

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors:

- Etta Friedman, Kenny & Marla Friedman, and Moish & Ira Friedman, on the 2nd yahrtzeit of Nissan Reuven ben Shammai, Norman Friedman. May his *neshama* have an *aliya*.
- Chaim and Eleanor Leventhal, in memory of Eleanor's father, Dovid ben Elyakum, whose yahrtzeit is the 28th of Shevat. May his *neshama* have an *aliya*.

May the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the *shul* with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

Last week, we read about *Mattan Torah*. Our *mesorah* directs us to re-live the experience of *Maamad Har Sinai*. We stand up, reading the *aseres hadibros* in a special tune. To the best of our ability, we imagine that we were there—experiencing the glory of Hashem, that was manifest then, in an obvious way and now, in more subtle ways.

שמות (פרשת יתרו) פרק כ פסוק טו
(טו) וְכָל-הָעָם רְאִים אֶת-הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת-הַלַּפִּידִם וְאֵת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר וְאֶת-הַהָר עָשָׂן וַיַּרְא הָעָם וַיִּנְעֻזוּ וַיַּעֲמָדוּ מֵרָחֵק:

The **Ramban** writes:

השגות הרמב"ן לספר המצוות לרמב"ם שכחת הלאוין מצוה ב
המצוה השני' שנמנענו שלא נשכח מעמד הר סיני ולא נסיר אותו מדעתנו אבל יהיו עינינו ולבנו שם כל הימים והוא אמרו יתעלה (ואתחנן ד ט - י) השמר לך ושמור נפשך מאד פן תשכח את הדברים אשר ראו עיניך ופן יסורו מלבבך כל ימי חיך והודעתם לבניך ובניך ביום אשר עמדת לפני י"י אלהיך בחורב וגו'.

The second Mitzva (which Rambam forgot to count in his Minyan HaMitzvos) is "to never forget the experience of Maamad Har Sinai." It must be forever etched in our memory and our hearts and perspective must be influenced by that experience every day of our lives...

How can we accomplish that *mitzva*? We read the account of *Matan Torah* three times a year--on Shavuos, Parshas Yisro, and Parshas Va-eschanan. But is that enough to make this experience so real that "our hearts and perspective are influenced by that experience every day of our lives?"

The **Ramban** writes further: At Har Sinai, the Jewish people experienced the glory of Hshem in a very public way. The Mishkan was intended to help continue that feeling in a more subtle way.

רמב"ן שמות פרק כה
וסוד המשכן הוא, שיהיה הכבוד אשר שכן על הר סיני שוכן עליו בנסתר.

But this leaves us with two apparent questions:

First, in the text of the Torah, why is there an interruption between the giving of the *aseres hadibros* in parshas Yisro and the construction of the Mishkan in parshas Teruma? If the mishkan was a means for continuing the inspiration, why does it not **immediately** follow parshas Yisro?

Second, how are we, who have lived without a *Mishkan* and *Beis Hamikdash* for so long, expected to keep this memory alive?

I believe the answer to these questions lies in the fact that the *Mishkan* was meant to inspire and represent the relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem. It was meant to motivate and focus us, but it is our undying commitment to Hashem, in our hearts and minds, that Hashem desires, and that is really what keeps the experience going.

Build a *Mishkan*, and I will dwell among **them**

And it is when Hashem lives in our hearts and minds that the *Maamad Har Sinai* is kept alive. Because that was the essence of *Maamad Har Sinai*—The Jewish people experiencing the presence of Hashem so vividly and palpably that they were committed totally and fully to the will of Hashem.

Rav Hirsch writes (Shemos 25:8): “*The meaning of וּשְׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכָם in our verse extends far beyond the presence of God merely in the Temple. Its true meaning is the proximity of God in our midst, the fulfillment of the covenant between Him and Israel...*”

And how does Hashem live in our hearts and minds? His will is more than just an abstract idea. It takes expression in our lives through civil law and day-to-day life.

As **Rav Hirsch** writes (Shemos 21:1) regarding *mishpatim* (civil law):

רש"ר הירש שמות פרק כא פסוק א
שבו מתבטא בדרך סימבולית העיקרון היסודי: כל יחסנו אל ה' יובן כך, שהוא יהיה בסיס איתן ובלתי - מתערער לבניין החברה ברוח הצדק והאנושיות ולהתחזקותו של כל יחיד ויחיד ברוח המוסר והצניעות.
Our whole relationship to God is to be understood as one that provides a firm and unshakable basis for upbuilding society in the spirit of justice and humanity and for strengthening each and every individual in the spirit of pure morality.

According to a **Medrash** cited by the **Ramban**, the *mishpatim* were given immediately after the *Aseres Hadibros* precisely because Torah is dependent on *mishpat*. . .

אמרו במדרש (שמות ל טו) כל התורה כלה תלויה במשפט, לכן נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא דינין אחר עשרת הדברות.

This raises a further question: Why is the Torah **dependent** on *mishpat*—on civil law? On business dealings, interpersonal relationships, and so forth--the mundane aspects of life? It seems incongruous to teach these prosaic laws immediately after the inspiring and powerful ten commandments!

The **Ksav Sofer**, citing the **Medrash Rabba**, teaches that Hashem was, in effect, telling the Jewish people: if you do not accept civil law, I will take back my Torah.

במדרש...אמר להם משה, הקב"ה נתן לכם את תורתו, אם אין אתם משמרים הדינים נוטל מכם את תורתו, שלא נתן לכם התורה אלא על מנת שתקיימו הדינים...ונ"ל ע"פ מה שאמרתי במק"א תחלת דינו של אדם נשאת ונתת באמונה, ע"פ שארז"ל (סוכה ל.) דכתיב שונא גוזל בעולה, מי שגוזל בהמה והקריבה שנוא לפני ה' ואין מקובל, וכן כתיב בוצע בירך ניאץ ד'...וכן כל מצוה שאדם עושה כגון לוקח לולב שופר ציצית ממצות גזל שנוא לפני ד' ואין המצוה מקובלת לפניו ית"ש. ולכן שואלים אותו תחלת נשאת באמונה, דאל"כ רוב המצות שעשה אינם נחשבים בעיני ה'. ולפ"ז המצות תלוים בדינים כי מי שאינו משמר הדינים משפטי צדק כל המצות שעושה לאין נחשבו...

He explains that adhering to *mishpatim* shows a person's character. That is why the first question a person will be asked after he dies is about his honesty in business, before he is judged on his commitment to Torah study. If a person has poor character, Hashem despises his *mitzvos*, even ritual law and Torah study. If a person is not a *mentsch*, then his spirituality is worth nothing to Hashem. The way a person acts in his everyday life reveals whether his *mitzvos* are genuine and had a transformative effect on him.

What does demonstrate our character? What shows that *mitzvos* are changing us? It is the way we act in **everyday** life. Most of us spend the majority of our lives **out** of the shul, **outside** the

holy places set aside for religious activities and rituals. And most of the week is not Shabbos. Most of the year is not *chagim*. Even when there was a *Mishkan*, how often did most people interact with it?

By putting *mishpatim* immediately after the Sinai experience, Hashem was telling us that for *Maamad Har Sinai* to live on, for religion to be vibrant and transformative--to change our character--it must be relevant at all moments of our lives.

People may think that spirituality is reserved for specific moments of overwhelming emotion or to specific times spent in specific locations. Many perceive spirituality as limited to jolting transformative experiences---moments when there is an overwhelming sense of God's presence. Such moments certainly are important in Yiddishkeit, as we place a great deal of importance on certain times of the year, like Elul and the *yamim tovim*, and, of course, each week on Shabbos. Similarly, we place a great deal of importance on holy places, like Yerushalayim, and *batei knessios* and *batei midrash*. We place a great deal of emphasis on certain activities, like davening and learning. They help us restore our sense of purpose and help recharge our spiritual batteries and establish a more guided direction for our lives.

But **after the inspiring moment passes, after the high is over, then real life resumes.** And that is where Yiddishkeit must dwell. Parshas Mishpatim reflects precisely that kind of spirituality, teaching us to look for God, not with closed eyes, but through our involvement in the world around us.

God teaches us that, if we follow the guidelines of *mishpatim*--honest labor, compassion, and justice--we can find Him in our world every day. **Mishpatim is the confirmation that Torah belongs in all locations and in all circumstances, and that is how the experience of Maamad Har Sinai continues.**

This is how we fulfill the words of the **Ramban**

שלא נשכח מעמד הר סיני ולא נסיר אותו מדעתנו אבל יהיו עינינו ולבנו שם כל הימים
to never forget the experience of Maamad Har Sinai. "It must be forever etched in our memory and our hearts and perspective must be influenced by that experience every day of our lives..."

Rav Kook, in his *Ein Ay*, "a writes:

רב קוק (עין אי"ה) יסוד עבודת ה' ע"פ התורה, הוא להשריש שכל דרכי החיים צריכים להיות הולכים ע"פ רצונו ית'. ומי שחושב שעבודת ה' נשלמת בפעולות פרטיות, ומקצה להן מעותותיו ושוב אין ה' בלבבו, הוא הורס כל בניני התורה. . . כי יסוד העבודה לה' יתברך הוא שיהיו דרכי החיים הולכים ע"פ תכלית רצונו, שהוא לשמו הגדול יתברך. "
The foundation of avodas Hashem based on the Torah guidelines is to implant within us the idea that the entirety of our lives must be according to the will of G-d. One who thinks that one can discharge his obligations with specific actions, and ignore G-d in the rest of his life misunderstands the foundation of Torah...The foundation of Judaism is the ability to give tangible presence to the theoretical inspiration; in a way that reminds us that God is concerned with every aspect of our lives.

This past Thursday, 25 Shevat, was the *yahrtzeit* of **Rav Yisrael Salanter**.. He made it his life's mission to stress—above all else--*midos*, character building, and respect for others.. דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה

The *sefer Ha-meoros Hagedolim* records the story of a student telling Rav Yisrael two stories he thought were inspiring.

(א) שאדמו"ר אחד מפורסם נדב עשרת אלפים שקלים לבנות בית המדרש
(ב) שפעם אחת נקלעו שני עניים אב ובנו גולים נודדים מעיר לעיר לבית המדרש והיה זה ביום תענית אסתר. אמר
הבן להאב שיתן לו מעט מן האסף שאספו לקניית מזון טוב וטעים לסעוד את לבם אחר הצום. ענה האב לבן
ואמר הלא לצאת ידי הסעודה שאחר הצום נוכל בכלל שהוא. ומוטב לנו שלא לחסוך מעט הפרוטות שאספנו
לשם קיום מצות מחצית השקל. לפני קריאת המגלה. בשמע ר' ישראל סלנטר את שני הספורים אמר גדול
ונאה הוא הספור השני מן הראשון.

The first was about a well-know Rebbe who raised thousands of dollars for a new building to function as his *Beis Medrash*. The second was about a simple Jew's self restraint and dedication to Hashem; putting the will of Hashem, and other people, before his own.

Rav Yisrael said he preferred the second story, because it shows the character of an eved Hashem.

It is sometimes easier to donate money to a cause, to build a building, even to build a Mishkan, than it is to follow Hashem's commandments about honesty, respect, and self sacrifice. But what matters more, and will ultimately define the essence of a physical structure is the character of those financing, constructing, and using the building. Parshas Mishpatim is about building Jewish character. That is where and how Hashem lives on beyond *Maamad Har Sinai*.

May we take this message to heart, and make Hashem real in our lives, every minute of every day. In that way, *Maamad Har Sinai* will continue, and we will be *zoche* soon to see the day when everyone will once again see the Glory of Hashem, with the coming of *Mashiach...bimhera viyamenu...amen*.