

# RABBI GOLDBERG'S *Parsha Perspectives* FOR TODAY

**Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Mishpatim for your Shabbos Table**  
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## DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

### Break the Cycle

Parshas Mishpatim presents the basic principles of the Torah's civil code. After the dramatic event of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, Hashem now transmitted the detailed laws that we are to observe.

This series of laws begins with the *halacha* of the עבד עברי – the Jewish servant. Right at the opening of this *parsha*, the Torah commands that if a person purchases a servant, he must release him after six years of work.

At first glance, this seems like a very peculiar choice of a topic with which to begin this series of laws. *Benei Yisrael* were only weeks away from *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. For centuries, they endured the pain and degradation of slavery, and were only very recently freed from that torment. Is the requirement to free an עבד עברי the most important law that they needed to hear at this moment?

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin, in *Meged Yosef*, explains that to the contrary – precisely because of *Benei Yisrael's* recent experience as slaves, the mandatory release of an עבד עברי is the first law they needed to be told. Any therapist who deals with abuse victims will affirm that suffering abuse as a child drastically increases the chances of becoming an abuser oneself. Children who were raised by abusive parents are more likely than others to grow to become abusive parents. Rationally, we would have assumed that those who experienced firsthand the horrors and pain of abuse would be less likely to inflict this suffering on others. But reality has taught us that this is not the case. People who suffered mistreatment feel the need to mistreat others.

Somebody told me about how he was raised in a very poor family, and then started working in a business where he was treated very insensitively. He eventually worked his way up, to the point where he bought the business. Those who had been in charge now work for him. He gleefully and proudly told me how he is now

treating them the way they treated him.

But this is not how it should be. The command of עבד עברי, Rav Sorotzkin writes, teaches us that we must break the cycle of violence, abuse and mistreatment. If we were treated badly, we are still able, and expected, to break the cycle, to be better than those who were unkind to us. *Benei Yisrael's* experiences as slaves do not entitle us to enslave others. In fact, the Torah requires that if a master has only one bed or one pillow, he must give it to his servant instead of keeping it for himself. If we were treated cruelly, we should treat others kindly. We can and must break the cycle.

## DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

### The Double Pain of the Widows and Orphans

Later in the *parsha*, we find what might be the most frightening *pesukim* in the entire Torah:

כל אלמנה ויתום לא תענון. אם ענה תענה אותו, כי אם צעק יצעק אלי, שמוע אשמע צעקתו. וחרה אפי, והרגתי אתכם בחרב, והיו נשיכם אלמנות ובנים יתומים.

*You shall not aggrieve any widow or orphan. If you aggrieve him, then if he calls out to Me – I shall assuredly hear his cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you by the sword, such that your wives will be widows, and your sons, orphans. (22:21-23)*

A loving, kindhearted woman, who would never as much as speak a hurtful word to another human being, would erupt in a furious rage if anyone attempted to harm any of her children. Similarly, Hashem here warns that if we cause pain to His "children," the widows and orphans, for whom He takes personal responsibility, so-to-speak, He will be enraged, and will react harshly. When it comes to the most vulnerable members of society, G-d doesn't hold back. He will come after those who hurt them, with a vengeance.

Many commentators noted the unusual repetitive form used in these *pesukim*. The aggrieving of the widow

or orphan is referred to with the double expression *ענה תענה*, and the victim's cries of pain are described with the words *צעק יצעק*. And then *שמוע אשמע* – Hashem will “assuredly hear” the cries. What’s the meaning of these double expressions?

Rav Avrohom Schorr explains that the pain inflicted in a widow or orphan is doubled, because the victim has nobody to turn to, nobody with whom to unburden himself or herself. When a woman has a rough day, or is experiencing any sort of hardship, she can sit with her husband to talk about the situation, and thus find a degree of comfort and solace. When a child is bullied in school, receives a bad grade, or is rejected from a program or by a prospective *shidduch*, the child right away turns to his or her parents for support and comfort. The widow or orphan, however, is denied this comfort. And thus not only does the widow or orphan suffer pain – but he or she also has no possibility of alleviating the pain through the love and support of a spouse or parent.

And since *אם ענה תענה אותו* – the pain is doubled, consequently, *צעק יצעק* – the victim's cries are doubled, resulting in a “double reaction” from Hashem – *שמוע אשמע* – *צעקתו*.

## DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

### Giving Hashem Nachas

The final section of Parshas Mishpatim completes the story of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. We read:

ויבא משה ויספר לעם את כל דברי ה' ואת כל המשפטים, ויען כל העם קול אחד ויאמרו: כל הדברים אשר דבר ה' נעשה.

*Moshe came and related to the people all of Hashem's words, and all the laws. The entire nation responded with one voice, saying: All the things that Hashem spoke, we will do. (24:3)*

Rashi maintains that this section appears out of chronological sequence, and actually took place before the pronouncement of the *Aseres Ha'dibros* and the presentation of the laws in Parshas Mishpatim. According to Rashi, when the Torah says that Moshe told the people “all of Hashem's words, and all the laws,” this refers to the *mitzvos* they were commanded before coming to Mount Sinai – the seven Noachide laws which are binding upon all mankind, and the *mitzvos* presented at Mara, several weeks before *Matan Torah* (Shabbos observance, honoring parents, *para aduma*, and a number of civil laws).

The Ramban (24:1), however, disagrees. In his view, the Torah here follows chronological sequence, and the events told at the end of Parshas Mishpatim occurred after *Ma'amad Har Sinai* and the presentation of the laws earlier in this *parsha*. Thus, according to the Ramban, the phrase *ויבא משה ויספר לעם את כל דברי ה' ואת כל המשפטים* refers to the new information which Moshe had just now heard from Hashem.

One of the arguments advanced by the Ramban against Rashi's understanding of the *pasuk* is the word *ויספר* (“related”). The Ramban writes: *ולא יאמר ויספר אלא בחדשות* – this verb is used exclusively for the relating of new information. The Torah would not use this word in reference to Moshe's reviewing with the people the *mitzvos* they had already learned and with which they were already familiar. Necessarily, then, the Torah refers here to the new material which Moshe had heard, the laws of Parshas Mishpatim.

Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, in *Kedushas Levi*, offers a beautiful explanation in defense of Rashi. He writes that Moshe did not simply review the *mitzvos* which the people had already learned, but rather explained to them something about their *mitzva* observance:

היה מספר לעם גודל הפעולה שפעלו ישראל בקיום ה' מצות ובמצות שנצטוו במרה והאיך שהקדוש ברוך הוא משתעשע בקיום המצות.

*He was telling the people the greatness of the impact which Yisrael had through the fulfillment of the seven [Noachide] laws and the mitzvos they were commanded in Mara, and how the Almighty delights in the fulfillment of the mitzvos.*

Rav Levi Yitzchak explains that Moshe was informing *Benei Yisrael* how valuable and precious each and every *mitzva* act is. He was telling them *האיך שהקדוש ברוך הוא משתעשע בקיום המצות* – that every *mitzva* we perform brings Hashem great *nachas*, immense joy and delight. He was impressing upon them that our *mitzvos* matter, that every good deed we do has great significance. Every time we get ourselves out of bed in the morning for *minyan*, we bring Hashem *nachas*. Every time we speak a kind word to our fellow, we bring Hashem *nachas*. Every time we feel an impulse to react angrily and insult a family member, but we restrain ourselves, we bring Hashem *nachas*. Every time we are inclined to share a juicy piece of gossip, but we keep quiet, we bring Hashem *nachas*. Every time we are about to open a website that should not be opened, we bring Hashem *nachas*. Just as a parent beams with pride every time a child acts properly, whenever a child makes the right decision, when a child displays maturity and responsibility, so does Hashem receive *nachas* from us whenever we do the right thing.

The Ramchal concludes his *magnum opus*, the *Mesilas Yesharim*, with the prayer, *ונזכה לתת כבוד לשמו, ולעשות נחת רוח* – that we should have the privilege to bring Hashem honor, and to bring Him *נחת רוח*. We often speak about our desire to enjoy *nachas* from our children – but we must also strive to bring *nachas* to Hashem.

We need to realize that everything we do matters. We might not be perfect, and we are not expected to be perfect, but each time we get it right, we bring Hashem great joy and delight – and knowing this should bring us great joy and delight, as well, and motivate us to continue striving to bring Hashem ever greater *nachas*.