

## Parshat Mishpatim Bias Beware

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The *mishpatim* in our Torah appear logical, but there is also a spiritual element. Let us examine one of these laws and explore how society and religion, logic and passion overlap to create a system for living.

“Do not accept a bribe, for the bribe will blind those who see and corrupt words that are just,” says the Torah. There are similar laws on the statutes of most governments. Yet Torah law has many additional layers of understanding. As the Higayon Leivov says, this law applies even when it would not influence a judge in his ruling. This court with its supplicants and judges may in fact be a reincarnation of a previous court with an opportunity to repair a decision where perhaps a judge was influenced in some way. Or perhaps there will be repercussions of this trial at some future time. Or maybe, as Menachem Zion points out, although the judge’s decision may still be strictly correct, his bias may influence other judges on the panel.

The Chochmat Hamatzpun explains that

bribery is not material but psychological, and no one is immune to its effects. Both the giver and the receiver become bonded in some way so that the receiver’s judgment becomes less objective. And Rabbi Munk reminds us that even small favors and expressions of gratitude have the effect of bribes. Citing the Chazon Ish z”l, Rabbi Druk z”l writes that it is inconceivable that our great rabbinic leaders would be swayed by bribery. However, Hashem wrote these laws as a challenge to the layman to accept the judgment of Torah authority completely and not try to circumvent their decisions by ascribing ulterior motives and benefits to them.

Had the Torah not commanded against accepting bribery, we would not have instituted it, for it is not a natural law. As Rabbi Yoffe z”l notes, nothing natural would sway a *talmid chacham* from judging properly. Since these are Hashem’s emissaries, adds the Chazon Ish z”l, there’s always a light of clarity from above when a *talmid chacham* is rendering a decision. To believe in the *Torah* is to believe in its scholars. If we believe that the wisdom of our Sages comes from Hashem, we should

consult them also about handling challenges in our daily lives. They have a unique perspective that comes directly from the Source of wisdom, writes the Chazon Ish z”l. A Torah scholar represents a direct link from the revelation at Sinai to the present. They are the living emissaries of the will of God. As such, writes Rabbi Gifter z”l, they must be accorded the same respect you would give to the Torah. Each generation has the judges with the appropriate clarity from Hashem to lead that generation.

We have a natural bias to see ourselves in a positive light. Rabbi Pliskin suggests that we step out of ourselves when examining our actions and judge ourselves as we would judge someone else acting this way. There is a constant battle between the physical self of desire and the intellectual, spiritual self. Only by constantly working on our *emunah*/God consciousness can we hope to succeed. The more we solidify the truth that Hashem is the sole reality and presence in our lives, the more likely we are to make the right decisions.

## Chulda: A Message of Hope Part I

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Chulda is one of the seven women prophetess whose prophecies were written down for future generations because they were relevant for all times. Chulda is discussed in two books of the *Tanach*, *Melachim Bet* and *Divrei Hayamim*. She lived in the times of King Yoshiyahu, one of the last kings prior to the destruction of the First Temple. King Yoshiyahu was the grandson of King Menashe who was very wicked. Menashe filled Yerushalayim with idol worship. He erased the name of Hashem from whatever *Torah* scroll he could find and inserted the names of idols. He was king for a few decades and his affect on the nation was so negative that he brought the destruction even closer. His son Amon followed in his ways. But his grandson Yoshiyahu was very different. He is described as following the

ways of King David, the paragon of a righteous king. He created a revolution in the Jewish nation. He ordered the renovation of the *beit hamikdash* and in the process Chilkiyahu, the high priest told Shafan, the scribe that he had found a *Torah* scroll. This was a special scroll. At the end of Moshe’ life he wrote a *Sefer Torah* and placed it in the Aron in the holy of holies and this was supposed to be the *Sefer Torah* that every new *Torah* would be compared to. It would ensure that every *Torah* would be transmitted perfectly from one generation to the next without any mistake. When Menashe went on his rampage, the *kohanim* hid this scroll so it would not be violated. Usually a *Torah* scroll is rolled up and opens up to *Bereishit*. Here the Torah opened to a verse in Devarim, “Hashem will send away you and the kings you appointed upon yourself to a nation that is foreign to you and your

forefathers.” This was a prophecy about exile, part of the rebuke where Hashem says what will happen if the Jewish people don’t follow the ways of the *Torah*.

Chilkiyahu and Shafan realized they had to bring the *Torah* to Yoshiyahu who understood it as a message from Hashem. He rent his clothing realizing that if they would not repent they would be sent to exile. He began a *teshuva* campaign to eradicate all idol worship. Many Jews took it very seriously and changed their behaviour. But it was not all across the board. Yoshiyahu appointed *Torah* scholars to go from home to home to check for idols. Those who did not want to do *teshuva* engraved images of idols on the inside of their doors so that the messengers wouldn’t see it. Unfortunately, the situation of the nation was

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such that it was impossible anymore to prevent the destruction. If Hashem would have not destroyed the *beit hamikdash* then he would have had to destroy the Jewish people. The more tools you have to do your job the worse it is if you don't do it. It might be more beneficial to take away the tools so you are judged differently. When one's clarity is on

a different level, less is demanded. At that point it was too late to change the situation. The Temple would be destroyed but Yoshiyahu did not know it. He saw great changes in the Jewish nation. He felt that they were improving drastically to the extent that *Mashiach* might come. He thought that perhaps Hashem had made them find the *Torah* so that the people

would repent and the destruction would not happen. But at the same time he wanted to know Hashem's opinion. Was his interpretation correct? Would the *beit hamikdash* be destroyed and would the Jews go into exile? Therefore, he sent people to Chulda, a great prophetess of the generation, to hear what would happen.

## The Ending of the Book Ohel Rachel Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Knowing your husband's heart means not just knowing his instinctive self like his aversion to ketchup on his spaghetti. It's much deeper. The word *melech* is always used in connection with a king's will. His will is his kingship. This is why when there was a monarchy the laws of rebelling against the king were very severe. Even a subtle gesture against the king's authority required the person to be killed. On a simple level this is because the king must maintain his authority. The worst thing that can happen to any kingdom is a civil war. But there's another reason- the heart of the people must be healthy in order to keep everyone functional. Nothing good happens if a husband's relationship with his wife is one where he continually has to defend the integrity of his role. When there's no room for him to lead he becomes defensive or distant. When a husband is distant it means he either got tired of defending his role or he never had confidence in his ability to live it out. Or maybe his wife never made him think he had a role or he never had an example of what it was. He doesn't feel like a *melech*, like he has some place to take his marriage. A husband has to provide leadership and he won't do it if you won't lead him lead. If the king feels secure in his leadership he loses his self. He looks to see how he could benefit his people. He continually asks, what do they really need, who are they really, where could I take them?

Rebellion against the king comes when the people feel no connection to him. That is tragic.

One of the great Torah scholars of the last century, Rabbi Shaul of Nitra, memorialized his righteous wife in his *sefer*. In the introduction he writes, "She helped me with everything. She took upon herself all the anxiety of raising our children and earning a livelihood so that I could learn and teach *Torah*. She didn't make any material demands although she was accustomed to a higher standard in order to give me the ability to become what I became. Yet there was no limit to what she would spend for our guests. No poor man ever left our house hungry. She would sit and feed those who were too sick to feed themselves. She would even give away her own food. She would fast and pray for worthy children and they all grew up to be Torah scholars and wives of Torah scholars. She would never stop thanking Hashem for this. The children only saw what the eye could see but the main thing she deserves praise was for matters between husband and wife. A wife is like a wall around a city protecting her husband as it says, 'The female surrounds the male.' She protects her husband from sin. The righteous woman will never delay and will try to be pure whenever possible." Rav Shaul shared this to show how much this reflected her love for him, how she

always wanted to give to him. She never wanted him to have a wandering eye. She cared about him and wanted their life together to be sanctified.

The sages speak about the righteous woman in Egypt who would beautify themselves with copper mirrors. They offered these mirrors for the mishkan. At first Moshe didn't want to accept it because it reflected vanity and the *yetzer hara*. But Hashem said to accept them because these are the things that are dearest to Him- the love and willingness the woman has to build together with her husband and to be one with him.

A woman beautifies herself not for her own vanity but for her love and desire to see her husband happy. If a husband knew how much hidden love is in his wife's heart and how much she wants to bring him joy, he would love her a thousand times more because a husband wants a happy wife. When they have a relationship like this, if there's anything he could do to make her happy he would do it. And this is how we are meant to be with Hashem. We forget our private grief by keeping the mitzvot with joy and take joy in our connection with the Almighty. That awakens Hashem's desire to give us all of our needs and to give us simcha and this is the deepest of all meanings of doing one's husband's will.