

## Parshas Mishpatim

# Faith, Logic, and Beyond

*This week’s parsha focuses on the rational laws of the Torah. Included in this Torah portion however, are the preparations for the giving of the Torah and the prohibition of milk and meat—both of which do not seem to fit into the above theme. Through an analysis of the chronology of events, this Sicha illustrates the need for faith along with rationale in the service of G-d and the fulfillment of His mitzvos.*

The name of each Torah portion expresses the theme of its entire content. The fact that the *parsha* as a whole is called by a certain name implies that all the details of the portion are expressive and connected to that title.

This week’s Torah portion is called “*Mishpatim*.” Accordingly, all the details of the *parsha* should be in line with the concept of *mishpatim*, rational laws.

It seems however, that this is not the case. For although much of the *parsha* does indeed deal with commandments which can be understood logically, other events and commandments related in *Parshas Mishpatim* seem to express an opposite theme.

### Contrasting subjects

The end of the Torah portion of *Mishpatim* deals with the preparation for receiving the Torah—an event which far surpassed natural limitations and human rationale. This general account of the preparation for the Torah, recorded in the *parsha* does not seem connected to the theme of *mishpatim* at all.

Furthermore, mentioned in the Torah portion is also the specific preparatory steps that took place before the Torah was given at Mt. Sinai. Amongst these proceedings was the Israelites’ acceptance of the Torah, in which the Jewish people declared: “All that the Lord spoke, we will do and we will hear.”

By prefacing with the words “we will do,” the Jewish people expressed their commitment to fulfill the commandments of G-d, *prior* to understanding them rationally.

This statement, though, seems to be in stark contrast to the concept of *mishpatim*, which encompasses those G-dly directives belonging to the realm of reason. The Israelites’ declaration, by distinction, vocalized their pure faith and commitment to the Almighty and His *mitzvos* (commandments); a faith which surpassed reason.

Additionally, amongst the *mitzvos* found within *Parshas Mishpatim* is also a commandment that seems to be opposite the theme of the *parsha* as well. This *mitzvah* is the prohibition regarding mixing milk and meat—an instruction which ultimately cannot be understood logically, but which is rather an edict from the Almighty.

Why then, was the preparation for the giving of the Torah and the prohibition of milk and meat included in *Parshas Mishpatim*, which deals with the rational laws?

### From Sinai

These questions can perhaps be explained through prefacing Rashi’s commentary of the first verse in the *parsha*.

In the opening sentence, “And these are the *Mishpatim*...,” Rashi explains the meaning of the initial word “And,” which the *parsha* begins with, based on the words of the Medrash.

The Medrash explains, that the laws of the *parsha*, which include many civil and logical guidelines such as the laws of injury, murder, etc., were also given along with the rest of the Torah at Mt. Sinai.

### Text 1

Wherever it says, “these” [in the Torah,] it [(this word) is used to] separate from what has been stated previously. [Where it says,] “And these,” [it means that] it is *adding* to what has been previously stated. [Thus] just as what has been previously stated [namely the Ten Commandments,] were from Sinai, these too were from Sinai...

*Rashi, Shemos 21:1*

The deeper meaning to this statement is that not only were these *rational laws*, given at Sinai, but they should be fulfilled in the same *spirit* of Sinai—i.e. for the very fact that G-d said so, not only because they make sense for us to abide by them.

In light of this, the reason for the inclusion of the super-rational elements in the *parsha* can also be understood.

The expression “we will do and we will hear,” articulates a complete subservience to the Almighty, which transcends reason. The prohibition of milk and meat as well—a commandment which cannot be understood logically—expresses this same notion.

The inclusion of these *mitzvos* in *Parshas Mishpatim* therefore relates, that in truth, all of the *mitzvos*, including the rational ones, ultimately must be fulfilled because they are the

will of G-d; not merely because of a moral imperative.

The super-rational elements that are present in the *parsha* are thus not in contrast with the theme of the Torah portion, but express that in addition to logic, one must realize that all the laws of the Torah—including the rational, moral ones—must be fulfilled because they are the will of G-d.

### The problem

However, this supposition cannot be accurate for numerous reasons:

- 1) While Rashi conveys the explanation of the Medrash, that the laws of *Parshas Mishpatim* were instructed after the giving of the Torah (and thus originally came from Sinai), the Medrash<sup>1</sup> brings an alternative opinion which states that these laws were given to the Jewish people *prior* to the giving of the Torah.

Accordingly, it cannot be stressed that one must fulfill these *mitzvos* with the same feeling that was felt at the giving of the Torah—as they were indeed told to the Israelites prior to their receiving of the Torah.

- 2) The *name* of the *parsha* is *Mishpatim*, meaning laws that are understood logically. Consequently, the emphasis of the *parsha* must be in expressing the rational, not the *irrational*.

Rather than the Torah portion emphasizing that one must fulfill the rational laws because he is subservient to G-d’s will, in actuality, it must stress that one is required to fulfill the super-rational *mitzvos* with understanding and logic as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Shemos Rabba 30:3.

Maimonides explains this idea as follows:

### Text 2

Although all of the statutes of the Torah are decrees...it is fit to meditate upon them and wherever it is possible to provide a reason, one should provide a reason. The Sages of the early generations said that King Shlomo understood most of the rationales for all the statutes of the Torah.

*Rambam, Temura 4:13*

Hence, although these above-mentioned laws are indeed decrees that are illogical, there is an element of reason within them as well. That is to say, that although the prohibition of milk and meat is irrational and the statement, “we will do and we will hear,” transcends logic, they too have a quality within them that can, and therefore *must* be understood with reason.

### The order of Parsha’s

In addition to the previous questions on the *parsha*, there is as well an issue of the chronology, of which *Parshas Mishpatim* immediately follows the giving of the Torah expressed in *Parshas Yisro*.

The main innovation that arose as a result of the giving of the Torah was the instruction of the *mitzvos* that were *super-rational*, not of those that were logically understood on their own.

Why then, were the *mitzvos* that immediately followed the giving of the Torah—i.e. those

<sup>2</sup> Vayikra 18:4.

found in *Parshas Mishpatim*—laws that would be understood and lived by, even were the Torah *not* have been given to the Jewish people?!

### The novelty of Mt. Sinai

The giving of the Torah primarily expressed the fulfillment of the *mitzvos* which transcend logic (those *mitzvos* that are classified as *chukim*, edicts), not the *mitzvos* which can be understood through human comprehension:

- 1) Regarding the *mitzvos* that are rational, a person should fulfill these cue to their moral obligation as a human being, even were they not to have been given in the Torah. Therefore, the primary *mitzvos* that are expressed *with* the giving of the Torah are those that transcend logic.

This is expressed in the Talmud as follows:

### Text 3

Our Rabbis taught: “My ordinances you shall do,<sup>2</sup>” i.e., such commandments which, if they were not written [in Scripture], they should by right have been written and these are they: [the laws concerning] idolatry [star-worship], immorality and bloodshed, robbery and blasphemy. “And My statutes you shall keep,<sup>3</sup>” i.e., such commandments to which Satan objects, they are [those relating to]: the putting on of *sha’atnez* (the mixture of wool and linen), the *chalizah* [performed] by a sister-in-law, the purification of the leper, and the he-goat-to-be-sent-away. And perhaps you might think these are vain things, therefore Scripture says: “I am

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

the Lord,<sup>4</sup> i.e., I, the Lord have made it a statute and you have no right to criticize it.

*Talmud, Yuma 67b*

Even were the Torah not to have been written, it would be understood that one should live by a moral framework.

- 2) Many of the laws that are expressed in this Torah portion were, in fact, already mandatory obligations *prior* to the giving of the Torah. They were included in the seven Noachide laws that were given to all mankind, and which dictate that man should live a civil and moral life.

Nachmonidies expressed this idea in his commentary on the Torah.

#### Text 4

...And in my opinion, the laws which were assigned to the children of Noach in their seven *mitzvos*, are not only to settle judges in every province, rather, He commanded them regarding the laws of robbery, cheating, withholding the wages of an employee, watchmen, rape, seduction, damages, injury, lending and borrowing, business, and the like, similar to the laws which were commanded to Israel....

*Ramban, Vayishlach 34:13*

Even without the giving of the Torah, the Jewish people were already directed to fulfill the majority of the rational laws. The specific revolution that was introduced by Mt. Sinai however, was concerning the commandments which

exceeded logic; the realm of the super-rational. Without G-d commanding us to fulfill them, we would not have understood to perform them on our own.

#### Revelation at Sinai

It was for this reason that during the giving of the Torah, the revelation of G-d's presence on Mt. Sinai was in a manner that the Jewish people "saw which was usually heard."<sup>5</sup>

G-dliness that transcends the world and which is usually "heard," was perceived by the people outright. This intimates that they perceived G-dliness in a way that transcended normative human experience and rationale.

Being that the giving of the Torah was primarily expressed in the super-rational, the above question is exacerbated: It would seem appropriate that immediately following the giving of the Torah, the Jewish people should have been commanded regarding those *mitzvos* which are classified as *chukim*, edicts above logical meaning, not the rational *mitzvos*.

Why then, was the giving of the Torah (recounted in *Parshas Yisro*) immediately followed by the rational laws of *Parshas Mishpatim*, and not by those of the super-rational?

#### Chronology within the Parsha

What is more, is that it seems rather curious that the episode at the *end* of *Parshas Mishpatim* is the Jewish people's preparations for receiving the Torah—an event which, in actuality, occurred during the time of the giving of the Torah—while the *beginning* section of *Parshas Mishpatim* deals with rational laws that were *not* given immediately at Sinai, but rather during the

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Rashi, Shemos 20:15.

forty days that Moshe was on the mountain *following* the giving of the Torah.

(This perplexity is further enunciated according to opinions who hold that these laws were given during the encampment in Mara, before the Israelites even reached Sinai.)

From all of the questions enumerated above, and from the fact that the Torah did indeed write the laws in the manner that they are found, it is clear that:

- 1) Because *Parshas Mishpatim* immediately follows *Parshas Yisro*, it is understood that although the giving of the Torah *itself* is not characterized by rational laws, it must be that specifically *within* the rational, the essential concept of the giving of the Torah is expressed.
- 2) From the fact that after listing the rational laws, the Torah once again discusses the preparation for receiving the Torah, it is understood that after reason and logic we must once again express the idea of Sinai and accepting the Torah through faith.
- 3) Nonetheless, all these ideas, even the ones that are beyond reason, are incorporated in *Parshas Mishpatim*. One can therefore conclude that the later discussion of the giving of the Torah is also expressive of the concept of the *parsha*, i.e. *mishpatim*-rational laws.

### **This is my G-d**

These ideas can be more fully understood through prefacing a deeper explanation on one of the verses stated in the praise of *Az Yashir* (the Song of the Sea), as the Jewish people crossed the Sea of Reeds.

The verse states:

### **Text 5**

This is my G-d, and I will tell of His beauty (*v'anveihu*), the G-d of my father, and I will exalt Him.

*Shemos 15:2*

In the commentary of the *Shnei Luchos Habris* (referred to as the *Shala*), he explains the language of the verse as follows:

### **Text 6**

When it is "my G-d," [that is to say] that he is "my G-d" because of my knowledge and understanding, then can be "*v'anveyhu*," from the composite word I (*ani*) and Him (*v'hu*). Meaning to say, I and Him cling together [to make one word]...However when a person does not have knowledge which comes from understanding and only has tradition that he is the "G-d of my father," then "I will exalt him," because he is exalted and transcendent and I am far.

*Shnei Luchos HaBris, Asara Ma'amaros 40a*

In order for a person to be one with G-d, he must have a connection to Him through his own understanding.

When an individual has only faith, they relate to G-d in a way that is somewhat removed from themselves. They have belief in G-d, but it isn't *their* G-d. Only when an individual intellectually comprehends the Almighty through their own efforts, can the person truly feel connected and be joined to G-d.

This idea is expressed as well in the following verse:

## Text 7

Know the G-d of your father and serve him with a full heart.

*Divrei Hayamim I 28:9*

It is not enough to have faith in G-d. In order to have a relationship with G-d, one must *know* Him as well. To serve G-d properly, one must have both faith and reason.

What remains to be understood, is that according to the above explanation, the verse seems to be in a backwards order.

The verse first expressed that a person must discover G-d on their own (“this is my G-d”), and only afterwards did it mention the tradition of faith as it is passed down from the previous generations (“the G-d of my father”).

The verse should have first stated, “the G-d of my father and I shall exalt him,” and only afterwards say that He is “my G-d.”

What is the reason for this anomaly?

### Endless faith

This difficulty can possibly be explained based on the concept that no matter how much a person understands G-dliness, he must nevertheless have a faith that transcends knowledge.

G-d is infinite, and no matter how great one’s comprehension, there will always remain levels of understanding the Almighty that cannot be grasped through knowledge and can only be perceived through faith.

It can be suggested that such is the intent of the verse’s chronology in first mentioning “This is my

G-d,” and only afterwards stating that this is “the G-d of my father.”

The order of the two statements would express that no matter the depth of one’s knowledge, a person must still have faith that follows in order to relate to the infinite G-d.

This though, is not an adequate explanation.

For, although it is true that there is a level of faith which comes after knowledge, why does the verse not mention (as well) the faith that comes *prior* to knowledge, which serves as the premise for a person’s understanding?

This question will be understood through appreciating the general idea of the giving of Torah. Through understanding the intent for which the Torah was given, we can understand why the initial faith that the person has is not mentioned in the Song of the Sea.

### Becoming one with the Divine

The intent of the giving of the Torah was to heal the divide between the supernal and the corporeal. G-d wished that instead of this lower world remaining mundane, it should be permeated with a sense of G-dliness.

The Medrash states,

## Text 8

When the Holy One, Blessed be He created the universe, He decreed that “the heavens are heavens of the Lord, but the earth He gave to the children of men.”<sup>6</sup> When He wanted to give the Torah, He nullified the initial decree and said: “The lower worlds should ascend to the upper worlds, and the upper worlds should descend to the lower worlds; and I will be the one to start,” as it says, “And the Lord descended upon Mt.

<sup>6</sup> Tehillim 115:16.



Sinai,<sup>7</sup> and it is written, “And to Moshe He said, ‘Ascend to the Lord.’<sup>8</sup>”

*Shemos Rabba 12:3*

At the time of the giving of the Torah, G-d desired to bridge the chasm between the infinite and the mundane and create a world where the two can exist in tandem. G-d did not wish that the physical cease being physical, but rather that the G-dly and the mundane should exist in perfect harmony.

To accomplish this end, there were two actions that occurred by the giving of the Torah: the supernal came down to the lowly, and the lowly arose to the supernal.

In order for the world to become holy, both steps were necessary. It was not enough that the supernal should come down to the mundane, as this would not cause that the physical world *itself* would be transformed into a G-dly entity.

Were the only action to have been from the side of the supernal, this physical world would remain passive in its relationship to G-dliness. G-dliness would merely be superimposed on it, and the world itself would not become a place which could perceive G-dliness on its own.

This revelation of the spiritual upon the physical world caused that world and man became completely nullified to G-d. It did not bring about that man *himself* should perceive G-dliness.

**Man:** When G-d revealed Himself on Mt. Sinai, it effected that “the entire nation that was in the camp shuddered,<sup>9</sup>” “and the people saw and trembled; so they stood from afar.<sup>10</sup>” The identity of the Jewish people was not *transformed*; they were overwhelmed by the

tremendous awe, and their personal existence was dazed.

**The world:** The world, too, was nullified by the revelation of Sinai, as is expressed in the verse:

### Text 9

And the entire Mount Sinai smoked because the Lord had descended upon it in fire, and its smoke ascended like the smoke of the kiln, and the entire mountain quaked violently.

*Shemos 19:18*

The physical mountain was so strongly affected by the terrifying strength of G-d’s revelation, that it shuddered violently, unable to retain its usual state of existence.

The effect of this tremendous descent of the spiritual was actually felt not only on Mt. Sinai itself, but throughout the rest of the world as well. The Medrash describes the utter silence that took place in the world when G-d gave the Torah.

### Text 10

R. Abbahu said in the name of R. Yochanan: “When the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave the Torah, no bird chirped, no fowl flew, no ox lowed, none of the *Ophanim* stirred a wing, the *Seraphim* did not say “Holy, Holy,” the sea did not roar, the creatures did not speak. Rather, the whole world was hushed into breathless silence and the voice went forth: “I am the Lord your G-d.”

*Shemos Rabba 29:9*

<sup>7</sup> Shemos 19:20.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 24:1.

<sup>9</sup> Shemos 19:16.

<sup>10</sup> Shemos 20:15.

The descent of the supernal—as mentioned—caused that this world was nullified by the awesome revelation of the Almighty, and it lost its individuality and sense of self. For man to perceive G-dliness on his own, he *himself* needed to put in effort and his existence could not be nullified.

The purpose of the giving of the Torah was not that the world be *nullified* and lose its sense of identity, it was that the world *as it was* should become one with the Divine.

For this to occur, the world needed to elevate itself on its *own*, and become one with G-dliness. It was for this reason that it was not enough that G-dliness came down into this world, as that caused the world's existence it to be nullified. There had to be as well, the act of the world raising itself *up* to the Divine.

On the other hand, it was also necessary that the lower worlds initially be nullified from their own existence, and receive the original revelation of G-d's glory, as the Almighty Himself announced, "I will be the one to start."

It was through prefacing the revelation of G-dliness that the mundane was given the *ability* to transform itself afterwards. Revealing G-dliness in the world was not an end to itself. It was rather a means that gave the world the ability to become G-dly.

### **Faith and reason**

These two ideas mentioned in the Medrash, of the Divine lowering itself to this world and this world raising itself to the Divine, are respectively expressed in the concepts of faith and reason.

Faith does not come through man's own efforts. It instead comes from tradition that is passed down. Thus, even when a person has complete faith in G-d, in a sense, this faith was

superimposed upon him and is not something that he *himself* relates to. Although the individual fulfills the will of G-d, he remains distant from Him, and G-d's will does not transform his personal existence.

The act of faith is similar to G-d coming down to the mountain. It serves as the means for the person to elevate himself afterwards through his own efforts, not as an end in itself.

It is specifically when a person works *on his own* to understand G-dliness and when this comes from the individual *himself*, that he becomes a person who is one with the Divine. He and G-d are then united.

However, the initial faith is very much necessary. Although a person needs reason to serve G-d, he must also have faith, since reason in and of itself can be corrupted and lead the person along a false path.

The "enticement" of self-love is so great, that when a person rationalizes on his own, he is susceptible to error.

As a prerequisite to reason, a person must first have faith and accept the yoke of Heaven. Only then can he use his own faculties of reason, without worrying that it will lead him along a false path.

### ***Yisro and Mishpatim***

Accordingly, we can now understand why the giving of the Torah is immediately followed by *Parshas Mishpatim*, which contains the *mitzvos* of rational nature.

First comes *Parshas Yisro*, the *parsha* of the giving of the Torah, which implanted in the Jewish people a sense of faith and nullification to the Almighty.

After the giving of the Torah though, the imperative was that the Jewish people *themselves* become one with G-dliness. Their



mandate was to become one with the Almighty, without losing their sense of personal identity.

It was for this reason that the giving of the Torah was immediately followed by the rational laws. In these laws, G-d's logic is grasped in human comprehension, to the point where the individual *identifies* with them. It is specifically then that the G-dliness becomes one with the human experience. This idea is expressed in Tanya:

### **Text 11**

Now, when an intellect conceives and comprehends a concept with its intellectual faculties, this intellect grasps the concept and encompasses it. This concept is [in turn] grasped, enveloped and en clothed within that intellect which conceived and comprehended it.

The mind, for its part, is also clothed in the concept at the time it comprehends and grasps it with the intellect. For example, when a person understands and comprehends, fully and clearly, any *halacha* (law) in the Mishnah or Talmud, his intellect grasps and encompasses it and, at the same time, is clothed in it...now therefore, when a person knows and comprehends with his intellect such a verdict in accordance with the law as it is set out in the Mishnah, Talmud, or *Posekim* (Codes), he has thus comprehended, grasped and encompassed with his intellect the will and wisdom of the Holy One, Blessed be He, Whom no thought can grasp, nor His will and wisdom, except when they are clothed in the laws that have been set out for us...

This is a wonderful union, like which there is none other, and which has no parallel anywhere in the material world, whereby complete oneness and unity, from every side and angle, could be attained.

*Tanya, Ch. 5*

Through understanding G-d's will in a way that can be grasped through the rational mind, the human being himself becomes permeated and one with G-dliness, to the point that they are in complete union.

It is then that the ultimate purpose of the giving of the Torah—the unity of the Divine and the mundane—is fulfilled. It is therefore understood why *Parshas Mishpatim* follows the giving of the Torah, as after the Jewish people were infused with faith, they were given the mandate to develop their own relationship and understanding of G-d.

### **Medrash vs. the simple explanation**

As was pointed out above, there is a difference between Rashi's understanding of when the laws of *mishpatim* were taught and that of the other opinion brought in the Medrash.

Rashi explained that these laws were instructed after the giving of the Torah, while the variant view in the Medrash maintains that these laws were taught prior to the giving of the Torah.

According to the above explanation concerning faith and logic, we can understand that from a deeper perspective, they are both in the right.

**Rashi:** When a person is in the initial stages of serving G-d—expressed in the simple learning of the Torah as taught by Rashi—he does not yet have an appreciation for G-dliness. He does not yet comprehend G-dliness, nor does he possess a love or fear of G-d.

At this point in one's service of G-d, the individual cannot rely on his reasoning alone, as he is still very much under the dominion of the natural proclivities of the animalistic soul and will not come to the truth through his own deductions.

At this stage must be the realization that these rational laws as well were given at Sinai, and his

understanding and fulfillment of them must be just as the Ten Commandments heard at Sinai.

He must approach these laws in the way that they too were given with the tumultuous din of the Sinai revelation, and allow himself to be nullified toward them. He should not rely on his own identity to serve G-d, but should instead, relinquish his personal understanding to the will of the Almighty.

This idea comes into expression in the individual's personal service of G-d through initially employing absolute humility toward the Almighty in order to subdue his animal soul.

The Talmud states the following:

### Text 12

A man should always incite the good impulse [in his soul] to fight against the evil impulse. For it is written: "Tremble and sin not."

*Talmud, Berachos 5a*

When a person overwhelms their natural impulses with the fear of the Almighty, this causes their animalistic soul to be nullified and keeps it in check.

This act of nullifying the animal soul, however, is only necessary in one's initial steps in their service of G-d, when they are still very much under the influence of their natural proclivities.

This leads to the Medrash.

**Medrash:** When a person though, has advanced in their service, and they have attained a level where they love and fear the Almighty and grasp G-dly concepts with their mind, this manner of service is no longer adequate.

At this stage, rather than serving G-d from of a *lack* of personal identity and a sense of

subjugation towards His will, he should serve G-d because he *understands* that he must do so with his own rationale.

At such a stage, it is important to stress, as brought in the Medrash that these laws are logically understood and were given prior to the giving of the Torah, rather than stressing that they were given with the tumult of Sinai.

Although according to the Medrash as well, the *parsha* of *Yisro* prefaces these rational laws, this is because a person must still have faith in G-d throughout his service, in order to keep him on the proper path. However, this is only the *preface* to the *mishpatim*. The laws themselves must be fulfilled through one's own comprehension and the individual must thereby connect and become one with the Divine.

### I don't want

Accordingly, we can understand the following Medrash:

### Text 13

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: "A person should not say, 'I do not want to eat meat and milk, I do not want to wear *shatnez* (a mixture of wool and linen) and I do not want to have illicit relations.' Rather he should say, 'I want to, but what shall I do when my Father in Heaven has decreed [forbidden] me from doing so.'"

*Sifra, Kedoshim 20:26*

Maimonides explains, that a person should only express the above and say that he would rather sin when it pertains to *mitzvos* that are *beyond* logic. These *mitzvos* he should indeed fulfill purely because the Almighty has mandated that he do so, though his own logic and feelings think otherwise. However, concerning *mitzvos* that

are indeed logical, a person should feel that he does *not* wish to sin. He should not sin because G-d does not want him to, but because he *understands* that these transgressions are wrong.

#### **Text 14**

The evils which the philosophers term such, and of which they say that he who has no longing for them is more to be praised than he who desires them but conquers his passion, are things which all people commonly agree are evils, such as the shedding of blood, theft, robbery, fraud, injury to one who has done no harm, ingratitude, contempt for parents, and the like. The prescriptions which the Rabbis said, "If they had not already been written in the Law, it would be proper to add them."...There is no doubt that a soul which has the desire for, and lusts after, the above-mentioned misdeeds, is imperfect, that a noble soul has absolutely no desire for any such crimes, and experiences no struggle in refraining from them.

*Rambam, Shemona Perakim 6*

Maimonides explains that the commandments that are moral should be done because of moral reasons and that commandments that are super-rational should be done because G-d said so.

This idea seems contrary to what is generally explained in Chassidic texts, that one must fulfill *all* of G-d's commandments—including the rational ones—with a feeling of a G-dly yoke. How is this statement of Maimonides to be understood in light of what is generally taught throughout Chassidic thought?

Yet, according to the above, this is understood. The basis for *all mitzvos* must be faith, as one cannot rely on one's personal feelings to serve G-d. If a person only employs rationality in fulfilling

the laws, then, in a sense, he is not *servicing* G-d and instead is doing what *he* understands. In order that all *mitzvos* be part of a service of G-d, he must do so because G-d said so. This is what is meant in *Chassidus* when it says that all commandments should be done because of the yoke of Heaven.

On the other hand, the intent of the laws which can be understood through the human mind, is that the person himself be permeated by G-dliness. Not only should he nullify his desires to G-d's, but his identity itself should be permeated by G-dliness to the point that on his own he should not wish to sin. It is for this reason that it is not enough that man serve G-d with a yoke of Heaven, he should appreciate their reasons as well.

#### **Transcending man**

A person's reason, though, must result in super-rational faith. Were he to only serve G-d through reason, his service will be limited to that which can be reached through logic.

For, as much as there is an advantage to understanding G-d through one's own mind, the level of comprehension will always be bound by the limitations of human intellect. Human understanding is finite and as much he becomes one with G-d, the union is limited to the confines of what man's comprehension can possibly grasp.

The intent of the giving of the Torah therefore, was not only that man should be united with G-d in the areas that he can comprehend, but that even G-dliness which is *above* comprehension should be drawn into this world.

After a person has already related to G-d through reason, he can have faith as well, this time, without losing his sense of personal identity. This is the ultimate purpose of the giving of the Torah, that that which is beyond human perception and understanding be brought into

the world without the world being nullified by its presence.

### **This is my G-d...the G-d of my father**

Based on the above, we can understand why the verse first says, “This is my G-d and I will tell of His beauty” and only afterwards does it state, “the G-d of my father and I shall exalt Him.” This idea expresses that after reason (at which point the individual identifies *personally* with G-d), a person must once again serve G-d with faith (as expressed by “the G-d of my father”).

While the verse communicates the need for faith, it leaves out the initial faith that serves as a prerequisite and a basis for reason.

This is because the faith which serves as the *basis* to becoming one with G-d through understanding is not a faith that the person developed on their own, but rather comes from tradition and inheritance from one’s forefathers.

As such, it does not have to do with the individual’s personal identity, and he does not relate to it as *his*. A person therefore cannot be proud of this faith, as the individual himself did nothing on his own to attain it. For this reason it is not mentioned in the verses of praise in *Az Yashir*. If a person didn’t develop it on his own, he cannot sing about it.

After a person becomes one with the Almighty through their own efforts and appreciation however, *then* they can obtain faith of a higher level—a faith that is now part of *them*.

Since the individual has already become one with G-dliness through their own understanding of His ways, they are not nullified by something that they cannot grasp intellectually. At that point, even the levels of unity with G-d that are beyond their own comprehension are not superimposed upon them, and do not nullify their existence.

This faith that follows reason is something that he can sing about, as it is a level that he reached through his own efforts.

Instead of being *nullified* by faith, he becomes *permeated* with faith.

### **Chronology of the parsha**

This is the reason that after the rational laws are enumerated in the *parsha*, it follows with the preparation for the giving of the Torah, and in the midst of all the rational laws the prohibition of eating milk and meat is mentioned.

For this expresses the concept that *after* a person’s rational mind has become permeated by G-dliness, matters of *chukim* and faith as well, can permeate the individual in a similar manner that the rational laws do. They are therefore a part of a *parsha* that expresses reason and personal identity (*Parshas Mishpatim*), and follow the mention of the rational laws—as this is a faith that does not *transcend* man (as did the events of the preceding *parsha* of *Yisro*), but instead *permeates* him.

### **The revelation of Chassidus**

Similar to the way that the Torah was taught in three steps, a) through a G-dly revelation on Mt. Sinai which was greater than man’s understanding; b) with a focus on understanding through the laws of *Parshas Mishpatim*; and c) through the ideas which were beyond understanding (such as the Israelites’ statement of “we will do and we will hear” and the laws of milk and meat), yet at this point, in a way that did *not* overpower the individual—so too, the teachings of *Chassidus* were revealed in a similar manner.

First, came the *Chassidus* of the Baal Shem Tov, which focused primarily on faith.

Next, came the *Chassidus* of *Chabad*, revealed by the Alter Rebbe (R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi),

which focused on the individual. It stressed that the individual themselves must serve G-d with their own faculties of understanding.

Finally, through this personal connection and appreciation of G-dliness, the person should *appreciate* that no matter how much he understands G-dliness, he cannot truly grasp Him at all. Even those things which he *thinks* that he understands are also, in truth, beyond human comprehension.

Through studying Torah in general, and specifically *Chassidus Chabad*, one paves the

way to the time when we will learn the Torah of Moshiach—a time when we will perceive G-dliness clearly with our own eyes, and when the entire world will be permeated by G-dliness in a revealed way.

*(Based on Likutei Sichos 16, Mishpatim 1, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel.*

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