



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

TORAH WEEKLY

T"01

4 - 10 February, 2018
19 - 25 Shevat, 5778

Torah:
Exodus 21:1 - 24:18

Shekalim
Exodus 30:11-16

Haftorah:
Kings II 11:17 - 12:17

■ CALENDARS

We have Jewish Calendars, if you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi / Chaplain to contact us.

■ FAMILY PROGRAMS

Do you have family on the outside who are struggling, please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

■ GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH

Aleph offers free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll, it is available to all prisons.

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SHEKALIM

When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, each Jew contributed an annual half-shekel to the Temple.

The funds raised were primarily used to purchase cattle for the communal sacrifices. The leftover monies were used for a variety of communal purposes, including providing salaries for the judges and maintenance of the Temple, its vessels, and the city walls.

This annual tax, known as the machatzit hashekel, was due on the 1st of Nissan. One month earlier, on the 1st of Adar, the courts began posting reminders about this Biblical obligation. In commemoration, the Torah reading of the Shabbat that falls on or before Adar is supplemented with the verses (Exodus 30:11-16) that relate G-d's commandment to Moses regarding the first giving of the half-shekel.

The Shekalim haftorah (II Kings 11:17-12:17) continues on the same theme, discussing the efforts of King Jehoash (9th century BCE) to earmark communal funds for the upkeep of the first Holy Temple.

We too give a commemorative half shekel to charity—on the Fast of Esther.

“Parshat Shekalim” is the first of four special readings added during or immediately before the month of Adar (the other three being Zachor, Parah and Hachode-

sh).

The Shekalim reading is also related to the upcoming holiday of Purim. According to the Talmud, Haman's decree was averted in merit of the mitzvah of machatzit hashekel.

IMORTAL MORALITY

The story is told of a fellow in communist Russia who is imprisoned for a serious offense and is sentenced to years of hard labor. He is positioned by a large crank installed in the wall and told to turn the crank. “This,” he is told, “will activate the mill, providing flour for all of the inmates.” The work is difficult and it takes its toll on his aching bones, but he keeps at it with vigor and intensity. Even as time goes by his energy never fades.

Years pass, and his time is finally served. As he leaves and is escorted outside the prison walls the man suddenly stops short. His face pale, he sways for a moment and then collapses in a deep faint. He is rushed to a medical facility where he is revived. When asked what caused his sudden and inexplicable collapse, he explained. “As I passed the area outside of the spot where my “mill crank” was positioned I saw - an empty wall. I realized, to my shock and dismay, that all this time, the crank had been attached to nothing and I had been accomplishing exactly that.”

Parshat Mishpatim

All throughout his time in prison, he had been able to keep doing the grueling task to which he had been assigned with the knowledge that, at the very least, his hard work means something to those benefiting from it. Realizing that all his hard work had been truly meaningless, the pain and anguish were too much for him.

This story illustrates the tremendous difference a sense of meaning can make to even a most menial task. This same meaningless task, when done with a purpose becomes incomparably bearable. The name of this week's Torah portion, Mishpatim, means “judgments.” The Sages explain that this refers to those commandments that can be understood by human logic. For example, the Torah's laws for business practices, family relations, and basic communication between people.

The very fact that these laws exist is a great lesson for many people. It is easy to think of Judaism as a religion relegated to the synagogue, that it is a faith which requires only that we go to the synagogue on Shabbat and holidays, and participate while designated people, i.e. the Rabbi and the cantor, recite special prayers. And then we are to return to real life, business, family, friends etc. But the truth is it's much more than that. The vast majority of Jewish Law has nothing to do with what goes on at the synagogue. Instead, it deals with injecting Godli-

ness into our everyday lives, conducting ourselves according to God's will within the down-to-earth realities that exist everywhere, at all times. Torah life means introducing Godliness at home, in our workplaces, and in our relations with others.

Rather than be carried out as merely human activities, these everyday things should best be carried out as "Mishpatim," God Almighty's directives. Most people have good intentions and they try to live morally and ethically. But Judaism gives us the potential for more than this. The Torah gives us an objective standard of ethical conduct determined by G-d. It is not mankind who decides whether or not something is good, ethical, or just.

That's very important. For standards of justice created by mortals can lead to error; after all, look at what one of the most sophisticated countries in the world did in the last century. A leader in the advancement of civilization, masters of science, culture, and philosophy wound up perpetrating the most hideous of atrocities in history - and all in the name of the improvement of humanity.

Moreover, there is so much more to living the way God desires than just the negation of undesirable factors. When we live Godly lives, then every single act we do, every word we say, and ultimately even our every thought contributes to the betterment of society, of our communities, and of the world at large. There is no more effective approach to living a life of meaning, depth, and happiness than following the directives which God Himself gave us.

GODLY REPOSONSIBILITY

Parshat Mishpatim discusses, among other things, the four types of guardians: the unpaid guardian, the paid guardian, the renter and the borrower. All four categories come with the obligation to keep the object safe while in possession of it. However, each has his own status and requirements as to what level of liability he would have should anything happen to the item at hand. For example, the unpaid guardian would understandably be held less responsible for the item than would a renter or borrower. Let's take a closer look at two of these categories. The unpaid guardian; he is watching an item or object purely for the sake of its owner. Say for example, watching your neighbors' dog while they're on vacation. The borrower, on the other hand, takes the item into his care for his own purposes or needs. Like someone might borrow his friend's car if he needed to run some errands.

The difference in reasoning behind these two types of cases is what can serve as the life lesson for all of us, for all times.

Every Jew is given a soul upon entering this world. He soul will always belong to God, and we are simply tasked with keeping it safe and whole throughout its time on earth.

Now, exactly which type of guardian we are during

our lifetime is entirely up to us. Some people will take advantage of all the exciting things the world has to offer, and those people are free to spend their time with the soul in that manner, if they please. These people could be likened to the borrower listed in the Torah's list of guardians. Others prefer to focus more on this guardian status with which they were born. Much like the first two guardians, paid or unpaid, they'll focus they're attention on what the owner of this precious object needs, rather than what they themselves might enjoy more.

The latter are like the paid or unpaid guardian in their choice of focal point, as well as in their level of liability. Nobody is perfect, and mistakes do happen. Much like the borrower, people who chose to spend their lives going with the flow and using their God-given time and talents on the worldly and the mundane will likely be half more accountable for the mistakes they make which may effect the soul's wellbeing.

On the contrary with those who maintain their focus on that for which God wants them to use their souls, a greater leeway would be granted for the inevitable error or mishap which might happen along the journey of life.

Which would you rather be, the meaningful guardian or the carefree borrower?

In Parshas Mishpatim From Hashem Moshe is told If you see your friends donkey Collapsing under its load	Helping a donkey with its lot Chamor can also mean physical And the load is Torah and Mitzvos If you see someone struggling to keep the laws Don't pretend no one knows
You shall come closer And not turn away Help it rearrange its load And continue on its way	Help the person, let them stand up And make the Torah easy for them Helping others in times of need Is what Moshe heard from Hashem
Why does the Torah include something that seems So random and in the wrong spot Why does the Torah need to include	

In Jewish History

Wednesday, 22 Shevat, 5778 - February 7, 2018

Passing of Kotzker Rebbe (1859)

Passing of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (1787-1859), renowned Chassidic leader, and forerunner of the "Ger" Chassidic dynasty.

Rebbetzin's Yahrtzeit (1988)

Rebbetzin Chaya Mushkah Schneerson (b. 1901), wife of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, passed away on the 22nd of Shevat of the year 5748 (1988). Chabad's annual international conference of sheluchot (woman "emissaries") is held on or near this date.