

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 248

Mishpatim | Light's Power Countering the Darkness



# MESILOT

## *Pathways to the Soul*

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha  
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son  
**Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita**

Dedicated to the hatzlacha of  
Arik Litmanovich and her Family

# ...∞ PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL ∞...

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Slowly But Surely .....	1
The Heart — A Vessel for G-d's Glory .....	6
The Revelation of Mount Sinai .....	9
Moses Hidden in the Clouds .....	12
Destruction Leads to Rebuilding .....	13
Fortification of the Soul - Through Trials .....	15
Bridging Higher and Lower Realms .....	18
The Superiority of the Babylonian Talmud .....	21
<i>Summary and Practical Conclusions</i> .....	24



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# Parshat Mishpatim

## Slowly But Surely

Even though a few days had passed since the last Shabbat, Yossi still hadn't calmed down from the intensity of the light he had felt when the cantor read the Ten Commandments from the Torah. The sweet feeling he experienced made him decide, right then and there: "From now on, I will put more effort into Torah study! From now on, I will strive to learn Torah with all of my strength!"

Yet, despite this clear decision, he felt a certain confusion: "So many Torah books, so many subjects—where do I begin?" He opened a book that contained a wide array of topics and started studying, but afterward, he decided it would be better to focus on one subject, even if it

would require him to open several books. A few minutes later, he regretted his decision, reverted to his first idea, and so it went on, over and over...

By the end of the day, he had managed to switch between ten books and attempted to study twelve topics! And that was only the first day of his resolve... By the fourth day, he felt he was falling apart: "What will become of me? What am I going to do with my life?"

He went to consult with his rabbi, who, in response, began to tell him a story that the saintly Rabbi Yosef Mashash, of blessed memory (the Rabbi of Tlemcen, Algeria), had told:<sup>1</sup>

"A pack of prairie wolves gathered to seek counsel, for

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### ∞∞ Wellsprings of Wisdom ∞∞

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1. His words are cited in *Sefer Yosef Da'at – Rosh Hashanah* (p. 14) by Rabbi Shalom Meir Wallach, *Shlita*.

they saw themselves pursued unto death by human beings and threatened by fearsome predators—like the lion and the leopard—that lurked and snatched their prey from between their teeth.

The wolves said: “Among all the animals of the forest, none is as calm and carefree as the fox, who by his cunning and wiles overcomes all that rise up against him and makes them objects of ridicule and mockery... Therefore, we have all agreed with one accord: the fox shall be our head and chief, and he will lead us with his wisdom and understanding. He will go out before us to battle, conduct our war, and save us from the hand of every attacker and enemy !”

It was agreed and decided—they said it, and thus they did. They went to a certain fox and implored him to be their leader. The fox consented, came to the camp, and was received with great joy and honor.

“Come, let’s search out some prey,” said the fox.

He walked at the head, and they followed behind him. They reached the forest’s edge and saw a herd of goats grazing in the meadow, with a shepherd watching over them. The wolves rejoiced greatly and were about to pounce on the herd.

“Not so fast, please !” said the fox. “If you all rush out of the forest at once, the shepherd will let out a mighty cry, and all the villagers will come with sticks and strike you thoroughly !

“But we’re hungry,” whimpered the wolves.

“Have patience,” the fox answered. “*By stratagem shall you wage war.* Let one of you go out from the forest and run toward the herd. The shepherd will come to meet him with his staff, and that wolf will dance around in circles and draw him away from the flock. Once the shepherd has wandered off, we will all burst forth, and each of us will snatch a goat and return with it to the forest !”

His words found favor in their eyes, and they realized they had

done well to crown the fox as captain over them. One of the wolves diverted the shepherd's attention, and his comrades each snatched themselves a goat and carried them off to eat their fill.

They reached a clearing in the forest and made camp there. They were preparing to dine—when, behold, a lion came roaring toward them. They all panicked, knowing that their hope of eating their meal had vanished. It was the lion who would eat all their hard-won catch.

The fox reassured them and said, "Silence now. I will fight for you, and you shall remain quiet."

They were astonished and thought, "How can the weak, scrawny fox possibly fight the mighty lion?"

The fox went toward the lion with dainty steps, bowed his head in a gesture of peace and submission, and led him off to the side of the trail to whisper secretly with him.

He said, "Peace be upon you, my L-rd and king! May this meal

of thirty goats be pleasing to you!"

The lion's eyes gleamed; he had not expected such a royal repast.

"But know, my dear king," said the fox, "that there are thirty wolves there—a wolf per goat. If you fight them, even though you are the king of the beasts, a mighty lion among animals, they will swarm you like bees, surround you, and kill you. Therefore, here is my advice to you—the counsel of a clever fox. Turn to cunning, and you will win all of the spoils without any effort!"

"Your advice is good and sound," replied the lion, "but what exactly is the scheme?"

"Come with me to the camp as a friend and ally," said the fox. "Greet them in peace and invite them to dine with you, a feast fit for a king—roasted ram, deer, and wild goat. If they tell you they have plenty of prey to eat, tell them to leave everything here under guard, and it will serve them as tomorrow's meal. I, too, will play along and persuade them to heed your

voice. Then, bring them to a nearby cave and tell them it is your dwelling. Ask them to wait a little—an hour or two—while you shall prepare a lavish meal for them. Meanwhile, hurry back here and take all of their spoils. They will wait in vain, and when they return to their place, they will find that everything has been taken..."

The lion rejoiced at the idea and thanked the fox.

The wolves saw the fox conspiring with their great enemy and grew terribly afraid. They saw the lion approaching them accompanied by the fox, and their hearts nearly failed.

The lion arrived and, to their surprise, greeted them warmly and spoke words smoother than oil. He ignored the battered goats and invited them to his lair for a rich banquet. The wolves were bewildered—can a lion change his nature? Surely, some ambush is hidden in his proposal! But the fox signaled to them to accept the lion's invitation, and they agreed. They left their plunder

behind and walked after the lion and the fox. They came to a cave, which the lion said was his abode. The wolves sniffed around but did not sense any lion's odor or the stench of carcasses. The fox, however, tucked his tail and sat down, and they, too, sat down like him and waited for the banquet.

"Wait here a bit until I prepare the food," said the lion.

The fox stood up and said, "Yes, wait right here in your place. I, the king's servant, will help him prepare the feast."

The wolves were stunned and wondered: Had the fox betrayed them and attached himself to their enemy?

The lion set out, and so did the fox. They reached the wolves' encampment and found the thirty dead goats. Delighted with such plentiful, effortless prey, the lion thanked the fox for his counsel and craftiness.

The fox said, "Now to work. We must hide them—and quickly! If you drag them one by one,

taking and returning and taking again, the task will consume much time. Meanwhile, the wolves' patience will snap, and they will come back; when they see our deed and grasp our ruse, they will rise against us, and we shall both be lost. Therefore, my advice is that we tie all thirty goats together with a stout rope and a firm knot, fasten the head of the rope to your tail, and you—being a mighty lion among beasts—will pull them all at once with your great strength and bring them to your lair!"

The proposal pleased the lion. The fox hurried off, brought a large, strong rope, bound the goats' legs one to another, and tied the rope's head to the lion's tail with a tight knot doubled eight times. Then, stepping four paces back, he said to the lion, "Pull!"

The lion flexed his muscles, mustered all his might—and still could not drag the thirty goats behind him.

"Ah, weakling, fool," the fox taunted, "pull them all at once!"

The lion gnashed his teeth, roared mightily, strained—and to no avail.

The fox burst into laughter, ran to the waiting wolves, and invited them to watch their enemy's downfall. They came and saw the lion roaring and raging, captive and bound to his own prey, and they laughed at his disgrace.

Said the fox to them, "Why merely laugh? Come—do to him what he meant to do!" At once, they pounced upon the lion, struck him mightily, and tore him apart as one would rip apart a kid goat..."

The rabbi concluded the tale and turned to Yossi: "Do you know why the lion was defeated, and how the fox ensnared him?"

It was all because of the desire to seize everything—at once.

Had he contented himself with a goat or two and carried them off, he would have been satisfied and well-fed, just as he wished...

This is what Scripture says: "Wisdom is before the face of

the discerning, but the eyes of the fool are on the ends of the earth" (Proverbs 17:24).

The wise, the discerning, identifies the goal before him, wins it, secures it, and then proceeds to the next goal. But the fool seeks to swallow everything, clear to the horizon—and ends up with

nothing. As the sages said: "Grasp at too much, and you grasp nothing."

One who wishes to succeed in general, and in Torah study in particular, must single out a realistic aim, cling to it, and achieve it !

With your permission, let us expand further...

## The Heart — A Vessel for G-d's Glory

The awe-inspiring work *Etz Chaim* (Gate I, Branch 2) opens thus:

At the very beginning—prior to creation—a simple light filled all existence. When it arose in His blessed will to create His world, He had to contract His light to the sides and fashion an empty space...

Within that empty space, His light descended, and He emanated, created, formed, and made every creature and every world.

At the end of the process, He created man and said: I have fashioned in you 248 limbs and 365 sinews; to every limb and sinew, I have assigned a function

and a mission. The eye's task is to see, the ears to hear, the palates to taste, the legs to walk... My principal desire is that you recognize My existence and accept the yoke of My kingship, and the awareness of My existence depends upon your heart !

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, of sainted memory, writes (*Likkutei Moharan* I, 49:1):

Before creation, the light of the Holy One, blessed be He, was infinite. He desired that His kingship be revealed—yet 'there is no king without a nation'—so He had to create human beings who would accept the yoke of

His kingship. His kingship can be apprehended only through the attributes, for through them we perceive His divinity and know that there is a Master who rules and guides...

And the heart is the artisan that shapes the attributes, that is, the wisdom in the heart, as it is written, "And in the heart of every wise-hearted person..." (Exodus 31:6).

In truth, although the human mind was not granted permission or power to grasp the supernal light—the Light of the Infinite—the heart was granted

permission and power to grasp something of that light !

The heart is the place where intellectual apprehension meets emotion. There awaken a person's yearnings and longings for that which is beyond him, and just as a candle's flame ever leaps upward—as though seeking to detach from the wick and return to nothingness—so too the heart burns with the soul's desire to return to its source, to the simple light that preceded creation...<sup>2</sup>

By the power of yearning and longing for the Blessed One, one draws forth and reveals that light.<sup>3</sup>

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### Wellsprings of Wisdom

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2. To quote *Neimot Netzach* (Vol. 5, p. 160) by Rabbi Chaim Menachem Kramer.
3. Babylonia was once the spiritual center of the Jewish people. It was the home of the *Tanna'im* and *Amora'im*, and it is where the "Babylonian Talmud" was created.

In the city of Baghdad in the same area, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Shevat 5619 (1859 CE), a son was born to the kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Petayah. The boy was named Yehuda, and in time, he became renowned as the holy Rabbi Yehuda Petayah.

As a child, poverty prevailed in his home. He did not have shoes with which to walk to *Talmud Torah*, but he yearned to learn Torah. What did he do ? He took his father's shoes and walked in them to his school. Because they were much too large in size, the shoes filled with water and mud from the puddles, but he paid no attention to that.

At age seven, he would go with his father on the holy Shabbat to hear the sermon of the holy Rabbi Yosef Chaim—the Ben Ish Chai of *saintly memory*. These lectures typically lasted over two hours

Let us specify further:

As is well known, one of the means for the acquisition of Torah is *binat ha-lev*—understanding of the heart. As stated in the introduction to the *Tikunim*:<sup>4</sup> “*Binah* is the heart, and the heart understands.” The essence of knowledge and understanding in Torah depends upon the heart; comprehension lies not in the brain but in the heart.

The heart is the essence of the person, and the essence of comprehension is in the heart.

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 *Wellsprings of Wisdom* 

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and were composed of explanations in *peshat* and *remez*, homilies, and halachot on the weekly Torah portion, and the last half hour was devoted to interpretations at the mystical level (*derekh ha-sod*).

On Motza'ei Shabbat (Saturday night), young Yehuda would cry bitterly because he had not understood the "mystical part" of the Shabbat sermon. These tears—he later told his student Rabbi Salman Mutzafi—gave him the merit that he eventually merited to engage in the precious wisdom of mysticism...

At age twenty-three, Rabbi Yehuda began to delve deeply into the wisdom of Kabbalah. For seven full years,

Therefore, King Solomon prayed: "Grant Your servant a listening heart" (I Kings 3:9); if a person's heart listens, he can begin to receive the words of Torah with greater force.

“Do you understand?” the rabbi continued, explaining to Yossi. “The heart is the vessel designated for knowing the Creator, and since that is so, it burns with a wonderful yearning and a fierce desire! It is in the heart that a person's longing and passion for what is beyond him

Rabbi Yehuda studied the holy book *Etz Chaim*—the fundamental work of the teachings of the Arizal. He learned it with profound analysis and broad understanding until he was an expert in all the details of the upper worlds and could recite by heart the kavanot of the Divine Names in prayer. After he finished learning *Etz Chaim* the first time—after seven consecutive years of study—he reviewed it six more times over approximately nine years... (*Ish Mi-beit Lechem Yehuda*, p. 43, by Rabbi Yishi Shaul Dvir).

4. *Tikkunei HaZohar*, Introduction, folio 17a.

are aroused. Just as a candle flame always leaps upward—as it seeks to part from the wick and return to nothingness—so too the heart burns with the soul's yearning to return to its Source, to the simple light that preceded creation. In truth, by the power of the heart's yearnings and pining for the Blessed One, that light is drawn forth and revealed.

Now, when the state of the heart is like this, it resembles the state before Creation, when the simple Divine light filled all of existence, and nothing could be created within it. Therefore, a Jew who wants to succeed in accomplishing something in his life needs to learn to constrict the light to the sides and create an empty space within which he can form his own reality. So, although enthusiasm and the desire to learn

and to know are very important, one must remember that enthusiasm needs to be measured, not excessive. Even too much can be dangerous...

"And so," the rabbi concluded his explanation, "sit down by yourself and think well: How much time do you believe you can learn each day according to your strength, and think carefully about what you want to learn. Then, set for yourself a fixed period of time, a week, a month, during which you will stick to that schedule, with no room for change.

Only after that fixed period of time will you sit and think again whether you want to continue or make a change. This is called constricting the light of the heart's flame!"

## The Revelation of Mount Sinai

The rabbi then offered Yossi: "This week, with G-d's help, we will be reading Parashat Mishpatim. Do you have a bit of time to study a verse from the parasha together with me?"

The rabbi opened the Torah portion and read aloud: *"The Presence of G-d dwelled upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days, and on the seventh day He*

## Parshat Mishpatim - The Revelation of Mount Sinai

*called to Moses from the midst of the cloud" (Exodus 24:16).*

"To understand this verse, let's first review what led up to it," the rabbi said.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, the people of Israel went out of Egypt and began traveling "*through the great and terrible wilderness, [with] serpents, fiery snakes and scorpions, and thirst where there was no water*" (Deuteronomy 8:15). Day followed day, and each day they came closer to the coveted

goal—Matan Torah (the Giving of the Torah)!

After 44 days of journeying, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Sivan, they finally arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai, and there it was made known to them that on this mountain, they would receive the Torah through Moses from G-d.

For five days, they prepared with all their might to receive the Torah: by purifying and cleansing their emotions, by readying their bodies, and with eager anticipation and yearning...<sup>5</sup>

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### Wellsprings of Wisdom

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5. In a talk delivered by my father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel, ZY" A ("Imrei Noam," Yitro – essay 4), he said as follows:

As preparation for the event of Mount Sinai, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Moses to sanctify the people of Israel, as it says: "*You shall sanctify them today and tomorrow, and have them wash their clothes*" (Exodus 19:10).

The Tzemach Tzedek, ZY" A (cited in *Hayom Yom*, 5 Sivan) explains that this verse hints that in order to merit attaining the holy Torah, each and every person has an obligation to cleanse and purify the three garments of his soul, namely: thought, speech, and action, as the verse states: "and

have them wash their clothes"—referring to the garments of their soul.

That is to say, regarding thought—a person must strive to remove from his mind any evil notion and think only holy thoughts.

Regarding speech—one must cease forbidden speech, such as words of slander and gossip, falsehood, flattery, foul language, and the like, and speak only sacred words.

Regarding action, he must distance himself from deeds that are not for G-d and only do deeds that bring satisfaction to G-d. By doing so, one makes himself a fitting vessel to receive the holy Torah.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, the people of Israel merited to hear the Ten Commandments (which are written in the sixth aliyah of Parashat *Yitro*). After this awe-inspiring event concluded, G-d turned to Moses and commanded him: “*Thus shall you say to the Israelites: You yourselves have seen that I spoke to you from the very heavens*” (Exodus 20:19), and He began once again to warn them about idolatry: “*You shall not make alongside Me g-ds of silver, nor shall you make for yourselves g-ds of gold*” (v. 20).<sup>6</sup>

G-d then went on to teach Moses all of the laws of Parashat *Mishpatim*.

Moses then returned to the camp and taught the people of Israel everything that G-d had taught him. As it says at the end of our parasha: “*Moses came and told the people all the words of G-d (to keep away from idolatry) and all the ordinances*

*(ha-mishpatim)*” (Exodus 24:3)... The people of Israel accepted everything with joy and responded: “*All the things that G-d has spoken we will do*” (ibid.). Then they returned to their tents and held celebrations, feasting and rejoicing.

All of that happened on the 6<sup>th</sup> of Sivan.

At the end of our parasha—Parashat *Mishpatim*—the events of the next day, the 7<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, are described.

Early the next morning, all the people of Israel arose and again stood at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses built an altar, put half of the blood on the altar of G-d and half in basins, and made a covenant with them by sprinkling the blood upon them.

Then, after the covenant ceremony was finished, Moses went up to Mount Sinai (at 12 noon) to bring the Torah down...

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∞ *Wellsprings of Wisdom* ∞

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6. This chronology is explained by the Ibn Ezra (Exodus 23:33), as well as the Ramban (Exodus 24:1).

## Parshat Mishpatim - Moses Hidden in the Clouds

"That is the review and synopsis of the Torah portion that preceded the verse I wish

to discuss with you," the rabbi concluded. "Now let's return to the discussion of our verse..."

### Moses Hidden in the Clouds

As we said, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. However, the holy Torah reveals to us in this verse that although he ascended for this very purpose, Moses was not yet fit to receive the Torah:

*"And the Presence of G-d abode on Mount Sinai and the cloud covered it for six days, and He called to Moses on the seventh day from the midst of the cloud"* (Exodus 24:16). Rabbi Yossi Ha'Glili, Rabbi Natan, and Rabbi Mattiya ben Charash explained (Yoma 4b) that after

Moses ascended Mount Sinai, a smoke-like cloud descended and covered Moses for six days.

Only after six days, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, did G-d carve out a path for Moses within it (Rashi on Exodus 24:18), and only then – *"Moses went inside the cloud and ascended the mountain (to receive the Torah)"* (ibid.) Thus, Moses learned from the Almighty for 34 days ! (from the 13<sup>th</sup> of Sivan until the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz).<sup>7</sup>

But as for the reason why Moses needed to remain in the

### ∞ Wellsprings of Wisdom ∞

7. However, according to Rabbi Akiva's view (Yoma 4b), the meaning of the verse is different, and according to his interpretation, Moses learned from the Almighty for 40 days.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer, the Chatam Sofer ZY" A (*Torat Moshe*, Ki Tissa, s.v. "Vayar ha'am"), linked this dispute between the *Tanna'im* (whether Moses learned 40 days or 34) to the saying that appears

several times in the Talmud: "I studied this law forty times until it was as clear to me as if it were placed in my pocket."

He explains that according to Rabbi Akiva, there is a necessity to study something 40 times—as we find with Moses—whereas according to the other *Tanna'im*, there is no proof from Moses that one must specifically review 40 times...

## Parshat Mishpatim - Destruction Leads to Rebuilding

cloud for these six days, we find a dispute:

Rabbi Yossi Ha'Glili holds that this is the rule: anyone entering the camp of the Divine Presence requires a period of separation. From here, we learn that even the High Priest, before entering the Holy of Holies (on Yom Kippur), requires seven days of separation and preparation.

However, Rabbi Natan holds that Moses needed to be delayed so that his innards would be purged of food and drink until he reached the level of the ministering angels (this, despite the fact that Moses ate *manna*, which is an utterly spiritual food, and drank water from Miriam's

well—since they nevertheless have a connection to physicality).

Rabbi Mattiya ben Charash, however, holds that Moses was still not worthy of receiving the Torah and had to stay in the cloud until he became worthy! To quote his words: *"The verse indicates that [Moses] was warned and intimidated, for the Torah was given with awe, trembling, and quaking."*

There is much more length to the description of Moses' encounters on high, but it is enough to explain to us the meaning of Rabbi Mattiya ben Charash's words: *"The verse comes only to instill fear in him..."*

## Destruction Leads to Rebuilding

"I don't understand," said Yossi. "Why did Moses have to go through all this?"

"You're right," said the rabbi. "That's a good question. But to answer it, we'll need to preface it with something:"

When we observe the galaxy visible to our eyes, we are filled

with awe and wonder—"How great are Your works, O L-rd, You have made them all with wisdom!" (Psalms 104:24). Yet our holy Sages revealed that it was not always so, and that before the world attained its present state, it went through many upheavals.

Thus, our Sages taught:<sup>8</sup> Before the world was created, the Holy One, blessed be He, was creating worlds and destroying them until finally He created *this* world...

Now, although this matter belongs to the hidden mysteries of the L-rd our G-d, nevertheless, it is incumbent upon us (as it is with all words of Torah) to learn from it.

The idea is that such was His will, may He be blessed—that before the world could reach a state of stability, permanence, and beauty, a shattering had to precede it. To teach us that, always, before the light, darkness comes first.

As taught by the righteous Rabbi Meir Shlomo, of blessed memory:<sup>9</sup> We must know that this is the nature that G-d set in His world: in every matter, before the light arrives—the

good and successful state—one must go through the darkness and confusion. Everyone needs to know that no one is acting against him, and Heaven forbid that anyone think someone wants him to suffer; rather, this is simply how it must be. Before one receives any illumination in serving G-d, one must first go through times and situations that are hard and dark, in which the person gets stuck and cannot bring his desires to fruition, and in which success may elude him.

Only after one passes through the passages of darkness and obstacles, and the person's soul has been tossed and afflicted by all kinds of descents—weaknesses, crises, trials, anguish, difficulties, and suffering—only afterward comes “Let there be light,” and one merits to reach a good and stable state, and: “*G-d's face shall shine upon you*”—the

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••• *Wellsprings of Wisdom* •••

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**8.** To quote the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 3:7): “Rabbi Abahu said: G-d would create worlds and destroy them, until He created these worlds. G-d then

said, ‘These please Me, whereas those did not please Me.’”

**9.** *HaSod Shebecha*, p. 254 (the next excerpt is also taken from that work).

Holy One, blessed be He, shines  
His face upon the person...

"And let us expand on this  
point..."

### Fortification of the Soul - Through Trials

One of the fundamental teachings of Kabbalah is that every light requires a vessel.

In other words, every bounty that comes down from heaven needs a vessel to receive it; if there is no vessel, there is no meaning or vehicle for the flow that descends.

Likewise, when the Holy One wants to bring down a new flow of blessing to a person's soul—to empower it, elevate it, and strengthen it—He needs the soul to become a fitting vessel to receive that flow. And the only way for the soul to turn into a vessel is through challenges!

There is a well-known principle in the holy books: "absence precedes existence." That is, before something new can be created, the prior reality has to disappear and be utterly nullified. Like a seed planted

in the ground, first of all, it must rot away completely, and only after it has entirely decomposed does a new tree or plant begin to sprout from it. Yet while the rotting process is underway, one cannot see what is going to come of it—the seed could well cry out: "What is happening here? You say that a great tree will emerge from me, but I'm being utterly ruined; I'm rotting away!" But the truth is that this decay is an inseparable part of the process of its growth; without the decay and loss, it is impossible to grow and sprout into a new and lovely tree...

And so it is with a person: the main strengthening of the soul's powers happens specifically when a person is in darkness and concealment, and it is by overcoming them that he gains new abilities, abilities that remain and accompany

him for the rest of his life.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, the challenge of a trial draws out from a person and reveals the great inner strengths that until now were hidden and concealed within him. Through trials, they are revealed and come out into the open, and from then on, he possesses the new strengths that were revealed to him at the time of trouble—strengths whose

existence within himself he was previously unaware of.

A primary part of this building and progress within each person during a time of concealment and trial is the courage and fortitude that he acquires in his soul—not to be alarmed by the darkness and concealment, not to lose his composure during downturns and difficulties, but to know to strengthen himself...<sup>11</sup>

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••• *Wellsprings of Wisdom* •••

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**10.** One time, when the holy Rabbi Elazar of Kozhnitz, ZY”A, was standing next to Rabbi Yechiel Meir—the “Seraph of Mogelnitsa,” ZY”A—the Seraph turned to him and said:

“Shall I bless you that you should have no trials ? It's impossible to ascend spiritually without trials. Rather, I will bless you that at the time of a trial, you will realize that it is nothing more than a trial !” (*HaSod Shebecha*, p. 261, by Rabbi Meir Shlomo).

**11.** In truth, during times of difficulties and challenges, a person is in danger—if he does not know how to strengthen and pull himself up, he is liable to fall and be shattered—as indeed happened to many who, in their moment of challenge, irreparably broke.

As the holy Rabbi Yitzchak Eizik of Komarno, ZY”A, testified (*Netiv*

*Mitzvoteca, Netiv HaTorah* – shvil 1, sec. 8):

“In truth, my brothers and friends: how much bitterness and salty waters does one undergo at the beginning... The author of *Brit Menuchah* said: a Torah scholar who leaves the Torah and becomes a heretic—Heaven have mercy—is because bitter waters passed over him and he drank of them, and he could not endure, and he 'studied and distanced himself'...

“Not to mention that at the very beginning, when one begins to serve G-d and to accept upon himself the yoke of Torah, he may taste a great bitterness. Moreover, even a completely righteous person undergoes much bitterness every day and at every moment, and it is all in order to set him on the light of life, the path of the righteous.

## Parshat Mishpatim - Fortification of the Soul - Through Trials

"And since that is so," the rabbi concluded his explanation, "since there must be darkness before the light, Moses had to go through what he went through in order to be able to receive the light of the Torah!"

The holy Torah is literally G-dliness, as the famous saying goes (Zohar, Acharei Mot 73a): "*The Holy One, the Torah, and Israel are all one.*" And since that is the case, before every attainment of a new level in Torah, darkness must precede it—an emotional whirlwind, fear, anxieties, disappointment, and self-doubt...

And since you have begun to advance in Torah, that's why you are going through this emotional storm. This storm is, in fact, evidence of your progress—because were it not for the advancement, the waves

of darkness and cold would not have been stirred up...

"However," the rabbi went on, "there is one difference between the fear that you have experienced and the fear that Moses experienced !

When Moses received the Torah, he drew down an exceedingly lofty, awesome light; therefore, corresponding to that intensity of light, he had to undergo an intense darkness, a smoke-like cloud that descended and covered Moses for six days ! Whereas for us—the intensity of the light that we draw is weak, and consequently the preceding darkness is not nearly as intense !" <sup>12</sup>

"Now, let us expand further on the intensity of the light that Moses drew down...

## ∞ Wellsprings of Wisdom ∞

One must accept upon himself all the bitterness with love. Then the Blessed Holy One, in His abundant mercy, lets him taste the bliss of the World to Come even in this world, and all of that bitterness is transformed to him into sweetness and pure light for the soul.

So just be silent, my brother—be silent, and accept it all with love ! Then the light of the radiant face of the King of Life will ultimately shine upon you..."

**12.** Rabbi Yitzchak Hershkowitz, Shlita, relates this personal saga—condensed, yet intact in spirit—told to him by a well-known and revered Rosh Yeshiva:

## Bridging Higher and Lower Realms

King David says in his praises: “*The heavens belong to G-d, but the earth He gave over to mankind*” (Psalms 115:16). The Midrash explains<sup>13</sup> that David

meant as follows: When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, He decreed that the upper realms will not descend to the lower (“the heavens belong to G-d”),

### ••• Wellsprings of Wisdom •••

*“In my youth, I was a prized scholar. When the time came to marry, a wealthy magnate secured me for his indulged daughter, showering us with an apartment in Jerusalem, a generous stipend, and a safety fund. I envisioned lifelong Torah study—but my bride’s boundless self-absorption soon made our home a palace in which I was the servant. After counsel with leading sages, our marriage was dissolved.*

*“The relief was brief. My former in-laws waged a ruthless smear campaign, branding me mentally unfit and ruining every new match I was offered. Hopelessness set in—until a childhood friend urged me to seek Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai at Meron on Lag Ba-Omer.*

*“I prayed through the night, vowing not to leave Meron until Heaven gave me salvation. One late night, I wept beside the tomb. When the tears subsided, I noticed another Jew in the shadows. He asked my story, listened intently, then posed a single question:*

*‘Could Rabbi Shimon have reached his towering stature without those years*

*hidden in a cave—starving, penniless, and with a death sentence hanging over him? Those hardships forged his brilliance. “Fortunate are you that you see me so,” he told Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, for without the scars, his greatness would be absent. In the same way, know that your trials are your ‘cave.’ Embrace them, and they will uplift you.’*

*“His words pierced me. I returned home, entered a beit midrash, and devoted myself wholly to Torah and fear of Heaven. Ten years passed unnoticed; the broken divorcee of twenty-two became a scholar of thirty-two who had finished Shas in-depth and tasted closeness to G-d beyond description.*

*“Everything I later attained, and everywhere I experienced success,” the Rosh Yeshiva concluded, “were a result of the very suffering that threatened to crush me. Faced with collapse or conquest, I chose to conquer—and thus prevailed.”*

**13. Shemot Rabbah 12:3.**

## Parshat Mishpatim - Bridging Higher and Lower Realms

and the lower beings will not ascend to the upper ("and the earth He gave to man").

But when He wished to give the Torah, He nullified the original decree and said: Let the lower realms ascend to the upper, and the upper realms descend to the lower—and I Myself will begin by doing so! As it is said: "*G-d descended upon Mount Sinai*" (Exodus 19:20), "*And to Moses He said: Come up to G-d*" (ibid. 24:1).<sup>14</sup>

In Chassidut, this is explained as follows:<sup>15</sup>

Even before Matan Torah, there were righteous individuals who kept Shabbat and fulfilled the mitzvot. However, since there was a decree and a separating barrier between the upper and lower realms, they

were not able to draw holiness into the world in an internal way.

Therefore, even when they performed a mitzvah using some physical object, the object remained something mundane, without holiness—and it could be discarded after performing the mitzvah.

But at the time of Matan Torah, the decree was nullified, and the upper and lower realms were able to unite. Thus, when one performs a mitzvah with a certain object, holiness remains within it. For example, a tallit or tefillin: even after one has performed the mitzvah with them, the tefillin themselves remain holy.

In greater detail:

The process of "the upper realms descending to the lower" began with Abraham our Father

## ∞ Wellsprings of Wisdom ∞

**14.** The Midrash (ibid.) offers a parable: "To what is this comparable? To a king who decreed and said: The people of Rome shall not go down to Syria, and the people of Syria shall not go up to Rome.

Afterward, the king annulled the decree and said: The people of Rome may go down to Syria, and the people of Syria may go up to Rome."

**15.** *Sefer HaSichot* 5750, Vol. 2, p. 495 (teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe).

## Parshat Mishpatim - Bridging Higher and Lower Realms

and reached its completion only after seven generations—through the work of Moses.

The revelation of G-dliness that existed in the world before Matan Torah (including the G-dly revelations that the Patriarchs drew down, beginning with Abraham, who “began to illuminate”) was on a spiritual level—but it did not penetrate into the physicality of the world.

Whereas, at Matan Torah, the decree was abolished, and the capability was given to unite the Divine light with the physical world. At Mount Sinai, the revelation of “*G-d descended upon Mount Sinai*” penetrated into the physical world itself, as the Midrash says (Shemot Rabbah 29:9) that at the time of Matan Torah: “No bird chirped, no fowl flew, no ox lowed, the Ophanim

did not flap a wing, the Seraphim did not say ‘Holy, Holy,’ the sea did not roar, creatures did not speak—rather, the world was utterly silent and still”...

At Matan Torah, there was, in actuality, a descent from above to below, where the “upper realms descended to the lower.” And this light Moses needed to draw down into the world.

However, the second half of the effect of Matan Torah, for the “lower realms to ascend to the upper,” depends upon us. When the people of Israel refine the physical world and turn it into a vessel for G-dliness, we then attain the longed-for perfection: “*the lower realms will ascend to the upper*”...<sup>16</sup>

“Let us now turn to conclude our discussion...

## ∞ Wellsprings of Wisdom ∞

**16.** For additional explanation concerning the two dynamics that began at Matan Torah—“the upper realms descended to the lower” and “the lower realms will ascend to the upper”:

At Matan Torah, G-d revealed His very Essence in this world. This immense

revelation affected absolute bittul (self-nullification) throughout the world to the point that “no bird chirped, no fowl flew.”

However, this revelation, which came “from Above downward,” does not yet complete the purpose of Matan Torah. The ultimate intent is not only that the

## The Superiority of the Babylonian Talmud

We bring a talk delivered by my father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel, *of saintly memory* (Imrei Noam, Chukat – essay 4):

As is known, one of the rules of halachic decision-making entrusted into our hands is that whenever there is a dispute in halacha between the Babylonian Talmud—written by the sages of Babylon—and the Jerusalem Talmud—written by the sages of Israel—the law always follows the Babylonian Talmud, and not the Jerusalem Talmud.

We need to understand why that is so. Why is it that the

halacha is always as ruled in the Babylonian Talmud?

A straightforward answer to this question is explained by one of the great early Halachic authorities, the sage Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi, ‘the Rif’ (Eruvin 13b): The Babylonian Talmud was compiled and sealed by Ravina and Rav Ashi about one hundred years after the Jerusalem Talmud was compiled and sealed by Rabbi Yochanan. That being so, certainly Ravina and Rav Ashi did not determine the halachic ruling they wrote in the Babylonian Talmud until they had thoroughly

### Wellsprings of Wisdom

Divine light be present in the world ("the upper realms descended to the lower") but also that the physical reality itself changes and be refined ("the lower realms will ascend to the upper").

When divine light is drawn from Above to below, an extremely lofty light is revealed in the world—a light of lofty quality, whereas the vessel itself—the world—is not necessarily changed by it. It is specifically when the lower beings labor and purify themselves through their own efforts that a change

is effected in the world, and the world, in turn, is elevated to a higher level.

However, since this refinement is accomplished through the power of created beings, it is limited and constrained relative to the degree of their service.

Thus, the two dynamics, "the upper realms descended to the lower" and "the lower realms will ascend to the upper," are two modes of the connection between G-d and the world, each with an advantage that the other lacks... (*HaMoadim BeChassidut*, p. 265, by Rabbi Yoel Kahn, ZY"A).

## Parshat Mishpatim - The Superiority of the Babylonian Talmud

examined the words of the Jerusalem Talmud. Only once it became absolutely clear to them that those rulings were not correct in practical law did they disagree with them. Therefore, it was agreed that the halacha in every case would follow the words of the Babylonian Talmud and not those of the Jerusalem Talmud.

However, in addition to this reason—which is on the revealed level—we must add an inner reason for why the halacha was fixed according to the Babylonian Talmud. The two Talmuds were both written during the bitter exile after the destruction of the Second Temple. Since the exile is so bitter and its darkness is doubled and redoubled, the entire world is full of hard kelipot (impure “husks” of evil), and therefore, in order for us to succeed in illuminating the great and immense darkness of exile and in breaking all those many *kelipot*, we must specifically hold fast to a form of Torah learning that is pursued with great toil, distress, bitterness, and exertion.

This cannot be achieved properly through the Jerusalem

Talmud because the sanctity of the place and the pure air of Eretz Yisrael assisted the sages of the Land of Israel to clarify the halacha and reach the truth of the Torah without any need for special toil or struggle. The sages of Eretz Yisrael would “gladden” each other in halacha rather than fight and argue with one another—because the pure air of the Land of Israel imparted to them great wisdom and ample aid to grasp the depths of matters with great speed and ease. Thus, they had no need at all to battle and contend with each other in order to understand the material fully.

Therefore, the halacha was not fixed according to the words of the sages of Eretz Yisrael as recorded in the Jerusalem Talmud because this mode of study has no power to illuminate the thick darkness of the exile and to subdue the *kelipot*.

Instead, the sages of Babylon’s approach to learning is better suited, as reflected in the Babylonian Talmud that they composed. Because the sages of Babylon lived in the lands of the

## Parshat Mishpatim - The Superiority of the Babylonian Talmud

nations, whose air is impure and whose darkness is doubled and redoubled, they had tremendous difficulty in attaining and understanding the Torah. They could not plumb the depths of halacha and reach the truth of the Torah except through great and prodigious toil and effort and by dueling each other in the “war of Torah” and “inflicting discomfort” on one another until they succeeded in bringing the truth to light.

This is the meaning of the verse: “*He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead*” (Lamentations 3:6)—our Sages expounded (Sanhedrin 24a) that “this refers to the Talmud of Babylon,” since the learning of the people of Babylon took place in a land of darkness, and consequently the learning was amid darkness, pain, and suffering. In order to understand any given Talmudic passage properly, the sages of Babylon would “*kill themselves*” over it in the tents of Torah—in the sense of “*like*

*those long dead*,” as it says in parashat Chukat: “*This is the Torah: when a man dies in a tent*” (Numbers 19:14), which our Sages interpret to mean (Berachot 63b): “The words of Torah endure only in one who kills himself over them.”

Therefore, the halacha was fixed in accordance with the Babylonian Talmud—because only Torah learned with such great toil and much pain and suffering has the power to illuminate the darkness of the exile and to shatter all the kelipot.

In the future to come, speedily in our days—when the Holy One, blessed be He, will remove the spirit of impurity and the kelipot from the world, and there will no longer be any need to break them, the whole world will be filled with the light of holiness, and there will be no need to illuminate any darkness—halacha will then follow the words of the Jerusalem Talmud, which is entirely luminous and straightforward...

## ***Summary and Practical Conclusions***

1. The Jewish heart is the place where intellectual understanding meets emotion. It is in the heart that a person's yearning and longing for the transcendent awakens. Just as a candle flame always leaps upward—as it wants to separate from the wick and return to its elevated source—so too the heart burns with the soul's longing to return to its source, to the simple primordial light that preceded creation. And indeed, by virtue of the heart's yearnings and pining for G-d, this light is drawn forth and revealed.

2. A Jew who wants to succeed in accomplishing something in his life must learn to channel the spiritual light shining in his heart. Although enthusiasm and the desire to learn, to know, and to grow are very important, one must remember that the excitement needs to be kept in moderation, not overdone. Too much can be dangerous...

3. We must know that this is the nature of the world that G-d created: in every matter, before the light arrives—the good and successful state—one must first go through the darkness and confusion. Before one receives any illumination in serving G-d, one often must first pass through times and situations that are hard and

dark, where he gets stuck and cannot bring his desires to fruition, and success may elude him.

4. Only after one navigates the passages of darkness and hindrances, and one's soul has been buffeted and tested by all kinds of descents, can one then merit to ascend and acquire a new and elevated spiritual level.

5. It is of great importance to study Gemara (Talmud) every day; through Gemara, a person illuminates his soul and lifts it up from all of its descents.

6. In our era of exile, the halacha follows the Babylonian Talmud, and the reason is that the sages of Babylonia, living in the diaspora outside the Holy Land—whose atmosphere is impure and whose darkness is doubled and redoubled—faced enormous difficulty in attaining and understanding the Torah. They could reach the depths of the halacha and the truth of the Torah only through great and intensive toil and by battling each other in the 'wars of Torah' until they succeeded in bringing the divine truth of the Torah to light.

7. Therefore, the halacha was fixed according to the Babylonian Talmud because only Torah learning that is pursued with great toil and much pain

**Parshat Mishpatim - Summary and Practical Conclusions**

and suffering has the power to illuminate the darkness of exile and to shatter all of the *kelipot*.

8. In the future—when the Holy One will remove from the world the spirit of impurity and the *kelipot*, and there

will no longer be a need to break them, the whole world will be filled with the light of holiness with no need to illuminate any darkness—then halacha will follow the Jerusalem Talmud, which is entirely illuminated...

**Shabbat Shalom !**





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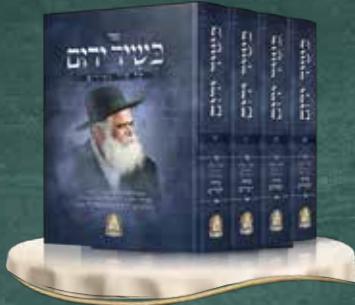
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## Shabbat Times Mishpatim

27th of Shevat, 5784

City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	5:10 pm	6:11 pm	6:41 pm
Miami	5:55 pm	6:48 pm	7:26 pm
Los Angeles	5:18 pm	6:15 pm	6:49 pm
Montreal	5:01 pm	6:05 pm	6:32 pm
Toronto	5:27 pm	6:30 pm	6:59 pm
London	4:54 pm	6:05 pm	6:26 pm
Jerusalem	5:08 pm	6:00 pm	6:36 pm
Tel Aviv	5:05 pm	5:57 pm	6:33 pm
Haifa	5:03 pm	5:58 pm	6:34 pm
Be'er Sheva	5:06 pm	6:00 pm	6:36 pm

### Pathways to the Heart

From the Words of  
HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l

Since you are a ben Torah, or at least striving to be a ben Torah, the closer you are (to Hashem), the more you must be truly "like nothing and as naught." For this closeness is meant to nullify you, not to make you feel great about yourself.

If you are given honor, know that this is a test for you – that you should not become filled with pride. You must restrain yourself, so that you do not become big in your own heart; rather, your entire being should be in a state of bittul, of accepting the yoke of Heaven.

All that one has is from Him, may He be blessed – and G-d bestow blessing specifically upon those that are modest and humble.



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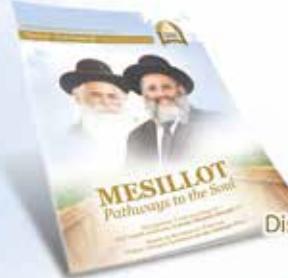
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