

A Taste of Torah Think Straight

By Rabbi Akiva Stern

Murder. Hate crimes. Oppressing the weak. All bad things, right?

Okay, but why?

There are certain things that we innately know are horribly wrong. Sometimes we hear a story of an atrocity that happened and it really shakes us up. We simply expect every human being to share certain morals, and we are shocked and outraged when we perceive a breach in what we consider to be basic human ethics.

But for a moment, let's ponder the source of our expectations. One could ask, why is baseless hatred wrong? It is but an emotion. Why is it that when someone owns something, and someone else takes it by force, we see it as a miscarriage of justice? Who decided that ownership is more than current possession? In fact, is the idea of "justice" anything more than an emotion?

The answer may astound you. This week's parsha deals with *mishpatim*, laws that seem to have a logical basis, such as laws of theft and damages. The first verse begins, "And these are the *mishpatim* that you shall place before them." (Shemos 21:1) Rashi (ibid.) explains that the verse begins with the conjunctive "and" to connect this parsha with the previous one, the Giving of the Torah. Just as those laws were given by G-d, says Rashi, so, too, these were given by G-d himself.

Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr (1910-1979), in his work *Ohr Gedalyahu*, poses a glaring question: Why would anyone posit that only *some* of the commandments written in these sections of the Torah are of Divine origin?! If we know and believe that the previous set of commandments were G-d given, why would we need the Torah to specify that these are, as well?

He answers that this *parsha* deals with *mishpatim*, which can be easily understood. In contrast, there are other

laws that were discussed previously that are called *chukim*, laws that are not self-explanatory or even understood (such as the classic *chok*, the red heifer). One might have mistakenly thought that only *chukim* are of Divine origin, as there isn't any clear rationale for them. But perhaps *mishpatim*, which seem obvious to any conscientious person, are simply the product of a baseline global moral code. The Torah addresses that misconception and states that *mishpatim* are mandated by G-d Himself, just as *chukim* are.

So why do we feel so powerfully drawn to these *mishpatim*, ideals of right and wrong? Rabbi Schorr continues that G-d implants these morals in the heart, soul and psyche of each person in order to facilitate the continuity of the world. If we had no respect for the property, lives and what we consider to be the inalienable rights of every human, anarchy would reign, and destruction and desolation would ensue.

This concept is essential to each and every one of us! We must be aware that while G-d created us with a perfectly-honed sense of right and wrong, we can easily become corrupted. Society's norms and values profoundly affect our *weltanschauung*. We need not look too far to find blatant examples of depravity and immorality that have leached into and poisoned our outlook. The very small things that a few short years ago were totally unacceptable have become completely, standard, and *even proper!*

May we internalize the message of this week's parsha and make sure our moral compass ever points straight, that is be precisely in line with Torah laws and values, so that we will not be swayed by the ever-changing whims of the society that surrounds us.

Stories For The Soul

Light for All Times

Back in the 1990s, a Jewish advertising executive came up with an idea. What if the New York Times listed the Shabbos candle lighting time each week? Someone would have to pay for the space, but imagine the Jewish awareness and pride that might result from such a prominent mention of the Jewish Shabbos every week. He sold a Jewish philanthropist on the idea, which cost almost \$2,000 a week.

For the next five years, each Friday, Jews around the world would see: "Jewish Women: Shabbat candle lighting time is ___." Eventually the philanthropist had to cut back, and in June 1999, the little Shabbos notice stopped appearing. From that week on, it never appeared again. Except once.

On January 1, 2000, the NY Times ran a Millennium edition. It was a special issue that featured three front pages. One had the news from January 1, 1900. The second was the actual news of the day, January 1, 2000. And then they had a third front page, which projected future events of January 1, 2100. This fictional page included things like a welcome to the fifty-first state: Cuba; a discussion as to whether robots should be allowed to vote; and so on.

And there was one more thing. Down on the bottom was the candle lighting time in New York for January 1, 2100. Nobody paid for it. It was just put in by the Times. The production manager - an Irish Catholic - was asked about it. His answer was right on the mark: "We don't know

Kollel Happenings

KOLLEL'S 15TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION FEB. 26TH

The Kollel will be celebrating fifteen years of bringing Torah to Denver Jewry on Tuesday, February 26th, at 6:30 pm, at the newly-renovated McNichols Building, 144 W. Colfax Ave. (corner of Colfax & Bannock). Tribute journal in honor of Rabbi Yehuda Amsel, who will be present at the event to receive an award. Ad deadline extended until February 15th. Reservations, as well as ads for Rabbi Amsel or other Kollel personnel, or in honor or memory of a loved one, can be emailed to journal@denverkollel.org, or call 303-820-2855.



TRUST THY FATHER

Join Rabbi Schachne Sommers for "Trust Thy Father," a series based on Chovos Ha'Levavos/Duties of the Heart. Discover and delve into vital Jewish concepts of Bitachon. The classes take place on Tuesdays, from 7:55-8:25 a.m. at Aish. For info email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.



A DEEPER LOOK

Join Rabbi Schachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issues, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights 7:40-8:30 pm at the Kollel, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at Aish Denver 8-9 pm.

Interpersonal Issues

Saving Another from a Loss

Included in the mitzvah of returning lost objects is saving another from a loss. For example, if one notices that his neighbor, who is not home, has a burst pipe in his home, and he has the ability to turn off the water main, he would be obligated to do so. Similarly,

if an employee is the last one to leave the office, he has an obligation to turn off the lights to save his employer from paying for the electricity.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

High Voltage

From: Jon Katz in Cambridge, MA

Dear Rabbi,

Can you settle a debate I have been having with some of my friends? Is it permissible to light Shabbos candles Friday night using an electric light? If so, would you be able to say the blessing? How about if one does not have any candles around?

Dear Jon Katz,

Two reasons are given for lighting Shabbos candles: shalom bayis, peace in the home, and oneg Shabbos, delight of Shabbos. It's hard to experience shalom bayis while stumbling over furniture, or oneg Shabbos while eating in the dark. By filling the home with light, Shabbos candles promote harmony and peace, and they make the food enjoyable.

Most poskim, therefore, say that you may use electric lights and even recite the blessing over them, since they add to shalom bayis and oneg Shabbos the same way as candles.

Some poskim, however, differentiate

between battery-powered lights, such as flashlights, and those that run on electricity generated from a power plant. Battery-powered lights are all right since they contain "fuel" - i.e., the battery - which is right there when you light it. Regular lights, on the other hand, have no "fuel." Rather, the electricity is "piped" in from the outside; furthermore, the electricity doesn't really exist yet - it's being created every second at the power plant. In a sense it's like lighting a wick with no oil.

It's known about Rabbi Moshe Feinstein that once when he was in a hotel and unable to light candles, he "lit" a flashlight and made a blessing over it.

Sources: The Radiance of Shabbos, Rabbi Simcha Bunim Cohen, and Shmiras Shabbos Kehilchasa 2:43, footnote 22.

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Stories for the Soul

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what will happen in the year 2100. You can't predict the future. But of one thing you can be certain. In 2100 Jewish women will be lighting Shabbos candles."

This non-Jewish production manager sensed a profound truth. Thus is the power of Jewish ritual. Thus is the eternity of our people.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.