



MACHSHAVOT

Parashat Mishpatim

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Injecting Ourselves With Passion

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I had a very interesting conversation this week with a friend of mine.

We were talking about the various things now on zoom such as *shiurim* and zoom '*minyanim*' for people who can't attend shul.

He said to me 'Isn't it fantastic!' and I thought to myself, it's so remarkable that we can access this on technology - but it's not fantastic, it's a tragedy that we have to do this.

This is in no way a substitute for what it should be.

I still go to shul, I still go to a *minyan* every day, three times a day, thankfully my shul is open with all the Covid guidelines. However, it is *davening* and leaving. It's not a *Bet Kneset*, it's not a place we come and schmooze and we have a sense of community, a sense of *kehilla*. Am I grateful that I have the chance to *daven* with a *minyan* and say *kaddish* for my parents? – of course. Is it fantastic? No, it's very sad.

However, my question is the following, do we realize what we're missing? What do I mean by that? Do we understand the centrality of *tefilla b'tzibur*? The fact that we can't, that so many people can't go to shul for whatever reason, do we miss it? Do we feel the lack?

At the moment we are so angry and so upset about what's happening in parts of the Charedi world. Where they're going to shul, when they're having their weddings, going about life as if nothing's happened.

However, think about it, part of the reason (and I'm not excusing it at all) is because in the Charedi world you have to *daven* in a *minyan* three times a day. It's what Jews do. Of course we say yes you do, but at the same time you have to take in the government guidelines, you've got to take in the covid secure measures.

However, the simple fact is, do we feel a sense of lack? Do we feel a sense that this is something we are missing out on, or are we quite content?

I remember someone said to me about the recent shul services – 'It's so nice, I get a lot of space, it's quiet, Shul services fly by, I like this.' Yes, there are 'benefits' to the current arrangements, but you know what, that's not shul. This is a 'sealed room' kind of shul we've had to create because of Covid,

but it's not what it should be and we should be absolutely distraught that we can't resume our daily lives as Jews the way we used to, especially when it comes to *davening* in a *minyan*.

I remember I was taught in Yeshivat HaKotel, all of us were, the importance of *davening* three times a day in a *minyan*. In Yeshiva it was rather simple to do that, but the messages were for when we returned to the UK, began university and the next stage of life.

I remember when I got to Leeds University it was a big shock for me because there was no daily *minyan* at Hillel. Yes, on Shabbat we had, but during the week we didn't. I had to *daven beyechidut*, by myself, or maybe with one or two others.

However, I remember so clearly one Sunday afternoon in the first term one of the boys in Hillel told us that his parents were coming to visit that afternoon and his dad had Yahrtzeit that night. So he asked us if we could please make a *minyan* for his dad so he could say *Kaddish*, of course all the boys agreed.

So there we were Sunday afternoon in the Hillel shul, and I remember that I was so emotional while I was *davening* the silent Amidah. I was thinking to myself that soon I'm going to hear *Chazarat Hashatz*-the repetition of the Amidah for the first time in a while, soon I'm going to hear *Kedusha*, I'm going to hear *Kaddish* after the Amidah. I hadn't heard them during the week for such a long time. I really remember that feeling, that emotional feeling of thank you Hashem, that I can now *daven* once again in a *minyan*. I felt a sense of lack and that's what inspired me and a few of us in that *minyan* after that day to say we've got to make sure this happens more often.

Eventually we started a regular *minyan* at Hillel, *Shacharit*, *Mincha* and *Maariv* and by the second year it had really grown because we realized we couldn't go on like this.

Of course, at the moment we can't change anything, because of the government regulations and we shouldn't, but we have to realize there should be a real sense of lack, a sense that we're not holding where we should be holding. That this is not in the slightest way ideal.

There's a fascinating idea in the *parasha* which I think brings this home. *Parashat Mishpatim* is generally known not to be the most exciting parsha! I mean we finished with all the great stories of *Adam* and *Chavah*, of *Avraham*, *Yitzchak* and *Yaakov*, of *Yosef* and *Moshe* - of *kriat yam suf* and *Matan Torah*, that's all gone, it's now *halachot* – *mishpatim* - laws.

However, if you look at the end of the *parsha*, there is the most incredible story.

It is just after we said *naaseh v'nishma*, after the Jewish people committed themselves to a life of Torah and mitzvot

לְאֶהָרָה שִׁינִיָּק. זָמַם מִיַּעֲבֹד שְׂאוֹהֵי בְּאֵן בְּדִגְן וְרֹהָאֵן הָ שִׁמְ לַעֲיִן

They went up, Moshe, Aharon, Nadav, Avihu and the seventy elders.

וְרָהֲטָלְמִיָּמָה שֶׁהִמָּצַעַ כִּי־רִי־פִסֵּה תִנְבֵּלָה שְׁעָמִ כִּי־לִגְרֵת־חֲתוּ לְאֶהָרָה שִׁי־יִקְלָא תֵּאֱוָרָהִי

They saw Hashem and under his feet was the likeness of sapphire brickwork and it was like the essence of the heaven in purity.

And then it says:

וְיָתִן שִׁיֵּן וּלְכֹאֲרֵי־מִי־לֵאֲהֶתֶאֱוֹזְחָתִי וְדִחַלֵּשׁ אֶל־לְאֶהָרָה שִׁינִיָּבִילִי צֶאֱלֵאֵן

Against the great men of Israel, He didn't stretch out his hand - they gazed at Hashem and they ate and drank.

The *Mefarshim* are split on what this means, when it talks about that Hashem didn't stretch out his hand - is that a negative or a positive? Was He happy with them or was He angry?

Rashi says based on *Tanchuma*, that they sinned grievously, He wanted to kill them for what they did. How dare they, in the presence of the *Shechina*, eat and drink. What are you doing! This is a holy place *kadosh kadosh*, you're not eating and drinking!!

Yet the *Ramban* says no, Hashem was praising them. Why?

When you have Hashem's presence have a *simcha*, eat and drink! It's something to celebrate, you're close to Hashem. They ate and drank in grateful celebration of the great spiritual privilege that Hashem awarded them.

But with both opinions, whether *Rashi* and the negative or the *Ramban* and the positive, what are they both saying?

When you're in the presence of Hashem it should mean something. It should give you an emotional connection, whether it's too much or too little, okay that's a discussion, but you've got to feel something.

At the moment we're going through a vaccination drive. Please God soon the whole country, the whole world will be vaccinated.

As far as our spiritual virus, we have got to inject ourselves with passion.

I feel so much that our world, the modern Orthodox world, we don't have that passion. The Charedi world, whether you disagree with things at the moment, fine. However, the Charedi world as a whole has the passion, has the commitment, has that *yirah* and *ahavat* Hashem that we have to learn from.

Of course we have to make sure that we learn from it within the guidelines of the modern world as well as Halacha and how to make sure that we are conducting ourselves as a *Kiddush Hashem*. However, we must strive to realize that passion, that commitment, that drive - that's something we should be emulating. Something we should be inspiring ourselves to be.

One final idea, that stone, that *Sapir*, that brick under Hashem's *kisei hakavod*, what does it mean?

The Midrash explains that Hashem placed it there because during our slavery in *Mitzrayim*, it was His way of remembering our sadness, our devastation while we were slaves and while He was preparing to redeem us. However, throughout that difficult time when we were in a terrible state, Hashem said 'I'm remembering you, I'm seeing you, I'm relating to your pain.'

In the same way we have to realize now that we cannot connect to Hashem in the way that we used to because of what's happening. We can't *daven B'kol Ram*. We can't *daven* in a Shul that's full. We can't have all the celebrations and the *simchas* that we normally do, to eat and drink and to celebrate with Hashem. We just can't.

However, we have to remember in our minds and in our hearts, that there is a lack, we are missing Hashem, we are missing the way we used to connect.

We should feel a sense of loss, should feel a sense of distance and doubt because we don't have it.

We pray that the injections, the vaccinations will help us restore our physical health to fight off this virus and give us the ability to once again inject ourselves with passion and commitment to really connect to Hashem in the way we should and to feel now, that even though we have Zoom and we have all this technology this is no substitute for real *yirah*, real *ahavah*, real connection.

Please God speedily and soon.

Shabbat Shalom

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Rav Ari Silberman, Rav Shaliach Mizrachi UK - Manchester



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Rav Andrew Shaw, CEO of Mizrachi UK

Rabbi Shaw served as Rabbi at Stanmore and Canons Park United Synagogue for over 15 years. He has also been a leading figure in the United Synagogue's central organisation for more than a decade and was the founder of Tribe as well as Director of the Living & Learning department. Rabbi Shaw lives in Edgware, London with his wife and two sons.

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How to Get Rid of Bad Habits and Create Better Ones!

Jodie Herszaft

Participant of the Mizrahi UK Fellowship Programme

In this week's Parsha, we learn an incredible lesson from none other than an ox. We hear about the liabilities one has for their ox if any damage was caused by the animal. Whilst these were important laws for people living in the ancient world, what relevance do they have for us today? Let me explain...

The Torah teaches (Exodus 21:28-37) that if an ox gores once or twice, the owner of the ox is only responsible to pay for half of the damage. The reason given for this is that it is considered unusual for an ox to gore. The ox is considered a *tam*, "innocent" and therefore the owner is only partially liable because he did not anticipate that his "innocent" ox would gore. If, however, the ox gores a third time, then the owner is responsible to cover the full costs of the damage, since this animal has now shown it has a habit of goading. The animal is a *muad*, "warned", and the owner is expected to be aware and guard the animal more carefully.

However, the Talmud offers various scenarios in which the "warned ox", the ox that gored three times, can revert back to the legal status of an "innocent ox". For example, if a "warned ox" is sold to a new owner, the status of the ox changes and it becomes an "innocent ox". The assumption being that the sale of the ox will change its nature, transforming it from an ox that is prone to damaging into one that is gentle and domesticated.

Why though would the sale effect such deep change?

An animal develops bad habits while living in a specific setting, since various elements of the environment trigger the behaviour. The moment that the animal is placed in a new environment, the triggers are no longer present, and the animal can develop new patterns of positive behaviour.

Perhaps, the same is true for each of us. Keeping resolutions to improve a specific behaviour is very hard, and takes a tremendous amount of willpower. We increase the likelihood of success if we change our negative environment to a positive one with positive influences. Scientifically, habits can be broken down into three basic components: (1) the cue or trigger from the environment, (2) the action and (3) the reward. Therefore, by changing our environment and removing negative cues or triggers, we stand a greater chance in being successful in changing our habits.

May we always find ways to try and surround ourselves with positivity, especially in these more challenging times.

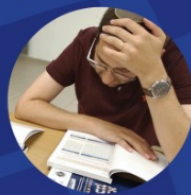
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