

Parshat Mishpatim

The Daily Laws of Life

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The question is asked: Why immediately after the parsha of the Revelation at Sinai - lofty and transcendent - does the Torah command many mundane laws so abruptly. The answer given is that the Torah wants to impress on us that living as a Jew can't only consist of moments of inspiration - but rather must include *halacha u'prateha*, the daily laws of life.

This dvar Torah endeavors to touch on a few ways towards internalizing this message of the Torah: learning the sources that speak of the importance of halacha and the ensuing personal and national simcha, and a more specific approach.

In Parshat Yitro, the Torah describes the Jews as standing in front of Moshe from day to night. The Gemara in Masechet Shabbat says that it is impossible that Moshe judged from day to night. Rather, there's a *gezera shava* from "*min haboker ad ha'erev*" to "*vayehev erev vayehi boker*" to show us that if one judges truthfully, it's like he's a partner with G-d in Creation. The Sfat Emet on this pasuk proves this point from the Flood. The Flood - destruction - resulted from a lack of justice; the presence of justice is equivalent to creation.

Similarly, Kohelet concludes: "The sum of the matter ... Fear G-d and keep his commandments, for this is man's whole duty." Logically, if serving G-d means fulfilling our role as man, then Yirat Shimayim **and** Halacha are the only means to serving G-d.

The Chazon Ish, in his sefer Emunah U'Bitachon, as well as Rav Solevitchik in Halachic Man, describe how the man who bows to the law has broken the shackles of his lower self. Instead of acting on the whim - whatever feels good - he's living nobly as a man of G-d.

The Rav makes a distinction between one who follows halacha and one who perceives a halachic reality. Meaning, when halachic man sees a beautiful setting sun he's reminded of a dispute in Mesechet Shabbat in regards to determining the time of T'fillah and Shabbat ... and maybe a bracha "*hatov v'hameitiv*" is required. His world is a complex framework of halacha

A more step-by-step approach can be found in the Chazon Ish. He describes the man who has "in his soul the acquisition of submission to halacha." He, "through two ways: commitment and learning" internalized this trait. With "vigorous persistence" he learned "Gemara, Rashi and Tosfot, halachot in general and *bein adam l'chaveiro* in detail." Moreover, he asked when a halachic question arose, and even in a difficult, perhaps embarrassing, situation - he persevered in keeping halacha.

Finally, Rabbi Jakobowitz's understanding is that Halacha is not a collection of laws, or we would treat slaves like property and friends like robots. Rather, just as building a house requires effort to dig the foundation and connect beams - so one can have living space - Halacha is the structure of morality. Take the common denominator of Choshen Mishpat and one will find the midah of *V'Ahavta L'Reacha K'Mocha*, hilchos brachot and Hakaros Hatov, hilchos T'fillah and D'Vaykus (see last Maharsha in Mesechet Brachot). Were we to learn halacha and it's principles - we would have the structure and spirit to merit the redemption.

[Note: For the purpose of emphasizing halacha, this d'var Torah did not speak of the role of mussur and machshava. However, the Chazon Ish 3:13 writes that these are essential as well.]