

Definitions

There is Creation, there is G-dliness and there is G-d.

Creation is a thought He thinks about.

G-dliness is His mode of thought.

G-d is beyond all thought.



Think JEWISH

לעילוי נשמות דוד בן יעקב ולאח בת יונה

ב"ה

Parshat Mishpatim
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Is He Aware of Us in Heaven?

By Aron Moss

Question:

My son recently died in an accident. Is he still aware of us now that he's in Heaven?

Answer:

We cannot comprehend the mystery of death.

But we know that our connection with a loved one is not only with their physical presence, but also, and more importantly, with their personality, their love, their energy, their spirit. And that relationship never goes away. It just takes another form.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe once spoke to a mother who was inconsolable after the loss of her son. He asked her, "What if I told you that your son isn't dead? Rather, he has gone to a place where he is safe and happy. He feels no pain; he has no fear and no regrets. You can't see him. But you can send him love packages, and he will receive them and enjoy them. If I told you this, would things be different?"

She thought about it and answered, "Well, I guess the pain would not be quite so unbearable

if I knew he was safe, and I could tell him that I love him."

"Well," the Rebbe told her, "this is in fact the case. Your son is in heaven, where he is at peace. And he can still feel your love. The love packages you send to him are the mitzvahs you do in his honor. With each good deed you do in his memory, his soul is elevated. Let the vacuum caused by your loss draw more light into the world."

Nothing can replace the physical touch of a hug, the pleasure of seeing your child grow and learn and play. But he is still with you. And he knows that he is blessed with a loving mother who will always think of him.

We don't know why it has to be this way. But one day, we will be reunited with the souls of our loved ones, and then we will understand it all. ■



A Hypersensitive People

By Mendel Kalmenson

Why have Jews been at the forefront of so many of history's moral battles? The South African struggle against apartheid, the American civil rights movement, and so many

others have benefited from a disproportionate percentage of Jewish participants.

What is it with us Jews? Can't we just keep to ourselves?

Perhaps this isn't surprising behavior for a nation that was charged at Mount Sinai to be a "light unto the nations."

We can argue about the definition of light, and yes, some have grossly mistaken darkness for light, but their mistake is in perception, not in motive.

The common denominator between them all—including the large proportion of Jews involved in the Bolshevik Revolution—is that they were driven by a higher calling: by a vision of a utopian world, in which goodness, justice, and equality reign supreme.

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Contents:

A Hypersensitive People

I can understand a ban on eating something that G-d insists is spiritually unhealthy. But what could be wrong with grilling a cheese-burger?

Just Think

The Borrowed Life

Our possessions, our talents, our very existence, have been entrusted to us by our Creator.

Not Just a Story:

The Power of a Good Deed

It looked like he had places to go and people to see. But he wasn't going anywhere.

Just Ask

Is He Aware of Us in Heaven?

Parshah In a Nutshell

Laws

Did You Know?

The Half-Shekel

About to Happen

Acts of Goodness and Kindness

Just a Minute

Standing Up

Just Do It

Lighten Up Your Mind

Just Think

Insights into the weekly Torah reading based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe ז"ל

The Borrowed Life

Adapted by Yanki Tauber

The Torah reading of Mishpatim contains a large part of the Torah's civil law—laws governing damages, theft, loans, etc. Also included are the laws governing the responsibilities of the borrower.

Generally, a borrower is responsible for almost anything that happens to the borrowed object, whether he was at fault or

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The Power of a Good Deed

By Alan Magill

It was incongruous. He lay in his bed wearing suit pants, a white shirt and tie. It looked like he had places to go and people to see. But he wasn't going anywhere. At least, that's what he told the recreation therapist who came to his room at the nursing home to invite him to the Shabbat afternoon get-together called Oneg Shabbat. His name was Shmuel.

Shmuel came to Oneg Shabbat every week. He enjoyed listening to the discussion about the Torah portion of the week, and he often shared his own insights and perspective. But today he was just staring up at the ceiling. The recreation therapist—whom I'll call Joel—really had to get back to the dining room, where 60 residents were waiting for the program to begin. But Joel wanted



so much for Shmuel to come, he wasn't ready to leave him yet.

"What's bothering you?" he asked.

When he didn't receive an answer, he asked again. Another minute passed, and he

asked once more. Finally, Shmuel told him that he didn't like the way one of the aides had spoken to him that morning. He didn't elaborate, but Joel knew that it was difficult enough for him to be in the nursing home... that so much had been taken away from him... that he didn't have the strength to fight off an affront to his dignity.

Joel was now two minutes late for his program.

Despite the 60 people waiting for him in the dining room, he felt a deeper obligation to help the normally gracious and social Shmuel get back to himself.

So Joel began a conversation that had nothing to do with the Oneg Shabbat, and nothing to do with the aide.

Grudgingly, Shmuel gave short answers to the questions Joel asked him. The topic turned to the past, and Shmuel told Joel about a job he had had 45 years earlier, collecting the quarters from the washing machines in New York apartment buildings. (Joel was now three minutes late for his program.)

Shmuel recalled the time he walked into the laundry room of one apartment building and

found three 100-dollar bills wrapped in a rubber band on the floor. He wanted to do the right thing and return the money to its owner, but he also had a job to do. As Shmuel continued to talk, Joel could see energy and vitality returning to his frail body.

Shmuel continued, "I called my boss from a pay phone and asked him what to do. He gave me permission to wait around and see if anyone came for the money, but insisted I would have to finish my route no matter what time I left the building.

"I decided to stay."

Shmuel was now smiling, and Joel was not even aware that he was six minutes late for the Oneg Shabbat.

"About fifteen minutes later," said Shmuel, "a woman came into the laundry room desperately looking for something. Then she began to sob, 'My husband's going to be so upset with me. I lost the rent money! Oh dear, what will I do?'"

Shmuel had Joel's rapt attention, and he knew it. "I said to her, 'You can stop crying, lady. I found your money.' When I handed her the money, she thanked me profusely and blessed me."

"That was a big mitzvah you did," Joel commented.

Beaming, as if the event he was describing was happening at that moment and not decades earlier, Shmuel said he was glad he had done it.

Then he got off the bed and, with a sense of purpose, said, "Let's go to Oneg Shabbat."

Following Shmuel down the hall, Joel was contemplative. If Shmuel had spent those 300 dollars oh so long ago, whatever material gain he might have acquired would almost definitely not be helping him now. But the kind deed he had done was able to comfort and fortify him, 45 years later! ■

It's Just About to Happen

Acts of Goodness and Kindness

Our nation has yearned for and anticipated the redemption since the moment the Temple was destroyed, nearly 2,000 years ago. The anticipation has grown in recent years, following the announcement by the Lubavitcher Rebbe that the era of redemption is upon us, and we must only increase in acts of goodness and kindness in order to be worthy to greet our redeemer.

The Rebbe pointed to various global phenomena as clear indicators that the process of redemption has indeed started: the end of the Cold War, the mass immigration of Soviet Jews to the land of their fathers, and the free world's ongoing trend of galvanizing resources to aid countries in need.



Synopsis of this week's
Torah portion:
Mishpatim
Exodus 21:1–24:18

Following the revelation at Sinai, G-d legislates a series of laws for the people of Israel. These include the laws of the indentured servant; the penalties for murder, kidnapping, assault and theft; laws pertaining to redress of damages, the granting of loans, and the responsibilities of the “Four Guardians”; and the rules governing the conduct of justice by courts of law.

Also included are laws warning against mistreatment of foreigners; the observance of the seasonal festivals, and the agricultural gifts that are to be brought to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem; the prohibition against cooking meat with milk; and the mitzvah of prayer. Altogether, the Parshah of Mishpatim contains 53 mitzvahs—23 impera-



Parshah in a
Nutshell

tive commandments and 30 prohibitions.

G-d promises to bring the people of Israel to the Holy Land, and warns them against assuming the pagan ways of its current inhabitants.

The people of Israel proclaim, “We will do and we will hear all that G-d commands us.” Leaving Aaron and Hur in charge in the Israelite camp, Moses ascends Mount Sinai and remains there for 40 days and 40 nights to receive the Torah from G-d. ■



*From the Sages
on the Parshah*

He shall pay for the loss of his work, and he shall fully heal him (21:19)

From here it is derived that a physician is allowed to heal [and we do not say that since G-d afflicted the person, it is forbidden to cure him].

(Talmud, Bava Kamma 85a)

The young wife of Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch had fallen ill, and the doctors were unanimous in their opinion that there was no hope of her recovery.

When her father-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, was told of the doctors' verdict, he said: “The Talmud specifically derives from the Torah that ‘a physician is allowed to heal.’ But nowhere has a doctor been given the right to declare a human being incurable.”

He shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep (21:37)

Said Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai: G-d is considerate of a person's dignity. For an ox, which the thief leads on foot and is not thereby degraded, he pays fivefold. For a sheep, which the thief had to carry on his shoulders, he pays only four times its value, since he was degraded by it.

Said Rabbi Meir: See how valuable work is. For an ox, whose theft deprived the owner of its labor, the thief pays fivefold. For the theft of a sheep, which caused no such loss of labor, he pays but four times.

(Mechilta; Rashi)

A WEEKLY MINI-GUIDE TO
JEWISH TRADITIONS

Torah Study

Lighten Up Your Mind

Jews are known as bright people. In fact, we've been a people of books and wisdom for four thousand years. Which makes for a lot of books and wisdom. What kind of wisdom? Well, there's the basic what-to-do-and-what-not-to-do stuff. Then there are the stories and legends. And then there's the real deep what-is-life-all-about wisdom, including the secrets of the Kabbalah and the chassidic masters. It's all there waiting for you. In fact, it's your personal heritage. It's called Torah.

Torah shares the same etymology as the Hebrew word *orah*, “light”—its teachings shine a light on life and show you which way to go. And its study is a mitzvah—actually, the greatest mitzvah we have.

When:

“You shall teach [it] to your children and speak its words when you sit in your house, when you walk on the way, when you lie down and when you rise”—Deuteronomy.

A Jew is always studying Torah—24/7/365. We take breaks to eat, sleep, pray, make a living and reenergize. The remainder of the time we connect to G-d by studying His wisdom.

The minimum requirement is that you fix some time for study once a day and once a night. Can't devote as much time as you'd like? Support a *yeshivah* and be a partner in their study.

Who:

The rich and the poor, healthy and sick, old and young, smart or dim. Torah is every Jew's personal heritage.

What:

“It is not your job to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it...”—Ethics.

Start with the rules that impact daily life, Shabbat, holidays, etc. And then keep on learning; there's more than enough material to last several lifetimes.

How:

- » Join a class at your local Chabad House; find one at Chabad.org/6268.
- » Get online to a Torah learning website (like, say, Chabad.org).
- » Study one-on-one with a scholar. Visit Chabad.org/489248 for details. ■

DID YOU KNOW?

When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, each Jew contributed an annual half-*shekel* to the Temple, which was due on the first day of Nissan. The funds raised were primarily used to purchase livestock for the communal sacrifices. Leftover monies were used to provide salaries for the judges and for the maintenance of the Temple, its vessels, and the city walls.

One month earlier, on the first of Adar, the courts began collecting the half-*shekel* contributions. In commemoration, the Torah reading of the Shabbat that falls on or before the first of Adar is supplemented with the verses that relate G-d's commandment to Moses regarding the first giving of the half-*shekel*.



JUST DO IT!