

This week's *Parashah* introduces the Torah's *Mishpatim* / civil laws, saying: "And these are the ordinances that *Ta'sim* / you shall place before them." Based on similar wording, our Sages comment that the verse in *Iyov* (4:20), "They are ground down from morning to evening without '*Mei'sim*' / contemplation, they are lost forever," alludes to the Generation of the Flood, which was destroyed because it did not practice *Mishpatim*.

R' Yerachmiel Shulman z"l Hy"d (*Menahel Ruchani* of the Bet Yosef-Novardok Yeshiva in Pinsk, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) asks: Is that why that generation was destroyed? Our Sages teach that they were condemned because of widespread theft!

He explains: Our Sages say that *Bnei Yisrael* who stood at *Har Sinai* were on the level of Adam before his sin. If so, why was it necessary, or even appropriate, to command them not to murder, steal, commit adultery, or covet another's possessions?

R' Shulman answers: The "world's" understanding of these sins differs from the Torah's understanding of them. Thus we read (*Kohelet* 12:14), "For *Elokim* will judge every deed--even everything hidden--whether good or evil." Our Sages ask: Why does "good" need to be judged? They answer: This refers to one who gives a handout to a pauper in public, thereby causing him humiliation. In the eyes of the Torah, that, too, is murder! It is these subtle sins about which even *Bnei Yisrael* at *Har Sinai* needed to be commanded.

R' Shulman concludes: Our Sages teach the Generation of the Flood was condemned for theft--specifically, for stealing minute amounts of money. In the eyes of the world, that may not be stealing. But, the Torah's *Mishpatim* hold man to a higher standard. (*Peninei Ha'chochmah*)

## Shabbat

*Midrash Rabbah* relates that Adam met Kayin after the latter had been judged for murdering his brother Hevel. Adam asked his son, "What was the outcome of your judgment?" Kayin answered, "I repented and G-d compromised with me." Hearing this, Adam became anguished and exclaimed, "The power of *Teshuvah* is so great and I did not know!" Immediately he said (*Tehilim* 92:1), "*Mizmor, shir l'yom ha'Shabbat*" / "A psalm, a song for the Sabbath day."

What is the connection between *Shabbat* and *Teshuvah*?

R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951) explains: *Teshuvah* repairs the past, something that is possible only if there is a relationship between the past and the future. *Shabbat* is the proof that such a relationship does exist, for it is the contrast with the six days of work (the past) that reveals what is special about *Shabbat* (the future).

R' Charlap adds: A person sins only when he is in "weekday mode," i.e., a lower level of holiness. *Teshuvah*, on the other hand, is related to the enlightenment that *Shabbat* provides--i.e., recognition of the Creator's Oneness--through which one becomes sanctified to *Hashem*. When Adam heard that Kayin's *Teshuvah* had been accepted, he understood that a sin, no matter how great, cannot extinguish that light of *Shabbat*.

(*Mei Marom: Nimukei Mikra'ot, Bereishit* 4:16)

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**“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Ascend to Me to the mountain and remain there, and I shall give you the stone Tablets and the teaching and the commandment that I have written, to teach them’.” (24:12)**

What is the significance of the fact that the *Luchot* were made of stone?

R’ Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z”l (1865-1935; *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) explains: “Those who would change the Torah pursuant to the wickedness of their beliefs” [in R’ Kook’s own words] say that only the spirit of the Torah is eternal. However, they claim, the deeds that result from that spirit must be modernized and brought up-to-date. In order to nullify such false assertions, *Hashem* gave the *Aseret Ha’dibrot*, which are a symbol of the covenant that includes the whole Torah, engraved in stone--a hard, unchanging material. This demonstrates that even the material manifestation of the Torah is unchanging. *(Ein Ayah: Berachot ch.1 no.17)*

**“The glory of Hashem rested upon Har Sinai, and the cloud covered it for a six-day period. He called to Moshe on the seventh day from the midst of the cloud.” (24:16)**

According to the opinion of Rabbi Yose Ha’Gelili in the *Gemara* (*Yoma* 3b), we learn from this verse that anyone who is entering the “precinct of the *Shechinah*” must prepare by separating himself from his everyday routine for six days. Thus, for example, the *Kohen Gadol* must leave his home and move into an apartment on the Temple Mount six days before *Yom Kippur*, as must the person designated to burn a *Parah Adumah* / red heifer six days before he performs that service.

Rabbeinu Nissim ben Reuven Gerondi z”l (Spain; 1320-1376) asks: How can we learn these *Halachot* from this verse? Perhaps ascending to “meet” the *Shechinah* on *Har Sinai* is unique, but entering a place of lesser holiness--even the *Kohen Gadol* entering the Holy of Holies--does not require advance separation!

R’ Nissim answers: The *Gemara* understands that Moshe Rabbeinu was always ready to receive prophecy from *Hashem*; therefore, he did not need to prepare to ascend *Har Sinai*. It follows that the separation alluded to in our verse was not needed by Moshe himself; its only purpose was to serve as an example for future generations. Thus, we can learn from this verse that one entering the “precinct of the *Shechinah*” must prepare for six days.

But how does a physical human being, which Moshe was, attain the level of constant readiness for prophecy? The answer, writes R’ Nissim, is that it was a miracle, something that no human being can attain on his own. That is why the Torah is able to guarantee (*Devarim* 34:10), “Never again has there arisen in *Yisrael* a prophet like Moshe, whom *Hashem* had known face to face.” The verse is phrased in past tense, but the Torah is eternal. Thus, whenever someone reads this verse in the future, there still will never have been another prophet like Moshe. If attaining Moshe’s level were within a person’s capability, *Hashem* would not withhold that goodness from someone who takes the necessary steps to attain it! Therefore, the verse must be telling us that it is not possible for a person to attain that level through his own effort. *(Derashot Ha’Ran #4)*

**“The choicest first fruit of your land shall you bring to the House of Hashem, your Elokim.” (23:19)**

R’ Elya Meir Bloch z”l (1895-1955; founder and *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland) comments: This is one of the fundamental principles of the Torah--whenever a person experiences joy, the first expression of that joy should be given to *Hashem*. This is the reason, as well, for the *mitzvah* of *Pidyon Ha’ben*. *(Peninei Da’at)*

**“Behold! I am sending an angel before you to protect you on the way, and to bring you to the place that I have made ready. Beware of him--listen to his voice, do not rebel against him, for he will not forgive your willful sin--for My Name is within him.” (23:20-21)**

R’ Aryeh Shapira *shlita* (Yerushalayim; author of many works based on the writings of *Ramchal* and the *Vilna Gaon z”l*) explains: The Torah is the blueprint for Creation, which means that even the existence of the angels is rooted in the laws of the Torah. Since an angel’s very existence is dependent on observance of the Torah, it follows that an angel cannot overlook or forgive a violation of the Torah.

*Hashem*, in contrast, can forgive sins, because it would be illogical if the “laws” of the world that He created for the purpose of doing good could restrict His ability to do that good. *(B’shimcha Esa Kapai p.9-10)*

**“Moshe, Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and seventy of the elders of Yisrael ascended. They saw the Elokim of Yisrael, and under His feet was the likeness of sapphire brickwork, and it was like the essence of the heaven in purity. Against the great men of Bnei Yisrael, He did not stretch out His hand--they gazed at Elokim, and they ate and drank.” (24:9-11)**

R’ Moshe ben Maimon z”l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes: These “great men of *Bnei Yisrael*” attempted to perceive Divine secrets without preparing themselves properly. Specifically, one who wishes to understand such matters needs to have certain knowledge beforehand, and he also must purify his *Middot* / character traits. Because they did not prepare themselves properly, they mistook what they saw for something material, *i.e.*, “the likeness of sapphire brickwork.” And, they were punished. (According to *Rambam*, this was the reason for the early deaths of Aharon’s sons, Nadav and Avihu).

In contrast, when *Hashem* first revealed Himself to Moshe (*Shmot* 3:6), “Moshe hid his face, for he was afraid to gaze toward *Elokim*.” The Torah (*Bemidbar* 12:8) tells us Moshe’s reward for this: “At the image of *Hashem* does he gaze.” *(Moreh Nevochim 1:5)*