

## **TorahFax: Mishpatim**

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One of the many mitzvot in this week's Parsha, Mishpatim, is the mitzvah of Tzedakah, to help those in need. If one is limited in their means, there are preferences in this mitzvah. Helping another Jew comes first. Helping a relative in need takes preference to helping a stranger. Helping someone who lives in your city takes preference over someone in another city.

Tzedakah and acts of kindness can be performed in many different ways. One can be charitable by giving money to someone in need. Tzedakah can also be in the form of Gemilas Chasadim - lending money to someone who is in need now, but who will eventually be able to pay it back. Helping someone in a spiritual way, such as teaching Torah, giving proper direction and good advice is also a form of tzedakah-charity.

Rabbi Asi said, "Charity equals in importance as all other mitzvot combined."  
(Tractate Baba Batra 9a).

Rabbi Eliezer said, "Greater is the one who does charity than he who offers all the sacrifices, for it is said, 'To do charity and justice is more acceptable to G-d than sacrifices'" (Tractate Sukah 49b).

Rabbi Yehuda said, "Ten strong things have been created in the world. The rock [mountain] is hard, but iron splits it. Iron is hard, but fire softens it. Fire is powerful, but water quenches it. Water is heavy but the clouds carry it. Clouds are thick, but winds scatter them. The wind is strong, but the body resists it. The body is strong, but fear crushes it. Fear is powerful, but wine banishes it. Wine is strong, but sleep works it off. Death is stronger than all, yet, it is written, "Charity delivers from death!" (Tractate Baba Batra 10a).

The Talmud tells the following tale: Once two pupils of Rabbi Chanina went into the forest to cut wood. An astrologer saw the two disciples enter the forest and remarked, "I see that these two men will not return alive!

As they were about to enter the forest, an old man encountered them and said, "Please give me some food, it is three days since I had anything to eat."

The two disciples had with them one loaf of bread, so they broke it in half and gave half to the old man. After he finished eating, he blessed them and said, "Just as you

saved my life today, so may your lives be spared." At the end of the day, the two disciples came out of the forest with their load of wood.

Seeing the two pupils alive and well, the people said to the astrologer, "Didn't you predict that they wouldn't return alive? You're a liar!"

The astrologer was puzzled. He called the two disciples over to him and said, "May I examine the bundles which you are carrying?" They agreed. Taking their bundles apart, the astrologer found a poisonous snake, cut in half; half in one bundle and the other half in the other bundle.

Turning to them, he asked, "What good deed did you do today that saved your lives?" The two disciples told him about the starving old man and how they saved his life with their half loaf of bread.

"That saved your life," exclaimed the astrologer. "What can I do if the G-d of the Jews can be appeased with half a loaf of bread?!"

Helping one in need may be helping ourselves and more to our benefit than the person we think we are helping!

Friday, Shevat 26, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / February 17, 2023

This week's Parsha, Mishpatim, is the first Parsha after the story of the Giving of the Torah. In this Parsha we find 53 of the 613 mitzvot.

The 613 mitzvot of the Torah are generally divided into two categories: 248 positive mitzvot - commandments which we are commanded to perform; and 365 prohibition mitzvot, which we are commanded not to do. All 613 mitzvot fall into three general categories: Eidut; Chukim; Mishpatim.

Eidut are mitzvot which serve as a testimony between us and G-d. For example, resting on Shabbat is testimony that G-d rested on the seventh day. Passover is testimony of the miracle of the Exodus etc.

Chukim are mitzvot which have no apparent logical reason. Example: The laws of Kashrut; the prohibition of eating pork; or not to wear wool and linen in one garment (Shatnez) etc. We observe these mitzvot only because G-d commanded us to do them or refrain from doing them.

Mishpatim are mostly laws of civil justice, such as, do not steal etc. They affect our relationship between one person to another. They fall within the realm of logic and reason. In fact, many secular societies may contain similar laws.

The name of the Parsha, Mishpatim, tells us that most of the mitzvot in this Parsha are such which teach us responsibility towards our fellow human being.

Q. Why is Parshat Mishpatim, which deals with mitzvot between one person and another, immediately after Parshat Yitro where we read about the Giving of the Torah? It would make more sense that immediately after the Giving of the Torah, G-d would tell us about our responsibilities toward Him?

A. We find the same thing in the Ten Commandments, where there is great emphasis on the mitzvot between man and man. Our performance of these mitzvot is a good barometer of our relationship toward G-d. One cannot separate the two, as Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa says, "If the spirit of one's fellow is pleased with him, the spirit of G-d is pleased with him; but if the spirit of one's fellow is not pleased with him the spirit of G-d is not pleased with him."

For this reason, Parshat Mishpatim comes right after the Giving of the Torah, to teach us the importance of the mitzvot which emphasize proper conduct and love amongst ourselves.

Rabbi Yechezkel of Kuzmir would say, "The Jewish people are compared to a box full of glass dishes. If the dishes are packed tightly, the box can be moved about and transported and none of the dishes will break. But if the dishes are packed loosely, they bang into each other and will easily break. We too, have to be tightly connected with each other, it is our guarantee of survival."