני - "Look upon yourself as if you are the poor person." The Torah here urges the lender to view himself as though he is poor, so he understands the plight of the individual who needs his assistance.

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in Lahavos Eish, raises the question of how the Torah could make such a demand of a wealthy lender. He knows what's in his bank account, he knows what his portfolio looks like, he knows all that he owns and what his net worth is. How could he possibly look at himself כאילו אתה העני - as though he is a struggling pauper?

Rav Druck writes that some explain Rashi's comments to mean that we are to see ourselves as "poor" because nothing we have actually belongs to us. Everything we own in fact belongs to Hashem, who has entrusted it to us for the purpose of allocating it toward worthy causes, such as charitable assistance to the needy.

No matter how much money a person has in his back account, no matter what his net worth is, he is poor, because everything he owns is Hashem's property which has been entrusted to him. He is but a steward managing Hashem's funds.

Certainly, one can take pride in his hard work and ingenuity with which he earned his money. At the same time, however, he must acknowledge Hashem as the "senior manager" without whom nothing would have succeeded.

Our efforts are indispensable but insufficient; nothing we do can succeed without Hashem's help. Thus, everything we have must be seen as having been given to us by Him, and הוי מסתכל בעצמך כאילו אתה העני - all people should consider themselves poor.

We might draw a comparison to a professional wealth manager, investor or broker, who handles his clients' portfolios. When he sits with a client and opens the files to show the client how his assets are doing, he does not foolishly think that this money is his. It is, of course, his client's assets, for which he has been given responsibility.

This should be our perspective on all our assets. We are the fund manager, and Hashem is the "client" who gives us the money in order to invest it wisely, in a manner that yields the greatest dividends, that produces the best results.

And, when the fund manager shows his client how his portfolio is doing, the client will look very carefully to see whether he made the right decision to entrust his hard-earned money in the hands of this manager. If he is pleased with the results, then he will likely give him even more money to invest. But if not, then he certainly will not want to give him more money, and might even consider pulling some money out of the account.

The same is true with us and Hashem. If Hashem sees that we are investing His assets properly, then He will give us even more to invest. If He's happy with our work and sees that we're distributing the funds effectively and productively, then we will be blessed with additional assets so we have even more opportunities to support and help those in need of assistance.

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 Halakhot IV, p. 380)

[As Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried teaches, “The only possessions we can truly call our own are the ones we give away to others. only they escort us to the next world.”]

EMULATING KINDNESS

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

“If you take your neighbor's garment in pledge, you must return it before the sun sets. 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.” (22:25-26)

The Torah here speaks of a case of a poor person who needed to borrow money, and he gave the lender his garment, the warm blanket he uses at night, as collateral. The lender is required to return the garment to the borrower each night so he can keep warm, and he may then take it again in the morning. Hashem warns that if the borrower does not receive his garment at night, and he cries out from the cold, *וּשְׁמַעְתִּי כִּי חֲנוּן אֲנִי* - “I will hear, for I am gracious” (22:26).

Rav Shmuel Berenbaum, in Tiferes Shmuel, contrasts this *pasuk* with an earlier *pasuk* (22:22), in which Hashem warns of the consequences of mistreating and taking advantage of a widow or orphan. In such a case, Hashem declares, *שְׁמוֹעַ אֲשַׁמַּע צַעֲקָתוֹ* - “I will assuredly hear his cry,” and says that He will exact harsh punishment from the culprits. Notably, the Torah here does not add *כִּי חֲנוּן אֲנִי* - “for I am gracious.”

Unlike regarding the case of the lender who refuses to return the collateral, where Hashem explains that He will hear the pauper's cries because He is kind and compassionate, in this instance He simply states that He will hear the widow or orphan's cries.

Rav Berenbaum explains this discrepancy by noting the clear difference between the two cases. When it comes to the situation of a mistreated widow or orphan, there is no need to explain why Hashem will hear the victim's cries.

They are vulnerable and frail, and in need of sensitivity and kindness. If somebody treats them in the opposite manner, then he of course needs to be held accountable for his cruelty. But in the case of the lender who keeps the collateral with him at night, he might understandably claim the rights to keep it, since he did, after all, generously grant the pauper an interest-free loan. He might feel that after doing this favor, he does not owe it to the borrower to go through the trouble of returning his blanket at night. Hashem therefore emphasizes in this context *כִּי חֲנוּן אֲנִי*, that He is kind and gracious. Although there is good reason for the lender to withhold the garment, Hashem treats the downtrodden with kindness and compassion above the strict letter of the law - and He expects us to follow His example.

We can always come up with reasons why another person does not deserve our help - but this is not how Hashem works, and this is now how we are supposed to work. When somebody is in need and cries out for help - we must go ahead and help, *כִּי חֲנוּן אֲנִי* - because Hashem teaches by example to extend kindness to the downtrodden.

MITIGATING JUDGEMENTS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“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 curse a judge, and you shall not curse a leader among 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.

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.

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!

NEED FOR REDEMPTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

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

Allegorically, the "field" is the exile, the realm outside our safe, spiritual home. This "field" is dangerous, fraught with threatening, wild "beasts" - the many spiritual pitfalls that can ensnare us if we are not properly cautious. Moreover, the very fact that we are in exile renders us "torn by the beasts of the field." No matter how great or heroic our spiritual attainments may be during exile, no matter how comfortable we learn to feel, we will never be truly whole, safe, or free until the Messianic Redemption.

We must therefore do all in our power to hasten the Redemption, pleading unceasingly with G-d to redeem us without delay. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 32, pp. 42-43) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

PREVENTING NEGATIVITY

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"You shall not bear a meritless report, do not put your hand with an evil person to be a fraudulent witness." (23:1)

Among the many laws detailed in Mishpatim is the law not to accept a false report (23:1). Why does the Torah need to give us these explicit prohibitions? Aren't these rules rather obvious?

Oznayim LaTorah suggests that this rule is an extension of the laws of *lashon hara* (slander). "You shall not be a talebearer among your people" (Vayikra 19:16) is meant to stop negativity at its source by not allowing evil speech in the first place. By expanding upon the initial law and now addressing the people on the receiving end of the *lashon hara*, the Torah is sensitizing us to how damaging negative words can be both to the recipient and the speaker.

Not believing *lashon hara* is the way to react upon hearing it and certainly absolves us of the wrongdoing; but standing by as it's spoken is still allowing negative speech to be put out there for consumption, whether in a personal or court setting. It is for this reason that we have a collective responsibility to prevent derogatory words from being spoken, even if no one believes them. Negative comments only create negative energy, and our world needs as much positivity as we can deliver.

WHEN MAJORITY MATTERS

Chasam Sofer

"You shall not go after the many to do bad; and you shall not respond over a dispute to turn after the many." (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.

GIVING OF YOURSELF

Rabbi Ari Ciment

"If you see the donkey of your enemy being overly burdened, will you refrain from helping him? Surely you should help [with] him." (23:5)

Give from yours because you and yours is His. (Avos 3:7)

What is the essence of charity? Is it the giving or the receiving?

The answer can be found in this week's *parashah*:

"If you see the donkey of your enemy being overly burdened, would you not help him? Surely you should help [with] him." (Shemos 23:5)

Rashi says that the word עזב in this context means “help.” Usually, though, a word takes on the meaning it has already been used for previously in the Torah, and clearly עזב has been defined as “to leave / move away from” (back in Bereishis: אמו ואת אביו - a man “leaves” his parents to marry) and so this seems quite odd.

The answer is very deep, and it is the key to a great team and/or relationship. The word “help” essentially focuses on the tangible benefit one receives from another. If I “help” another but he receives no benefit, I haven’t really helped him. But if I sacrifice something of mine (my time/energy/money) for someone else, even if I didn’t give that person anything tangible in the end, I have benefited us both.

Even an “enemy” can recognize when someone donates their time or energy for him, and this can add emotional or spiritual support beyond the tangible. And so perhaps Rashi translating “abandon” with “help” here means that true “help” is when you leave your comfort zone for someone else. If so, then the *pasuk* can also be read: עזב תעזב - “You shall ‘leave yourself,’” (i.e., sacrifice of yourself) for another person, so that “עמו,” you can then forge a unifying connection independent of the tangible end product.

And this may explain Rabbi’s Akiva’s cryptic remark that, ואהבת לרעך כמוך זה כלל גדול בתורה - “Love your neighbor as yourself” is a great principle of the Torah.” I would have thought לא תרצח - “Don’t murder” is at least an equally giant precept, and so why did Rabbi Akiva stress this specific precept? Again, homiletically one can perhaps say: “ואהבת לרעך כמוך” - when you give (הב) to your friend [of yourself], “זה כלל” - this unifies us/connects us (כלל), can mean “precept,” but also “generality/unifying” as in (כולל), and then “גדול בתורה” - you can only then become a true great in Torah! The goal of giving of yourself to another (עזב תעזב or ואהבת לרעך) enables us to be a stronger team (כלל or עמו).

The Tanna in Avos may have specifically focused on the key aspect of charity, which is the giving of oneself, תן לו, “משלו שאתה ושליך שלו.”

Of course, charity is about helping another in need and supplying him with something he is missing. But helping someone else begins by giving of oneself. Becoming a more charitable person really derives from practicing giving from oneself. Thus, this is the essence of charity, because it is by this training that one can ultimately become charitable. Abandoning our selfish tendencies (עזב תעזב) is a prerequisite of *tzedakah*.

Takeaway Messages: The Torah prescription for ideal “helping” is when one sacrifices of oneself for another with less emphasis placed on the final product. The mere sacrifice creates team unity and benefits both parties. “Abandonment” is then understandably clearly as “help.” Why does the word עזב, “abandon,” also mean עזר, “help”? By leaving “yourself,” you help another.

ELIMINATING ANIMOSITY

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“If you see the donkey of your enemy being overly burdened... Surely you should help [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.

CONDITIONING OUR BODIES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If you see the donkey of your enemy being overly burdened, will you refrain from helping him? Surely you should help [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 Wisniewsky

DISTANCING FROM HATRED

Tosafos

"If you see the donkey of your enemy being overly burdened, will you refrain from helping him? Surely you should help [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.

FORGIVENESS AND ACCEPTANCE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"If you see the donkey of your enemy being overly burdened, will you refrain from helping him? Surely you should help [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)

HELPING THEM GET BACK UP

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"If you see the donkey of your enemy being overly burdened, will you refrain from helping him? Surely you should help [with] him." (23:5)

The Torah (23:5) addresses the situation of a person who encounters his enemy, somebody whom he strongly dislikes, struggling with his donkey, which is unable to stand because too much cargo was loaded onto its back. Upon seeing this scene, the person's initial reaction is to leave his enemy to deal with the problem on his own, as the Torah writes, *וחדלת מעזוב לו* - "and you will think to refrain from helping him." But the Torah commands the person to overcome this instinct and help his fellow despite his feelings of animosity toward him.

Rav Noson of Breslov, in Likutei Halachos, comments that this command applies also to people facing spiritual struggles. We might occasionally see someone whom we have reason not to like because of their bad behavior, and who is now buckling under the burden of his own failures, facing dire straits because of his mistakes and wrongdoing. Our instinct is to say, "They made their bed, let them sleep in it," to feel that they deserve to wallow in the crisis that they brought upon themselves. But the Torah commands us to help our fellow Jew to get back up after failure, to recover from his mistakes, instead of allowing him to drown in the consequences. Even a Jew who had committed a crime and was sent to prison deserves kosher food, *tefillin*, a *siddur*, and a rabbi to help guide him, and indeed there is an organization that provides these services to Jewish inmates. We are commanded to help all our struggling brothers and sisters - even those whose struggles result from their own failures.

HATE FALSEHOOD, LOVE PEOPLE

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"Distance yourself from a false matter; and do not kill a truly innocent person or one who has been declared innocent, for I will not vindicate a guilty person." (23:7)

Two gentlemen were speaking, and one said to the other that they are very much alike except for one significant difference. "You love *emes*, and therefore, anything that contains a grain of *emes* is exciting for you. Although the majority may be *sheker*, since there is a grain of *emes*, you will concentrate and magnify that shred of *emes* and accept the whole situation. I am completely the opposite. I detest *sheker*, and therefore, a situation that is overwhelmingly *emes* but contains some *sheker*, I reject out of hand."

Which one of these is the correct approach?

The Torah tells us that the approach of hating *sheker* is the one to follow. מדבר שקר תרחק - anything that contains *sheker* needs to be distanced.

However, that only applies to situations, ideas, or philosophies, not to people. In our quest to uproot *sheker*, we must not fall into the trap of demeaning people who are held in high regard because we feel that there must be some *sheker* contained within them; they can't be as good/holy/religious as everyone thinks.

When it comes to human relationships, we need not seek out any *sheker* that we think may be hiding beneath the surface, but we must treat people as we find them.

The *pasuk* (23:7) tells us, ונקי וצדיק אל תהרוג - if someone is a *tzaddik*, don't go looking for anything wrong in them. Why not? Because כי לא אצדיק רשע - we can leave it to Hashem. If someone who is thought of as a *tzaddik* really isn't, Hashem will see to it that the truth comes out.

Our hatred for *sheker* has to be complete, but not aimed toward righteous people. (Idis She'b'idis, p. 369)

KEEPING A DISTANCE

Kossover 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 Radomsker

"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.

SHABBOS ATMOSPHERE

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall desist so that your ox and donkey may be content, and your maidservants and converts may be refreshed." (23:12)

At first glance, the Torah here is telling us that the purpose of Shabbos observance is that our animals and servants can get some rest, so that they have a day off.

Now while we certainly appreciate the importance of treating animals and hard-working servants kindly, and allowing them time to rest and rejuvenate, can this really be the goal of Shabbos? Doesn't the purpose of Shabbos extend far beyond the consideration owed to the people and animals who work for us?

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in *Lahavos Eish*, explains that the Torah here describes not the goal of Shabbos, but rather the metric by which the quality of our Shabbos is measured.

We are to make Shabbos so special that our entire atmosphere transforms, that we succeed in creating a fundamentally different environment all around us. When we, as a community, observe Shabbos properly, not merely by refraining from all forbidden activities, but by using our time for Torah learning, for davening, for song, for quality time with family and friends, then we have an impact on all our surroundings.

Yes, even the animals will feel the difference when we spend Shabbos the way we should.

The purpose of Shabbos extends far beyond the animals and servants - but the impact that Shabbos has on them testifies to our proper observance of this sacred day.

TAILOR-MADE ACCOMMODATIONS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall desist so that your ox and donkey may be content, and your maidservants and converts may be refreshed.” (23:12)

Among the laws detailed in the *parashah*, we are told: “Six days shall you accomplish your activities, and on the seventh day you shall desist so that your ox and donkey may be content, and your maidservants and converts may be refreshed” (23:12). Why do only the ox and donkey get to rest, while maidservants and converts get to be refreshed? Why are the instructions for animals different?

Rashi explains that animals should not be restrained and forced to work, thereby breaking Shabbos, and maidservants and converts should not be forced to break Shabbos. The Mechilta explains that animals relax in their own way, and restricting them would diminish their enjoyment. The opposite is true for the maidservants and converts - keeping Shabbos would help them relax with proper perspective. The Torah is, as should we be, sensitive to animals, Jews, and non-Jews, in addressing how to best accommodate a day of rest meaningful to each.

FAITHFUL SPEECH

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Do not mention the names of other gods; 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). (Likutei Halachot I, p. 502)

Just by speaking words of faith, one can strengthen his faith. Conversely, voicing atheistic opinions damages one's faith (see Likutei 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

RECIPROCAL PRAISE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You shall observe the Festival of Matzos. For seven days you shall eat matzos, as I have commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of the beginning of the ripening, for in that season you left Egypt. You must not appear before Me empty-handed.” (23:15)

In the Torah, this festival is usually referred to as “the Festival of Matzos.” Commonly, however, it is called “Passover.”

According to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, this is because G-d - in His book, the Torah - stresses the greatness of His people. He therefore focuses on the matzos, which we ate because we left Egypt in such haste that there was no time for our dough to rise. Every mention of matzos, therefore, highlights the Jewish people's great faith and willingness to follow G-d wherever He directed them.

We, in contrast, relate to the holiday as an opportunity to thank G-d. We therefore refer to the holiday as Passover (Pesach), as a reminder of the great miracles that G-d performed for us, particularly when He skipped over (*pasach*) the Jewish houses and brought His plagues only upon the Egyptians.

We can learn from this phenomenon that what should be paramount in our minds is how kind others have been to us, rather than on how good we have been to them. (Kedushat Levi, Bo; Sichot Kodesh 5737, vol. 1, p. 629; Sichot Kodesh 5741, vol. 4, pp. 236-237) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

GATHERED IN UNITY

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)

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. (Likutei Halachot 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)

PROTECTIVE PUNISHMENTS

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

"Behold! I send an angel before you to protect you on the way, and to bring you to the place that I have prepared..." (23:20)

Rashi comments that Hashem revealed to His people that they were destined to sin, and therefore He would not lead them personally but would send an angel instead to guide them.

This comment is difficult to understand; we would think that even though Hashem knew that they were going to sin, He should not have said anything about their punishment before they actually sinned.

We will say, therefore, that sending the angel in His stead was not a punishment but rather was intended for the Jews' own good. Whatever Hashem does by Himself, rather than through a messenger, cannot be undone. Thus, if the Jews had sinned against Him directly, He would not have been able to vent His wrath by destroying the *Beis HaMikdash* but would have had to punish them directly. The Sages therefore said (Eichah Rabbasi 4:14) that Psalm 79 is called a Song of Rejoicing, even though it laments the tribulations connected with the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, because the Psalmist could rejoice at least in the fact that Hashem vented His anger on the wood and stones of Jerusalem rather than by totally annihilating the people (Heaven forbid).

DISCIPLINING WITH LOVE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"For My angel will go before you and bring you to the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizite, and the Canaanite, and the Hivvite, and the Jebusite, and I will annihilate them." (23:23)

In this passage, G-d is informing the people that they would eventually sin and thus forfeit the privilege of being led into the Land of Israel by His presence directly, instead being led by an emissary. Nonetheless, G-d assures them that this emissary will succeed in driving out the nations occupying Canaan in order to facilitate the Jewish people's settlement in it.

We see here that even when G-d deems it necessary to discipline His people, He never ceases to both love us and manifest that love toward us.

Similarly, whenever circumstances require us to administer disciplinary measures, we should do so out of genuine love and concern, making sure, at the same time, to manifest that love to those whom we are disciplining. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 21, p. 226) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

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 (יה) 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

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 (מימך ... 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.

THE GIVER ALWAYS GETS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"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)

The Torah implores us to serve G-d and describes the blessings of food, water, and health that we will receive: "And you shall worship the Lord, your G-d, and He will bless your food and your drink, and I will remove illness from your midst" (23:25).

However, the word that is used to describe our service to G-d is plural, while the "you" that receives the benefits is singular. What is the significance of the different pronouns?

Chasam Sofer suggests that through communal interaction, we achieve the most extraordinary form of personal benefit. In fact, many commandments can only be done as a community, such as returning lost objects, loving our neighbors, etc.

If we pray and work to help others with their struggles, the Torah attests that our personal needs will be satisfied. Helping others not only improves their lives but benefits ours as well.

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 Wisnefsky

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.

SACRIFICING FOR OTHERS

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 Mishnah testifies was someone who truly loved peace and pursued it (Pirkei Avos 1:12), and regarding whom the Torah (Bamidbar 20:29) declares that all of the Jewish People cried for thirty days when they found out that he had died (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.

PLURALITY PREFERRED

Rabbi Ari Ciment

"And Moshe wrote all the words of Hashem, and arose early in the morning, and built an altar under the mountain, and twelve pillars, for the twelve tribes of Israel." (24:4)

Akavia ben Mahalalel says: Look at three things and you won't come to sin: From where you came, where you are going, and in front of Whom you are going to come for דין (judgment) and חשבון (an accounting)! (Avos 3:1)

What is the difference between דין - judgment and חשבון - an accounting? My father, Dr. Larry Ciment, quotes Rabbi Mordechai Shapiro as saying that when you go up to heaven, although you get judged by your own merits, represented by the personal, direct דין, you can also claim

extra continual merits by the impact you have on others, including family members and community, which are included in the more flexible and continually accumulating variable **חשבון**! Where in our *parashah* do we see such an idea of **דין** and **חשבון**?

The verse (Shemos 24:4) states, “And Moshe wrote all the words of Hashem, and arose early in the morning, and built an altar (**מזבח**) under the mount, and twelve pillars (**מצבה**), according to the twelve tribes of Israel.” We see Moshe building a **מזבח** and a **מצבה**. What is the difference between a **מזבח** and **מצבה**?

In Devarim (16:22), we see the injunction of utilizing a **מזבח** to worship G-d but not building a **מצבה** for that purpose: **ולא תקים לך מצבה אשר שגא ה' אליך**: “And you shall not set up for yourself a monument, which Hashem, your G-d hates.” Rashi states over there that a **מצבה** is made up of one stone, while a **מזבח** is made up of many stones.

The classic mussar here is that G-d prefers the plural over the singular. If you can worship Him with a **מזבח** made of several stones representing a congregation, that is more pleasant than worshipping Him as one as in a single **מצבה**.

In a similar vein, my father wondered why we bring stones to the tombstone (also called a **מצבה**) of a dead person in the cemetery.

He answered that the **מצבה** of a person represents a single person's lifework. Once dead, the person has but one **מצבה**, a single stone reflecting his accomplishments. We bring other stones to add on top of the **מצבה** to represent that the person should not be merely assessed for their accomplishments but also for the influence that he had on so many others. The singular **מצבה** thus becomes a **מזבח** (many stones), reflecting a congregation of people who were positively influenced by the deceased and who then cause continual merit for the deceased.

When it says in Avos - **לפני מי אתה עתיד ליתן דין וחשבון** - the **דין** is the **מצבה**; we are assessed stand-alone for our personal accomplishments. But the **מזבח** is the **חשבון**, where we are granted continual merits for influencing others beyond our demise. We must realize that we not only have an opportunity for personal growth (**דין**), but also have a concomitant ability to accrue continual merit by influencing others (**וחשבון**).

Takeaway Messages: Moshe builds a **מזבח** as well as twelve **מצבות**, in our *parashah*. G-d prefers worship through a **מזבח** over a **מצבה**. This may be because, inherently, a **מזבח** is made of several stones representing a congregation, while a **מצבה** is intrinsically made up of only one stone.

Likewise, by a tombstone: By adding stones to one tombstone (**מצבה**), we are showing how the deceased is more than a singular **מצבה**. The person who passed away is a **מזבח** of many stones that accrues merit based on how he continuously impacts us all currently living (my father, Dr. Larry Ciment). The **דין** may be done, but the **חשבון** keeps on going.

COMPLETE ACCEPTANCE

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

“And the entire people responded with one voice, and they said, ‘All the words that Hashem has spoken, we will do’... They said, ‘Everything that Hashem has said, we will do and we will hear.’” (24:3,7)

To explain the differences in these two declarations of acceptance of Hashem's words, we can say that in the first one, the Jews agreed to accept only those utterances they knew to have been said by Hashem. Hashem, however, knew that this kind of acceptance is not adequate, since it is possible that over the course of time certain things would be forgotten or their underlying reasons distorted. Therefore, He desired that the Jews also believe that they must accept whatever would be said by the Torah Sages of each generation. This includes both the traditions received by the Sages from their predecessors and their interpretation of the Torah's meaning. This is what they meant in agreeing to uphold all the words of the Torah, even those things they had not heard directly from Hashem but rather from Moshe or from his successors, the Prophets and Sages of subsequent generations (see Rashi on 19:9, who comments that in the phrase “they will also believe in you forever,” the word *also* is a promise that the Jews would believe not only in Moshe but also in his successors.) The cantillation markings on the first verse therefore emphasize the word **כל** (all), since it includes so much in its purview.

Also implied in this is the teaching that those things known to have been said by Hashem Himself do not require detailed scrutiny and analysis, as we see from the fact that the first declaration of acceptance does not include the word **נשמע**, *we will hear*. The second declaration, however, does include this word, implying that those things the Sages tell us are the words of Hashem do require “hearing,” in other words, a process of examination and analysis if we are capable to ascertain as much as possible whether they are in fact the words of Hashem.

UNIQUELY CONNECTED

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“They said, ‘Everything that G-d has said, we will do, and we will hear.’” (24:7)

This week's *parashah*, Mishpatim, details many of the laws put forth to the Jewish people. This is followed by the famous declaration by the people, “*Naaseh v'nishma*,” they will “do and hear” all of these laws (24:7). What's less well-known is the fact that they had already accepted these laws twice before, including in this very *parashah* (19:8, 24:3). The differences between the first two declarations and this third famous one is (1) the people proclaimed in unison the first two times but not the third, and (2) the first two declarations included only following the laws and the third added hearing them. What is the reason for these differences?

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks offers a beautiful explanation. The first two declarations involved strict adherence to a unified code of conduct and behavior with no room for individuality or divergence, hence why the Jews' acceptance was in unison.

While everyone yet again affirmed that they would adhere to the laws the third time, the absence of that unity reflects that one's understanding (hearing) of those edicts is very personal and varied, as people connect, understand, and appreciate them at their own level.

Judaism leaves room for individuality, and that is what makes us unique as people and as a nation. While our actions unite us, embracing our uniqueness makes us stronger.

JOYFUL ACCEPTANCE

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 Wisniewsky)

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.

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 on 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

"The appearance of the glory of Hashem was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain." (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

"The appearance of the glory of Hashem was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain." (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.

EMERGING UNSCATHED

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Moshe came in the midst of the cloud and ascended the mountain. Moshe remained on the mountain for forty days and forty nights." (24:18)

In order to receive the Torah from G-d, Moshe had to first traverse the cloud of smoke produced by the dirt and rocks burning on the top of the mountain. The lesson for us here is that we must be willing to descend into even the lowest aspects of reality (symbolized by the dirt and rocks) in order to sanctify and purify the world, and make it into G-d's home.

Nonetheless, we are taught that G-d made a path for Moshe through this cloud so his face and clothing would not become soiled by passing through it. There is indeed danger of being soiled by contending with the gross materialism of reality. But as long as we remain true to the Moshe within us and the Moshes - the true teachers of the Torah - of all generations, G-d will protect us, enabling us to emerge unscathed from the encounter. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 16, pp. 282-283) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

HAFTORAH

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.