

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

MISHPATIM

JANUARY 25-26, 2013

24 SHEBAT 5774

**DEDICATIONS:** in memory of Moe Maleh -Moshe ben Jamileh

Rosh Chodesh is next Friday and Shabbat, the 31st of January and 1st of February

In memory of my father and teacher, Yosef Ben Esther – Joseph R. Bibi

Candle lighting this Friday evening is at 4:46 p.m. Mincha at 4:45

SHABBAT 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:58AM

Derasha by Rav Aharon

Asher Abittan will be with us this Shabbat

**Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30**

Ages 0-5 - Morah Avital in the Playroom

Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library

Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

**KIDDUSH:** Would anyone like to sponsor?

Mincha follows Kiddush with amidah not before 12:33 PM

Shabbat Ends – 5:46PM

Return for Arbit – 6:00 PM

Kid's Game and Movie Night - will continue next week

## WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

## WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yenai – 7PM –

Daily class with Rabbi Colish at 6:30AM

Please join us for the next movie night sponsored by the Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach and Lido Synagogue. **Yellow Asphalt** will be shown at the Lido Synagogue on Saturday evening, February 1st at 7:30. Refreshments and discussion to follow. Suggested donation: \$5

**Yellow Asphalt** ([Hebrew](#): אספלט צהוב, *Asfalt Tzahov*) is an [Israeli](#) movie depicting [Jahalin Bedouins](#) and their way of life, specifically their conflict with Israeli [Jews](#). The film is a pastiche of three short stories depicted sequentially:

- *Black spot* ([Moshe Ivgi](#), [Zevik Raz](#)) - about an Israeli tanker crew which runs over a Bedouin boy
- *Here is not there* ([Tatjana Blacher](#), [Abed Zuabi](#)) - about the doomed love of a German woman and her Bedouin husband
- *Red roofs* ([Raida Adon](#), [Sami Samir](#), [Motti Katz](#)) - about a love affair / physical relationship of an Israeli Jewish farmer and his Bedouin maid

The stories are shot on location in the [Judean desert](#), and casts members of the [Jahalin Bedouin](#) tribe in acting roles. The three shorts are woven together by the presence of the same village elders in all the films, who happen to be actual members of the Jahalin Bedouin. The movie was released with [Hebrew](#) and [Arabic](#) audio tracks. The shorts are based on true events, and the director actually lived with the Bedouin tribe for some time before making the movie, learning their view of things portrayed in the movie. The entire movie took seven years to create. The movie tries to portray the [clash of civilizations](#) between the Bedouins and Israeli Jews in a non-judgmental manner.

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Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor,  
 Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100

### Editors Notes

I have received hundreds and hundreds and hundreds or notes, emails, texts and messages from so many of you sending condolences after our recent loss. I know I responded to most of them and if I missed yours, I am so sorry. It's been a crazy few weeks and I still feel like I'm lost in some strange dream. A day hasn't gone by without me needing to ask my dad something, and then remembering that I can't. When my friend Jack Maleh's dad, Moe passed away last night, I wanted to call my dad who could tell me about all the communal work that Moe did over the last half century and then some. My dad was the community historian. But I couldn't..... I received a picture that dated back to when I met Haham Ovadia Yosef in Ahi Ezer Yeshiva and wanted to ask my dad who everyone in the picture was, but I couldn't.... I had a question in work about a furniture design, and have no one to ask.... I actually forget he's not here for a brief second. Its just so strange ....

I wrote the following for the Jewish Voice on Tuesday and it was read by my cousin Ruby at the Areyat held on Tuesday afternoon in Miami. I am deeply grateful to Rabbi Galimidi who spoke in Aventura and to Rabbi Saul Maslaton and Rabbi Benoliel who spoke in New York. I am very proud of my nephews Joseph Jemal, Joseph Bibi and Ezra Bibi who spoke so well. And my brother Ruby blew me away with stories I never heard before. Between Ruby's stories and what I learned during the Shiva there is so much more to discover about my dad. Pity that I didn't ask more!

**VeEleh HaMishpatim Asher Tasim Lifnechem. These are the statutes which you shall place before them.**

Society requires laws and statutes to live by. As Jews we are expected to follow the law and go beyond the letter of the law.

My father Joe Bibi, AH, passed away this week. My father in his humility probably arranged for his funeral

to fall on Tu Bishvat and at the outset of yeshiva vacation week to avoid crowds and eulogies at his funeral. Even today Tuesday as we plan his areyat - his seventh day memorial service for this afternoon, the skies are open with snow falling. Did he manipulate that too so that less people come?

With so many families away, I received hundreds and hundreds of emails from people who knew, loved and respected my father.

One email I received Friday stopped me in my tracks. The gist of it began:

"Dear David,  
 You may or may not know me, but I will be saying Kadish for your father, my brother Joe Bibi. "

Today in America if someone received a letter like this, he might think. Oh my gosh, what did my grandfather do?

But anyone who knew my grandfather knew better.

The note continued, "I came to America when I was 15 years old. I had no relatives here nor any friends. I moved into Reuben and Esther Bibi's home and stayed there as their child for years. Your father was my brother".

The stories about the chesed of my grandparents are legendary. As we sat for the shiva we heard from Rabbi Maslaton how his father took him to see a true sadik, my father's grandfather Isaac Mizrahi. We all heard the amazing stories of my dad's other grandfather Yosef Obadiah Bibi. But being the son and grandson of righteous people is no guarantee of being righteous.

My father was a man of tremendous midot. One might argue if his greatness was in his service to others, in his encouragement of others, in his trust in G-d, in his humility or in his patience. Rabbi Ben Oliel suggested that even one born with these merits is still tested every day.

On Wednesday after hearing of my dad's passing, I stopped by my office. As I left to get the car, the attendant was crying at my father's passing. The building concierge, a truck driver, the guy in the coffee cart, people we pass after day and rarely give a thought to were distraught.

Joseph Bibi had the amazing quality of seeing the selem elokim, the G-dly image within every person. Not only did he see it, but he drew it out and made

everyone feel important. People would come to him with their problems and would leave feeling great.

A man told us that twenty five years prior he had a disagreement with another man in the synagogue over work that was done. They didn't want to be in the same room with each other. They approached my dad and each spoke to him. The matter was settled and they became best of friends. What did my dad say? We think it's not what he said, it was his tremendous skill of being an active listener. He heard them. He made them feel better.

Given all the tremendous communal accomplishments of my father, whether for the Synagogue, school or lodge; the edifices built, the synagogues, the Torah centers, the senior citizen residences, children's camps, community centers and schools, the accolades could have gone to his head. Everyone wanted to honor him, yet he ran from honor. He never expected anything, never asked for anything for himself. It was always about everyone else.

Last year when a nurse in error caused my father severe damage which caused tremendous pain and lasted for many weeks, instead of anger my father accepted it as some tikun, some heavenly reparation.

My brother insisted that my father's greatest midah was his patience. He said that a thousand times my father waited for us and never complained. At a light he would never honk when the guy in front didn't move. He never stared after the train on the tracks. When it comes, it comes. Who am I to think it should come for me?

One of the rabbis said he caught himself after hearing the stories when he thought he was rushing his wife from the house. He committed to giving patience a try.

I tried it waiting for my kids that night. I also tried it on the road in the morning. It's not easy even once let alone thousands of times my father seemed to be patient without effort.

Is patience required of us? Or is it going beyond the requirement of the law? Whatever the answer, exercising patience can make us better people. So next time your tempted to look at the watch, to honk the horn, or to press someone else, stop. Take a breath, pause, think of my dad and exercise patience. It takes tremendous effort but will bring tremendous reward. Do it in his memory.

May the soul of my father and teacher, Yosef Ben Esther be bound in srer hachayim.

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

**Rabbi Fischel Schachter told over a story of a woman, a Holocaust survivor, who settled in America after the war and was married for twelve years without having children.**

One day she was sitting in a doctor's office on Madison Avenue in Manhattan, and the doctor, going over her charts, said to her, "Madame, please listen to me. I am saying this for your own benefit, give up. Medically speaking, there is nothing we can do so you can have children. When hair will grow from my palm that is when you will have a child."

The woman left and boarded the Madison Avenue bus. During the ride, she contemplated her life. She recalled the horrors she experienced as a young girl in Poland, when the family had a trap door beneath the dining room table and they would go and hide under the floor when the Nazis approached. She volunteered to be the one to close the door, put the carpet over it and then hide on top of a piece of furniture. She would sit there, all curled up, and listen in terror as the Nazis searched the house, smashing furniture as they went from room to room. Time and time again, the family was saved. But finally, the Nazis noticed a soft spot on the floor, and they discovered the trap door. This young girl watched as the Nazis dragged her family away. She was the only one who survived the war.

Once she got to America, she desperately wanted to begin a family. And now, after twelve long years, her hopes were shattered.

She said to herself, "I have no reason to get off this bus." And so she stayed on the bus, sitting there the rest of the day. Finally, the driver informed her that he was driving the bus to the garage for the night, and she needed to disembark.

"I have nothing to live for," she muttered.

"Listen, lady," the driver said, "I've had a hard day. I don't know what your problem is, but you're not going to solve it by staying on this bus."

She got off the bus and said, "Master of the world, You were with me all along. You saved my life countless times. You brought me here. You let me start my life over, and so it is in Your hands. I have no right to give up. The bus driver is absolutely right, You didn't save my life for me to live on the Madison Avenue bus. Please tell me what to do. I won't give up. I will continue serving You no matter what."

A year later, she had a child.

That child grew up, got married, and has his own grandchildren. By the time this woman passed away, she had enough great-grandchildren to make that doctor's hair stand up.

Rabbi Fischel Schachter added that he heard this story firsthand from the woman herself, whom he knew quite well. She was his mother.

### **Rabbi Biggs**

**Dedicated in merit of Yosef Ben Ester Bibi, a man who not only followed the Torah but also lived the Torah. May his soul be bound in the bond of eternal life with Hashem.**

This Shabbat we read the portion of Mishpatim and we bless the first month of Adar. This year is a leap year, so there is an additional month of Adar. The Talmud teaches that when the month of Adar arrives, we increase in joy. The Mazal of the Jewish people is strong in this month. When we have two months of Adar, we have a double measure of joy. Although the Hebrew months generally alternate between 29 and 30 days, the first month of Adar is a full 30 days, allowing 60 days of joy.

The portion of Mishpatim primarily discusses Jewish civil law. The Torah not only directs our spiritual lives, but also creates a civil justice system of responsibility and compassion. The portion later discusses details concerning the giving of the Torah that were not mentioned in last week's portion. We will seek to find the connection between these ideas and the months of joy.

Before receiving the Torah, the Jewish people promised that whatever Hashem commands we will do and we will hear. Seemingly, the order is unusual. First one hears what to do, and then one does it. "Hearing" in this verse has a deeper meaning, understanding. The Jewish people promised firstly to do: an unequivocal acceptance of whatever Hashem would command. Thereafter they promised to "hear," to seek to understand the words of the Torah. Our understanding of the Torah is based on our acceptance of Hashem's will rather than our acceptance of His commandments being based on our understanding.

This gives us a special insight to the Mishpatim, the Torah's civil laws. Although the Mishpatim are generally laws of logic, we fulfill them not because we agree with the logic of the Torah, but rather because they are the laws of the Torah.

This is connected to the months of joy. The Talmud teaches that there is no joy like freedom from uncertainty. When we rely on our own logic, it may be flawed. When we follow the Mishpatim of the Torah, we are positive we are doing the right thing. Furthermore, the Mishpatim allow us to make our most mundane affairs a form of contact with G-d.

When we live according to the Mishpatim, our commerce and interactions are all parts of one great Mitzvah.

A deeper meaning of "hearing" is contemplating the meaning of each of the Mitzvot as a path to become G-dly people. Each Mitzvah guides us to compassion, humility, responsibility and self elevation from the mundane to the divine. When we truly "hear" the Mitzvot and our lives, minds and hearts are imbued with Hashem we reach true happiness.

The word Adar is related to the word Adir, which means mighty. Rejoicing during these sixty days is a vessel for Hashem's blessings in everything. Further, the Rebbe has taught that through joy in these sixty days we can overcome negative decrees. The word Adar is a composite of Aleph and Dar. Aleph symbolizes Hashem, who is One. Dar means to dwell. Adar is the perfect time to establish Hashem's dwelling place in this world in the rebuilt Temple with the coming of Moshiach. May Hashem grant that we immediately share in that joy!

Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov!

A project of Chabad of Great Neck  
400 East Shore Rd. Great Neck NY 11024

### **Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:**

1st Aliya: The Jewish slave, Jewish maidservant, manslaughter, murder, injuring a parent, kidnapping, cursing a parent.

2nd Aliya: Killing of slaves, personal damages, injury to slaves, the killer ox, a hole in the ground, damage by goring, penalties for stealing.

3rd Aliya: Damage by grazing, damage by fire, the unpaid custodian, the paid custodian, the borrowed article, seduction, occult practices, idolatry and oppression, lending money.

4th Aliya: Accepting authority, justice, strayed animals, the fallen animal.

5th Aliya: Justice, the Shmitah (7th) year, Shabbos, Pesach, Shavous, Succos, prohibition against milk and meat.

6th Aliya: Hashem (G-d) instructed the nation to respect the authority of His messengers, the Prophets and Rabbis. He promised to chase out the seven nations who inhabited Canaan and forewarned us against making a treaty of peace with them, or being influenced by their practices and values.

7th Aliya: Hashem stated the means by which the seven nations would be chased out of Israel, and

promised that if we do as instructed no woman would miscarry. The borders of Eretz Yisroel (The Land of Israel) were defined. The conclusion of the Parsha returns to the aftermath of Revelation. Moshe built an altar, offered a sacrifice, and in 24:7 the nation proclaimed "we will first obey Hashem's commands and then attempt to understand". Moshe, Aharon, Nadav, Avihu, and the 70 elders have a shared vision in 24:10 and then Moshe is told to ascend Sinai where he would remain for 40 days and nights.

### The Weekly Haftorah

**By: Reuben Ebrahimoff - The Haftorahman**

The Haftorah is read from the book of Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah), 34: 8-22 and 33:25-26

The connection of the Haftorah to the Parsha: The first laws of Parshat Mishpatim deal with the Hebrew servant. The Jews had suffered in Egypt as slaves and they knew first hand what slavery meant. Therefore, Hashem expected the Jews to empathize with their servants; do not take advantage of a person when he's down. The Haftorah speaks of a time when the Hebrew servant was being taken advantage of too much.

The storyline of this week's Haftorah: The Jews transgress the mitzvah of freeing their Hebrew servants.

Part 1 - Jeremiah's word of doom. This section establishes the setting: a royal proclamation by King Zedkiyah that all Hebrew slaves must be set free. After the initial compliance with this "covenant" the slaveholders violate the edict and force their compatriots back into slavery. This elicits the prophet's condemnation. The previous episode is juxtaposed to the event at Mt. Sinai, when Hashem "made a covenant" with all of Israel to release its slaves every 7th year. The present revocation of manumission is deemed a profanation of Hashem's name. The consequences of this breach of the slaves "release" are announced: those who have violated the "covenant" will be punished. Jerusalem and its inhabitants will be destroyed.

Part 2. The natural & supernatural. Hashem swears that as surely as He established a "covenant" with nature He will never reject the promises made to the descendants of the patriarchs. Israel will be restored in love.

**EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN**

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

As I sit in my hotel room in Jerusalem, I put pen to paper with a feeling of gratitude to Hashem. Thankful just to be in this holy city and thankful to be with so many friends from our community who are celebrating Bar Misvahs in Yerushalayim.

In this perashah, we learn of the gravity of those who hurt the feelings of a widow and an orphan. The Kli Yakar quotes the pasuk, "Im aneh teaneh oto – if you cause him pain." Why does it say "oto" which means "cause him pain" when it refers to a widow and the orphans? It should have said "otam," which means "them." The Kli Yakar answers that when one causes pain to them he is really causing pain to Hashem.

Once a broken hearted widow came to Rabbi Yaakov of Hrimlov, the author of Kochav Miyaakov, and poured out her tale of woe. She hadn't been able to pay her rent for some time. The landlord informed her in no uncertain terms, that unless she paid, she and her orphaned children would be thrown out into the street.

The Rav sent a messenger to the landlord, who was very wealthy, pleading on her behalf. "You have so many other houses that you rent," the Rav implored. "Just because you don't get rent on this one house is reason to evict a widow and orphans?"

Offended by the suggestion of not collecting what he believed was rightfully his, the man refused to consider it.

This incident happened during the ten days of teshubah. During the Yom Kippur morning prayers, the landlord approached the Rav's young son Berish (later to become famous as the Tchebiner Rav), and pointed to the lengthy poem-song that the people sing during the high point of the morning prayers., "Go tell your father," the rich man told the child, "there are so many songs, maybe it is possible to forgo one of them..."

The landlord was certain that the Rav would never consider leaving out any of the songs, let alone one so important that it is actually recited during the high point of the prayers. Young Berish went over to his father and repeated the message. The Rav, who was certainly very cognizant of the sanctity of his song and the gravity of this ancient custom, walked over to the hazan and motioned to him to leave out this song. \ On Saturday night word came from the landlord. He would forgive the back rent owed and the widow and her children could stay. Young Berish and his brother Nahum, (also to become a great Rabbi) promptly ran out of the house and raced through the streets, each hoping to be the one to tell the widow the good tidings. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

**We are not surprised to see how Hashem cares for us from how He runs the world and how He rewards us for our good deeds.** But to learn this lesson from how Hashem punishes a thief, this is truly remarkable. The Torah says that if a person steals an ox or a sheep and sells it or slaughters it, he must pay five times the amount of the ox and four times the amount of the sheep, as a fine. Why the discrepancy between the ox and the sheep? The Gemara says that when a person stole an ox he had to pull it away from the owner's house, but when he took the sheep, he had to carry it on his shoulders so as to run away faster. That little embarrassment which he suffered in carrying the sheep on his shoulders reduces his fine so that he only pays four times the amount, not five. What Divine concern do we learn from here! Even though this man is a thief, he still is judged by Hashem Who is compassionate and just. How much reassurance should this give us that G-d is watching over us, taking every minute detail into consideration of His Divine Providence. We should turn to Him for everything; He is our caring Father. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### **RABBI ELI MANSOUR Setting the Table**

In Parashat Mishpatim, G-d presents many of the fundamental rules governing the Torah's system of civil law. G-d introduces this section by instructing Moshe, "These are the statutes which you shall place before them." Rashi explains: "The Almighty said to Moshe: Do not think to yourself, 'I will teach them the chapter and the law twice or three times until it is properly arranged in their mouths,' and I will not go through the trouble of explaining to them the reasons and explanations of the matter.' It therefore says, 'that you shall place before them' – like a table that is set and ready for people to eat."

Rashi explains that when G-d instructs Moshe to "place" the laws before Beneh Yisrael, He means that Moshe must not simply state the law, but also provide the background explanation, "like a set table" ("Ke'shulhan Ha'aruch").

How are we to understand this comparison between teaching Torah and a "set table"?

Rav Haim Vital, in his Sha'ar Ha'kedusha (1:2), writes that all people are made from four basic elements – fire, water, air and earth – and all negative qualities in people stem from an imbalance caused by these elements. Arrogance is the result of excessive fire, as fire rises and thus represents feelings of superiority and self-absorption. This also includes outgrowths of

arrogance, such as anger and the pursuit of fame. Desires for forbidden pleasures stems from the water, which is what produces food and is thus the symbol of indulgence. Sins of speech are the product of abundant air, and earth, which is stationary, represents depression, which leads to lethargy and inactivity.

The experience of bringing a sacrifice upon the altar in the Bet Ha'mikdash served to correct these imbalances and restore proper equilibrium to the spirit. Fire constantly burned on the altar; salt, which is taken from the water, is poured on all sacrifices; the penitent sinner confessed over his sacrifices, using his faculty of speech; and the altar was constructed on the site from which G-d took earth for creating Adam. Thus, the process of offering a sacrifice incorporated all four elements, and it thus served to rectify the deficiencies in the soul affecting all four areas of human conduct.

The Gemara in Masechet Berachot (55) comments that after the Temple's destruction, a person's table brings atonement in place of the altar. This is why Jewish tradition requires conducting oneself with respect and decorum during a meal, as the experience of sitting by the table is seen as a religious act, whereby we earn atonement. Rav Haim Vital relates that his great mentor, the Arizal, always ensured to eat his meals at a table that had four legs. The reason, perhaps, is that the four legs of the table signify the four elements of the soul which require correction. As the table is meant to replace the altar in bringing us atonement by helping us refine our souls, it must have four legs to signify the four elements.

Torah wisdom also consists of four categories, known by the acrostic "Pardes" – Peshat, Remez, Derash and Sod. These are the four different areas of Torah knowledge, and they, like the four legs of the table, correspond to the four elements of the soul. By studying all four areas, we can repair the imperfections of the various parts of our being, thus bringing ourselves ever closer to spiritual perfection. And thus when a teacher teaches Torah, this must be the ultimate goal – to incorporate all four areas of "Pardes" in order to help his students refine and perfect all four areas of their souls.

This might be Rashi's intent in comparing the instruction of Torah to a "set table." Significantly, Rashi compares teaching Torah not to the food on the table, but rather to the table itself. Torah must be arranged before the student as a four-legged table, including elements from all four areas of Torah for the purpose of refining all four elements of the students'

souls. This is the desired effect of our study – not merely the acquisition of precious wisdom for life, but also the cleansing of our souls so they can become purer and more perfect.

### Rabbi Wein

In an article that appeared two months ago in the Jewish Review of Books, Daniel Gordis wrote about the sorry state of the Conservative movement in the current American Jewish scene. The Pew Report documented, with a great body of anecdotal evidence, the demise of this once most numerous and powerful movement.

Gordis himself is the scion of a distinguished rabbinical family that exercised great influence in the Conservative movement over the past six decades. Gordis correctly bemoans the fact that for most American Jews their connection to Judaism can only be found in halachically rigorous Orthodoxy or in a vague liberal, upper crust, vacuous social agenda which claims somehow to be a representation of the Jewish religion.

I also bemoan this fact of American Jewish life. I have long felt that a great deal of the responsibility for the apparently inexorable demise of the American Jewish community lies with the failure of the Conservative movement in preserving the Jewish identity and self-worth of its lay adherents.

If Conservative leadership would have spent energy and creativity in preserving Jewish values, families, a spirit of the Sabbath and a sense of loyalty to fellow Jews instead of aping current social trends that were doomed to spiritual obsolescence, the movement would be stronger and vital today.

Instead it seems doomed to extinction as the title of Gordis' article indicates. I feel that it is not an exaggeration to state that the failure of the Conservative movement to maintain itself over the past decades has contributed greatly to the sorry state of non-belief, disloyalty and lack of spirituality, which characterizes current American Jewish society.

Gordis rightly puts the blame for this failure on the spiritual leadership of the movement, which made few demands on its congregants and succumbed to every societal whim of the time. A religion, which in essence stands for nothing and allows everything, cannot in the long run remain viable and alive.

Gordis emphasizes how the (in)famous decision of the Conservative movement in 1950 to allow its congregants to drive to the synagogue on Shabbat

not only helped destroy the Shabbat but also contributed to the destruction of the movement itself. People instinctively saw through the sham and realized that if it was permissible to drive to the synagogue than it must also somehow be permissible on Shabbat to drive to the golf course.

People have the ability to do as they please but nevertheless a religious movement must always remain an arbiter of right and wrong, of what is permissible and what should not be done. By blurring that line the Conservative movement lost its identity and its reason for existence.

There are many Orthodox Jews who are not really halachically observant in all forms of technical requirements. Nevertheless they realize that Orthodoxy stands for basic principles and historical beliefs that remain valid and uncompromising in its demands on its adherents. The Jew who drives his automobile to attend Shabbat services at an Orthodox synagogue is aware that he or she is not observing the Shabbat as it should be observed.

One is entitled to behave as one wishes but the requiem for the Conservative movement was pretty much self inflicted by its dumbing down of the core principles of Judaism and severing itself from the ideas of Jewish spirituality and historical continuity.

There is a dangerous trend that exists in the fringes of the Modern Orthodox Jewish world to imitate these errors of the Conservative movement. Feminist fetishes, women rabbis, condoning what the Torah specifically forbids, and disregarding lessons of past history and current conditions will in no way guarantee the survival of the Jewish family, the Orthodox synagogue or the general Jewish society.

A greater concentration on the value systems that the Torah represents, a true sense of tolerance for others and for differing opinions and an emphasis on spiritual growth as a necessary companion for pure Torah knowledge can create a wider reach and a stronger appeal in Orthodoxy. A clear definition of what we are, a delineation between true Jewish values and passing current fads and a sense of response to the existential questions of life – who I am, what am I doing here, and of what value is my existence – is the basic core of Jewish belief, theology and history.

The Conservative movement was somehow unable or unwilling to address these basic needs of the human soul. This more than anything else has led to its decline and predicted extinction. One would hope that the Orthodox Jewish world, instead of the

exulting in unwarranted triumphalism, would learn the proper lessons from the debacle of current American Jewish life.

### Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

Our parsha takes us through a bewildering transition. Until now in Shemot we have been carried along by the sweep and drama of the narrative: the Israelites' enslavement, their hope for freedom, the plagues, Pharaoh's obstinacy, their escape into the desert, the crossing of the Red Sea, the journey to Mount Sinai and the great covenant with God.

Suddenly, now, we find ourselves faced with a different kind of literature altogether: a law code covering a bewildering variety of topics, from responsibility for damages to protection of property, to laws of justice, to Shabbat and the festivals. Why here? Why not continue the story, leading up to the next great drama, the sin of the golden calf? Why interrupt the flow? And what does this have to do with leadership?

The answer is this: great leaders, be they CEOs or simply parents, have the ability to connect a large vision with highly specific details. Without the vision, the details are merely tiresome. There is a well-known story of three men who are employed cutting blocks of stone. When asked what they are doing, one says, "Cutting stone," the second says, "Earning a living," the third says, "Building a palace." Those who have the larger picture take more pride in their labour, and work harder and better. Great leaders communicate a vision.

But they are also painstaking, even perfectionist, when it comes to the details. Edison famously said, "Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration." It is attention to detail that separates the great artists, poets, composers, filmmakers, politicians and heads of corporations from the merely average. Anyone who has read Walter Isaacson's biography of the late Steve Jobs knows that he had an attention to detail bordering on the obsessive. He insisted, for example, that all Apple stores should have glass staircases. When he was told that there was no glass strong enough, he insisted that it be invented, which it was (he held the patent).

The genius of the Torah was to apply this principle to society as a whole. The Israelites had come through a transformative series of events. Moses knew there had been nothing like it before. He also knew, from God, that none of it was accidental or incidental. The Israelites had experienced slavery to make them

cherish freedom. They had suffered, so that they would know what it feels like to be on the wrong side of tyrannical power. At Sinai God, through Moses, had given them a mission statement: to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," under the sovereignty of God alone. They were to create a society built on principles of justice, human dignity and respect for life.

But neither historical events nor abstract ideals – not even the broad principles of the Ten Commandments – are sufficient to sustain a society in the long run. Hence the remarkable project of the Torah: to translate historical experience into detailed legislation, so that the Israelites would live what they had learned on a daily basis, weaving it into the very texture of their social life. In the parsha of Mishpatim, vision becomes detail, and narrative becomes law.

So, for example: "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything" (Ex. 21: 2-3). At a stroke, in this law, slavery is transformed from a condition of birth to a temporary circumstance – from who you are to what, for the time being, you do. Slavery, the bitter experience of the Israelites in Egypt, could not be abolished overnight. It was not abolished even in the United States until the 1860s, and even then, not without a devastating civil war. But this opening law of our parsha is the start of that long journey.

Likewise the law that "Anyone who beats their male or female slave with a rod must be punished if the slave dies as a direct result" (Ex. 21: 20). A slave is not mere property. He or she has a right to life.

Similarly the law of Shabbat that states: "Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed" (Ex. 23: 12). One day in seven slaves were to breathe the air of freedom. All three laws prepared the way for the abolition of slavery, even though it would take more than three thousand years.

There are two laws that have to do with the Israelites' experience of being an oppressed minority: "Do not mistreat or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in Egypt" (Ex. 22: 21) and "Do not oppress a stranger; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt. (23: 9).

And there are laws that evoke other aspects of the people's experience in Egypt, such as, "Do not take



advantage of the widow or the fatherless. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry" (Ex. 22: 21-22). This recalls the episode at the beginning of the Exodus, "The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. (Ex. 2: 23-25).

In a famous article written in the 1980s, Yale law professor Robert Cover wrote about "Nomos and Narrative." [1] By this he meant that beneath the laws of any given society is a nomos, that is, a vision of an ideal social order that the law is intended to create. And behind every nomos is a narrative, that is, a story about why the shapers and visionaries of that society or group came to have that specific vision of the ideal order they sought to build.

Cover's examples are largely taken from the Torah, and the truth is that his analysis sounds less like a description of law as such than a description of that unique phenomenon we know as Torah. The word "Torah" is untranslatable because it means several different things that only appear together in the book that bears that name.

Torah means "law." But it also means "teaching, instruction, guidance," or more generally, "direction." It is also the generic name for the five books, from Genesis to Deuteronomy, that comprise both narrative and law.

In general, law and narrative are two distinct literary genres that have very little overlap. Most books of law do not contain narratives, and most narratives do not contain law. Besides which, as Cover himself notes, even if people in Britain or America today know the history behind a given law, there is no canonical text that brings the two together. In any case in most societies there are many different ways of telling the story. Besides which, most laws are enacted without a statement of why they came to be, what they were intended to achieve, and what historical experience led to their enactment.

So the Torah is a unique combination of nomos and narrative, history and law, the formative experiences of a nation and the way that nation sought to live its collective life so as never to forget the lessons it learned along the way. It brings together vision and detail in a way that has never been surpassed.

That is how we must lead if we want people to come with us, giving of their best. There must be a vision to

inspire us, telling us why we should do what we are asked to do. There must be a narrative: this is what happened, this is who we are and this is why the vision is so important to us. Then there must be the law, the code, the fastidious attention to detail, that allow us to translate vision into reality and turn the pain of the past into the blessings of the future. That extraordinary combination, to be found in almost no other law code, is what gives Torah its enduring power. It is a model for all who seek to lead people to greatness.

### **Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky Parsha Parables - Sealed and Delivered**

This parsha is called Mishpatim. Simply translated it means ordinances. The portion entails laws that deal with various torts and property damages. It discusses laws of damages, of servitude, of lenders and borrowers, employers and laborers, laws of lost items and the responsibilities of the finder. Many of these mitzvos that are discussed in the section of Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat. But there are quite a few mitzvos mentioned that engage the purely spiritual quality of the Jew. Some of them deal with kosher restrictions, others with our relationship with the Almighty.

One verse that deals with the requirement of shechita (ritual slaughter) begins with a prelude regarding holiness. "People of holiness shall you be to Me; you shall not eat flesh of an animal that was torn in the field; to the dog shall you throw it (Exodus 22:30). The question is simple. There are many esoteric mitzvos whose only justifiable reason is spiritual. Why does the Torah connect the fact that Jews should be holy with their prohibition of eating meat that was torn as opposed to ritually slaughtered? There are myriad mitzvos that require self-control and abstention. Can there be another intonation to the holiness prelude?

(I heard this amazing story a number of years ago from a reliable source; I saved it until I was able to use it as an appropriate parable to answer a scriptural difficulty. I hope that this is it!)

Dovid, a serious yeshiva student, boarded the last flight out of Los Angeles on his way back to his Yeshiva in New York. He was glad that they were going to serve food as he had left his home in a rush and did not get a chance to eat supper. Sitting next to him on the airplane, was a southern fellow who knew little about Judaism, and considered Dovid a curiosity. As the plane flew eastward, he bantered with Dovid about Jews, religion and the Bible, in a poor attempt to display his little bits of knowledge. Hungry and tired Dovid humored him with

pleasantries and not much talking. He was pleased when his kosher meal was finally served. The kosher deli sandwich came wrapped in a plastic tray, and was sealed with a multiple array of stickers and labels testifying to its kosher integrity. His new-found neighbor was amused as Dovid struggled to break the myriad seals and reveal the sandwich, which unbelievably looked just as appetizing as the non-kosher deli sandwich the airline had served him.

"Hey," he drawled, "your kosher stuff doesn't look too bad after all!" Dovid smiled and was about to take his first bite into the sandwich when he realized that he had to wash his hands for the bread. He walked to the back of the plane to find a sink. It took a little while to wash his hands properly, but soon enough he returned to his seat. His sandwich was still on his tray, nestled in its ripped-open wrapping, unscathed.

And then it dawned upon him. There is a rabbinic ordinance that if unmarked or unsealed meat is left unattended in a gentile environment, it is prohibited to be eaten by a Jew. The Rabbis were worried that someone may have switched the kosher meat for non-kosher.

Dovid felt that in the enclosed atmosphere of an airplane cabin, nothing could have happened. After all, no one is selling meat five miles above earth, and would have reason to switch the meat, but a halacha is halacha, the rule is a rule, and Dovid did not want to take the authority to overrule the age-old Halacha.

Pensively he sat down, made a blessing on the bread and careful not to eat the meat, he took a small bite of the bread. Then he put the sandwich down and let his hunger wrestle with his conscience. "Hey pardner," cried his neighbor, "what's wrong with the sandwich?"

Dovid was embarrassed but figured; if he couldn't eat he would talk. He explained the Rabbinic law prohibiting unattended meat and then added with a self-effacing laugh, "and though I'm sure no one touched my food, in my religion, rules are rules."

His neighbor turned white. "Praise the Lord, the Rabbis, and all of you Jewish folk!" Dovid looked at him quizzically.

"When you were back there doin' your thing, I says to myself, "I never had any kosher deli meat in my life. I thought I'd try to see if it was as good as my New York friends say it is!

Well I snuck a piece of pastrami. But when I saw how skimpy I left your sandwich, I replaced your meat with

a piece of mine! Someone up there is watching a holy fellow such as yourself!"

The Pardes Yosef explains the correlation of the first half of the verse to the second with a quote from the Tractate Yevamos . The Torah is telling us more than an ordinance. It is relating a fact. "If you will act as a People of holiness then you shall not eat flesh of an animal that was torn in the field; to the dog shall you throw it. The purity of action prevents the mishaps of transgressions. Simple as that. Keep holy and you will be watched to ensure your purity. Sealed and delivered.

**AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL**  
"And these are the Judgments" (21:1)

The Mishkan (Sanctuary) was exceedingly important, and more space is devoted to it in the Torah than anything else. Yet the first subject to be treated at length after the giving of the Torah was the subject of laws governing relations between men. Just as "Derech Eretz (ethical behavior) preceded the Torah" (Vayikra Rabbah (9:3), so also in the Torah from Sinai the Mishpatim between men was the service of Hashem that was taught prior to the service of the Mishkan.

Like all Torah practices, these Judgments governing behavior towards men are also intended chiefly to keep us ever mindful of Hashem. Although these Mishpatim cause the welfare of men and also the perfection of their character, yet the most important achievement of even these Judgments is to serve as constant reminders that Hashem looks always upon men's deeds, and that we must behave always as one behaves in the Presence of the King.

By the manner in which a man relates to his fellowmen, so also does he relate to Hashem. One who is selfish or impatient towards men cannot be otherwise to Hashem, and "Anyone that the fellowmen are pleased with him, Hashem is pleased with him" (Avot 3:10). By fulfilling all the Mishpatim, men become perfect in their character traits: they learn to be considerate of others, they accustom themselves to restrain their desires, they overcome impatience and arrogance, and they also learn to fear Hashem.

Thus by fulfilling these obligations to our fellow Israelites, we become worthy of having among us the Mishkan and the Presence of Hashem.

Quoted from "A NATION IS BORN" by Rabbi Miller ZT'L