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**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE**

**PARSHAS
MISHPATIM**

BY

HESCHEL GREENBERG

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS
MISHPATIM**

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS MISHPATIM**

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS MISHPATIM

**Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who,
more than any Jewish leader, has prepared
us for Moshiach and the imminent
Redemption**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS MISHPATIM

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS
MISHPATIM**

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

**ESSAY ONE: THE ANGEL'S
ANGLE**

**ESSAY TWO: WIDOWS AND
ORPHANS**

ESSAY THREE: A TWO WAY STREET

**ESSAY FOUR: UNITY AND
DIVERSITY**

**ESSAY FIVE: WHO DO WE
DEMAND OF TO REDEEM US?**

ESSAY SIX: TRIPOD

**ESSAY SEVEN: PUNISHMENT
OR REHABILITATION**

**ESSAY EIGHT: A JOB FOR A
NICE JEWISH BOY?**

ESSAY NINE: HEAL A HEEL

**ESSAY TEN: AN EYE FOR AN
EYE**

ESSAY ELEVEN: KIDNAPPED

**ESSAY TWELVE: THE OX AND
THE LAMB**

**ESSAY THIRTEEN: OUT OF
BOUNDS**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS MISHPATIM

**ESSAY FOURTEEN: TALENT
ON LOAN FROM G-D**

**ESSAY FIFTEEN: LIBERATING
G-D**

**ESSAY SIXTEEN: TUNNEL
VISION**

**ESSAY SEVENTEEN: WHEN
ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS
THREE**

**ESSAY EIGHTEEN: NO PAIN,
MUCH GAIN
HAVING OUR CAKE AND
EATING IT**

**ESSAY NINETEEN: INTERNAL
MEDICINE**

**ESSAY TWENTY: PUT YOUR
MOUTH BEFORE YOUR EARS!**

**ESSAY TWENTY-ONE: THE
ALPEH, BEIS, GIMMEL OF
MOSHIACH**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS MISHPATIM

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Mishpatim* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS MISHPATIM

general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

The parsha Mishpatim is obviously a fundamental parsha because it represents the implementation of the Sinai dynamic into day to day practice, paving the way

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS MISHPATIM

for a moral, just and peaceful world—the
world of Moshiach!

ESSAY ONE

THE ANGEL’S ANGLE

Humans and angels represent two ideals.

**From Sinai onward, the human ideal superseded
the angel paradigm.**

ESSAY ONE

THE ANGEL'S ANGLE

The Follow Up to Sinai

This week's parsha, *Mishpatim*, follows the one in which we read about the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. The laws discussed in this parsha therefore are central to the message of Sinai which is intended to make the world hospitable to the one G-d. To accomplish that one must translate the lofty ideals and sublime revelations of G-dly light that occurred at Sinai into the most mundane aspects of life.

This is what this parsha is about—the laws and judgments that govern our interpersonal relationships. But as long as these commonplace activities are no different than they were before Sinai, the entire purpose of the giving of the Torah is called into question.

More specifically, this week's parsha begins with the laws concerning the rather rare case of an *eved ivri*, a Jewish thief who has been sold into

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

indentured servitude to make restitution for things that he had stolen.

The message is clear: when is Torah's message effective? When it can inform us how to deal with a common thief, how to rehabilitate him and to bring him back into society.

The indentured servant was to become part of the household of his master. His master would have to support him, and if he had a family, the master would have to support his family as well. And while his material needs were taken care of he was also given the opportunity to make amends for his wrongdoing and to grow morally and spiritually in the stable environment of his "master."

Comes in and Leaves Single

One of the laws concerning the *eved ivri* was, "if he came in single he leaves single." There are many explanations as to what this means, but we will focus on a cryptic Midrashic comment to this verse:

When the Holy One, Blessed is He said,
"If he came in single he leaves single,"
the angels asked, "Why then did You

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

command them to wipe out the memory of Amalek (the evil nation that sought and continues to seek the annihilation of the Jewish people)?”

What connection does the war against Amalek have with the *eved ivri* who enters and leaves his six years of servitude single?

The Interplay between Amalek and Marriage

One way of answering this question is to understand the spiritual dynamic of Amalek.

In an earlier parsha where it records the battle against Amalek, G-d says that “His hand is on the throne of G-d.” The word “G-d” there is written in its incomplete form. Normally the essential name of G-d has four letters: a *yud*, a *hei*, a *vav* and another *hei*. Amalek in his struggle against G-d and the Jewish people bifurcates the name of G-d and only allows the first two letters to be written.

Our Sages thus comment, “G-d’s name is not complete until Amalek’s memory is obliterated”. Amalek’s evil is directed against allowing the full expression of G-dliness in this world.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Marriage, we are told, is the union of two half souls that makes G-d's name complete. The words for man and woman in Hebrew, *ish* and *isha* respectively, both contain the word *eish*, fire. The word *ish* has the letter *yud* of G-d's name in it, and the word *isha* has the letter *hei* of G-d's name in it. When the two are together in an ideal union they generate G-d's fire-energy in a wholesome way. A proper marriage is what makes the name of G-d complete.

When the Torah speaks of the *eved ivri* as one “who enters single and leaves single” it implies that he does not have the opportunity to achieve the union of G-d's name. Why then, the angels asked, is there such a preoccupation with Amalek's assault on the integrity of G-d's name? Why isn't this servant's institutionalized single status just as bad, or perhaps even worse? Why does G-d “allow” for this form of dividing G-d's name while “obsessing” with getting rid of Amalek who undermines the integrity of His name?

Angel Psychology

The Midrash does not provide G-d's answer to the challenge posed by the angels. It stands to

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

reason that their argument is rooted in angel, not human, psychology. If we examine what makes us different from angels we can figure out what the answer to their argument should be.

Angels are programmed beings. Angels can only exist in their original mold. They cannot change their feelings, mindsets, and modus operandi. Angels can therefore not understand how a person can compensate for his/her disabilities. When an angel sees a person who is disabled it views the person as one who is denied the possibility to accomplish his or her G-d given goals.

Human beings are totally different creatures. We are not fixed in any mold. Not only do we have free choice, but we can break out of any prison. In the modern age an amputee, G-d forbid, is not a cripple or a handicapped person. The term that is used, and properly so, is: “physically challenged.”

Indeed, there is no person in the world who is not either physically, emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually challenged. Indeed, we were put here to be challenged. And we therefore compensate for what angels will call “crippled.”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

We can even thrive and accomplish so much more because we overcame adversity and developed innovative means of achieving more than we would have achieved had we not been challenged.

Thus when the Torah speaks of the Hebrew servant it symbolizes all of us; we are asked to be G-d's servants. And as we discover that we are missing part of our capabilities—and this lack doesn't seem to change even as we are ready to complete our mission—we should not think of ourselves as failures. We should not, G-d forbid, think of ourselves as spiritual cripples for having undermined G-d's plan and harmed the Jewish people the way Amalek did. Such a comparison to Amalek is an ill-advised one that is a result of the skewed perspective of angels, for only angels are truly limited, not people.

On the contrary, challenged people will discover that they have other means and avenues in which they can excel in to ensure the integrity of G-d's name.

To be sure, no person should ask for challenges that he/she does not already have. Every person who wants to follow the “conventional route” to being whole in every respect has every right to

desire this. And we have every obligation to assist this person in achieving this goal.

For example, the Torah commands us to do everything in our power to attain such wholeness through marriage. But by no means should a person who, for whatever reason, has remained single feel that he or she is inferior. And no one has a right to look condescendingly at such a person whose life's path did not follow the same "conventional" route as most others.

This, of course, is true only when the alternate route is totally in conformance with Halacha. Needless to stress, it is not a license to do whatever one pleases.

***Eved Ivri* and Moshiach**

The *Tosfos* commentary on the Torah indicates that the word *Eved Ivri*, the Hebrew indentured servant, has the same numerical value as the word Moshiach. This tells us that the lessons we can learn from the Torah's approach to this individual applies to the way we approach and prepare for Moshiach and the final Redemption.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

The approach to Moshiach—when the Amalek compromising of G-d's name will finally cease—can be approached from two angles. The angels' angle is that we are fixed forever in the mold of exile. How can we change our exile mentality? Only G-d can pull us out of it. We cannot do it ourselves. The single servant is a metaphor for the person who is hopelessly constrained and bound by exile conditions. The angels see our identities as the cover we happen to be wearing at the time. They cannot fathom how we can break out of the strait jackets that are the identities that were given to us at birth or as imposed on us by society.

The angels ask: "How could we come in to this world and leaves it without the ability to make G-d's name complete? And if that is not our goal, why the obsession with getting rid of Amalek?"

This is the question of the angels who see everything through their own prism of fixed identities. They are puzzled by the seeming human inconsistency.

That is how angels think.

We were told to think differently. There are no molds imposed by nature or circumstances into

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

which we are permanently locked. If we are denied access to one avenue to get closer to G-d, He provides us with alternative routes which may be superior to the “natural” ones.

One example is the way the Ba'al Shem Tov extolled the virtue of the simple but sincere Jew. To him they were superior to many of the scholars who followed the conventional route and the one the Ba'al Shem Tov himself advocated. The Ba'al Shem Tov did not, G-d forbid, oppose education and intellectual sophistication. He was a towering scholar himself and so were all of his closest disciples. Yet he saw that these simple Jews—who, after all, did not choose simplicity—expressed their soul's passion for G-d in ways that were superior to that of the scholars.

In exile we are like the poor Hebrew servant who was sold into servitude because of his lapses. And because we are in exile we come into this challenge with our own solitary power. We may not have access to the support system of the days in which we had the *Beis Hamikdash*—we are spiritually single—and yet, it is this humble *eved ivri* whose numerical value is Moshiach. Moshiach comes mostly

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

through those who might think they are deficient in their capabilities, but who, in truth, shine brightly.

ESSAY TWO

WIDOWS AND ORPHANS

Programmed into the Jew's psyche is compassion for all of G-d's creatures, especially the downtrodden; the widow and the orphan.

Included in the widow and orphan is our internal widow and orphan.

Have compassion for the internal, widow and orphan

ESSAY TWO

WIDOWS AND ORPHANS

Dual Nature of *Mishpatim*

This week's parsha, *Mishpatim*, is replete with commandments that govern our relationships with others as well as commandments that govern our relationship with G-d.

It is ironic that the portion is called *Mishpatim* which refers specifically to the commandments between man and man, even though this portion also contains a significant number of commandments between man and G-d.

In truth, these two categories are not totally separate and distinct. Even the man to man Mitzvos involve a man to G-d component and vice versa. When the Torah commands us to give Tzedakah, for example, it refers to charity in the most literal sense and it also refers to charity in the spiritual sense.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

This premise—that the commandments contain a dual nature—is most pronounced in this week’s parsha which commences with the conjunctive “**And** these are the judgments that you shall place before them.” As Rashi notes, the Torah thereby connects this parsha, which deals with social commandments, to the preceding one, which featured the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. As Rashi states, this is to underscore that all of the commandments, including the social ones, were given by G-d at Mount Sinai. And to further underscore the dual nature of the commandments, this week’s parsha ends with the continuation of the Sinai experience.

With this introduction in mind, we will attempt to understand the two dimensions of one of the enigmatic commandments in this parsha.

Afflicting with a Smile

The Torah commands us:

“Do not afflict a widow or an orphan.
If you do oppress him and he cries out
to Me, I will hear his cry...”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Commentators raise the obvious question: Does the Torah really have to command us to not afflict a widow or an orphan?

Rashi seems to have anticipated this question and explains that while the law against affliction applies to everyone, the Torah, nevertheless, cited the widow and the orphan because, due to their special vulnerability, they are the most likely victims of abuse.

The question still remains, why couldn't the Torah just make a general statement which forbids afflicting anyone?

One possible answer is that the Torah may not be referring to outright affliction but to cases where the affliction is disguised as a gesture of concern and compassion. A devious individual might act as if he is looking out for their best interests and, because of their vulnerability, cause them harm. Thus the Torah follows this commandment with a threat of Divine retribution. This may be the Torah's way of warning the potential abuser that G-d could see through the subterfuge and would hold the abuser fully accountable.

Spiritually Widowed and Divorced

Another question has been asked: Why does the Torah use the singular tense when it says, “If you do oppress **him** and **he** cries out to Me...”? Why does it only refer to the orphan’s cries and not the widow’s?

And one more question has been raised. Why does the Torah employ repetitive expressions for the word affliction, the orphan’s cries and G-d’s response?

To answer these questions, we must take a deeper look at, and introduce, the second, spiritual dimension of this verse:

The commandment against afflicting a widow and an orphan can be explained as a reference to a person who is spiritually widowed or orphaned as a result of exile conditions.

In Biblical and Talmudic literature, G-d is referred to as our “Husband” and we are His “wife.” When a Jew is in exile—and his or her connection to G-d is severely curtailed—it can be said that he or she has become a widow. For this “exile Jew,” G-d ceases to be a living part of his or her life.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

In truth, there are two metaphors for our severed relationship with G-d in exile. One is widowhood and the other is divorce.

The difference between these two metaphors is that a divorce can be a sign of unfaithfulness, hostility or incompatibility in a marriage. In spiritual terms, this occurred when segments of the Jewish nation rebelled against G-d and embraced foreign gods and alien values. It symbolizes a pro-active assault on the marriage between G-d and the Jewish people.

The “widow” metaphor, by contrast, is one in which the alienated Jews have lost their enthusiasm for G-d and for His Torah in a much more benign way. They were not divorced by G-d nor did they initiate a divorce against G-d. They did not rebel. Rather, golus – exile – influences insidiously invaded their world and eroded their inspiration and interest in G-d and His Torah. Golus kills the G-dly spirit in us. This situation is, therefore, best compared to a woman whose husband is no longer alive.

There are Jews for whom their Husband is no longer a vibrant force and it can no longer be said that He is alive and well in their lives.

To be sure, G-d's presence can never be extinguished. Even the Jew who has consciously "divorced" G-d from his or her life is still connected. However, these connections can become so concealed that they can appear to be non-existent.

The Spiritual Orphan

The orphan is also a metaphor for Jews dwelling in exile conditions.

In Chassidic philosophy, the term father and mother are representative of the two intellectual faculties of *chochma*-wisdom and *binah*-understanding. Chochma is the ability to conceive of an idea and binah is the ability to flesh out all the details of the idea. Chochma is like a seed and binah is the womb.

When one applies these two intellectual faculties to comprehending G-d's greatness, it will result in the birth of the two emotions of love and reverence for G-d. These emotions are referred to as the "children" of the intellectual parents. Chochma, which contributes the seed of the idea, is the "father" of the emotions and binah, which allows the idea to gestate and

assume its form, is the “mother” of the emotions.

In exile, however, we are orphaned. We lack the intellectual ability to comprehend G-d and His greatness. Galus conditions—the physical suffering and the powers of assimilation—have a deleterious effect on our ability to think in spiritual terms. And as a result, we have lost our emotions—our spiritual children -- and we are thus rendered orphans.

King David in his Tehillim referred to this orphaned state. In Psalm 27 he says, “Though my father and mother have forsaken me, G-d has taken me in.” Chassidic thought explains that King David was speaking about the spiritual orphan who lost his intellectual abilities. Nevertheless, King David speaks of how G-d will take him in. King David was echoing the pleas of the “orphan of exile” in our verse and he assures us that G-d will certainly listen to his pleas and will “take him in.”

The Silent Widow

We can now understand the answer to our earlier question on why the Torah employs the

singular tense when it speaks of the cries of the afflicted.

As explained, the “widow” describes the lowest state of exile in which G-d’s presence is completely absent. Except for their soul’s essence that can never be extinguished, all of the spiritual “widow’s” soul’s emotions are, for all intents and purposes, lifeless. When there is no life, the person cannot even cry out to G-d for help. They may be totally devastated by exile affliction or even completely unaware that they are suffering in exile.

The spiritual “orphan”, by contrast, might be lacking in his ability to generate emotion through intellectual reflection, but he is not bereft of his ability to express raw emotion. When he senses how much he is missing because of exile conditions, he cries out to G-d.

Double Affliction and Double Salvation

We can now also understand why the Torah employs a repetitive expression for the word affliction: The spiritual orphan, as mentioned, is doubly afflicted because he lacks both intellectual powers of chochma and binah. His

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

cries, therefore, are also twofold; he cries for the loss of chochma and cries for the loss of binah. And G-d's response is also a double one; restoring both of our intellectual powers.

In addition, one might suggest that the double expression of affliction, cries and salvation in this verse allude to the destruction of two Holy Temples. The first was destroyed because of a lack of reverence for G-d and the second for a lack of Jewish unity. Our golus must rectify both causes. So the “orphaned” golus Jew cries out to G-d because he or she feels the vacuum caused by the absence of our Beis Hamikdash, which possessed the dual function of creating an awareness of G-d and a force of unity.

G-d's response is to bring Moshiach and the final Redemption at which time the third Holy Temple will be built, that will be a composite of the two Temples that we lost.

And it is to these exile Jews—the widows and the orphans—that the Torah directs its commands to us to not afflict. When we meet the exile/widow or the exile/orphan, it is our duty to assist him or her to get out of exile widowhood and the exile orphan state.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

The Midrash tells us that G-d observes all of the commandments. When we who are in our state of widowhood and we who are orphaned cry out to G-d, He will certainly fulfill the commandment not to afflict the widow and the orphan, bring an end to the exile and rebuild the Beis Hamikdash, with the imminent complete revelation of Moshiach and the true and complete Redemption.

ESSAY THREE

A TWO WAY STREET

The slogan, “Life is a two way street” can be understood to reflect the two directions of Judaism: from the top down and the bottom up.

The Messianic Age will be a time of successfully merging the two movements

ESSAY THREE

A TWO WAY STREET

Theft and Eliyahu

What does theft have to do with the coming of Moshiach?

According to *Ba'al HaTurim*, “Eliyahu-Elijah,” the Biblical prophet, whose spirit attends every Bris and Seder and who will also herald the coming of Moshiach, is hinted in this week’s parsha where the Torah discusses the laws concerning theft. One such law concerns a person entrusted with money or an article of value who later claims it was stolen: “If the thief was not found, the homeowner (i.e., the guardian) must approach the judges that he has not laid his hand upon his friend’s property.”

Ba'al HaTurim discovers an interesting hint in the foregoing verse. The initials of its first five words spell the word “Eliyahu-Elijah,” as if to suggest a connection between this particular law and Eliyahu!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Ba'al HaTurim explains that this is an allusion to a passage in the Talmud that discusses the case of two people who entrusted their money to a third person. One gave 200 zuz, the other gave 100, however both now claim to have deposited 200. Absent any evidence as to who is telling the truth, the disputed 100 zuz must be left in escrow until Eliyahu arrives to usher in the final Redemption and clear up all unresolved legal matters.

The fact that Eliyahu's role as the ultimate clarifier is associated with the law that involves a dispute concerning who is entitled to the 100 zuz held in escrow must have some deeper significance.

How Tall?!

Chassidic thought cites a dispute in the Talmud about human growth in the future: Rabbi Yehudah maintains that we will grow to the height of a hundred cubits. Rabbi Meir asserts that we will reach the height of two hundred cubits!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

The Rebbe explains that their dispute reflects two approaches to the unification of our personality traits in the future Messianic Age.

A human being is endowed with ten faculties, three are intellectual and seven are emotions. Kabbalah and Chassidus teach us that each one of these ten comprises all of the others. Thus the total number of faculties we possess is 100. If one were to describe a person who has realized his or her full potential using numbers, it would be the number 100.

This then is what the Talmud meant when it says that we will grow to the height of 100 cubits: In the Messianic Age we will have achieved perfection.

A Tale of Two Journeys

However, the number 100 can be divided into two parts. If life is a journey and the number we attain is expressive of how far we have come, a Jew can express his or her spiritual faculties in two modalities:

The *Tzadik*, a righteous individual, is one who expresses a spiritual bent. The *Tzadik* stands head and shoulders above the rest of society.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

From his exalted perch the *Tzadik* “showers” the rest of us with his inspired mindset. His journey requires him to channel his spirituality to the rest of the world in a downward direction and that is how he attains perfection and becomes a “100er.”

The *Ba'al Teshuvah* (penitent, returnee to Judaism), by contrast, travels in the opposite direction. He starts his journey at the bottom. He is very much a product of the world we inhabit and its outlook on life. He has to grapple with all of the conflicting perspectives on life that stem from its secular and materialistic world view. He begins the climb as a slave to the negative forces of society. The *Ba'al Teshuvah* must extricate himself from this morass and journey upwards. Along the way he discovers his spiritual energy and faculties, one by one, until he can climb the proverbial “Mountain of G-d” and reach its zenith, thereby scoring a 100.

In other words, there are two ways one can reach the state of perfection; from the top down or the bottom up.

This is the tale of the two journeys undertaken by two very distinct classes of Jews.

Who is Superior?

The *Tzadik* has an advantage on the journey because he is always inspired and enjoys a more or less consistent life of spirituality. The *Tzadik* also has a clear vision of the world because he sees it from a higher vantage point, thus affording him a perspective that those who are situated on a lower level are denied.

The *Ba'al Teshuvah* has certain advantages as well. The *Ba'al Teshuvah* has to struggle and that struggle generates a powerful divine energy that the even the *Tzadik* cannot access. And not only is the energy that he unleashes greater, but, moreover, the energy generated by the *Ba'al Teshuvah* penetrates the physical dimension of the person and the world around and is unparalleled.

The *Tzadik*, who is not really a product of this world, cannot really make inroads into it. When the *Tzadik* generates spirituality it cannot be fully absorbed within the parameters of the material world because he is the antithesis of the material world. Rather the *Tzadik* overwhelms the world with his holiness and neutralizes its power to obstruct. He cannot,

without the assistance of the *Ba'al Teshuvah* fundamentally change the world.

The *Ba'al Teshuvah*, by contrast, works with the material world. He is within it, molds it and refines it until it too begins to be receptive to the G-dly energies that the *Ba'al Teshuvah* generates through his actions.

For this and other reasons the Talmud states—and the Rambam cites this statement in his Mishneh Torah: “the place where a *Ba'al Teshuvah* stands, even a perfectly righteous person lacks the ability to stand.”

Skiing and Mountain Climbing: The Best of Both Worlds

In the Messianic Age, however, we will all enjoy both qualities. Each one of us will reach the peak of spiritual perfection in both modalities. We will enjoy the spiritual sophistication of the *tzadik* even as we simultaneously access and internalize the penetrating force generated by the *Ba'al Teshuvah*. The two journeys will be united.

However, even in the future era of unity there can be two scenarios. We can either alternate

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

between the two models of the *tzadik* and the *Ba'al Teshuvah* or we can synthesize them into one dynamic, but paradoxical force.

In the first scenario we have moments of intense inspiration which enable us to look down at and dismiss the enticing powers of the material world. We realize how small, petty and insignificant they are in comparison with our spiritual experiences. We will view them the way we view the tiny houses and cars from a plane high in the sky. We can then change over to the *Ba'al Teshuvah* approach and painstakingly work our way, upward, step by step. We can journey to our goal by alternating between spiritual skiing and mountain climbing.

By the time we achieve this balance we will have grown 200 cubits because we have achieved perfection in both directions.

The second scenario for the future is where the two journeys merge into one seamless, paradoxical, journey. The *Tzadik* will be permeated with the spirit of Teshuvah and the *Ba'al Teshuvah* will be uplifted to the level of *Tzadik*. In this scenario the person remains a “100.” Even when he is on the highest level this person does not lose sight of the world below.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

As the *Tzadik* peers down from the highest peak he is very much capable of relating to and affecting the world below.

Preparing for the Future

With this introduction to the spiritual connotations of the numbers 100 and 200, we can now revisit the case of the two people who entrusted their money to the guardian. This may be interpreted as a reference to our pre-Messianic efforts.

Prior to the Redemption, our options are limited. We can either be in a constant state of struggle or transcend it. We can either rise to the top to feel spiritually divorced from reality, or meet the challenge of engaging the lowly world which we inhabit. This is the one who deposits only 100 zuz because he feels constrained and can only operate in one direction.

Some may even attempt to alternate between the two approaches and deposit 200 zuz, making an attempt to travel in both directions as a preparation for the perfection of the Messianic Age.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

There are times that he is inspired and holy, such as on the Shabbat or during other inspirational simchas, such as a wedding. During these spiritually rich times this person strives to reach for the top, rising above the constraints and struggles that punctuate our quotidian lives. For the 24 hours of a Shabbos or the few minutes that we participate in and delve into Torah study where spiritual concepts are highlighted, we are like the *tzadik*. And then our traveler returns to take on the “real” world with all its conflicts wearing the hat and playing the role of the *Ba'al Teshuvah*.

These efforts are not for naught, G-d forbid. Every movement on our part in the right direction—whether from the top down or from the bottom up—is deposited with G-d, who zealously guards our good deeds and preserves them for such time when they will be expressed to their fullest capacity.

It is not clear yet which opinion will prevail in the future Messianic Age. Will we follow the opinion of Rabbi Meir and travel on two tracks (200), or will we follow the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah and travel on one unified track (100)? Eliyahu and Moshiach will determine our path.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

However, whatever efforts we do now to prepare for that time, particularly by working in both directions, is the best way to bring about the Redemption at which time that question will be resolved.

ESSAY FOUR

UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Too often people have viewed faith and reason
as enemies; unity and diversity as opposites.

The Sinai experience demonstrated the fallacy
of these perceptions

ESSAY FOUR

UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Preparing for Sinai

While last week's parsha recounted the story of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, some additional details are discussed at the end of this week's parsha, *Mishpatim*.

The Torah recounts the events and communications Moses had with the Jewish people prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments:

Moses came and told the people all the words of G-d and all the laws. All the people answered in unison and said, "All the words that G-d had spoken we will do."

Rashi explains that this occurred before the Torah was given on Mount Sinai. The "words of G-d" Moses communicated were instructions as to how the people should prepare themselves for the giving of the Torah, for example, by not

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

going near the mountain. The “laws” he imparted were the Seven Noahide Laws plus the additional commandments they received earlier at the place called Marah.

The people’s response was an enthusiastic “we will do.”

Moses then wrote down all of G-d’s words (according to Rashi, all of Biblical literature known prior to the giving of the Torah as well as the commandments that had been given at Marah).

The Torah then recounts the events of the next day:

And he arose... and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and twelve stone monuments for the twelve tribes of Israel... He took the Book of the Covenant [as described by Rashi] and read it in the ears of the people, and they said “we will do and we will hear everything G-d has said.”

Why the Change in their Response?

Commentators have raised the obvious question why they responded by saying “we will do

them” to Moses’ initial communication of the commandments yet on the following day when he read the same commandments to them they responded “we will do and we will hear?”

Kli Yakar answers that when Moses initially communicated the commandments to them, they thought that these were going to be the only commandments so they declared “we will do them!” But when Moses read them the Book of the Covenant on the next day, they understood that more commandments were coming so they responded by saying “we will do [the ones we already heard]” and “we are prepared to hear [the additional commandments],” as well.

The difficulty with this view, however, is that, according to Rashi, Moses read them the exact text of what he had told them the day before. What changed their response from “we will do” to “we will do and we will hear?”

A New People

One approach to answering this question is to realize that the Jewish people underwent significant change in the time between these

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

two responses. According to Rashi, as related in the Talmud, the entire Jewish nation underwent a ritual conversion that involved Moses' sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifices that he offered on their behalf, their circumcision and their immersion in a Mikveh.

Prior to their conversion, the Jewish people were not ready to hear more of the commandments. They were only prepared to affirm their commitment to the commandments they had already been given. However, when they went through the conversion process they became spiritually transformed and were ready to hear and accept more of G-d's commandments.

Answering in Unison

Another approach to this question may be based on an answer to a related question.

Concerning the Jewish people's initial response, the Torah states:

All the people answered **in unison** and said, "All the words that G-d has spoken we will do."

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

However, when they responded with “We will do and we will hear,” the Torah does not mention that they said it in unison. Why not?

The answer lies in the difference between doing and hearing. It is the difference between acting with and without understanding.

When they first heard G-d’s commandments, the Jewish people responded that they accepted everything G-d told them, unreservedly. They did not need to understand the commandments before accepting them. This, indeed, is the foundation of Judaism: accepting G-d’s commands, categorically and unconditionally.

When a group of people declare their submission to a Higher authority they can do it as a unified body. This is so even when there are differences among the people of that group. What distinguishes us from each other is our understanding. No two people think alike, the Talmud states, just as no two people look alike. However, when dealing with simple submission to authority, as servants to our master, we can all stand together as one.

Vive la Difference!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

When Moses read the Book of the Covenant to the people, the Torah states that he read it “in the ears of the people.” This expression implies that he wanted them to understand these commandments so that they would be meaningful to the people. The lesson here is that it is not enough for us simply to accept G-d’s words as His will; we must also study and internalize them until they penetrate and permeate our consciousness.

Once the people realized that G-d would not be content with their simple obedience and total submission to His will, but **also** that He desired them to internalize His commands, the Jewish people could no longer respond in unison. Each individual brought a different level of understanding to the table. And while they all answered using the same words, each individual’s level of hearing/understanding varied.

One Altar, 12 Stones

That there was a need to highlight the differences among the Jewish people at this stage is evident from the fact that Moses built both an altar and 12 stone monuments

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

signifying the 12 tribes of Israel. Why the need for the 12 monuments? Why not highlight the unity of the Jewish people instead? Didn't the Torah, in the preceding parsha, use the singular expression for the encampment at Mount Sinai to dramatize their unparalleled unity? Why does the Torah now highlight their differences?

The answer is clear. G-d wants the Jewish people to exist on two planes simultaneously and integrate those two dimensions into their relationship with G-d and Judaism.

First and foremost, the Jewish people are “one nation on earth.” They are inherently one people based not only on their common history and destiny but also because they possess a common essence rooted in one G-d: their Jewish souls. Their unity came to the fore as they approached Mount Sinai.

This, incidentally, helps us understand an otherwise puzzling passage in the Haggadah: “If G-d would have brought us close to Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah, *dayeinu*, it would have been enough.” Commentators ask what benefit it would have been for us to stand in front of the mountain if we did not also receive the Torah there?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

The answer is that the seemingly simple act of just standing at Mount Sinai revealed our inner unity and demonstrated that no matter how different we might be externally, we are and will always be one unified nation.

When that unity is revealed, we appreciate G-d and His Torah in a commensurate manner. We are able to see the essential unity in G-d, notwithstanding His multifarious powers that are evident in our world. We can also grasp the Torah and its commandments in the same unified way. We see the unity of all of Judaism as the expression of a unified Divine will and we commit ourselves to these precepts through our singular submission to His will.

That is the first step.

Step Two

However, Judaism doesn't end there; rather, it begins there. Once we can comprehend that there is one G-d, one Torah and one Jewish people, we are required to see how G-d is able to manifest Himself in so many diverse ways. We also must apply this understanding to the Torah and its precepts in order that we will be

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

able to see the different hues and colors that distinguish one Mitzvah from another. And in doing so, each one of us reveals our individuality, that which distinguishes us from each other and, at the same time, demonstrates the uniqueness and indispensability of each individual.

When the Jewish nation saw that Moses built one altar along with 12 monuments corresponding to each of the tribes, they realized that a unified submission to G-d would not suffice. This understanding was reinforced when Moses read the Torah **in their ears**, suggesting that they must understand the words of the Torah to the best of their individual ability. They therefore responded accordingly: “Yes, we will combine both dimensions. We will do as we are told but we will also hear, study and internalize the teachings of the Torah and its precepts.”

Yes and Yes!

What happened then is a great lesson that guides us in the way we are to behave in the present as we wait for the Messianic Age to unfold. When preparing for the future

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Redemption, some might be confused at what they feel is a mixed message.

On the one hand, great emphasis is placed on **believing** in Moshiach and suspending our rationality. Faith transcends intellect. The Talmud states that Moshiach will come when our minds are distracted from it [Moshiach's coming]. The Tanya explains that it means that Moshiach's coming and the future Redemption transcend our understanding. Yet, the Torah, particularly in the mystical teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus, devotes substantial attention to understanding the physical and spiritual dynamics of the future Redemption. Which is it to be? Do we believe with simple faith or do we try to study and understand it?

The answer is, obviously, yes and yes. We must recognize, first and foremost, that when Moshiach and the Age of Redemption arrive, G-d's transcendent glory will be revealed. Moshiach's teachings will be so sublime that we can only declare in unison, "Yes, we are ready for Moshiach!" But, in order for us to be prepared for this new age of G-dly revelation, with its new vistas of Torah knowledge, we must transform our exile mindset by study and

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

understanding. Moreover, we must internalize the belief and have the desire for Moshiach resonate throughout our entire being by applying our minds to the understanding of Moshiach and Redemption.

ESSAY FIVE

WHO DO WE DEMAND OF TO REDEEM US?

We like to complain. But our complaints have to be directed to the right source. Our most potent prayer is for Moshiach. His petition needs to be directed to the right address.

ESSAY FIVE

WHO DO WE DEMAND OF TO REDEEM US?

Loans

Many Jewish communities have dedicated this week to the Mitzvah of *Gemilus Chassadim*, acts of loving kindness, referring, specifically, to making interest free loans to those in need, which appears in this week's parsha.

The Torah presents this law in the following words:

When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you, do not act toward him as a creditor...

The simple meaning of this law is that when we make a loan to a poor person we should not pressure him to repay it.

Every law that applies to us in the physical sense can also be understood in a spiritual and allegorical manner. To discover the underlying

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

spiritual dimension of this command we must retranslate several of the words in this verse.

An Exercise in [Re]translation

The Hebrew word for money in this verse is *kesef*, which can also be translated as desire or passion.

The word for lending *talveh* can also be rendered “[you will be] attached.”

The word “poor” can also be understood as a metaphor for Moshiach; the description given to him in the Biblical book of *Zecharyah* (9:9).

Don’t Demand of Moshiach?!

In light of all these revised allegorical translations let us now retranslate the entire verse:

When you have a desire to attach yourself to Moshiach that he should be with you, do not act toward him as a creditor.

This can be understood to mean that when we wait and yearn for Moshiach we ought not demand of him that he reveal himself because he is not the impediment. Moshiach wants to be revealed and liberate us from exile more than

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

we could ever desire. If he has not done so yet, it is not for a lack of desire on his part. It is either G-d or us who have placed an impediment before his coming.

The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 98a) relates the story of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi who asked Elijah the prophet how he could identify Moshiach. He told him he was sitting among the sickly paupers at the entrance of Rome. He stands out because these paupers untie all their bandages at once, cleanse all their sores, and then rebandage them all, whereas Moshiach unties and replaces each of his bandages separately, so that when the time comes to reveal himself, he will not be delayed by having to bandage many sores.

Moshiach is often described as one who suffers pain for every moment he cannot redeem his people. Moshiach, we are told pines for the opportunity to redeem us much more than we could even want to be redeemed. So to demand of Moshiach, as if he owes us something and that, G-d forbid, he is withholding his coming from us, is out of place.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

To translate the verse more specifically it can yield the following retranslation and reinterpretation:

When you have a desire to attach yourself to Moshiach, realize that he is with you. He wants to be revealed no less than you. So, do not act toward him as a creditor and demand of him as if it is his fault that he was not given the signal from on High to reveal himself and redeem us. Don't assume that he owes us something; on the contrary we owe him.

Demand of G-d and Yourself!

So, if we don't demand of Moshiach to come, from whom should we demand the ultimate Redemption?

There is a twofold answer:

First, the demand must be made of G-d Himself! Indeed, this demand we make of G-d thrice daily during the Amidah prayer when we, respectfully, demand the Redemption of Him. We demand of Him to bring us Moshiach and rebuild the Beis Hamikdash. Indeed, Moshiach himself says these same prayers with the most heartfelt devotion.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Moreover, Nachmanides writes that Moshiach suffers anguish over the fact that we do not weep and pray over the withholding of the Redemption. In his words, “we do not take it to heart, but go about our affairs among the nations.”

So instead of demanding of Moshiach we should direct our prayers to G-d.

If one thinks that demanding something of G-d is irreverent or sacrilegious, we should quote a powerful Midrashic narrative (*Midrash Tehillim* 17), which establishes the reason we make these demands of G-d:

“Those thousands who fell in battle in the days of King David perished only because they did not request the building of the Beis Hamikdash-the Holy Temple.”

One way of explaining this Midrash is that the thousands that perished was not a punishment for them. Rather, it is to be understood that if they had demanded the building of the Beis Hamikdash it would have inaugurated the Messianic Age and there would not be any more wars and war casualties.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Furthermore, the Lithuanian Sage known as the *Chofetz Chaim* (in his commentary on the Siddur) writes:

Several times a day we ask for Redemption, but asking alone is not enough. We must **demand Redemption**, just as a worker demands his salary, because if he does not' his employer is no obligated to pay him that day."

The second answer to the question, as to whom should we be making demands of concerning the Redemption, is: We should be directing the demands to ourselves. We must demand of ourselves the strengthening of our desire for Moshiach and for personal redemption.

The Chassidic work *Me'or Einayim* cites the teaching of the Ba'al Shem Tov that each of us possesses a spark of Moshiach. However this spark is latent and needs for us to expose and liberate it. We must therefore make demands of ourselves and do everything in our power to reveal and activate that spark. That will certainly contribute to the revelation of the general Moshiach and bring about the full Redemption.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Who can Forget?!

Another nuance can be detected in the above verse. The Hebrew word for creditor *nosheh* also connotes the idea of forgetfulness as in the name Menasheh which Joseph gave his first son because he said, “G-d made me forget [*nashani*] my travail...”

In light of this new translation of the word *nosheh*-forgetfulness, let us now retranslate the verse:

When you desire to be attached to Moshiach so that he is with you, don't allow yourself to forget him.

We forget the things that are not important and which therefore have only superficial value to us. Moshiach cannot be forgotten for a moment because he, and the Redemption he will usher in, is so central to our lives. Every aspect of our lives will be affected positively in the Messianic Age just as every aspect of our lives is affected adversely in exile. The difference between a living person and a dead one is not just related to one organ but it involves one's entire body. Similarly, Moshiach, who, according to the Sephardic commentator known as the *Or Hachaim*, is identified with the name *Chaim*-life,

will affect every fiber of our being. There is not one aspect or dimension of our lives that does not yearn for true life; the life that is associated with Moshiach and Redemption!

We must understand then, if this is so, how is it possible for us to forget such a central part of our existence? How could it be that we can go a day, week or even a month and not focus on the words that we recite thrice daily in our prayers: “We await your salvation the entire day?”

Are we Riding on our Donkeys?

The answer lies in the description of Moshiach as a poor man, which, as stated is based on the verse in the prophetic book *Zecharya*. There it states: “a lowly/poor man **riding on a donkey**.” The Hebrew word for donkey is *chamor*, which also means materialism. Part of Moshiach’s “resume” is that he is tasked with controlling **our** animalistic and materialistic pursuits just as he does exercise that control over his own.

The reason we do not think of Moshiach consistently and persistently is because we have yet to partner with him in “riding on our

“donkey;” our materialistic tendencies. Forgetfulness, the Alter Rebbe says in Tanya (Chapter 37) comes from the strengthening of our animal souls.

Thus, the verse exhorts us to not forget by working together with the poor man-Moshiach in controlling the animal within us so that we can elicit and reveal the spark of Moshiach.

Riding on a Cloud

There is another salient point concerning the association of Moshiach with a poor man:

In the above allegorical interpretation of the verse concerning lending money to the poor, Moshiach is characterized as a poor person. There is, however, a radically different depiction of Moshiach, in the book of Daniel (7:13), as majestically riding on a cloud. The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 98a) ascribes these two scenarios of Moshiach—either a poor or a majestic man—to two circumstances of his arrival. If he arrives and we are not worthy he will come as a poor man on a donkey. However, if we merit his coming because we have refined ourselves, he will come in a majestic fashion.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Let us now, retranslate the above verse yet a fourth way:

When you have a desire to attach yourself to Moshiach [who is tragically] “poor,” [it is because] he is with you; [because you have not refined yourselves and you remain spiritually impoverished, he is therefore “poor” like you.] Do not [therefore] act toward him as a creditor. Do not demand of **him** to change; demand it of yourself!

When we demand of ourselves to stop living an impoverished life but the life of a spiritual magnate we will be able to easily demand the Redemption of G-d because we will have experienced personal Redemption.

ESSAY SIX

TRIPOD

Every culture has an ethical system. Torah provides us with a three pronged system. This three knotted system is guaranteed not to unravel.

ESSAY SIX

TRIPOD

Three Categories of Commandments

The Torah divides Jewish law into three categories. *Chukim*, *Edot* and *Mishpatim*. And it is this third category that serves as the theme and indeed name of this week's parsha. Usually they are translated as: Statutes, Testimonies, and Judgments.

A more precise rendition would be:

Chukim: Practices that the human mind finds difficult or impossible to fathom. Yet we observe them because it is G-d's will that we do so. Included in this category are the commandments against wearing wool and linen, mixtures of milk and meat, etc.

And although many of the Torah's commentators have given reasons for these commandments, it is easily recognized that the reasons themselves to not justify these

practices. Only after we have accepted these precepts because they were given to us by G-d do we then try to find additional meaning and derive lessons from them.

Edot: Practices that are intended to remind us of certain events and ideals, such as Shabbat (a reminder of Creation); Passover (a reminder of the Exodus); mezuzah (a reminder of G-d's presence etc.). If the Torah had not commanded us expressly to observe these testimonies, we would not have conceived of them on our own. However, now that the Torah had given us these rituals, we can easily grasp their meaning.

Mishpatim: Practices that govern the relationships between one person and another. In this category one finds the laws against theft and murder. Even if the Torah had not specifically commanded us to observe these laws, the human mind would have come to the realization that one should follow them. Indeed, the Talmud declares that had the Torah not been given we would have been able to learn certain ethical and moral behaviors from animals.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

This week's Torah portion, while entitled *Mishpatim*, because it is its main theme, actually comprises commandments that fit into all three categories:

In this parsha we find:

The laws concerning mixtures of milk and meat (*Chukim*-Supra-rational laws); (b) The laws of Jewish holidays (*Edot*-Testimonies and remembrances) along with (c) laws concerning murder etc. (*Mishpatim*-Rational judgments) are all lumped together in this Torah portion that is the first to follow the account of G-d giving the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Our sages explained that while Judaism can be divided into these three categories, they all have **one** Divine source. They were all given to us at Sinai by one G-d. Ultimately, one must observe even the most basic laws that govern the running of a civilized society with the realization that it is a G-d given—and not a manmade—law.

Conversely, we are told that even those laws for which there is no apparent reason; we must

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

look for and find meaning in their observance, just as those laws for which we have apparent and clear reasons.

In effect, every Mitzvah is a G-d given commandment. Every Mitzvah is intended to remind us of our G-d and our history. Every mitzvah is intended to teach us a moral lesson that we can apply to our lives.

Ethics³

The fact that the Torah classified these commandments and divided them into three categories is intended to impart three distinct messages to us.

The *Chukim* were given to us to instill within us the sense of discipline and acceptance of Divine authority. Only when our morality is based on a belief in an Absolute set of morals that derive from an Absolute Creator, will we have the correct and stable foundation for our lives.

The *Edot* were intended to inspire us with an awareness of G-d's role in our lives. By accentuating the spiritual nature of these commandments, we become a more spiritually

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

sensitive and refined individual. In doing this we become more G-dly and receptive to G-dly things.

The *Mishpatim* were intended to instill within us a sense of societal concern and responsibility. It clearly does not suffice for a Jew to be good simply because G-d said so. It is also insufficient to be naturally inclined towards goodness because one had internalized a spiritual set of values that make one's ethical behavior natural.

In addition to all that, one must also cultivate a sense of belonging to a society, a nation, a community, a family, that requires mutual respect and love. When one chooses to help another it should be based on all three foundations: G-d's commandment and surrender to a Higher authority, one's internal sense of spirituality and also on one's appreciation for the needs and rights of others.

Messianic Perfection

There are, however, three impediments to our embracing of these three dimensions of Judaism. When G-d's presence is concealed, we will struggle harder to accept the existence of a

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

transcendent G-d. When our hearts are dulled by the pain and suffering of the exile experience, we may find it hard to get emotionally involved with our Jewish observances. And when we are dispersed throughout the world, as a result of exile circumstances, it becomes increasingly more difficult to feel part of a community.

With the advent of the Redemption, we will be imbued with a complete realization of G-d's presence; our hearts will be "unplugged" enabling us to enjoy the full measure of delight in our Jewish life. With the removal of the geographic fragmentation and dispersion of the Jewish nation, we will be able to realize the ultimate in social consciousness. At that time the observance of Judaism will be complete, because all three elements will be at their highest point.

When Maimonides lists the changes that will occur in the Messianic age he refers to three things: The defeat of those nations, who oppress us, the building of the third Temple and the ingathering of the Jews from exile to the Land of Israel.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

If we examine these three achievements carefully, we will see how they correspond to the removal of the three barriers to the complete fulfillment of the three categories of Commandments.

By defeating the enemies of Israel and thereby removing oppression and persecution, the desensitization process that was caused by exile will no longer exist. We will be much more capable of experiencing the joy of our Holidays. We will not be so emotionally drained and our observance of the Edot-Testimonies will be complete.

By rebuilding the Temple, our ability to feel G-d's presence in our lives will be restored to the days of old and even beyond. It will therefore be possible for us to fulfill the Chukim-Supra-Rational commandments with ease because our reverence for G-d will be at its peak.

And by gathering all of the Jews and physically uniting them in the Land of Israel, it is self-understood how our social consciousness will be enhanced. To be sure, in the Messianic Age we will not have the same problems that society suffers from now, but we will still benefit greatly as a society when we are united into one

people. That will facilitate the smooth observance of the Mishpatim-Rational judgments.

Exile Conditions: The Catalyst

To be sure, exile conditions do not make it impossible to achieve the realization of the three goals represented by the three classes of Mitzvos. Exile conditions just make the achievement of the above more challenging and therefore more meaningful. And indeed, the transformation that will occur in the Messianic Age will occur precisely because of our efforts in these final days of exile.

When we succeed in observing the Chukim, we hasten and lay the groundwork for the building of the Temple. When we fulfill the Edot with perfection we set into motion the process that will remove the obstacles to experiencing joy. And when we observe the Mishpatim we generate the energy that will bring about the unification of the Jewish people.

ESSAY SEVEN

PUNISHMENT OR REHABILITATION

**The Torah is a Torah of Kindness. Even
punishment has to benefit the one who is
punished.**

ESSAY SEVEN

PUNISHMENT OR REHABILITATION

Purchasing a Master

This week's Torah portion *Mishpatim* begins its discussion of Jewish criminal and civil law with the laws of the *Eved Ivri*—the Hebrew servant. A person, who could not make restitution for a robbery, would be sold as an indentured servant for six years. At any time during these six years, he can release himself from servitude by remunerating his master. At the end of the six years he can stay on as a servant until the jubilee year. However, the Torah strongly discouraged him from choosing this option, of remaining a servant.

The Talmud tells us that while in servitude, his “master” may not subject him to any demeaning type of labor. Moreover, if the master had one pillow, he had to give it to his servant. These and similar laws have prompted our sages to

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

declare “one who purchases a servant, has actually purchased a master for himself.”

The question has been asked why would the Torah—on the heels of last week’s *parsha* in which the Ten Commandments were given—begin its detailed discussion of Jewish law with the Hebrew servant, which was a rare occurrence?

One Master Only

One explanation is that the Jews had just been liberated from their experience of servitude in Egypt. Lest they would wax nostalgic about the “good old days” when they were slaves, the Torah wanted to impress upon them how undesirable even the most benign form of slavery was. It is not uncommon for slaves to yearn for the days when they had a “roof over their head.” For these tragic individuals who suffered from slavery living independently may be an imposition.

The Torah thus strongly inveighs against this “slave mentality” and commands us to divest ourselves from it.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

In the words of our sages, G-d said to Israel “You are **My** servants, not servants of servants.” No matter how secure one's life can become by becoming a servant, the Torah considers this institution anathema to Judaism.

As an introduction to all of Jewish criminal law, the Torah—by introducing us to the undesirability of any form of servitude—guides us how to avoid being caught up in a life of crime. “Don’t ever become a slave to another human being, fad or any worldly influence. No one, except for G-d and His Torah, should dictate to you what to do.” Only when we realize the undesirability of servitude can one be free of the insidious influences that can cause one to lead a life of crime.

This distaste for servitude is the reason why Jews have always clamored for the ultimate and final Redemption, when we will have no masters over us except for one G-d.

It is not the appeal of freedom, in and of itself, that makes us yearn for the coming of Moshiach, but the opportunity that this freedom provides. We will no longer have to “share” or allegiance to G-d with other forces and institutions.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Even the movements of recent history to gain freedom and independence are not true revolutions and the freedom gained, although much appreciated, are not absolute. Whenever one group of people overthrew the yoke of an oppressive regime they have merely substituted one form of tyranny for another, perhaps, more benign form of subservience. It may be subservience to another government that wields excessive power and may even discriminate against one class as we have seen in our own blessed country. Or it may be society enjoying freedom that looks to various fads and vices to worship, such as the drug culture where millions of people become slaves to drugs etc.

In the Messianic Age we will enjoy true and unmitigated freedom.

A Criminal and Human Dignity

On another more down-to-earth level the Torah is also teaching us a lesson about how to deal with a criminal. Rather than to subject a person to a meaningless prison sentence, stripping the individual of his/her human dignity and denying him/her the opportunity to accomplish something, which is, after all, the essence of

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

humanity to contribute to society, the Torah provides an “ideal” form of punishment for a criminal who is not an immediate threat to society, but needs to be rehabilitated.

First, the victim of the crime of theft gets restitution.

Second, the criminal goes through some measure of humiliation and a limited loss of freedom. It is enough of a punishment to serve as a deterrent because it informs the thief that his recalcitrant behavior was a result of his servitude to worldly and material desires. It was not, however, enough degradation to demoralize the individual and strip him of his dignity.

Third and most important, the thief would have to spend six years in the home of a decent, law-abiding member of society. He would be part of a household where ethics were part of life. Most likely the thief did not come from a good and stable family. His six years of constructive work—within the confines of a warm home atmosphere—would guarantee the thief's complete rehabilitation.

Clamoring for Complete Freedom

Another positive feature of the limited servitude the criminal would endure is the realization how bad loss of freedom can be. Even the limited loss of freedom and degradation would suffice to impress upon the perpetrator to never want another master, but to cherish and strive for complete freedom.

Our stay in exile has gone through many stages. For most of our history, we have been subjected to the worst deprivation of freedom. We were persecuted in the most inhumane ways. However, in the last century—for the Western world—and in the last decade for the rest of society, Jews have been living in a free society.

Upon closer analysis, as has been noted above, even our freedom is incomplete. Our experience in this country can perhaps be compared to the benign state of the *Eved Ivri*, the Hebrew servant. While the servant has all his conveniences—and he is clearly not a slave who has no legal status and few rights—he still has other masters over him. He is not just beholden to the one G-d and the Torah.

Maimonides, in describing the most significant characteristic of the Messianic Age states that it

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

will remove our subservience to other governments. At that time we will enjoy complete and unmitigated freedom, so that we can be true servant of the One Master.

Perhaps, one can find this idea alluded to in the *gematria* (numerical value) of the phrase *eved ivri*, the Hebrew servant, which is the equivalent of the word Moshiach!

The message is twofold. First, even the most subtle form of servitude cries out for Moshiach. And second, it will be Moshiach, the ultimate **servant** of G-d, who personifies and will bring about ultimate freedom. True freedom can only occur when one transfers all their subservient and submissive behavior to the one and only G-d.

As good as life can be now, we must never forget to mean what we say in our prayers for G-d to liberate us, imminently, even from this benign phase of exile and bring the final and complete Redemption, when we will all assume the status of *eved ivri*, in the truest sense of the word!

ESSAY EIGHT

A JOB FOR A NICE JEWISH BOY?

Judaism and healing have always gone hand in hand. The challenge is to extend our physical and spiritual healing powers to places to which few would venture.

ESSAY EIGHT

A JOB FOR A NICE JEWISH BOY?

Revered or Reviled?

Among the multitude of commandments that are contained in this week's *Parsha* of *Mishpatim*, one finds the law concerning the payments one must make for injuring another.

In addition to the actual damage, pain, anguish and loss of wages that the one guilty of assault must pay; the Torah also obligates him to pay for the doctor bills. In the words of the Torah: "And heal he shall heal."

From this expression, the Talmud (*Bava Kamma*) derives that "License has been granted to the physician to heal." As Rashi explains, had the Torah not granted this license, one could have erroneously thought that it is not proper for humans to meddle in G-d's affairs. To dispel

this erroneous view the Torah clearly permits the use of physicians to heal.

Throughout Jewish history, physicians have occupied a prominent position in the Jewish community. Many of the Talmudic Sages were physicians, as were a multitude of medieval Sages. Most famous of these rabbi/physicians was, of course, Maimonides.

In light of the veneration that Jewish tradition accorded the physician, one is puzzled by the caustic remark found in the Mishnah (end of *Kiddushin*): “*Tov she’be’rofim l’Gehinnom*—The best of the doctors are destined for *Gehinnom* (Hell)!” How do we reconcile this biting criticism of physicians with the historical veneration of this profession by Judaism?

The Pitfalls of a Physician

Rashi anticipating this question limits the reprimand to physicians who are so cocky and arrogant that they forget they are mere agents of G-d. This arrogance can lead them to be negligent in their treatment of patients and cause them to refrain from treating the poor. The sixteenth century commentator, *Meharsha*,

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

extends this rebuke to physicians who do not deem it necessary to consult with other physicians.

Nachmanides, (13th century) explains that a doctor must take his profession seriously and imagine the *Gehinnom* is situated underneath him. The slightest mistake—which can clearly cost the patient his life—will cause the physician to descend into the abyss. With this sobering thought, Nachmanides says, a doctor will take the grave responsibility he holds in his hands more seriously.

Etz Yosef (19th century) notes that it does not say that they are wicked but rather that they are destined to *Gehinnom*. This means that while the doctor has the potential for great degradation, he can turn it around by being mindful of the dangers involved.

Maharal (16th century) explains that physicians who are constantly dealing with life and death can lose sensitivity.

Some say that this expression “The best of the physicians” refers to someone who only recites seventeen of the eighteen benedictions of the *Amidah*, omitting the blessing for good health. The Hebrew word for “best” is “*tov*” which has

the numerical value of seventeen. The doctor who omits the blessing for good health because he thinks that he can heal without G-d's assistance belongs in *Gehinnom*.

Accolade

Perhaps we can view the enigmatic expression, “*Tov*—the Best of the physicians to *Gehinnom*” in a totally different and positive light. First, we should note that the word *Gehinnom* in Hebrew, though it is generally translated as “hell,” literally means the Valley of *Hinom*,” so known for the depraved behavior of its inhabitants. Thus, *Gehinnom* symbolizes the lowest possible place, both on a spiritual and—since it was a valley—on a physical level.

When the Talmud tells us that the best of the physicians are destined for *Gehinnom*, it may not be discussing the doctors own destiny, but rather how far they will go to help another person in need. It is telling us that true doctors, who heal with “*tov*—goodness,” referring to both kindness and spiritual light, who treat the soul and not only the body, will “go—even—to *Gehinnom*.” They will involve themselves even with those people who have fallen to the very

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

nadir of depravity and despair and are in desperate need of physical and spiritual healing.

It takes the best, the kindest and most spiritual individuals, to heal even the lowliest.

We are all “Best of the Physicians”

Moshiach, our Sages tell us, can be found among the most ailing and lowliest of people. In another Midrashic source it lists Moshiach among the inhabitants of the lowly and depraved city of Sodom. One meaning of these enigmatic passages is that Moshiach “lowers” himself to heal even those who have degenerated to the very abyss.

While all teachers of Torah, who impart their wisdom to others selflessly, have been compared to physicians, Moshiach is unique in that he can reach those no one else can. Moshiach will therefore be sent to heal our spiritual ailments and takes us out of the lowest levels of exile and brings us up to the greatest of heights. Moshiach is the ultimate “Best of the physicians.”

We all possess a spark of Moshiach. And part of the process in bringing Moshiach is to

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

anticipate and emulate his behavior. Our role now, in the last moments of exile, in the words of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, is “to increase our acts of goodness and kindness.” And this goodness and kindness can not only be extended to those who we think are most deserving, but must also (nay, especially) be given to those who are in Gehinnom.

It is no wonder that the Rebbe encouraged his followers to provide Jewish inmates with their physical and spiritual needs. If there is any situation that exists today in the Jewish community that can be called Gehinnom on earth it is a prison.

By helping those who are in a state of physical incarceration/Gehinnom we create the dynamic to assist Moshiach in getting us out of the exile which has been likened to Gehinnom and prison. By becoming the best of the physicians we will heal the world and liberate it from its lowly and impaired state.

ESSAY NINE

HEAL A HEEL

**Moshiach is the ultimate physician who will
restore all of the innocence and holiness we
have lost in exile.**

ESSAY NINE

HEAL A HEEL

The Pedestal

The physician has always held a special position in Judaism. Many of the greatest Talmudic and Medieval Sages were not only scholars of Jewish law, they were also physicians. Judaism always regarded the art and science of healing to be a noble one. And despite the rare criticism voiced by the Talmud against physicians who are arrogant and insensitive (see preceding Essay), the Talmud's attitude towards health-care individuals is extremely positive. Indeed, they are placed on a pedestal.

Where did Judaism's view of the medical profession begin?

In this week's *parsha*, the Torah speaks of a person who injured another. In addition to all the other payments of damage, pain, embarrassment, lost wages, the perpetrator must also pay the medical bills. This obligation,

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

the Torah phrases by saying, “and heal he shall heal.”

From the repetition of the word “heal” the Talmud derives: “from here license was granted to the physician to heal.”

Why would we need a license to heal?

Rashi in his classic commentary on the Talmud explains that if not for the Torah’s granting of a right and license to heal, one would have thought that it would be forbidden to intervene in G-d’s workings. If G-d caused the illness, one might have thought, perhaps only G-d has the right to cure it. To dispel this notion, the Torah emphatically states and repeats, “and heal he shall heal,” we do have a right to heal.

In yet another discussion, the Talmud states that it is an **obligation** (not merely a right) to rescue a person from danger. Just as one is Biblically obligated to return a lost object to its rightful owner, so too, one is obligated to return one’s lost health to its rightful owner. Maimonides extends this to the practice of medicine. A physician not only has the right and license to heal, he has an outright obligation to do so.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

A question has been raised. Once the Torah makes healing an obligation, isn't it obvious that one has the right to heal? One cannot be required to do something he doesn't have the license to do.

One answer is that there are two types of illness. One that is debilitating, an organ or body part is injured, or even life threatening. Without intervention, the person's condition will not improve.

And there is another type of medical intervention that deals with an elective procedure, to alleviate some minor condition. While one has the right and license to provide medical assistance, even for such a minor procedure, one is duty bound to restore the health of a person who suffers from a more serious ailment and who is in need of emergency, non-elective treatment.

All of the above can be applied to each and every one of us, even if we have not pursued a career in the medical profession.

Whenever we see another individual who is in need of spiritual guidance because he or she is a lost soul, we have an obligation to return his or her soul to that individual. We cannot stand

by idly while one loses or doesn't even know they have a spiritual and Jewish heritage.

Drowning, Mauled and Pursued

The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 73a) gives three examples where the principle of restoring life applies: One who is drowning; one who is being mauled by an animal and one who is being pursued by armed bandits.

On a spiritual plane, this refers to those who are in danger of losing their Jewish and spiritual identity because they are “drowning” in the materialistic culture.

Alternatively, one can be in spiritual danger because the animal and bestial nature we all possess is mauling his Divine soul, losing all their soul's sensitivity. Or, as is often the case, “armed bandits,” unscrupulous and immoral people threaten to indoctrinate others into a life of immorality devoid of Jewish values and practices.

In any of these dire circumstances, one does not just have a right to intervene, it is an outright obligation. If we must return a paltry sum of money to the one who has lost it, how much

more so that we are obligated to return a system of values and a treasured heritage that they may have lost or are even unaware of.

Conversely, there are people who are in basically good spiritual shape. But they may still be in need of a spiritual boost. In relative terms we may also call them “sick,” because they are lacking some measure of health. However, because there is no emergency, the treatment of such people is only optional. One does not have an obligation to stop everything and treat this individual. And if there are two people, one has the emergency situation and one who seeks spiritual perfection, it is clear that the other person’s emergency takes precedence over one’s own desire to grow in his or her spiritual life.

Three Classes of Jews

Generally speaking, the Chassidic approach shuns the labeling of Jews the way we usually divide them into three or more denominations. A label is divisive and misleading. We are told, time and again, A Jew is a Jew is a Jew! No Jew is more a Jew and no Jew is less a Jew; the differences are about one’s potential abilities to live Jewishly and the degree to which they

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

actualize their potential. And since only G-d can judge these matters, we can only judge people's behavior not their potentials, and motives. Neither can we know all there is to know about a person to make a fair judgment.

Based on the above, if we had to divide all of Jewry into different categories I would divide it this way:

There are three types of Jews: Those who know that they have a treasure, access it and enjoy it. There are those who are aware of the existence of a treasure in their possession, but for whatever reason never or rarely avail themselves of it. And a third category includes those for whom the existence of the treasure eludes them entirely. They have no clue as to what treasures a Jew possesses.

The only reason it is important for us to classify and categorize Jews into these three groups is for us to determine what our obligation may be vis-à-vis these three levels. The degree to which we must help the other is commensurate with the degree of their loss. Our obligation to help restore that which our fellow Jew may have lost devolves primarily on the one who does not even know of the existence of the treasure or its

true value. They ought to be the primary goal of our efforts to help others spiritually just as we would triage patients and work on saving the ones who are in the greatest of danger.

A story is told of a Chabad follower who had a “debate” with a Chassidic leader who believed in the “insular” approach; staying within one’s own enclave and catering to the spiritual needs of the insular community. This insular Chassidic leader argued his case by employing the metaphor of a burning building. “Would you expend your efforts to save the furniture that has already been damaged, or would you attempt to salvage the furniture that is still undamaged?”

To this the Chabad follower responded: “Your analogy is good for furniture, but when we deal with human lives, we attempt to save those who are injured and in greatest peril before we save those who can walk out on their own two feet...”

Moshiach: Treatment for All Forms of Illness

In the teachings of Kabbalah we are told that the word *Choleh*-sick has the numerical value of

49. This alludes to the person who has attained 49 levels of spiritual growth out of the total number of fifty. Yet this person craves to reach the pinnacle and considers himself to be sick and demands “medical” attention.

Chassidic literature refers to the situation we are in during the period of exile. Exile has given us both forms of spiritual maladies. We have people who are genuinely and direly sick, who need immediate attention and intervention. And there are people, “lofty souls” who crave to get out of the stifling environment of exile, where they cannot attain the fiftieth transcendent level of spiritual growth.

Moshiach is the antidote for both “medical” problems. While Moshiach will remove the spiritual constraints that do not allow us to reach the fiftieth level of spirituality, first and foremost, Moshiach is endowed with the capacity to heal the more serious spiritual problems.

The Heels of Moshiach

Indeed, this period—the last days of exile—are referred to in the Talmud as “the heels of

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Moshiach.”

One interpretation of that phrase is that our generation—notwithstanding many of its virtues that make us unique—is the lowest and lowliest of all of the preceding generations in terms of the treasure it possesses. We are at the very bottom or “heel” of Jewish history. And it is precisely the “heels” of society and of history that demand medical attention before everyone else. Moshiach is the healer G-d sends to heal all of us but especially the “heels” (pun intended).

Exile is when we experienced the loss of many of our national and individual treasures:

We lost the Holy Temple and the atmosphere of G-dly light that pervaded the entire Land of Israel that emanated from the Temple.

We lost our knowledge of parts of Torah.

We lost our ability to connect to G-d with so many of the Mitzvos that were applicable in the days of Temple.

And we lost millions of precious souls in the Holocaust as well as throughout Jewish history etc. etc.

If we have a commandment to restore a lost

article to its rightful owner, and if we are told that G-d “observes” His own commandments, it follows then that the Messianic Age is when G-d makes good on His “obligation” as it were, and restores all of the above to us.

He rebuilds the Holy Temple and the many Mitzvos that are associated with it, reveals even the heretofore secret teachings of Torah, and brings the dead back to life in the process known as *Techiyas Hameitim*—the Resurrection of the Dead, the belief in which Maimonides considers to be the last of the Thirteen Principles of Faith.

ESSAY TEN

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

**One of the worst injuries one can sustain is the
loss of an eye.**

**Our vision has been clouded, jaded and
distorted in exile.**

**G-d promises us that He will give us an eye
that sees in place of our injured vision.**

ESSAY TEN

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

Biblical Vengeance?

“Biblical vengeance” is the phrase many have used to characterize the punishment of “an eye for an eye,” that appears in this week’s Torah portion.

In truth, Jewish law never interpreted this statement literally. The Talmud goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the meaning of these words is “the **value** of an eye for an eye.” The punishment for injuring another person is always a financial one. The perpetrator of the injury must make financial restitution for all of the monetary losses that were incurred by the loss of the eye or any other limb or organ.

This premise, however, raises two questions:

First, if the Torah really meant that the attacker should pay with his money and not with his eye, why didn’t the Torah say so explicitly? Why

did the Torah use an expression that can be—and has often—been misconstrued?

Second, how can we assign a monetary value to a person's limb? Does it not trivialize the victim's suffering when he or she is told that they will be given money in lieu of their limb?

Cathartic Power of Empathy

Maimonides addressed this issue in his *Mishneh Torah*. Here is what he says with some embellishment drawn from Chassidic sources.

The first premise is that the Torah does not believe in punishment for the sake of punishment. The objective of punishment is for the person to cleanse his/her soul while they make restitution to the victim. Any type of punishment that serves only the purpose of getting even is inconsistent with the Jewish value system and can certainly not be ascribed to G-d who is the epitome of kindness and compassion.

This premise, however, seems to be contradicted by many Biblical verses where it is stated that G-d will avenge the crime. In other places it speaks of the courts avenging the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

crime. How can we reconcile vengeance with atonement?

In truth, the most effective way one can atone for a sin s/he has committed is to experience the damaging effects of his/her actions. For example, to atone for the sin of hurting another person, one has to feel the pain and suffering they caused their victim. When a person empathizes with his or her victim, he or she can express genuine remorse for having caused this pain. The pain the perpetrator will endure, coupled with the feeling of contrition that it engenders, erases any and every trace of the crime from his or her soul.

It follows then that for the crime of taking out someone's eye, for example, the only way that the perpetrator's sins can be erased is through his own eye being removed. However, G-d in His infinite mercy commuted this harsh, but necessary, sentence of losing an eye, to a financial one. This means that by paying for the financial losses for the loss of an eye, one is not paying for the eye that was injured. Rather s/he is really paying a ransom for one's own eye.

When the criminal realizes that s/he is redeeming his/her own eye it sends a sharp

message as to the seriousness of the crime. It will have the effect of jolting the perpetrator into feeling empathy for the pain they caused others.

This is why the Torah states “an eye for an eye,” even though it means financial compensation. By using this stark language, the Torah underscores that the only way that one can truly atone for this heinous crime is to empathize with the victim. This is the Torah’s way of saying to the perpetrator: “Imagine that G-d would not have commuted the sentence and **your** eye would have been taken out? How would **you** feel? Well, realize now that this is what you did to the other person.”

When the person realizes the seriousness of the crime and empathizes with the pain he caused and expresses remorse, then, and only then, could the stain and stigma of the crime be removed. Hence even the mention of vengeance is meant to serve as a jolting reminder as to what damage the perpetrator has caused.

G-d gives us “An eye for an Eye”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Our sages tell us that G-d observes His own commandments. The exile that we have been enduring for thousands of years denied us our “eye,” our ability to see G-d’s presence in this world. With the absence of perfect eyesight, it is sometimes hard for us to see the needs of others as well. Frequently, we deny ourselves the things that our souls need, because we have lost the spiritual vision that would have enabled us to see the spiritual dimension of life.

G-d Himself, the Talmud declares, “expresses regret every day for having caused this exile.” G-d also empathizes with our suffering as the Psalmist says: “I am with him in his distress.” And as Rashi explained, the reason for G-d having revealed Himself to Moses in a thorn bush was to express how He too was suffering due to the suffering of Israel.

G-d has also promised us that He will make restitution by giving us an “eye for an eye.” Instead of the “injured” eye of exile—where we cannot see G-d’s overt presence—G-d will give us an eye that can see.

When will we get our vision back? This will happen; the prophets of old predicted during the Messianic Age, at which time they

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

prophesied, “For they shall **see** [G-d] **eye to eye** when the L-rd returns to Zion” (Isaiah 52:8) and “The glory of the L-rd shall be revealed and together all flesh shall **see** that the mouth of G-d has spoken.” (Isaiah 40:5)

To hasten this new age of overt G-dliness, we should do our part to open up our own eyes to see the presence of G-d in our lives and to live our lives inspired by this realization.

ESSAY ELEVEN

KIDNAPPED

**Alienation is the first step to rebellion. Many
crimes begin with but a small rift.**

**Galus is the state of our alienation from G-d.
We were kidnapped by exile forces.**

**But as long as we have not been sold on it, we
possess the power of liberation.**

ESSAY ELEVEN

KIDNAPPED

Striking a Parent?!

When the Torah discusses the law against kidnapping in this week's parsha, it interposes it between the prohibition of striking or cursing a parent.

Commentators have asked, what is the connection between kidnapping and attacking a parent?

Rabbi *Sa'adia Gaon* (tenth century) answers that by inserting the law concerning kidnapping the Torah anticipated an obvious question that would arise when learning about the child who strikes or curses a parent.

The question is: How is it possible that a child should strike or even curse his parent?

To answer this question the Torah introduces the law and scenario of kidnapping. Since it is mostly children that are kidnapped, it is

plausible that the child that was kidnapped would grow up without a close relationship with his parents. And even if, at a later date, the child would discover who his parents are, the natural bond that naturally exists between a parent and a child would obviously not exist. It would therefore be possible for this estranged child to strike or curse his parent.

R. Sa'adia's comment has been challenged by later commentators. The Torah specifically states that the person who was kidnapped is an "*ish*," meaning a full fledged adult. How then could R. Sa'adia interpret this as a reference to a child?

We can answer this question, with another question (in typical Jewish fashion). Why did the Torah have to provide for a more plausible scenario for the phenomenon of a child hurting a parent? The Torah frequently deals with unusual circumstances, as well as the more common ones. Why did the Torah, according to R. Sa'adia Gaon's explanation, have to find a rational basis for this crime?

This question would have been a valid one if the Torah's objective was merely to provide us a list of crimes and their punishments. In truth,

the Torah is interested not just in presenting us with a penal code: If you do crime x you get punishment y . Rather, the Torah is primarily interested in getting us to understand the root of the problem, which then provides us with a means to find a remedy for it.

Getting to the Root of the Problem

Here too, the Torah wants us to get to the root of the problem of a child turning against its parent. Whether it is a child or an adult who is rebellious, it is frequently a product of alienation. When a parent abdicates his or her role and treats the child as if he were not there (“kidnapped” and “sold”) the child will naturally reciprocate in kind and feel distant and detached from them.

According to the Talmud, the pre-Messianic age is characterized by the way the youth will rebel against their elders and indeed their own parents. In times like these, the message to the parents is to fortify their connection to their children.

We are All Kidnap Victims

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Every simple understanding of the Biblical text is supported by a more spiritual understanding of the same text. On a more spiritual plane, the reference to a father or mother is a reference to G-d. Since G-d is both our “Father” and “Mother,” Who provides us with our very existence, it is therefore unfathomable how we can rebel against Him?

The Torah informs us that this spirit of rebelliousness derives from the fact that we were “kidnapped and sold.” In Talmudic literature we find the concept of a “*Tinok shenishbah*—a child who was captured” and raised by gentiles and therefore cannot be held accountable for their lack of observance of the commandments.

In a certain sense, however, this phenomenon of a “kidnapped child and sold” can be applied to each and every one of us. This is especially true during our stay in exile.

When we ask ourselves, how is it that we could be rebellious, the answer is: We were kidnapped and sold!

“Kidnapping” symbolizes the forces of assimilation that compel us—against our better judgment—to do things that are incompatible

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

with our Jewish souls and Jewish heritage. After a while, we are “sold” on this change. We look for and accept the payment or rewards that accrue from our new environment and its value system and we then identify with it.

And while, at first, we feel some measure of “home-sickness,” we eventually degenerate into a state that we no longer yearn for a particular Jewish practice or experience. It is at that time that we are capable of rejecting our heavenly Father.

Sold!

We can now appreciate why the crime of kidnapping in the Torah is only a capital crime when it is followed by the sale of the victim. As long as the victim has not been transferred to another domain, the victim still harbors some hope that he or she will be returned to their home. Once there is a sale to another the process of kidnapping assumes a status of finality. The crime then is a complete crime.

The same can be said about the spiritual form of kidnapping. As long as we are in exile but recognize that we are in exile there is still some

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

hope of reversing the process of alienation. Once we are “sold” on the change of our identities, the destructive character of exile has taken hold.

This is why the Torah uses the word “*ish*” connoting an adult when addressing the issue of kidnapping, because the idea of alienation is not restricted to a child.

Knowing that one has been “kidnapped” and “sold” is the first step at bringing about the rapprochement between ourselves and our Heavenly Father.

This explains why our prayers are replete with references to the fact that we are in exile and requests to G-d to take us out of exile. By making these requests, thereby demonstrating our distaste for our state of alienation, we have already commenced the process of liberation and reuniting with G-d.

ESSAY TWELVE

THE OX AND THE LAMB

**Humans possess the qualities and faults of
animals.**

But we also possess a G-dly soul.

**Our goal is to reveal that G-dly soul, but we
must also cultivate the positive attributes of our
“ox” and lamb.”**

ESSAY TWELVE

THE OX AND THE LAMB

The Discrepancy

If one were to steal an animal and then sell it or slaughter it, the Torah—in this week's parsha—states that the thief must not just pay restitution for the theft, but must also pay a fine. For the theft of a lamb, he must pay **four** times the value of the lamb and for the theft of an ox he must pay **five** times the value of the animal.

Our Talmudic rabbis discussed the reason why the discrepancy between the theft of a lamb and the theft of an ox? It seems that the Torah regards stealing an ox to be a more serious crime than stealing a lamb.

One of the explanations the Talmud provides relates to the function of the ox. It is more serious an offense to steal an ox which would normally be working than to steal a lamb that does not perform any labor. By adding on an

additional payment for the theft of an ox, the Torah wishes to impart to us the importance of work.

Every law mentioned by the Torah is relevant for all, not just for the— hopefully and thankfully—few people who happen to pass through the halls of justice because of their recalcitrant behavior. What lesson—relevant to all—can we derive from the contrast between the fine for stealing a lamb and stealing an ox?

The Animal Soul

As stated on numerous occasions, the human condition is not a monolithic one. We get our inspiration and direction from at least two internal sources. One is our G-dly soul and the other is what is called our “animal soul.”

The animal soul, however, is not synonymous with evil. Rather it is what motivates and energizes us to satisfy our physical, emotional and intellectual needs.

Contrary to the assumption that the animal soul is inherently evil and destructive, Chassidic thought teaches us that it contains many positive assets. And precisely because the

animal soul can often get in the way and eclipse the signal that emanates from the more deeply embedded G-dly soul, it is therefore crucial that the positive side of the animal soul not be ignored or suppressed.

Indeed, by utilizing the positive aspects of our animal nature, it ceases to be an impediment to the G-dly soul, thus enabling the G-dly soul's message to be transmitted to and through us more clearly.

Denying the Positive Qualities of the Animal Soul

By stealing an animal, the Torah alludes to the one who dismisses, denigrates and takes away the positive qualities of another person's animal soul. In this, there can be two forms, corresponding to the two general types of "animal souls"—the ox and the lamb.

The ox is a strong and hardworking animal, while the lamb is meek and timid. They represent two personality types that are simultaneously positive as well as negative.

The "ox" personality is often arrogant, overbearing and sometimes destructive. Yet the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

same ox can also represent a hard working individual, who submits to the yoke placed on it by his master, and one who will be a formidable agent for bringing about growth and development.

Likewise, the “lamb” can be said to symbolize two opposite traits. On the one hand the lamb is weak, introverted and is preoccupied with satisfying its own needs and wants. The lamb does not draw plows and cultivate fields; it does not labor and make positive and constructive changes in its environment.

On the other hand, a lamb is also a symbol of innocence, an easy going nature, a humble disposition and natural submissiveness. One does not have to place a yoke on the neck of the lamb to enable us to shear its wool.

To “steal” any of these creatures is to take the positive traits these “animal souls” possess and deny their potential. When one tries to suppress the natural “lamb” disposition of another, by demeaning their innocence, or modest demeanor, one is guilty of theft and must compensate by paying **four** times as much.

Similarly, some may try to denigrate the energetic and extroverted nature of others,

rather than encouraging them to channel this energy in a constructive direction. They too are guilty of theft, and must make proper restitution by over compensating—paying **five** times the value of the ox. The added on fine represents the sense that the loss of the activist is ultimately a greater loss for society.

Four and Five

The significance of the numbers four and five in this regard is that both numbers represent the multi-layered composition of the G-dly soul. Our soul is comprised of four levels: action, emotion, intellect and will. In addition, there is a fifth, quintessential part, which represents the inner core of our being and from which all the other faculties flow.

If a lamb was stolen—i.e., one lost their natural innocence, modesty and civility—one must work on reinforcing the positive nature of the lamb, by revealing the person's soul-powers that are divided into four. This one can accomplish by encouraging humble **actions**, cultivation of humble **feelings**, attempting to **understand** the value of humility and motivating one's **will** to be humble.

For the person who had been deprived of the positive side of their “ox” personality—i.e., by ceasing to be firm, outgoing and productive—it does not suffice to repay four times as much, to simply invest all four parts of one’s nature with this trait. One must also seek out the fifth level of one’s being. For it is from this most essential level of one’s being that one is motivated to go beyond one’s own self-interest and become a selfless activist for change and constructive efforts for the rest of the world.

Moshiach: The Quintessential Soul

The Messianic Age is associated with the fifth and most essential level of our soul. The Kabbalists speak of five historical individuals who represented the five types of souls:

King David possessed the level known as *nefesh*; the soul power that inspires us to action. Elijah the Prophet possesses the soul power known as *ruach* that generates our spiritual emotions. Moses was endowed with a soul level called *neshamah* which endows us with the capacity for Divine knowledge. Adam personified the level of *chaya* which instills within us the power of will. Moshiach possesses the level called *yechidah*, which is the very essence and core of

all the other levels.

This does not mean that these five individuals do not possess the other four levels. Indeed, we all possess the five levels; it is just a question of which trait/soul level predominates. And each one of these great souls had one particular level that was dominant and which they generated and transmitted to us.

In the Messianic Age the quintessential level of our souls—our *yechidah*—will be revealed by Moshiach. That means that we will be compensated for the loss of the “lamb-like” and “ox-like” qualities during our stay in exile. G-d will repay us by giving us four-fold and even five-fold payments because in the Messianic Age all of the levels of our soul will shine brightly, inasmuch as even the fifth level of our souls will be fully revealed.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

OUT OF BOUNDS

Tikkun Olam, making the world a righteous world is just the first step.

Righteousness is not the ideal.

The ideal is to bring a higher form of devotion that goes beyond just doing that which is right.

It is going out of our limits.

That is the difference between *Tzedakah* and *Gemillus Chasadim*

ESSAY THIRTEEN

OUT OF BOUNDS

Don't Weigh the Mitzvos!

Generally speaking, one cannot say that one Mitzvah is more important than another. All the commandments were given to us by one G-d and compliance with any of them means that we have fulfilled the will of G-d. Nevertheless, we do find Mitzvos that are singled out by our Sages for their importance.

Chassidic thought reconciles this apparent contradiction by referring to two dimensions of every Mitzvah. The first is the fulfillment of G-d's will and the second is the function of the Mitzvah to change the person who performs it and the world around him. While every Mitzvah is the same from the perspective of it being G-d's will, and every Mitzvah we perform creates an eternal bond with G-d, there are myriads of differences between Mitzvos insofar as they

pertain to their effects on us and the world.

One of the Mitzvos concerning which our Sages have stated that “it is the equivalent of all other Mitzvos” is the Mitzvah of *Tzedakah* (usually translated as charity). However, even the Mitzvah of *Tzedakah* is exceeded in importance by a Mitzvah that appears in this week’s parsha, loaning money, known colloquially as *Gemillus Chassdaim*, (or by its acronym: *g’mach*) acts of loving kindness.

For the Poor and the Rich

Our Sages declare: “Acts of loving kindness are even greater than Tzedakah.” (Talmud, Sukkah) The Talmud then proceeds to give three reasons for this: The reason that applies specifically to the mitzvah of lending money is: “Tzedakah can only be performed for the poor, whereas acts of kindness (such as lending money) can be performed for the rich and the poor.”

At first glance this explanation itself is in need of explanation. Why should Tzedakah, which is given to the poor, take a back seat, so to speak, to the lending of money to the rich? Moreover, when one gives Tzedakah, one actually parts

with his or her money forever. Isn't that a greater sacrifice than lending money, where the lender receives the money in return and suffers no loss (except the interest that they could have made had they invested the money in business)?

Whose Money is it?

Perhaps one way of looking at it is to reflect on the perspective offered by Chassidic thought concerning Tzedakah.

In truth, we are told, the money that a person gives to a needy person really belongs to that person. G-d had originally intended for that money to go to him or her. However, in order to facilitate the act of *Tzedakah*, G-d temporarily entrusted the rich person with the money that He had intended for the poor. That individual does not have the right to choose whether to give; their choice is whether they will do the right thing or not.

To be sure there are other legitimate choices in the process of giving Tzedakah. The affluent person does have the prerogative to decide to whom the money shall be given, the amount and in what way, cheerfully or begrudgingly. This allows the rich person to exercise his choice to do that which is right. Moreover, it

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

makes the giver a partner with G-d in the allocation of resources to the world. And, as a “fringe benefit”, by acting as G-d’s agents to provide for others, we come out of the experience more refined and filled with a profound sense of satisfaction and joy.

This explains why the translation of *tzedakah* is not generosity or goodness but righteousness. By giving *tzedakah* one is doing that which is just and right. And while we have the right to take credit for doing the right thing, since we had free choice to do otherwise, we must always remember that the money was always rightfully the possession of the recipient and the act of giving only appears to be that; in reality, *tzedakah* is the act of returning.

This does not mean that there is no kindness in the act of giving. On the contrary, the Talmud (codified by Maimonides) speaks of the different degrees of *tzedakah* that are commensurate with the degree of kindness that one exhibits and expresses while giving Tzedakah. However, one cannot forget that the main objective of Tzedakah is to help the needy and thereby rectify the imbalance that G-d allowed to exist and return the money, as it were, to its rightful

owner.

Lending Your Own Money

Lending money to a rich person, by contrast, is not the same as *tzedakah*. One cannot say that the money lent was originally intended for the rich borrower because, in reality, the money is returned to the lender. In effect, when one lends money they are truly parting with the money that G-d gave the lender, albeit temporarily. By doing so, the lender transcends the boundaries of “what is mine is mine and what is yours is yours,” because even what is truly his, he gives away to another.

Tzedakah, on the other hand, is not really giving that which is yours to someone else, as was discussed above. *Tzedakah* simply rectifies the disparity that G-d allowed to exist in this world; it rights the wrongs of the world.

Gemillus Chassadim, acts of loving kindness, by contrast, allows us to go beyond the parameters of a just world, by taking that which was allocated for ourselves and giving it to another. Even after the wrongs were righted, by helping the poor and needy, we seek to transcend the

bounds of propriety. The act of giving an interest free loan constitutes truly breaking out of our boundaries and limiting parameters.

The Optional Obligation

When the Torah introduces the Mitzvah of lending money it uses the term “*im*” which usually translates as “if.” Rashi, however, points out that here it means “when,” because lending money is not an option, it is a Mitzvah a commandment.

Why then does the Torah use the word *im* which can be translated “if?” It could have used another, more common, Hebrew word such as *ka’asher*, which means “when.”

Based on the earlier analysis, the Mitzvah of lending money, though it is an obligation, differs fundamentally from other obligations, which are primarily directed at correcting an undesirable situation. Lending money, by contrast, is intended to supersede the process of repairing what is broken. Hence, it was prefaced by the word *im*-if that implies that it is not a conventional obligation. On the one hand it ought not be an obligation because nothing is

broken; on the other hand it is nevertheless an obligation, because the Torah wants us to transcend the necessary.

Ifs, Ands and Buts

An allegorical explanation may also be suggested based on the composition of the word *im*, which consists of the Hebrew letters of *aleph* and *mem*. These two letters are special because they are said to be the initials of the historical leaders of the Jewish people who were also their liberators: Aaron and Moses, (the liberators from Egyptian bondage) Esther (which begins with an Aleph in Hebrew) and *Mordechai* (the liberators of the Jewish people during the saga of Purim) and *Eliyahu* and Moshiach (who will usher in the future Redemption and the Messianic Age)

By prefacing the Mitzvah of lending money with the word *Im* that signifies the process of liberation, the Torah has thereby conveyed a message that the way to hasten the process of liberation, i.e., breaking out of the boundaries that constrain us, is by increasing our acts of goodness and kindness, especially when the kindness is not just to “repair the world,” but,

moreover, to “upset the balance” in a positive vein, by allowing the good to break out of its boundaries. This we accomplish by specifically lending money to others.

Lending in the Future

On a more basic level, the connection between lending money and tzedakah and the Messianic Age is that in the Messianic Age there will be no need to assist the poor because the poor will no longer exist.

Although the Talmud (Shabbos 63a) describes the Messianic Age as one in which there will still be poverty, it is understood that in a more advanced stage of the Messianic Era poverty will disappear.

However, even then there might be situations where one may not have access to his or her resources and needs a loan. Lending one's property is thus a Mitzvah that will not only exist in theory but may very well be a staple of our Jewish life even in the days of Moshiach.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

TALENT ON LOAN

FROM G-D

We live in an age of credit. G-d too gives us His blessings on credit and expects payment.

The sooner we make good on our repayment of our debts to G-d, the faster, smoother and more glorious the Redemption will be.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

TALENT ON LOAN FROM G-D

G-d's Gifts and Loans

In this week's Torah portion, *Mishpatim*, we find the verse: "If you lend money to My people..." The word "if" usually implies an optional act. However, lending money (without interest) is actually a Mitzvah, a biblical commandment!

This obligation to lend money is distinct from the Mitzvah to give *tzedakah*—usually translated as charity, but, more accurately as "righteousness." As great a Mitzvah as *tzedakah* is, the Talmud considers acts of kindness, which includes lending money, to be an even greater Mitzvah. (See preceding essay for an analysis of this statement.)

According to the Midrash, G-d only commands the Jewish people to do and observe those things, which He, Himself does. Thus it follows

that G-d also “observes”, as it were, the precept of “If you lend money to My people.”

A loan is given to someone even if s/he doesn't deserve it. Unlike the purchase of an object where the purchaser pays for the object the borrower does not give the lender anything in return for the loan. Nonetheless, it is not a gift; the borrower must ultimately repay the loan.

G-d, too, provides us with various abilities that we do not necessarily deserve. And in many cases what G-d gives us is His way of performing His Mitzvah of *tzedakah*. He does not expect us to repay it, and in many instances what He gives us exceeds our ability to ever repay Him. This is Divine *tzedakah*.

There are however times when G-d gives us abilities, talents and resources on loan. He demands, though, that this “loan” be repaid—that the abilities be utilized for the realization of one's mission in life.

***Simchas Torah* Loans**

Simchas Torah, when we conclude and celebrate the completion of the annual cycle of weekly Torah reading, we dance with the Torah in

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

circuits around the *Bimah* (the platform or table upon which the Torah is read, which is traditionally placed in the center of the sanctuary). These circuits are called *hakafos*. It is interesting that the Chassidic translation and interpretation of the word adds a completely new dimension to this beautiful ceremony. The word *hakafot* can also be rendered as “credit.”

The meaning of this novel interpretation is that on Simchas Torah G-d allocates heaps of blessings for the entire year even before we did anything to earn those blessings. Simchas Torah is thus the time for Divine credit that is extended to us. The rest of the year is the time when we repay the loan we received on Simchas Torah.

Two Types of Loans

There are two types of loans: loan of an object and loan of money. The difference between them is that in the first case the borrower must return the same object, for it does not become his property; he only retains the right to use the object. A monetary loan, however, is “given to be spent,” it becomes the property of the debtor and s/he may use it any way s/he desires.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

When G-d provides us with abilities it is like a monetary loan. We choose how we will use these abilities. Will we use them exclusively for our own selfish purposes or to realize our mission in life?

A loan, even of abilities, is given to be spent. Every Jew is permitted to take this loan and utilize it for one's personal affairs. However, one must always bear in mind the ultimate purpose for which the loan was intended.

No harassment

There is another Mitzvah in the Torah that devolves on the lender not to harass the debtor to repay the debt when he realizes that he cannot do so. Indeed, this Mitzvah follows the statement that requires of us to lend money to others.

The Jewish people have become spiritually impoverished as a result of the disorientation, persecution and suffering that have punctuated our long exile experience. Consequently, we might have a hard time to repay the debt we owe G-d. We can therefore assume that G-d

follows His own rule not to pressure us inordinately.

And while our plight does not relieve us of our obligation to make good on our loan, G-d has “no choice” as it were, and must bring an end to the exile and usher in the age of Redemption by sending us Moshiach. Only then will we be equipped to happily repay the loan in full

Two Scenarios: The Donkey or the Cloud

With this point we can understand the Talmud’s description of two possible scenarios for the coming of Moshiach. In one Biblical text Moshiach is described as a “Poor man riding a donkey,” whereas in a second verse Moshiach arrives majestically on a “heavenly cloud.”

The Talmud reconciles this apparent contradiction by asserting that Moshiach’s coming can come majestically if we are deserving. If we are not meritorious, however, Moshiach will still come, but as a poor man riding on a donkey.

It may be suggested that the two scenarios—of Moshiach’s coming as a poor man or

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

majestically—is a reflection of the state in which the Jewish people will be.

In the scenario where we are meritorious and deserving, Moshiach will come because **we** are spiritually rich. We have paid our debts and we deserve to have Moshiach come. If however, we failed to pay our debts in the last days of exile because we are spiritually impoverished, Moshiach will also have to come, because that will be the only way G-d will get His loan repaid.

We have the choice. We can either act in good faith, and start to make good on our obligations, to pay our debts, or we can wait it out. Either way Moshiach will come. The difference is whether Moshiach comes because of us or in spite of us.

Which scenario do you prefer?

ESSAY FIFTEEN

LIBERATING G-D

**G-d is simultaneously above and within our
world.**

**In His “within” mode He too suffers from exile.
Our role is to “liberate” G-d as we liberate
ourselves from the scourge of Galus.**

ESSAY FIFTEEN

LIBERATING G-D

The Commandment to Lend

One of the most important Mitzvos can be found in this week's parsha. It is the Mitzvah to lend money to one's fellow. According to the Talmud, lending money to anyone in need is deemed to be an even greater Mitzvah than giving tzedakah/charity. (See preceding essays).

The Torah presents this commandment in the following manner:

“If you lend money to My people, the poor person who is with you, do not behave towards him as a lender [by pressuring him to pay]. Do not place interest payments upon him.”

(Although the Torah begins with the word “*im-if*”, our Sages explained that, in this context, it is not an optional Mitzvah. The Hebrew word “*im*”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

here should be understood as “**when** you lend,” rather than “**if** you lend.”)

Every verse and word of Torah contains many layers of meaning.

The following is a rather novel way of understanding this verse based on a commentary by one of the great Chassidic Masters, Rabbi Elimelch of Dinov in his work *Igra d’kallah*:

Before we present his commentary it is important to preface that each word in the Hebrew language has multiple translations that introduce us to the multiple layers of meaning.

An Exercise in Hebrew Etymology

In our context, the word *kesef*, which is translated as “money” in this verse, is related to another root which is “a longing desire,” or just plain “love” or “passion,” as in the words used in Genesis “*nichsof*” which means desire.

The Hebrew word “*talveh*,” which is translated here as “you lend”, can also be translated as joining or bringing together. The name of the third son of Jacob given by his mother Leah was Levi, because she felt that now that she bore

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Jacob three sons “my husband shall attach himself to me.” Hence the root of the name Levi as well as *talveh* is attachment or the similar concept of gathering scattered things to be in one place.

The Hebrew word for “*noshe*-lender” can also mean “forget.” It is similar to the name Menashe, Joseph elder son, given by Jospheh because, “G-d made me forget all my travail and my father’s house.” The same root is used here to chaarecterize the lender or the claimant.

A Novel Translation

And here is the novel way Rabbi Tzvi ELimelech of Dinov translates the entire verse:

“If you have a passion [*kesef*] to gather [*talveh*] my people who are scattered amongst the nations in exile, do not forget the Divine presence that is [metaphorically referred to as *Ani*] poor/suffering.”

From the time the Romans destroyed our Temple in Jerusalem close to 2,000 years ago, and the Jewish people were scattered throughout the world, subjected to persecution

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

and misery, the Jewish people have been in the mode of finding ways of coping with exile conditions, minimizing them and most importantly, attempting to get out of exile.

What does getting out of exile mean?

It depends on how we define exile.

In its most literal sense, exile is a geographic phenomenon. It is the state of Jews being dispersed throughout the world as opposed to all Jews living as one nation in the Land of Israel as we did when the Temple stood in Jerusalem.

This geographic dispersion is a reflection of a spiritual sense of alienation and division of the Jewish people from one another.

If we understand exile in this vein, we must direct our efforts towards reversing that state of affairs by uniting all of the Jews.

How do we unite all of the Jews?

The answer to this question is provided in this novel way of interpreting this verse:

G-d is Also in Exile

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

When we devote our efforts to bringing the Jewish people together and uniting them, our efforts will best succeed if we will focus on the fact that not only our we in exile and scattered in all directions, but G-d Himself is also in exile!

The Divine energy that gives life to the world is concealed and not seen as the unified force that it is. The world often forgets its dependence on G-d for its very existence. Our world could not exist for even one instant if G-d would have withdrawn His creative energy from it. And yet there are people who are unaware of G-d's presence. Some will even irrationally deny the existence of G-d and believe that the world came to be on its own accord.

Imagine the pain a person would feel when after saving another person's life they deny that their benefactor even exists. G-d—in His mode as Creator and Sustainer of the world—finds Himself in a similar position.

Moreover, not only is G-d in exile because we fail to appreciate His presence, G-d also feels our pain as we suffer in exile. In the words of King David, G-d says, "I am with him in his distress." G-d appears to Moses in a thorn bush as a way of expressing that just as the Jews

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

were suffering in Egypt so too G-d empathized and suffered with them. Our pain is His pain. In fact, G-d feels our pain even more acutely that we can feel our own pain.

As difficult as it is for us to theologically explain the concept of G-d's pain—and it certainly cannot be understood literally—the Torah conveys these images of G-d's pain to us to underscore the degree of G-d's aversion to exile.

In order for us to succeed in getting ourselves out of our morass we must work on getting G-d out of **His** state of “confinement” and “distress.” To the extent that we conceal G-d's presence in our lives we strengthen the stranglehold exile has on us as a people.

The Torah thus informs us that if we are passionate about uniting Jewish people we cannot forget about the impoverished and constricted state G-d is in. When we “liberate” G-d from His exile by seeking the Divine in everything we do, that G-dly energy—which is characterized by unity—it will serve to unite all of the Jewish people and get them out of exile.

Lending and Ideal Unity

The fact that this message is transmitted in a verse which—on the surface—deals with the Mitzvah of lending money, we must conclude that there is a close association between lending money, interest free, and unifying the Jewish people by focusing on liberating the G-dly presence from exile.

When we make an interest free loan to another we demonstrate that our relationship with the other is not limited to the business benefits that a loan might generate. And while giving charity is also an expression of selfless giving, frequently we give tzedakah to alleviate the pain we have when someone else suffers. It also serves to assuage our guilt.

Proof of this phenomenon are the people who would rather be oblivious to the needs of others because it pains them to see their suffering. It is not the suffering of the people that bothers them but their own discomfort at seeing the suffering. Giving *tzedakah* under these circumstances is certainly still a mitzvah, but it lacks the ideal unifying force, for after all the donor would rather have never discovered the existence of the recipient.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Similarly, the guilt feelings are a sign that the donor is not exactly enamored with the poor individual who actually causes him discomfort.

Lending money, by contrast, lacks the sensation of magnanimity and satisfaction. And since the mitzvah of lending applies even when the borrower is not a poor person it does not do anything to remove feelings of guilt we might harbor. It is a thoroughly altruistic act.

And since lending money is devoid of the divisive potential that might even occasion the giving of *tzedakah* it represents the ultimate force of unity and gathering together—*talveh*.

In addition, when a Jew is able to break out of his own narrow world of self-interest, it liberates the Jew from his internal exile and simultaneously it allows for the G-dly presence in this world to be expressed.

Indeed, altruism is a manifestation of the G-dly because only G-d can do something that is not tainted in any shape or form. By lending money to others for the purest of motives it is our way of getting G-d and the Jewish people out of exile.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

TUNNEL VISION

**Probing beneath the surface of our personalities
can yield surprising and painful results.**

**One can either stop digging or dig even deeper
to find the treasures of goodness in the deepest
recesses of our personalities.**

ESSAY SIXTEEN

TUNNEL VISION

Legitimate Self-Defense

Mishpatim, this week's parsha, is filled with the Torah's civil and criminal laws. One of the most dramatic expressions of the law of self-defense is recorded in this parsha.

“If a thief is discovered in a tunnel and is stricken and killed it is not considered bloodshed...”

The rationale for this law is that when a person illegally enters another's property he anticipates armed resistance. He thus prepares himself to fight and even kill the owner of the house who will likely put up resistance and kill him. Hence, notwithstanding the fact that the thief is only interested in burglarizing the home, he poses a mortal threat to its owner.

In other words, when there is even the slightest and most remote possibility that someone

threatens a person's life, the Torah allows the person to use lethal force to protect himself. The only exception to this rule, the Talmud states, is when we are absolutely certain that the thief harbors no desire to harm the occupant of the house even if he were to put up resistance. The classic example given of this exceptional case is where the burglar is the father of the victim. In all other situations the law is that we may kill the burglar.

It has been pointed out on many occasions that the laws of the Torah were meant to be implemented as stated, except where the oral tradition modified its plain meaning. But, in addition to its plain meaning and application, every law in the Torah carries a message to us in our own personal quest for spiritual refinement and perfection.

The Torah's example of a burglar is one who burrows a tunnel into someone else's house. There are many ways a thief can get into a house, what message is there in the Torah's example of a thief burrowing a tunnel?

Digging It!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

One approach to this matter is based on an alternate translation of the Hebrew words concerning the finding of the thief in the tunnel. Instead of “If a thief is discovered in a tunnel...” this revised translation reads:

“If one tunnels deeply into oneself he may discover a thief.”

This means that if we dig into our personalities we may discover that we are not as honest and sincere as we might have thought.

We may discover that we have ulterior motives in the good things that we do, or worse.

As one searching Chasid cried to his Rebbe about his lack of sincerity, whereupon he exclaimed,

“even my recognition of my insincerity and desire to change is not totally sincere. And even my recognition of that recognition is insincere, etc. etc.,”

He kept on digging deeper into his motives and the lack of sincerity until he fainted.

When we question our own integrity and pureness of heart and discover that there may be a “thief” lurking there it makes it easier to not judge other people’s motives. There is a

tendency among some to judge others more harshly than the way we judge ourselves. The Torah therefore teaches us that when we see a thief it is time to introspect about our own honesty and sincerity.

And conversely, when on the surface it seems that we are far from being ideal, after tunneling deeply into the hidden recesses of our soul, we will discover that there is a part of us that is deceptively good and holy.

The Mining Analogy

The above analysis raises the obvious question: How can it be both ways? How is it possible that deep down we are insincere and deceptive and, simultaneously, deep down we are also deceptively good?

An analogy from the mining industry can be helpful in understanding human nature.

An incident that captivated the entire world occurred in the year 2010, when a copper mine in Chile exploded and 27 miners were caught for many months until their extraordinary extrication that turned them into celebrities.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

We must view our own existence as miners who were sent into the bowels of the earth to mine treasures. But these same bowels that contain treasures also contain some of the most lethal elements

The metaphor can be taken a step further: Each one of us is a diamond mine. We are full of inner treasures. As the Ba'al Shem Tov interpreted the verse: "For you shall be unto me a land of desire" that each Jew is like the earth that contains treasures beneath the surface that we might not see. But if we dig we will discover the greatest treasures.

However, in the process of digging there is a possibility that we may discover lethal amounts of gasses or/and explosions that will prevent us from safely emerging from the mine.

Why are there these contradictory features of a mine in the spiritual domain?

The answer is that our souls consist of many layers. The deeper we dig, the more our true nature is exposed. So while digging beneath the surface will yield some painful aspects of our personalities, if we just dug a little deeper we will discover that at our core we are indeed sincere.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Before the coming of Moshiach, we are told that the hidden aspects of our nature are more easily accessed. Sometimes they might even surface without any effort. This explains the paradoxical phenomenon of our times. On the one hand, we see so much more negativity and hostility in people's attitudes and behavior, and, on the other hand, we are witness to so much more sincerity, selflessness and altruism.

This emergence of the hidden negativity and goodness gives us an opportunity to once and for all “strike and kill” the negative thief within us, and bask in the glow of the radiant goodness that has been revealed. By doing so we are ready to greet Moshiach and usher in the future Redemption.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

WHEN ONE PLUS ONE

EQUALS THREE

There is good and there is good.

**What is the test that our goodness is the more
sophisticated and pure variety?**

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

WHEN ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS THREE

Linked!

In this week's parsha we find the following verse:

“The first of the fruits of your land you shall bring to the house of G-d your G-d.”

The very next verse reads:

“Do not cook a kid in the milk of its mother.”

These two commandments are lumped together in this week's parsha, and many of the Biblical commentators provide differing views as to why they are linked.

One way this juxtaposition can be explained is by understanding the nature of giving. When one is inclined to make an offering to G-d, it is only natural for one to want to give their best. And, indeed, the Mitzvah of giving the first

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

fruits was intended for precisely that reason. Usually the first fruits of the season—for which one has toiled to produce—is the most precious. Yet, the person gladly gives it away as an offering to G-d as a way of expressing gratitude, love and devotion to Him.

One might therefore have thought that it would be proper to offer G-d a similar “gift” that also expresses the idea of giving that which is first and most precious. The word “kid” mentioned here is understood by all commentators as a reference to a young animal—the parallel to the first fruits. Cooking the kid in the milk of its mother symbolizes giving away the animal even at this tender age when it is still dependent on its mother’s milk. One might have thought—based on the preceding verse that requires bringing the first fruits—that this too would be an expression of dedication to G-d.

And this is where the Torah draws the line.

While G-d appreciates our gesture of giving the first and choicest of our possessions to Him, G-d does not want us to do something for Him that expresses a lack of sensitivity to G-d’s creatures. As commentators point out, cooking

an animal in the milk of its mother is an act of cruelty.

Why Sacrifices?

One is entitled to ask: If G-d does not appreciate the offering that involves cruelty to others, why does the Torah allow animal sacrifices? In truth, we can expand the question to all consumption of meat. Why does G-d allow us to cause pain to animals? If we take this line of questioning to its logical conclusion we can even challenge our right to destroy any part of creation such as plants and trees for human consumption. Who gives us a right to dominate other forms of life?

Indeed, those who do not believe in a Creator who gave the world a purpose and the means through which we realize our goal—by way of the Mitzvos—cannot truly find justification for human existence if we are simply an accident of evolution.

Only a person who believes in a Creator who created us with a purpose and made us depend on the rest of creation for our existence can find legitimacy in consuming other parts of

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

creation provided it is within the parameters of propriety as determined by G-d's Torah..

To elaborate:

It is axiomatic in Judaism that animals—as well as all other forms of life, physical and spiritual such as angels—were created for a higher purpose. When they are utilized for that higher purpose in ways the Torah approves of, they are considered to have been “elevated” into a higher sphere.

When we consume kosher vegetation or kosher animals and use the energy to do good, a seismic and cosmic change has taken place. The entire universe—that influenced directly and indirectly the development of that piece of food—has experienced its elevation from the level of a created being to the level of the Creator. The minerals, plants, animals and people who were instrumental in doing the G-dly act all become elevated to the level of the Divine.

Conversely, when we utilize any of the earth's resources and utilize them incorrectly, or derive the benefit in a manner that contradicts G-d's will as articulated in the Torah, it does not elevate anything. Even if we do the forbidden

act with the objective of elevating it, it does not get elevated. Moreover, it actually causes it, the person who offers it and the whole world to be degraded; it destroys the Divine potential of that resource.

The Third Party

Returning to the original point of not cooking a kid in the milk of its mother even if our intentions are good; the lesson from this idea is obvious:

There are so many times that we give things and services to others as our way of showing concern, friendship and love for another. The lesson conveyed here by the Torah is that we must always ensure that what we do to express our generosity and good will to others is not at the expense of a third party.

In fact, the test of whether our generosity is impelled by our need to show how good we are, or whether it is out of genuine concern for the other is how sensitive we are to a third individual while we are engaged in our acts of kindness to the second person.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

This lesson can perhaps shed light on the saying of the Lubavitcher Rebbe that was intended to explain his custom of distributing dollars to thousands of people every Sunday afternoon when they would meet with him for his blessings. The dollar, or its exchange, that he would give each individual was to be donated to tzedakah (with an added on contribution). The Rebbe explained:

“My father-in-law [the Rebbe’s predecessor, Rabbi Yoseph Yitzchak Schneersohn] would say: ‘Whenever two Jews meet they should think of what they can do for the benefit of a third individual.’”

In other words, when the Rebbe would meet with individuals who came to him for his blessing and counsel the Rebbe would utilize that opportunity to generate assistance and generosity for a third individual or cause.

“There is kindness and there is kindness (Zohar).”

In the present day and age of exile, our senses are dulled and our kindness often lacks the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

purity and sincerity that it ought to possess. By contrast, in the Messianic Age, when the veil of darkness and insensitivity will finally be removed, our positive qualities will shine brightly and not be tainted in any fashion.

But Judaism does not believe in sitting back and waiting for the good times to unfold. The way we bring Moshiach and the age of unadulterated goodness is by trying to behave that way in these last moments of exile.

When we look out for the well-being of others even as we are doing good, we express kindness that springs from a well of pure G-dly energy within our souls. We are, in effect, accessing, the spark of Moshiach, the Ba'al Shem Tov stated exists within each and every one of us.

When we reveal that core of G-dliness, we prepare ourselves and the whole world for the coming of Moshiach.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

NO PAIN, MUCH GAIN

HAVING OUR CAKE

AND EATING IT

While adversity has a silver lining; G-d's/our goal is to eliminate pain and adversity and discover growth exclusively through positive experiences.

Essay written originally in memory of Susan Wehle a"h and all those who perished during the tragic crash of Continental Flight 3407 on February 12th 2009 in Buffalo, NY

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

NO PAIN, MUCH GAIN

HAVING OUR CAKE AND EATING IT

A Whole Life

What makes life whole?

The answer is provided for in this week's parsha.

“You shall serve G-d your G-d, and He will bless your bread and your waters, and I will remove illness from your midst. There will be no miscarriages and barren women in you land; the number of your days I shall make full.”

The simple meaning of the words “the number of your days I shall make full” is that one will live a long life. However, if that was the meaning of these words it should of said “I will lengthen your days” as we find in other verses.

Commentators therefore explain that the term “full” is not only a reference to the quantity of

days but to the quality of life that we will enjoy as well. These two verses describe three aspects of life that in their absence one will enjoy a full life. The three components of a full life thus are: a) good health, b) healthy children, and c) ample sustenance.

It is quite obvious that the loss of one of the above can be debilitating and can compromise the quality of life. But, it is equally obvious that there are countless people who suffer from the lack of health, children and sustenance and yet we would be hard pressed to say that their lives are unfulfilled.

On the contrary, we could make the argument that it was precisely the challenges and obstacles that they had to surmount that made their lives more complete. As has been noted in so many Torah sources, adversity has the capacity to reveal latent soul powers. Why then would the Torah connect a full and complete life with one that is without pain and suffering?

**Indoctrinated to Accept Suffering as a
Necessary Part of Life**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

One could derive a very powerful lesson from the above in response to our question. All of the suffering that accompanied our long journey through exile has instilled within our collective psyche the belief and recognition that adversity can generate positive energies.

And while we don't G-d forbid crave pain and suffering, we have learned the hard way that light out of darkness is more powerful than just constant and consistent light.

We have trained our eyes and ears to see the silver lining in an otherwise negative existence. It has become almost axiomatic that Judaism and Jewish existence are synonymous with pain.

Some people feel that the experience of adversity is necessary because it is a fact of life. Others feel guilt when their lives go smoothly. And still others with a more theological bent believe that suffering and pain are necessary to expiate our sins. Based on the Talmud, there are those who assert that suffering in this world gives us greater reward in the next world.

We can go on and on citing different rational, emotional and theological arguments to justify pain and suffering.

Forgotten Philosophy

In fact, we've developed such a sophisticated philosophy about pain and suffering that we've forgotten an even more powerful belief and recognition that G-d's scheme for our existence is the **abolition** of pain and suffering.

The entire world's creation, The Talmud teaches, is to lead to the Messianic Age. This is the age we have been hoping and praying for from the time we were driven into exile to begin a life of wandering and suffering. Our persistent pleas to G-d was to bring Moshiach at which time there will be no more evil and "all tears shall be wiped away from all faces."

To paraphrase King Solomon in his book of Koheles, "there is a time to look for the silver lining in the pain" and "there is a time for us to say to G-d—as we do daily in our prayers—bring an end to the *Galus* and the pain it delivers on a daily basis. Let the heretofore hidden good be visible for all to see. Bring us Moshiach now!"

We will then see that a full life does not have to be punctuated with constant threats to our

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

existence and incessant tragedy. On the contrary, a full life is one where we are permitted, nay encouraged, to have our proverbial cake and eat it too!

Yes, a full life is one where we don't have to feel guilty that we have it all.

And a full life is one that is blessed with the best in health, children and ample sustenance that parallels the most sublime form of spiritual health and wealth.

ESSAY NINETEEN

INTERNAL MEDICINE

**Science and modern technology have opened up
new vistas.**

**One is the ability to see the internal workings
of our bodies and our world.**

**There is a parallel spiritual power we now
possess. We can, through prayer, penetrate to
the core of our souls.**

ESSAY NINETEEN

INTERNAL MEDICINE

Groping in the Dark

In this week's parsha, the Torah declares: "You shall serve G-D your G-d, and He will bless your bread and water, and I will remove illness from your midst."

The question has been asked, why does the Torah use the phrase "from your midst" when it could have stated simply "from you," or, just simply, "I will heal you."

Ohev Yisrael, a Chassidic commentary, explains that the word "*mikerbecha*" that we translated "from your midst" can also be translated "from within you." This, he writes, is a reference to G-d removing internal illness.

Physicians are best equipped to deal with external injuries and illnesses. But when it comes to internal ones the physicians grope in the dark and frequently cannot identify, let

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

alone, treat the illness. And here the Torah promises us that if we will serve G-d, He will remove even those illnesses that are “within” and otherwise beyond the reach of the physicians.

This interpretation is based on a commentary by the medieval Biblical commentator, Ibn Ezra, who qualifies the Torah’s license for the physician to heal:

In this week’s parsha, the Torah discusses the payments a person must make upon injuring his fellow. In addition to compensation, payments for pain, embarrassment and loss of income, the Torah requires payment of his medical bills: This is the way the Torah presents this payment: “And heal he shall heal.” From this verse the Talmud derives that “permission was granted to a physician to heal.”

Ibn Ezra, however, explains that the right to heal was limited to the treatment of external injuries. However, internal medical problems are beyond the scope of medicine. One must depend solely on G-d’s protection to heal from internal illnesses.

To be sure, medical science has come a long way in treating internal illnesses since Biblical

times as well since the time in which Ibn Ezra lived. That is due to the fact that we now have ways to see the insides of the body through x-rays, ultrasound, CT scans and MRIs and other sophisticated diagnostic tools. Much of what was once concealed and internal is today external and revealed, though even today there are illnesses that are still elusive, and physicians today admit that G-d alone can heal them.

Two Forms of Spiritual Maladies

What is true in regard to physical ailments is also true about spiritual sickness. There are two forms of spiritual deficiencies: The first is when a person behaves in an illegal or unethical manner. These symptoms of a spiritual malady are quite obvious and they can therefore be treated with conventional Torah wisdom. All one has to do is study the works on Jewish law and ethics and make a sincere effort to follow their directives.

By contrast, there are spiritual ailments that lie beneath the surface. Conditions such as an inflated ego, envy, anger etc. are much more difficult to locate and therefore almost impossible to treat effectively. In order to deal

with these “internal” issues one must rely on G-d’s infinite mercy. And the way to elicit Divine mercy is through prayer.

The Prayer-scope

This might explain why the Torah states, “You shall serve G-D your G-d,” rather than “You shall follow His commandments.” Here we are discussing serving G-d in the broader sense of praying to G-d and accessing His Divine power. Prayer helps us to introspect and discover who we are and what “makes us tick.” Prayer is the instrument that helps us probe into the dark areas of our soul and discover those internal traits that are harming us.

Prayer begins with self-examination and self-judgment consistent with the root meaning of the Hebrew word for prayer “*tefilah/palel*,” which means judgment.

But prayer then assumes a second function. It enables us to beseech and reach out to G-d and ultimately connect to Him. This too is consistent with another translation of the word *tefilah/tofel*, which is to attach. Through *tefilah* we become attached to G-d and that in turn

gives us the ability to remove even those internal flaws that we identified in the process of prayer.

The Physical a Reflection of the Spiritual

Everything that happens in the physical world parallels processes that occur in the spiritual realm.

The fact that physicians today have a much greater ability to see inside of us and treat even the hidden ailments is a reflection and a derivative of the pre-Messianic phenomenon of being able to access the hidden dimensions of Torah, through the teachings of Jewish mysticism, particularly Chassidic thought. As a preparation for the Messianic Age when all the secrets of Torah will be revealed, we are already seeing some of the most profound esoteric teachings of Torah being revealed to all.

By having access to the inner dimension of Torah in these final days of exile, especially with its focus on *tefilah*, it enables us to have a view of the inner dimension of our personalities as well as a glimpse into the inner workings of G-

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

d! Hence we are equipped to deal with any spiritual malady.

ESSAY TWENTY

PUT YOUR MOUTH BEFORE YOUR EARS!

Miracles are usually defined as changes of the natural order as the splitting of the Red Sea.

At Sinai, the Jewish people performed their own miracle.

They fused a transcendent G-d into their rational mind.

This miraculous synthesis will be permanent in the Messianic Age

ESSAY TWENTY

PUT YOUR MOUTH BEFORE YOUR EARS!

Putting the Cart before the Horse

When the Torah was offered to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai, they responded, *Na'aseh v'nishma*, We will do and we will hear and understand." Our Talmudic sages interpret this to mean that the Jews were willing to accept the Torah before they even heard what was in it and what it was all about.

The Talmud describes this unusual response to G-d on the part of the Jewish nation as: "They put their mouths before their ears," i.e., they declared their unqualified acceptance of the Torah and pledged their unconditional commitment to it even before they were informed of the content of the Torah or understood the meaning of its commandments.

As a reward for their unconditional acceptance of the Torah, they were rewarded with two

crowns, “one for ‘we will do,’ and one for ‘we will hear.’”

Why Two Crowns?

Upon close reflection, one can raise the question as to why they received **two** crowns. Had they not prefaced “we will do” before “we will hear” they would have received no reward. Why then did they receive two crowns for saying ‘we will do’ before ‘we will hear’?

The answer lies in the difference between the Jewish people’s desire to understand the Torah after they had accepted it unconditionally, as opposed to the independent desire to understand the Torah that is not preceded by unconditional acceptance of it.

Normally, when we seek to learn something, it is based on our own desire and interest. Understanding leads to appreciation and pleasure. In effect, the desire to understand and appreciate the Torah possesses no inherently special virtue. It is no more and no less than a natural sense of intellectual curiosity, which can be healthy and good if it is used for good purposes. But, intellectual curiosity, in and of

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

itself—while more sophisticated—is no more virtuous than a desire for a nice home, or any other material acquisition.

When the Jewish people said ‘we will hear and understand’ **after** first accepting the Torah unconditionally, their desire to understand was of a qualitatively different nature than standard intellectual curiosity. It was as bold and unique as their willingness to embrace the Torah without first hearing what it was all about.

Not only was their acceptance of the Torah based on their desire to subordinate themselves to G-d, but also their desire to learn and understand the Torah was rooted in the conviction that this too was G-d’s will. For not only does G-d want us to perform the Mitzvos because G-d said so, G-d also wants us to understand the Mitzvos—to the extent that we are capable of doing so.

Their desire to understand Torah, thus, was not only born out of intellectual curiosity, but it was grounded primarily in their realization that G-d wants us to comprehend His teachings as well as committing ourselves to their fulfillment.

If they were to say, “We are satisfied with our observance of the Mitzvos, why do we have to

tax our minds to comprehend them,” it would have constituted only a partial acceptance of G-d’s will. One’s mind, the most important human faculty, would have remained detached from G-d’s will.

We can now understand why G-d gave them two crowns, because not only were they prepared to surrender their **will** and **actions** to G-d, they were also willing to dedicate their **minds** to G-d. And the willingness to dedicate their minds to G-d was because they sensed that this too was G-d’s will

Delayed Response

This will also shed light on why the declaration of *Na’aseh v’nishma* ‘We will do and we will hear and understand’ is not mentioned in last week’s Torah portion where the entire narrative of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai is featured. Instead, this declaration is mentioned in *this* week’s Torah portion, *Mishpatim*, which focuses on those commandments that we can understand.

However, the inclusion of their declaration in this *parsha* that focuses on the rational aspects

of Torah, underscores the extent of their dedication. Not only did they subordinate their will and actions to G-d, but also their minds. After accepting all of the commandments without first understanding them, they then proceeded to a second level: of attempting to get their mindsets conform to the mindset of G-d; to make their human intellect grasp the Divine intellect, because this too is G-d's will.

Harbinger of the Messianic Age

When the topic of what will life be like in the Messianic Age is broached, invariably images of spiritual life come to mind. We will all become more spiritual, more G-dly like angels. And despite the fact that we've never seen an angel before, our image of them and of our future is one that defies rational thought.

In truth, one of the most salient features of the Messianic Age will be the reverse. As Maimonides concludes his classic work *Mishneh Torah* with the description of the Messianic Age as a time when we will be “great sages and know the hidden knowledge, grasp the Divine mind according to the extent that is humanly possible, as it says, ‘And the world will be filled

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea.”

Even the most esoteric and elusive Divine knowledge will become accessible to our human minds. What began at Sinai—the declaration of the Jewish people that they want to accept G-d’s will and that they want to **fathom** G-d’s will as well—will come to fruition during the Messianic Age. That time will be characterized as an age in which G-d’s laws will be accepted and His existence, His Torah and Mitzvos—and even the way that He conducts the world—will become intelligible to our finite human minds.

To take an infinite G-d Who created logic and nature and have Him enter our finite consciousness is nothing short of a miracle of unprecedented proportions. There is nothing more impossible than something infinite being apprehended and grasped by something finite.

For this to happen, G-d must reveal His very Essence, which transcends even the boundaries of infinity! G-d is not bound by the “limits” of infinity which does not allow it to be contained within a finite mind. In the Messianic Age G-d’s Essence—which transcends both infinity and

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

finitude—will enable our finite human minds to absorb and digest infinite G-dly knowledge.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

THE ALPEH, BEIS, GIMMEL OF MOSHIACH

Youth is not just a prefatory stage for adulthood. Its presence must be felt throughout our lives.

Moses' demand that the children be allowed to leave was also a request for Pharaoh to allow adults to take their youth with them.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

THE ALPEH, BEIS, GIMMEL OF MOSHIACH

Divine Editing

King Ptolemy of Egypt summoned 72 Sages to translate the Torah into Greek, he placed them in separate cubicles. The Talmud (*Megillah* 9a) relates that a miracle occurred, and they all translated the Torah identically.

In fact, they even made the same deliberate modifications in their translation. For example, instead of translating the opening verse in Bereishis with the words: “In the beginning G-d created” they rendered it, “G-d created in the beginning” so that he would not misinterpret the words of the Torah as a suggestion that the first G-d (“The beginning”) created G-d. That would have supported the idolatrous view of there being a hierarchical system of g-ds.

Another one of these divinely inspired modifications can be found in this week’s parsha. In the section where it discusses the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

offering of sacrifices to coincide with the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the Torah states: “He [Moses] sent the youths [firstborn-Rashi) of the children of Israel, and they offered up burnt offerings, and they slaughtered bulls as peace offerings to G-d.” These offerings, our Sages tell us, were part of the Jewish people’s “conversion” to Judaism that was part of the Sinai experience.

Instead of the word “*na’arei*-youths” the 72 Sages translated “*zatutei*” which has the connotation that Moshe sent distinguished members of the community such as the elders.

Talmudic commentators explain that the reason for this “correction” was to avoid Ptolemy raising a simple question: Why would Moses send mere youths to offer the sacrifices? Wouldn’t it have been more appropriate and dignified to send the elders? To avoid this challenge to the Torah, the Sages were divinely guided to mistranslate the word so that it would not offend Ptolemy’s sensibilities.

In other words, G-d was willing to sacrifice the accuracy of the Biblical text just so that a pagan monarch would not trivialize the ritual offering of the sacrifices that were associated with the giving of the Torah.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

However, this understanding of that “emendation” raises an obvious question: if it appeared so disrespectful to a pagan monarch to have Moses employ mere youths in such an important ceremony, then why, in fact, did Moses send youths and not the more distinguished members of the community?

Perhaps, as some commentators suggest, it was this question that prompted Rashi to interpret the word “youths” as “firstborn.” True, they might have been youths, but they were of a special class of youths—the firstborn who served as priests. Only after they were involved in the sin of the golden calf was the priesthood taken from them and given to the sons of Aaron. The fact that they were young did not diminish their special status within the community.

The above, however, will not completely resolve the difficulty. The original question, somewhat modified, can still be asked: Why does the Torah refer to these firstborn priests as youths and not simply as firstborn? If the Torah had done so, there would not have been a need for the Sages to mistranslate the word as “*zatutei*—distinguished.” Even Ptolemy would most likely

have appreciated the elevated position of the firstborn, inasmuch as even in pagan societies the firstborn were considered to be special.

The Preeminent Role of Youth

The role of youth in Judaism, in general, is central to understanding why the Torah employed the term "youths" here and, conversely, why King Ptolemy would have taken exception to this term.

Ptolemy was not the first Egyptian monarch who could not appreciate the value of involving the youth in Jewish rituals and assigning a central role to them in Jewish life. In an earlier parsha we read how Pharaoh—after the seventh plague and after having been warned of the devastating consequences of the plague of locusts which was to follow—finally relents and offers to let the Jewish people go. However, curiously, Pharaoh asks Moses, “But exactly who will be going?”

Moses replies: “With our youth and with our elders we will go! With our sons and with our daughters...” Pharaoh protests vociferously to the suggestion that the children would be

included. In Pharaoh's mind, religion was exclusively an adult occupation. Thus the Jewish children must remain behind.

Pharaoh's eventual successor as the king of Egypt—Ptolemy—seems to have had the same ideological aversion to assigning a central role to children in Jewish practice.

Indeed, there are still modern day educators who echo the Egyptian monarchs' objection to allowing children to be fully immersed in Judaism. They might accept the notion that we must educate the children Jewishly, but why do we have to expose them to the spiritual, mystical, and non-rational aspects of Judaism? Give them only an edited and watered down version of Judaism, and later, when they mature, let them decide on their own what—if any—part of Judaism suits them. “Why indoctrinate them” is sadly a refrain that can still be heard by some in the Jewish community.

What is the ideological basis for this phenomenon? Why are some Jewish people tainted with an Egyptian monarch's mentality? Why do they find the inclusion of children in the thick of Jewish practices so objectionable?

The Child Moshiach

The answer lies in the nature of a child to accept and embrace the teachings and practices without reservation. The verse in both Psalms and Chronicles recited daily declares, “Do not touch My anointed ones (*Meshichoi*)...” The Talmud interprets this as a reference to children who study Torah. They are G-d’s Moshiach’s!

The child’s study of Torah and observance of Mitzvos is untainted by the outer layers of our personalities which haven’t yet fully developed. The child is not shackled by worldly conventions, nor is he or she encumbered by the stifling influence of a mature intellect. A child’s embrace of Torah is unqualified, total, pristine, and devoid of any external influences. On the other hand, a much more complex approach is a prerequisite of the adult study of Torah, which requires rigorous intellectual efforts.

If we left the intense study of Torah and the observance of the Mitzvos for the adult years, the Jew would be left without Judaism’s crucial foundation, which is acceptance of G-d’s teaching that transcends reason. The character

of that person's Judaism would not offend even a leader of Egypt because it is confined to one's intellect and to society's standards. Indeed, the very word for Egypt in Hebrew—Mitzraim—means boundaries, straits or confinement. The Mitzraim mindset wants the Jew to keep his or her Judaism boxed in to defined borders. It must be measured and redacted to make it palatable to the Pharaohs and Ptolemys of the world.

The emphasis in Torah on the child occupying a prominent and preeminent role in Jewish life tells us that, on the contrary, Judaism is about breaking out of Mitzraim and allowing the hidden energy that comes naturally to a child to be unleashed by everyone.

“Child First” or “Adult First” Approaches

It may be suggested that the deliberate, Divinely inspired, mistranslation of the word “*na'arei*—youths” parallels the first mistranslation of the 72 Sages referred to earlier. The syntax of the Torah's opening words, “*Bereishis bara Elokim*—In the beginning G-d created...” was altered by the 72 Sages and rendered “*Elokim bara bereishis*—G-d, in the beginning created...”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

The Rebbe in one of his discourses (*Likkutei Sichos*, volume 15) notes that the correct version of the Torah begins with the letter *beis*, the **second** letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In the redacted version, the first letter is an *aleph*, the **first** letter of the alphabet. What does this alphabetic rewording signify?

The Rebbe explains—based on a statement in the Jerusalem Talmud—that the reason why the Torah begins with the second letter is to indicate that the formal, intellectual level of Torah study that commences with Genesis is but the second level of Torah study. Before a Jew embarks on the study of Torah he or she must recognize that Torah is Divine wisdom which transcends our understanding of it. Thus, the Torah begins with a *beis*, the second letter, to underscore that the study of Torah is step number two. Torah study must be preceded by the recitation of the blessings on the Torah in which we invoke the Divine nature of Torah.

When they translated the Torah for Ptolemy, however, that version had to be altered to begin with the letter *aleph*, the first letter of the Torah. From a Ptolemaic or non-Jewish perspective there is no room for the Divine

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

element in Torah as a prerequisite for the study of Torah. Torah study was to them a discipline like any other discipline. Thus there is only one level and approach to Torah—the intellectual approach. The study of Torah to Ptolemy and his ilk is not only step number one, but the only step.

The same is true about his aversion to the role of children in the sacrifices that were offered at Sinai. If Torah and Jewish practice are exclusively intellectual exercises, the involvement of children is uncalled for.

In truth, the children's involvement is not only acceptable; it is the very foundation of all of Judaism. It is the first and most fundamental step—the *alpeh* of Judaism—without which adult involvement has no validity and will prove to be as unstable as a building would be without a foundation.

The “adult first” mentality is a product of Egyptian exile. The “child first” mindset is one that liberates us from our limited grasp of Torah and its Mitzvos; it is the ultimate repudiation of Egyptian exile.

But one does not have to be a child in the chronological sense to enjoy the spiritual

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

benefits of the “child first” approach. The Ba’al Shem Tov (as recorded in the Chassidic work *M’or Einayim* of R. Nochum of Chernobyl) teaches us that every Jew possesses—at his or her core—a spark of Moshiach. That spark of Moshiach represents the innocent, pure, and unadulterated devotion to the infinite aspect of G-d, Torah and Mitzvos.

When we ask G-d for Moshiach to take us out of exile we are essentially saying to G-d: We want to return to our most essential spiritual state that is not tainted, stifled and suppressed by the outer layers of our personalities. We certainly don’t want the Pharaohs and Ptolemys of the world to dictate to us how we should think. We want total freedom to be in touch with the Moshiach/child within us.

But asking for Moshiach is only the first step. We must also live with Moshiach. This means we must not wait for the external Moshiach—the Jewish leader who ushers in the Messianic Age—to compel us to expose our internal Moshiach. Even now we must try to live in a liberated way by doing everything the way a child approaches Judaism—with innocence and joy. We must not allow our natural penchant to

be skeptical and cynical to taint our Judaism. While we are certainly required to learn, understand and even raise questions about all matters of Judaism, that should be step number two. It must be preceded by the first step: an unadulterated and unconditional acceptance of Torah and a pure desire for the ultimate Redemption through Moshiach that will facilitate our complete embrace of Torah.

The Three Steps

In terms of the Hebrew alphabet, step number one, the “*aleph*”, is:

Involve your biological children as well as the internal child—the internal Moshiach—in your Jewish life. Instill all of your doings with Moshiach innocence. And, of course, focus on the role of Torah and Mitzvos to prepare us for the ultimate Redemption.

Step number two—the “*beis*”—is:

Learn what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption, applying rigorous analysis and in-depth study so that our minds become saturated with Torah knowledge in general and with a Moshiach perspective in particular.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Step number three—the “*gimmel*”—is “*Geulah*,” the actual Redemption, when the internal Moshiach is completely ignited, exposed, and unites with the Moshiach spark of every Jew because our Moshiach spark will merge with the soul of Moshiach himself who will usher in the true and complete Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

JUDGMENT: PRELUDE TO MOSHIACH

**The notion that there is a difference between
man-to-G-d obligations is a myth.**

**Indeed, the Final Redemption rests on our
fidelity to the social commandments.**

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

JUDGMENT: PRELUDE TO MOSHIACH

The First Parsha after Sinai

The first parsha that follows the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai is called *Mishpatim*. It deals with the so-called “man to man” or societal laws. This underscored the Divine nature of these laws. Every civilized society has its own system of law that keeps its people civilized and protects them from harm caused by illegal behavior.

What makes the regulatory laws different in Judaism is that these social laws are not man-made. They come from G-d, just as the laws that govern our relationship with Him. There is no theological difference between the laws that dictate that we believe in, revere and love G-d and the laws that tell us to not mistreat our fellows.

This symbiotic relationship between man-to-G-d commandments and man-to-man

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

commandments is demonstrated by the Torah in at least five ways.

Five Hints

First, when G-d gave Moses the Ten Commandments (or more accurately the “Ten Statements”) they were etched on two tablets instead of just one. Moses carried these tablets, which were divided into the two subjects of man-to-G-d and man-to-man commandments, side by side to underscore their equal nature.

A second demonstration of the equality between these two categories of commandments derives from the juxtaposition of Mishpatim with the parsha of Yisro which records the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

A third and stronger indication is that the Torah’s opening letter in the text of Mishpatim is the letter *vav*-and. Rashi explains that this indicates that the laws contained here were also given at Sinai.

More specifically, the Torah begins with the description of a Jew who sells himself as an indentured servant and who refuses to leave after completing his six year service

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

commitment. His ear has to be pierced with an awl. Rashi, citing the Talmud, explains: “The ear that heard G-d say ‘For the children of Israel Are slaves to Me; they are My slaves,’ but they are not slaves to slaves.”

In other words, the Torah disapproves of a Jew subjecting himself to even a limited form of servitude. Why? Because in so doing he has violated the Divine declaration in the first commandment/statement, i.e., that G-d took us out of slavery exclusively to be His servants. This too connects the laws governing society with G-d’s direct communication of the Ten Commandments.

A fifth indication of the synergy between these two sets of commandments is what happened after Moses returned with the second set of Tablets. The Torah relates that on the very next day Moses was already sitting in judgment of the Jewish people. He was so preoccupied by this duty that his father-in-law Yisro had to counsel him to delegate some of that responsibility.

In writing about a later parsha (*Vayakhel*) Rashi informs us that on the same day, Moses gathered all the Jews to instruct them

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

concerning the construction of the Mishkan, G-d's dwelling place. In effect, Moses accorded the same degree of importance to adjudicating civil law as he did to constructing the Mishkan, G-d's sanctuary; the most powerful expression of the Divine in this world!

Indeed, G-d's approval of the construction of the Mishkan showed that He was willing to forgive the Jewish people for the construction of the Golden Calf and would dwell among them. The construction of the Mishkan was the climax of the G-d's revelation at Mount Sinai; the most dramatic revelation of G-d to the world. What happened at Sinai, though, was a momentary revelation that dissipated with the sounding of the Shofar. Construction of the Mishkan was actually the first step in concretizing G-d's presence in this physical world; a process that continues to this day and will be completed with the Final Redemption.

What emerges from this analysis is that the need to judge the people and ensure a prompt resolution of their disputes was considered no less urgent to G-d and Moses than the momentous commandment to solidify the

relationship between G-d and Israel by building the Mishkan!

Sinai Justice

One may reasonably ask why the civil laws are accorded so much significance here? In an earlier parsha, the Torah states that the civil laws had already been given at Marah, prior to Sinai:

...[T]here [at Marah G-d] gave them the commandments and judgments...

Rashi, citing Talmudic tradition, says that the “judgments” referred to here are the civil laws.

Why was it necessary to restate these laws and with the added emphasis that they came from G-d at Sinai?

The simple answer is that the revelation at Sinai changed the entire dynamic of the previously revealed laws. Before Sinai these laws were intended to protect society from self-destruction. After all, there can be no place for a relationship with G-d if we can't get along with each other. A world of chaos and anarchy is headed to self-destruction just as it did in the

generation of the Great Flood in the days of Noah.

The revelation by G-d at Mount Sinai introduced another dimension to these same laws. Rather than just controlling threats to society, these laws now underscored G-d's relevance in every facet of our lives. Sinai linked G-d to the most mundane aspects of existence. Similarly, the Mishkan demonstrated that G-d's presence is compatible with the physical world. In fact, the *only* world in which G-d's essence can be manifested is our physical world.

The social laws introduced at Sinai and implemented immediately after Moses descended from the mountain reflected a much more positive and sublime objective of these laws. Rather than being a distraction from the construction of a Sanctuary for G-d, the social laws served the same purpose: bringing the Divine into the ordinary.

Focusing on the Past and Future

There can be another way of understanding the need for and emphasis on the social laws after

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Sinai, which corresponds to the foregoing explanation:

There are two focuses we must always have in life's journey. The first is to remember. We must always keep the memory of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs in our consciousness. We can never forget the Exodus from Egypt that molded us into a nation under G-d's exclusive sovereignty. We must never forget the evil violence of Amalek. The echo of Sinai must always reverberate in our ears.

At the same time, we must always look to the future, when G-d's plan for the Universe will be fully realized. It will be a world of justice, peace and harmony among all of G-d's creatures. We will experience total harmony. There will no longer be dichotomies between the upper and lower, inner and outer, spiritual and physical, collective and individual. All that seemed to be in conflict will experience complete unity. This will be the ultimate and true form of justice.

The prophet Isaiah declared that "Zion will be redeemed with Mishpat-Justice..." Zion is Isaiah's metaphor for Jerusalem and the Bais Hamikdash. Jerusalem is the City of Peace, which, ironically, has known scant peace

throughout its long history. This is consistent with the notion that the most important ideals are also the most challenged and threatened. Only in the Messianic Age will Jerusalem become the fountainhead of peace for the entire world, when it will house the third and final Bais Hamikdash.

When the Torah speaks of justice in the post-Sinai era, particularly as we stand on the threshold of the Final Redemption, the focus must be on the higher function of Mishpat. That will bring the world to its ultimate state of fulfillment. This state is not just simply the absence of strife and discord; it is characterized by the positive energy of unmitigated Divine unity pervading all of existence.

The above thoughts on Mishpat tie into the Rebbe's statement that, while love of our fellow Jew will repair the communal flaw that lead to the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash and exile, our focus today is no longer rectification of the past but rather on riding the peaceful, loving and unifying wave of the future.

Hebrew Servant = Moshiach

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

The laws discussed in our Parsha this week allude to the future as evidenced by the opening theme of Mishpatim: the *Eved-Ivri*-Hebrew servant. The Gematria (numerical value) of this term is 358, the same as the word Moshiach. This righteous descendant of the House of David will be the ultimate Hebrew servant, whose life is dedicated exclusively to the idea of serving G-d.

One can explain the entire verse concerning the Hebrew Servant in light of the above:

If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall work for six years. But in the seventh year he is to be released without liability.

The Hebrew word for “you buy” is “*tikneh*,” which can also mean “you perfect.” The verse can now be interpreted to mean “When you bring the world to its state of perfection, it will be done through Moshiach (the “Hebrew slave”).”

And the Torah continues: “he shall work for six years.” This can be interpreted to mean that Moshiach will perfect the world while standing on the shoulders of six millennia of efforts (we are now at the tail end of the sixth millennium). Moshiach is the container that holds all the

cumulative energies of the past. As result of these mighty efforts, we will be set free from all the constraints of exile and sin.

Two Messages

The fact that this hinted reference to Moshiach is found in the context of Mishpatim-social laws informs us of two messages:

First, the social laws of the Torah based on the revelation at Mount Sinai (as opposed to their secular counterparts) play an integral role in bringing the world to its state of perfection.

Second, one of the defining characteristics of Moshiach is his fidelity to the highest standards of justice, righteousness, goodness and kindness. The Prophet Isaiah (Chapter 11:3-5) states in his description of Moshiach:

And his delight shall be in the reverence of G-d; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither decide after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the land... and righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Moshiach's fidelity to Mishpatim will be based on his reverence for G-d and will lead us to universal peace, as Maimonides described metaphorically in verse 6:

And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and fatling together, and the child shall lead them...