



In a small village in Poland there lived an unassuming and pious Jew named Meir. While he was by no means well-to-do, his family never wanted for their daily bread. Each day on his way home from the synagogue Meir passed through the farmers' market, buying produce and poultry which his wife sold from a small store attached to their house. The prices were always fair, and they earned a reputation for honesty.

Meir stood out from the other buyers at the market, for he would never haggle over prices. Meir had his one fair price, and that was that—he would never budge. Eventually the farmers came to respect him and would even seek him out when they had some special goods for sale, and he became known to everyone as "Honest Meir."

Meir had only one regret in life—his business took time away from his beloved Torah study. One day he decided that he would work only half as much, and spend the time saved learning Torah. His wife was worried by his decision, but he calmed her saying, "Don't you think that G-d can send us enough in those three days?" She wanted to reply that of course He could, but would He? But she stopped herself and decided to wait and see what would happen. As it turned out, their income was the same and her husband thrived on his Torah learning.

One day his wife came to Meir to discuss the marriage of their daughter, Mirele. "G-d has been good to us, and we must certainly be grateful, but our daughter isn't getting any younger, and the time has come for us to start saving for her dowry."

Meir looked at his wife and replied, "G-d has taken care of us so far. Trust in Him and stop worrying."

But his wife couldn't rest. "Meir, we aren't supposed to rely on miracles. Maybe you should go out and work like you used to."

Meir replied, "What you're saying may seem true, but don't forget my 'silent partner'—G-d. Haven't you seen with your own eyes that since I've spent extra time with my 'partner' we have lost nothing. I can not stop my Torah studies, especially now when we need Him even more." There was nothing more his wife could say except a heartfelt "Amen."

A short time later a peasant showed up at the marketplace with a large honeycomb encased in a block of wood. Several prospective buyers approached him, but he refused them, saying, "I will sell only to Honest Meir." And there he sat and waited until finally, late in the afternoon someone told him that Meir wouldn't be coming to market that day.

The peasant made his way to Meir's house where he was greeted by his wife. "My husband isn't at home now," she told him, but she asked him to wait while she ran to fetch her husband. Meir measured the honeycomb and lifted it; then he made his offer, "Judging by its size and weight, and even allowing for the wood, there should be a lot of honey in it." The two men agreed on a figure which seemed fair to both. The only problem was that Meir didn't have such a large sum. Meir's wife interrupted, saying: "I will try to borrow the money from some of our neighbors."

Meir served the peasant a cup of tea, and then he questioned the man: "Tell me, how did you come to have such a strange honeycomb?"

The peasant replied, "I was walking through the woods collecting fire-wood. When my cart was full, I got inside and fell asleep, but it seems that my mare wandered a bit, for when I awoke, I found myself in a different part of the woods, in front of a tree stump. Looking up, I noticed bees buzzing, and being something of a beekeeper myself, I hopped out of my cart and with a long thin twig I removed the queen bee from the hive. I tried to take out the honeycomb, but it was impossible to do so without breaking it. That's when I got the idea of sawing off the stump."

By the time the peasant had finished his tale, Meir's wife had returned with the money. Meir gave it to the happy peasant who went off feeling very pleased. Meir's

wife began to extract the honey. She pulled out two and then three heavily laden honeycombs and reached in with a deep ladle for more, when she found there was nothing there but a deep, empty hole. The poor woman was horrified. They were now in debt, and for nothing but a bit of honey and a piece of wood!

She screamed for her husband, who was equally shocked at the find. "What will we do now?" his wife wailed. Meir was also at a loss, but not willing to give up he said, "Go fetch your longest cooking spoon and maybe we can salvage something from the bottom."

Meir dipped the spoon into the wooden cavity, and lo and behold, the spoon was filled with a pile of golden coins and jewels! His wife almost fainted from the shock, but when she recovered she asked her husband, "Do you think G-d had the bees produce this treasure for us?"

Her husband turned to her, smiling, "Possibly, but I think there's a simpler explanation. Probably someone hid this treasure years ago and had to abandon it for some reason. Then the bee colony settled in the trees stump and built their hive on top of the treasure. Now, it seems that G-d must have decided there was no longer any reason to leave it hidden since we need the money to marry off our children and do other good things. So, you see, the peasant was rewarded for his labor, and we were even more richly rewarded for our faith and trust in G-d."

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

On the weekly Torah Portion

And these are the ordinances which you shall set before them (Ex. 21:1)

This section of the Torah comes immediately after the Revelation on Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments. Yet what is enumerated here are not lofty principles pertaining to the relationship between G-d and man; they are very concrete laws governing man's relationship with his fellow man.

We learn from this the lesson that "good manners are a prerequisite to Torah." Rabbi Mendel of Kotsk used to say: The same way that a book's preface informs the reader of the book's contents, a person's courtesy and manners indicate just how much Torah learning he has acquired.

Six years shall he serve, and in the seventh he shall go free(21:2)

"Six years" symbolizes the six thousand years of the world's existence; "shall he serve" refers to our mission to learn Torah and perform mitzvot; "in the seventh" refers to the seventh millennium, when "he shall go free," when the Messianic Era shall reign on earth and G-dliness will no longer be hidden but revealed. (Lubavitcher Rebbe)

For all manner of transgression...of which he can say, "this is it" (22:80)

Pride is the root of all transgression. The essence of sin is when a person says of himself—"this is it"—"I am the most important thing in the whole world!" (Rabbi Yisrael of Modzitz)

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Dedicated in honor of a dear friend of the Lubavitch Youth Organization
Mr. Rotem Rosen

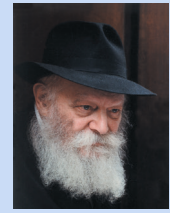
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 נוסד תוך ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
 "To You I lifted up my eyes, You Who dwell in heaven" (Psalm 123:1)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

In last week's Torah portion, we learned about the Revelation on Mount Sinai. This week, in Mishpatim, the text begins by delineating some of the many practical laws which the Torah contains. The first subject dealt with is, "If you buy a Hebrew servant." This pertains to a Jew who was sold into servitude by the courts in order to make restitution for stealing, or one who sells himself due to his great poverty.

At first glance, it seems odd that the Torah would begin with this subject first. After all, in the generation of Jews who left Egypt, there were no Hebrew servants! The Children of Israel were all very wealthy, having received many gifts of gold and silver from the Egyptians before they left, and from the great riches they plucked as they passed through the Red Sea. There were no poor people who had to sell themselves into slavery. And even if there were those who succumbed to the prohibition "Thou shalt not covet" and actually stole something, they were all sufficiently wealthy to be able to pay back the rightful owner twice, or however many times the value of the stolen object, as prescribed by Torah law. Why then does the Torah choose precisely this subject to begin the portion dealing with practical commandments, those governing man's relationship with his fellow man—the laws of offerings, festivals and the like?

The section on the Hebrew servant, more than any other commandment, illustrates the effect the Revelation on Mount Sinai had on this world. With this mitzva, more so than with others, we see a direct cause and effect between the sin and its punishment. If a Hebrew slave does not desire to be freed after six years of servitude, his punishment is "and his master should bore his ear through with an awl."

The commentator Rashi explains that this ear, which heard the prohibition uttered on Mount Sinai against stealing and committed thievery anyway, deserves to be bored through. This ear, which heard G-d declare that the Jewish people are His servants alone—yet wants to remain a slave to a human master—deserves to be pierced. In many instances of Torah law, we do not find such a direct cause and effect between a wrongdoing and its rectification. For example, the Torah promises that the reward for honoring one's parents is longevity, but we don't always perceive this connection. Similarly, punishments may also seem to have little connection to the sin committed. However, the penalty for a Hebrew slave who refuses to be set free is one instance in which the punishment is an obvious consequence of the actions.

When the Torah was given it enabled the spiritual and physical world to influence each other. Prior to that time, the spiritual and material were sealed off from one another—each realm remained isolated and distinct. The Hebrew slave is an example to illustrate this innovation, for his spiritual defect found a physical expression, one which could be seen by all. Furthermore, Chasidic philosophy explains that the Hebrew bondsman also symbolizes man's obligation to subjugate his baser instincts and desires in the service of G-d. After the Revelation, the road to spirituality is paved by our properly utilizing physical reality in the service of holiness. Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

No Deposit, No Return

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

There is a line in this week's parshah concerning the Jewish bondsman. Im b'gapo yavo, b'gapo yeitzei – if he came in alone, he goes out alone. If he entered his period of service unmarried, he must leave unmarried and his master may not exploit him to father children who would be born into servitude. But this Torah phrase has become a traditional way of expressing one of life's basic home truths, i.e. no deposit, no return. No effort, no reward.

Whether in business, relationships, or in raising our children, the principle holds true. In the words of the Psalmist, "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy."

There is the story of Shmerel, a poor man who once walked by the home of the richest man in the shtetl and smelled the tantalizing aroma of the wealthy man's favorite dish, cheese blintzes. Shmerel took one whiff and just had to taste those blintzes. As soon as he comes home, he begs his good wife, Chasha, to make him some of those blintzes. Chasha says, "I'd love to make you blintzes, Shmerel, but I have no cheese." "Nu, my dear, so make it without the cheese." "But we've got no eggs either." "Chasha," says Shmerel, "you are a woman of great ingenuity. I'm sure you can make a plan." So Chasha sets

out to do the very best she can under the circumstances. Her work done, she sets the plate of blintzes in front of her dear husband. Shmerel takes one taste, crooks his nose and says, "You know Chasha, for the life of me, I cannot understand what those rich people see in blintzes."

Clearly, you cannot make good blintzes without using the right ingredients. Just as clearly, we cannot have nachas from our children without putting in the necessary ingredients of a good Jewish education, a solid upbringing at home, quality family time, and above all, by setting a good example.

Too many parents assume that nachas is a democratic right, almost a genetic certainty. If parents are good people and committed Jews, then surely their children will turn out the same. But there are no such guarantees.

As Rabbi Sholom Ber of Lubavitch said, "Just as it is a Biblical commandment to put on tefillin every day, so is it obligatory to spend a half hour daily thinking about our children and to do whatever possible to ensure that they follow the path in which they are being guided."

So don't be a dreamer. Put in the effort, and please G-d, you will see the rewards. Whether it's our work or our children, may we enjoy the fruit of our labors.

