


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 20 February 2009 - 26 Shevat 5769
Sedra Mishpatim

THE DIVINE LOAN

THE INTIMATE JEWISH RELATIONSHIP WITH G-D IS EXPRESSED IN THE IDEA that G-d Himself keeps the laws of the Torah. The Sages tell us they are called “G-d’s laws” because not only do they come from G-d, they are also kept by G-d¹. This teaching helps a person understand more clearly how closely we are connected with the Divine at every step of our lives. The Zohar states: “G-d, the Jewish people and the Torah are one”. This applies in many ways. The teaching that, so to speak, both we and G-d keep the laws of the Torah helps us understand that we are truly bonded together.

The Sedra² presents us with many laws, most of them concerning relationships with other people. One of them tells us about lending money to the poor. “If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you...” (22:24). The Sages of the Talmud comment that the word ‘If’ is not to be taken literally. There is a duty and a requirement to lend money to the needy person.

This is a central concept in traditional Jewish society. In many communities today there are interest-free loan funds. A loan helps an individual or a family deal with the constant pressures of life.



Dedicated by Mrs Tzipora Sufrin זצ"ל, to the memory and merit of her father k'zila et k'rgcus lfsm w wv j"vrv

117 GEORGE STREET, LONDON W1H 7HF
cru@lubavitchuk.com - www.chabadresearch.org

How does G-d Himself keep this law ? He 'lends' each of us everything we have. Our physical bodies, our skills and talents, our minds and intelligence, our homes, our possessions. This is a Divine loan which we for our part are able to enjoy - yet we also have to repay it.

How do we pay back the loan? By using all that G-d has given us in order to fulfil His objective: to make this world into a dwelling for the Divine, through keeping the laws of the Torah.

There are two types of loan. If you borrow someone's watch, you have to give the same watch back to its owner. The borrower never truly possesses the watch. However, if you borrow money, you do not have to give back the same banknotes, just the equivalent. The original banknotes become fully the property of the borrower.

G-d's loan to us is of the second type. Everything that G-d gives becomes ours: our physical selves, our skills, our minds and our possessions. Yet - ideally - we deliberately use all of this in every aspect of our lives for a sacred purpose, guided by the teachings of the Torah³. In this way we repay the Divine loan, or at least we try to. Someone might ask: "How much do you owe?" Answer: "*Everything!*"

MONTH OF JOY

This Shabbat there is the blessing for the New Moon of Adar. The Sages tell us "When Adar begins, we increase joy"⁴. The obvious reason is because of Purim, which is on 14 Adar.

What is joy? Revealing our 'inner' dimension. In each person there is an outer and an inner aspect. From the point of view of the outer, ordinary level, life is fragmented and often dull. From the point of view of the inner level, life is unified and exciting. Revealing the inner level is called 'joy'. Best wishes for a month of joyful Adar!

1. Midrash Shemot Rabbah 30:9. 2. Exodus chs.21-24. 3. Adapted from the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 1 p.158-9. 4. Taanit 29a.

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SEDRA MISHPATIM

FICKLE TASTE

Sam was almost ready to go to school. All he needed to do was collect his snack from the refrigerator, and then put on his shoes and jacket. The truth was, he was early this morning, and was happy he would not have to run to catch his bus.

“Muum!” Sam's smiling face turned sour in an instant, as he saw the snack his Mom had prepared for him. Instead of putting it in his bag, he put it down on the table. “Green peppers? Why did you give me that today?”

Mrs. Green hurried down the stairs. “Sam? Is everything OK?”

“Mom, you know I don't like green peppers - I only like red ones. Why did you pack green for me?” Sam did not look pleased.

Mrs. Green was confused. “I have been packing you green peppers for the last month. You told me a month ago that you like them.”

“I Know. But now I changed my mind.... I'm allowed too, right?”

Mrs. Green smiled. “If you do it in a polite manner, of course you are. Actually, this reminds me of this week's Torah portion, Sedra Mishpatim. Do you know what Mishpatim talks about?”

Mrs. Green started rinsing a red pepper, as Sam began to talk.

“Sure. It tells us how we need to behave towards one another. It says we should help lighten the load of our enemy’s animal. It tells us about thieves having to pay back double of what they have stolen, and sometimes more than double.”

“Very good,” says Mrs Green. “In last week’s Torah portion, the Jewish people received the Torah. This week’s Sedra starts by teaching Mitzvot that are easy to understand - ones we would probably do if we were just a nice and well behaved nation. Then in the second part of the Sedra, it tells about Shabbat and Festivals and not eating milk and meat together. Why did G-d teach the laws in this order? Why not first teach us the Mitzvot we don't understand - like keeping Shabbat, or the laws of eating Kosher?”

Sam wrinkled his brow. “I don't know. It's true - why is Mishpatim full of laws that are almost self explanatory?”

Mrs. Green began slicing the red pepper. “G-d wants to make sure we are keeping the Mitzvot because of our faith and our special connection with Him. Even the Mitzvot that can be understood are not kept only because they make sense. They are kept with special care because G-d commanded us to do so.”

Mrs. Green dangled the bag of red peppers in front of Sam. “Otherwise, we may change our minds! One day we may wake up and decide to do the Mitzvot, and the next day, we may decide it we are going to do something else, which also seems logical and reasonable!”

Sam looked intently at his mother. “You mean they may change their mind, like me?”

Mrs. Green winked.

Sam grabbed his snack, and ran out the door. In a second he was back.

“Thanks Mom.”

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