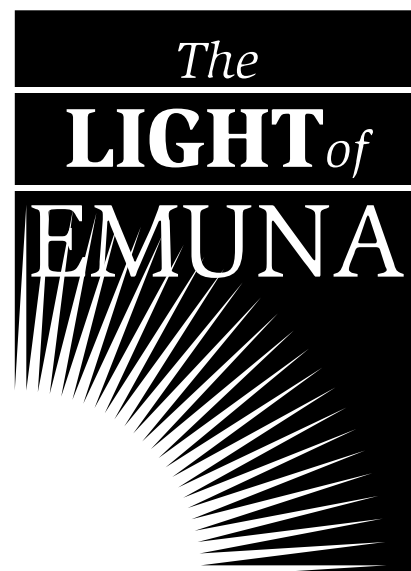


פרשת משפטים-שקלים

This week's adaptation is dedicated in honor of:
my dear wife, Devorah.



Based on Harav Menachem Azolai's "Ohr Ha'Emuna"

"ואלה המשפטים קשר תשים לפניהם" (כא, א)
"And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them."

Why does the *pasuk* begin with a vav (ו)? R' Yishmael explained that these laws are supplemental to the previous ones (the Ten Commandments) – just as they were given at Sinai, so were the laws in this week's *parsha*.¹

"כי תקנה עבד עברי" (כא, ב)
"If you buy a Jewish bondsman"

Just a week ago, we stood at the foot of Mount Sinai and the Torah descended from Heaven. It was an exalted, exciting and sublime assembly. Human beings were elevated to the level of angels. And this week we encounter a Jewish bondsman – the lowest status to which a Jew can fall. How can that be? One who hits his father or mother, one who curses his father or mother, one who hits a man and kills him – such despicable acts. How is that possible? Yet, this is our path in serving Hashem – even after the loftiest ascents, collapses occur. A Jewish soul is like a melody and melodies are not composed of high notes alone. A Jew soars higher, is elevated by feelings of holiness, feels so close to Hashem – and the next minute, he finds himself wallowing in matters of this world. Hashem wants us to coronate Him in the midst of this world – His monarchy cannot remain in the heavens. His sovereignty reaches all sectors of reality and descends to the minutest details and the lowest places.

¹

מכילתא

There are times during which nothing goes well. There are troubles with livelihood, raising children, peace in the home - or in spiritual matters – difficulty focusing on *davening*, struggles with maintaining one's joy – nothing is flowing smoothly. "Master of the World, I don't feel You. Master of the World, save me from this darkness, encourage me, buoy me, return me to You." We strive to be this type of Jew – to fight for our connection with Hashem, in the midst of the darkness, from within the routine, while dealing with all of the snags, when things go contrary to our desires, when things occur exactly as we had prayed they would not. Such is how Hashem created the world – but we do not despair, become confused – we attempt to lift ourselves up despite everything, to feel something, to connect. When we do not feel anything, we continue nonetheless – we recite the blessings, we continue to pray, we force a smile to our lips. We must be happy even during these periods, even when we sense nothing and everything is bleak. That is what Hashem wants – this type of service. We must remember that everything is from Hashem, He is the conductor and He knows exactly what we need to become close to Him. It is difficult, things are bad, we feel dreary, we wonder where the inspiration, passion and sweetness have gone? There is a Creator – we must turn to Him, talk to Him, ask of Him. This is the route on which He is guiding us and we must believe fully that this is best for us – that from here salvation will sprout. There

is no other path. No one's life progresses perfectly – everyone faces his own challenges, from various directions. There is no tranquility – unless we strengthen our *emuna* that Hashem is in control, he maneuvers all causes – then, we stop blaming ourselves and blaming others. Even when we stumble or fail we have reason to be joyful for then we begin to understand that we cannot go it alone. We recognize that we need Hashem. Hashem is our address for everything that is lacking and for everything that happens to us. He created us so that, at every stage of life, we are completely dependent upon Him. He is with us in all of our disappointments and He helps us rise back up.

Rav Eliezer Berland: A person must never think that he accomplishes anything with his own abilities, that he can walk alone, perform without Hashem's assistance. A person believes that he rules the world – he walks, he breathes. In one second, when some tiny part of his body moves a fraction of a millimeter – he is done. He can suddenly require surgeries, tests, x-rays – and he is instantly made aware of the fact that he is not G-d, he is not an angel, he is not in charge.

As we age we become more aware of this. When we are young we can convince ourselves that we are invincible, but as we age we gain greater insight into the blessing of *asher yatzar*. We must open our eyes and recognize this while we are still healthy and strong – health is from Hashem, strength is from Hashem, everything is from Hashem.

Our purpose in this world is to acknowledge that we bring about nothing by ourselves – Hashem steers the world, we merely observe G-dliness in every step, every movement, every thought and every word. When we move our hand, our leg – it is all Hashem. A person can be very successful, building buildings, even building *yeshivas* – but if he fails to accept that it is all Hashem – he is building the Tower of Babel. The Maggid of Mezeritch famously forbade his students from using the word “I.” There is no “I.”

The entire Torah, Gemara, Shulchan Aruch, all

tefillos – are all so that we realize that there is Hashem in the world – we do nothing on our own. Every single breath is from Hashem.

Life is a seesaw. There are “up” times and “down” times. Sometimes we experience the pleasantness of Hashem in a powerful manner and feel so connected to Him and, at other times, our hearts are like stone. We long for a time when we will be constantly inspired and alight. Our worst enemy is routine - when we do things purely out of habit, out of obligation, like robots, without heart, without feeling, without desires or yearnings, without joy or passion. “Master of the World, I do not wish to live like this – I want to want, to feel, to be cheerful. What will become of me? Why have You abandoned me?” When we turn to Hashem in this manner, He immediately descends to us, He extends His hand. He is always found with us, we need merely seek Him. “And Moshe approached the thick cloud – where Hashem was.”² There, in the blackness, in the midst of the thick cloud, in the midst of concealment – there, Hashem was found.

What devastation our forefathers lived with – Yoseph was cut off from his family, Avraham was forced to expel his son from his home, Sarah was barren for so many years and had to share her husband with her servant, Rivka had to send Yaakov away to protect him from Eisav. Nevertheless, they went on, no questions asked. That is Hashem's greatest source of pleasure – people serving Him despite everything. We feel like we are in a black hole but we know You are here. Our job is to know Him. It is impossible with intellect alone – we must have *emuna*. Nothing is going right – but I have *emuna*. *Emuna* is the foundation of Creation. After 120 years, we will see that in that place where we understood nothing – it was Hashem. When things were so difficult – Hashem was with us. We will be overjoyed when we see how Hashem took us by the hand even when we felt unable to continue. One who merits understanding this now – that everything is for his own good - one

² ומשה נגש אל הערפל אשר שם האלוקים (כ, יח)

who has *emuna* and does not complain, one who trusts that everything is for the best – essentially, already hears the melody of the next world. As Rebbe Nachman taught, when a person knows that all events are for his own good, it is an aspect of the next world.³

A person who participated in the great assembly at Mount Sinai could subsequently fall into servitude, the worst kind being enslavement to the *yetzer hora* and urges. When our nature and our inclinations overpower us, when it so grueling to curb them, that is our worst anguish. The agonies of the soul are so much more painful than those of the body. Suffering of the soul makes one feel as if he has no freedom, that he is a slave to the *yetzer hora* who hounds him mercilessly. Every person has his own weaknesses. A person can be strong and in control, but at specific moments he is a complete captive. He can be completely disciplined for twenty-three hours a day and for one hour become a slave to his nature. He may even be able to conceal it from anyone else, but it burns within. Everyone knows the limitations of their own restraint and in what areas they are powerless – and that only intensifies the shame.⁴

Our only remedy in this battle is Hashem. We must beg Him to save us from our urges, to guard us, to give us the power to conquer. Without Him - there is no hope. We beg for a taste of the flavor of holiness so that everything else appears insignificant and bland.

The soul is drawn to holiness - that is its source. It tolerates terrible suffering from the vanities of this world and is pulled towards its pure roots. Our struggle is to empower the soul over the body - to transform the body into the holy of holies. This is all that the soul desires. At those compassionate moments when we unexpectedly experience Hashem and we wish to cry, to pour out sacred words of prayer – we suddenly witness miracles, we feel Hashem amid the tribulations – it is such a spiritual delight and

that is our response to the *yetzer hora* and the urges. Darkness transmutes into light.

Our *parsha* lowers us into the nethermost places – but it also provides counsel on how to escape – “People of holiness shall you be to Me.”⁵ We must pray for, desire and have *emuna* in sanctity – to believe that it is the gateway to Hashem. Holiness is humility, foregoing, thinking of Hashem constantly, accepting Hashem’s sovereignty. We must accept that we cannot do it alone.

שבת שקלים

One might have assumed that after receiving the Torah last week, we would have continued with laws between man and G-d. Instead, the Torah went on to the regulations governing relationships among men - because loving each other is the fundamental precept of Torah.

We are instructed to help with the excessive burden of our enemy’s donkey. We must ignore all of our prior calculations and lend a hand. R’ Moshe of Kobrin used to say that if a day passed in which he had not performed some favor for another Jew – it was not considered to be a real day. After the great Vilna Gaon died, his students fasted so that he would be able to inform them as to what was considered most significant in Heaven. Their Rebbe revealed to them that Heaven values *chesed* above all else.

R’ Yoseph Shaul Nathanson was a tremendous *talmid chochom* and a noted philanthropist. Once, he travelled with his brother-in-law, R’ Mordechai Zev Ettinger, to collect a large ransom on behalf of Jewish captives. On their journey they encountered a fabulously wealthy individual who offered to provide them with the entire sum required if they would dine with him and allow him to wait on them throughout the meal. The Rabbonim happily agreed and the man proceeded to serve them like a simple waiter. Upon the conclusion of the meal, the man

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באור פני מלך חיים
עלה לתרופה

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ואנשי קדש תהיון לי (כב, ל)

asked what sum was needed and promptly handed it to them. Intrigued, they asked where the man had learned to give so magnanimously and honor *talmidei chochomim* in such a manner. The man told them the following story: When he had first married he was desperately poor. He had decided to borrow money from friends and family and try his luck at the fair. He managed to put together a decent sum of 400 coins and set out. On his way, he met a crying woman who had come to the fair to buy a dowry for her daughter but had lost the money. She was now certain that wedding would be called off. He asked how much money she had lost and she said 400 coins. Without hesitation, he proffered her his entire fund and ran away before she could protest. Having no investment ability he decided to head on to the fair anyway and see if he could figure something out. He stopped to pray, "Master of the World! You know that my situation is desperate, I beg you to help me like I helped that dejected woman. Help me!!" Before completing his *tefilla* a man approached him with a coral necklace and asked him if he wanted it. He did but he did not have the money with which to pay for it. The merchant replied that he

looked like an honest man and he should take it on consignment. They agreed and exchanged contact information and our protagonist proceeded to sell the necklace for twice what he had agreed to pay the merchant. When he tried to find the merchant so that he might repay the loan, he could not be found – neighbors said that no such person ever existed. The man concluded his story, "That began my ascent to extraordinary wealth and I've always recognized that that act of *tzedaka*, when I could ill afford it, propelled me to my current status. I've never forgotten the power of our Torah and I endeavor to repay it by honoring *talmidei chochomim* as much and as often as possible."

This Shabbos, we read how everyone gives a half *shekel*, no more and no less. To be complete we require another Jew. Each of us is incomplete without others. The *shekalim* represents the quintessential integration of spirituality and materialism. We take money, the symbol of physical wealth, and we elevate all the way to the actual *Mishkan*. We cannot be satisfied with the material – we need the soul and we need each other.

תפילה

Master of the World! Help me realize that I truly want to be close to You, to feel Your presence, to love You, to be beguiled by You, to experience Your pleasantness. I cannot be entrenched in the mindset of those who are easily offended, who take affront, who feel as if they are due something, who get angry, who bear grudges.

Help me, Father, to understand that it is ridiculous to get stuck in that place and still hope to sing and dance to You – because when we get offended, angry, insulted – we are constantly preoccupied with what was done to us, what we deserved – we are not focused on You – we cannot walk together.

Therefore, **Master of the World**, I beg of You, help me learn to forego, to forgive, to judge favorably, to think well of others, to consider their challenges, to convert my anger into compassion – may I always remember the following general rule: It is inconceivable to get angry at someone else because I can never be sure that, had I been in his situation, I would have acted any differently. And, if this is difficult for me and I still become irate, insulted – grant me the strength to raise my head to You and never cease pleading, "Master of the World, free me from this condition quickly so that I may return to You, feel You, love You."

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

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Notice: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the Parsha Sheet, *Ohr Ha'Emuna*, disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai *Shlita* and is not a complete or exact adaptation of *Ohr Ha'Emuna* and is not necessarily even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented therein. *Ohr Ha'Emuna* is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azolai has not reviewed this material - any inaccuracies, omissions or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy and it provides some *chizuk*.

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To receive this adaptation by weekly email, email me at LightofEmuna@doveliass.com