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SEFER SHEMOS - THE PENSON FAMILY EDITION

IN HONOR OF SHEA MOTTI'S UPCOMING BAR MITZVAH

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THE **PENSON FAMILY** EDITON

IN HONOR OF SHEA MOTTI'S UPCOMING BAR MITZVAH

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Address: 5014 16th Avenue, Suite 488, Brooklyn NY 11204

משפטים-שקלים
WITH
R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

Money and Piety

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Part I. Awareness of the Laws

Is Every Jew A Lawyer?

Everyone knows that when Parshas Mishpatim comes along, right away people begin to tune out. It's all laws! Laws and more laws and bylaws – with details! Some people might even think, “Bring back the stories! Yetzias Mitzrayim and Kriyas Yam Suf and Ma'amad Har Sinai and the Mann! Even the stories of the Am Yisroel complaining – it's interesting at least. But laws?! After all, are we all going to be lawyers or dayanim?

I remember years ago I met a Jewish street cleaner. This was many years ago when there were city workers whose job it was to scrub the streets clean. He was dressed in a white uniform, pushing a barrel on wheels and holding a brush, and when he saw me he stopped to talk to me. He was proud to tell me that his grandchild was learning in a yeshiva. But he was bothered: “I'm surprised,” he said. “He's spending his mornings studying law!” He was telling me what his grandson was studying – he was explaining to me the beginning of Bava Kama. “My grandson is not

a law student – he's only in the fourth grade!" he said. "Why are they training him to be a lawyer?"

It's a good question. Here's this little boy, and his mind is being cluttered up with a *shor* and a *bor* and a *maaveh* and a *hev'er*; all the *avos nezikin* and the *toldos* – all the different scenarios of damages. And it's not merely that one *yeshiva* has this system – it's the system of the Jewish people; actually it's the system of the Torah.

A Torah System

That's why you find that *agadata* and *middos tovos* is only one seventh of the *gemara* – the other six-sevenths are taken up by intricacies of law. Someone who learns *gemara* knows that it boggles the mind how much time and space is devoted to details and sub details – minutiae and technicalities. *Bava Kama*, *Bava Metzia*, *Bava Basra*! Three big *mesichtas*; pages and pages about *dinei mamanos* and *dinei nezikin* are gleaned from *parshas Mishpatim*! And young people spend their lives studying them. Years and years go by; they could have learned *middos tovos* in that time. They could have learned *Mesillas Yeshtarim* or *Chovos Halevavos* in that time. It would seem like we lose out on so many great things because of the time spent in the three *Bavas*.

But that's how it's supposed to be. In *Bava Kama* (30a), the *gemara* asks the following question – it's an important question because it applies to all of us sitting here: **מֵאֵן דְּבַעֵי לְמַהוּי חֲסִידָא** – If someone wants to be a *chossid*, a pious man, so what should he do? Now, suppose someone would ask us that question. So with our little heads, who knows what kind of a program we would think up! We would say maybe, "First on the list is fasting – a lot of fasting! And lots of *Tehillim*!

The Genuine Chossid

But it doesn't say a word about that over here. Maybe a *chossid* fasts and says *Tehillim* as well, I can't tell you, but not a word is mentioned in this *gemara* about that. What does the *gemara* say? **לִיקְיִים מְלִי דְּנִזְיָקִין** – Let him fulfill the things of *nezikin*, damages (*Bava Kama* 30a). Studying *Parshas Mishpatim* – learning how to be careful with other people's money, that's the ticket to *chassidus*.

Now, that doesn't mean that just because you don't go out with stones and smash your neighbor's window that you're considered a *chossid* already, no. *Chassidus* means much more than that. But **מֵאֵן דְּבַעֵי**, if you want to become a *chossid*, if you want to reach the summit of perfection, that's the first step – to be careful with your fellow man's property.

Now, I understand that for many people *chassidus* means something else altogether. *הַחֲסִידוֹת הָאֲמִתִּי הַנִּרְצָה הַנֶּחְמָד רְחוֹק מֵצִיּוֹר שׁוֹכְלָנוּ* – *The true piety that is accepted and desired by Hashem is far away from any picture we have in our minds* (Mesillas Yescharim – Hakdamah). I'll tell you a true story. There was once a boy who wanted to come into my *shul* to study Torah. The door was locked, but he was a dedicated boy, full of enthusiasm, so he was trying to make his way through the window. I happened to come just as he was breaking the window. He didn't intend to break it; he was just trying to force it open, but it broke. Now, a new window costs good money but I didn't say anything. He was a *yeshiva* boy, a sixteen year old *bochur* with no money, so I kept quiet. He should have paid, but I didn't say anything.

The Bekishe Chossid

A few months later, I met him on Church Avenue on Shabbos. And he's all dressed up in a *chassideshe kapoteh* – with silk lapels. Beautiful! It's a beautiful thing to honor the Shabbos. But I knew this boy – he came from Canarsie and he wasn't a *chossid*; he didn't come from such a family at all! I don't even know if his parents are *shomrei Shabbos*. But he wanted to wear a *chassideshe kapoteh*. Now, there's nothing wrong with that, but it costs a lot of money. Silk lapels! These *kapotehs* can cost a small fortune. And I was thinking to myself, "That's his idea of being a *chossid*?" Because the *gemara* has other, less fanciful, ideas. *מֵאֵן דְּבַעֵי לְמַהֲרֵי חֲסִידָא* – *Someone who wants to be a chossid, so the first thing is לִיקְיִים מְלֵי דְנִזִּיקִין* – *he should fulfill all of the details of never doing any sort of damage*. A *chossid* thinks before he pushes on somebody's window so hard. And if he breaks it, he pays for it.

Imagine you're a man who is going before Pesach to distribute packages, parcels to needy families. So you step into your car and you're loaded down with various packages – *matzos*, bottles of wine and other things. You're a special fellow! You must be, because you're taking from your own time – and your own money too – to help others. So as you load your car, you're leaving packages on the sidewalk where people can trip. Or maybe you're speeding through the streets because you have a lot of good deeds to accomplish. "Ohhhh!" Hakodosh Boruch Hu says. "You're making a *bor b'rshus harabim*! And you're speeding too. You're an *Adam Hamazik*! That's worse than if you hadn't delivered any packages at all." There will be a much greater punishment for that, for being a *mazik*, than for not being a *goimel chasodim tovim* because the very first thing that's expected of you is not to transgress any *nezikin*. What comes after that is certainly a good thing but *nezikin* is the most basic responsibility you have.

Everyone is Honest

And without the details, without studying *Mishpatim*, you have no idea what is right and what is wrong. Without studying *Bava Kama* and *Bava Basra*, you are a crook – only that you're a crook who has the best opinion of yourself. Every man thinks he's honest – he knows that others are not, but he's honest, that he knows.

Let me tell you a little story. There was a time when I used to take a taxi every day. I had to go from one school to another to talk. And I used the same driver every day; he was an old American Jew, an eighty year old man. To all the institutions that I had to speak, he always took me there. So he became like a close associate of mine. Now this man didn't know how to learn a thing. He didn't even know *siddur*; he knew nothing. But one thing he did know. He knew that the Orthodox Jews are no good.

So while he's driving, he's telling me his criticism of Orthodox Jews, all of his complaints. This and that, and also how honest of a man he was – unlike the Orthodox. Finally we crossed the parkway and we came into Flatbush – there was a long way to go yet – and he closed down his meter. I said, "Why are you closing the meter?" So he tells me "Because my boss earned enough today. The rest of the fare will go to me." This was the man who prided himself on being honest! He didn't even dream that anything was wrong; he didn't dream that he was a crook. And that's how it is – the unorthodox don't even know that they're crooks. All they know is that the Orthodox are crooks. By virtue of being Orthodox, you're already a crook.

The Ganav In The Fur Coat

I walked past a fruit store the other day, and I see a lady, not a poor woman. She's wearing a fur coat; she's dressed very proper. So she stops by the apricots in the bin outside, and she takes an apricot and begins to eat it. And then a second apricot. She's a *ganav*! I see it all the time – gentiles in the street, walking past the fruit store and picking off a few grapes. And then some peanuts and even a plum. "Oh," they'll say, "I'm just tasting to see if I want to make a purchase." Just tasting?! *Ah nechtige tug!* I see it all the time and I tell them it's stealing. "You can't steal from the owner like that!" And the lady is surprised. "Me, steal?!" She would never steal!

But people who never learn, people who rely on their innate sense of right and wrong, are a thousand times worse than they could even imagine. And even the learners, the *talmidei chachomim*, have to think about every step they make – if you're not thinking then it doesn't even occur to you.

The Ganav In The Black Hat

Once I was in the yeshiva across the street and I was observing a young man studying *Perek Merubah*. It's the seventh *perek* of *Bava Kama* and it talks there about the laws of a thief, the obligations of someone who steals. And he was learning with a real appetite. It was a pleasure to look at! He was learning out loud: **מְרֻבָּה מִדַּת תְּשֻׁלוּמֵי כֶּפֶל מִמִּדַּת תְּשֻׁלוּמֵי אֶרְבָּעָה וְחֻמָּשָׁה** – He was saying it with a *geshmak*! He was clarifying all the details of paying *keifel*, paying a fine when you're caught stealing. And I noticed that he was studying from a *gemara* that he “borrowed” from my synagogue! It didn't even occur to him that the thief that the *gemara* was talking about was he! Stealing a *gemara* is not called stealing?! He's *chayav keifel*, he has to pay me two *gemaras*. Lucky for him, I happened to be around!

And even if you do study, that's only the beginning – you have to keep the laws in mind always and be vigilant about applying them. All of the general rules are models for the small details of how to live every minute. You have to apply the *pesukim* and the *halachos* because they are intended as models for the situations you face all day long.

It's not only an ox that man is responsible for. The one who studies Hashem's words as intended is not thinking only about an ox. He understands that Hashem is telling him that he is responsible, not only for his ox or dog, but for other things as well. For leaving a bag for “one minute” on the sidewalk and for a banana peel left on the ground and a dirty tissue on the table. For how he drives and for what he leaves on the steps and for sticking his foot out into the aisle. All harm caused to others by negligence is punishable by *dinei Shomayim*, by the laws of Heaven. And often, the guilt in the eyes of Hashem is extremely heavy.

Part II. Awareness of Hashem

The Secret of Parshas Mishpatim

And now we come to our subject for tonight. Because everything we said up till now is only an introduction – an important introduction – to the secret of *Parshas Mishpatim*. Because there's a big puzzle here: As important as *Mishpatim* are, and as much as it requires constant study and awareness, why is it so important that it should be the first thing the *Am Yisroel* heard from Hashem after *Matan Torah*?

I want you to understand this question: The most remarkable spectacle that the *Am Yisroel* would ever witness was *Matan Torah*. We stood at *Har Sinai* and we saw what nobody before ever saw: **הִנֵּהיָה כְּרָבֵר**

הַגְדוֹל הַזֶּה אוֹ הַנִּשְׁמָע כְּמִהְיוֹ הַשָּׁמַע עִם קוֹל אֱלֹקִים מִדְּבַר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ בְּאֶשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ אֹתָהּ וַיְחִי – Has there ever been any such thing like this great event or has anything like it been heard?! Has a people ever heard the Voice of Hashem speaking from the midst of the fire as you have heard, and survived?! (Devarim 4:32).

When they heard that tremendous Voice for the first time, the words אֲנֹכִי הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ – I am Hashem your G-d, it was an experience of the greatest love and yearning for Hashem that our nation would ever experience. There's no question that the people were on a very high level of enthusiasm and they expected now to hear *who knows what* kind of instruction in walking the path towards Hashem! The greatest ideals and attitudes, the deepest of Torah secrets and the mysteries of our purpose in life – how to achieve this perfection of closeness to Hashem. That's what they were expecting and they were ready to accept it all. *Naaseh v'nishma!* – “We want to do everything! Just let us know the path that we should walk on in order to serve You best and we'll start running down that road.”

The Big Letdown

And what happened then? A remarkable thing! Hashem came down on Har Sinai and said to His people, “Oh, you're saying *naaseh v'nishma*? You're ready to do?! So let me tell you what I want: וְאֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵיהֶם – And these are the statutes that you, Moshe, should place before them (Shemos 21:1). Laws of dealing with your fellow man; all forms of damages, and the monetary relationships with those around you. That's how I want you to get started.”

We sit down to learn *Mishpatim* with *peirush Rashi* and we're reading a law book! The dry details of how to treat your fellow man's property; his cows and his sheep, his shirt and his land. All the various payments for bodily injury, and the laws of torts and contractual agreements. *Parshas Mishpatim* is famous as the Torah source of monetary law.

And that's a big question. *Mishpatim*?! These aren't the high ideals that we were waiting for! Is this what we accepted the Torah for?! We had just heard the Voice of Hashem! “I am Hashem your G-d.” The booming thunder, the bolts of lightning and the smoking mountain! We saw the Presence of Hashem with our own eyes! And for this?! Just to hear these mundane monetary laws?!

I Didn't Sign Up For This!

Let's say a *ba'al teshuva* comes into *yeshiva* for the first time. And so, he'd like to hear about great ideals; he'd like to be taught noble aspirations and life-changing attitudes. That's why he came in, because

he's an idealist. And instead what does he get? The first book they give him is *Seder Nezikin*! He wanted ideals, and instead he's being treated to a course in financial law.

He's looking for Hashem, and instead he finds laws about what happens if one's animal trespasses into his fellow man's field and eats some of the grain. Or, if you leave your wine barrel in the public path, and someone's camel falls over it. And it's endless; it goes on and on. Sometimes there's a little oasis of a few lines of *agadata* by which he can refresh his *neshama*. A *ba'al teshuva*, an idealist, waits for that – he loves it. Sometimes it seems to him that all the rest of it is unnecessary. “If only we could skip over all of this, and just spend our time on the noble ideals.” That's what he's thinking.

And that's what the *Am Yisroel* was thinking when they stood at Har Sinai. We just heard the first commandment, *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*, and we said, “We will do and we will listen” – and at that very moment when their hearts were open to everything, ready to hear the most sublime ideas, we get *Mishpatim*?! *Mishpatim* is what You tell us?! I think it's a big question.

Explaining the First Commandment

So listen well to the answer. Because what does *Anochi Hashem Elokecha* – I am Hashem,” mean anyway? What command is there? He's not telling us that we have to do anything – it's just a statement, a fact. But what are we supposed to do about it?

So you'll tell me what the Rambam says: **לִידַע וּלְהֶאֱמִין** – It's a command to know and believe in Hashem. OK, if that's the case, it's easy. As soon as you hear it, it's a done deal. I agree, I accept. Just show me where to sign on the dotted line and it's all settled.

Oh no, it's far from being settled! It's just beginning. *Anochi Hashem Elokecha* means that your job is to learn to be aware of Hashem more and more and more. It's not enough for us to just concede the fact – to merely accept Hashem's Reality as a fact; to rattle off some words, “*Ani ma'amin b'emunah sheleimah* – I believe; I know,” and then to get back to regular life. Just to repeat these ideas all of our lives, the same way we heard them when we were four years old, means that we are frustrating the purpose of this great command. Nothing doing! *Anochi Hashem Elokecha* is a *mitzvah* that you can never stop fulfilling. Those three words come to declare the necessity of continuing always to gain more and more awareness of Hashem – to be thinking of Hashem always!

Mishpatim – The Details of Anochi

And that's exactly why after *Matan Torah*, right away came *Mishpatim*. Because, while *Anochi Hashem Elokecha* was the *klal gadol* they heard on that glorious day; all the details of how to be aware constantly of Hashem were given in *Parshas Mishpatim*. It's only possible to fulfill these *dinim* if you keep Hashem in mind always. "Because if you were aware of Me always," says Hashem; "If you would train yourself to always be aware that I'm watching you, you'd be careful. And if you're not practicing being aware of Me all the time, then it's impossible for you to succeed in this world, it doesn't matter how big of a *talmid chochom* you are."

The great subject of *nezikin*, to always be on guard against causing damage to other people or to their property and their feelings, that's the first step *because it demands constant Awareness* that Hashem is watching. That's the foundation of the service of Hashem – you are aware at all times that He is watching and that He's demanding something of you always! That's the greatest fulfillment of *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*!

Digging a Pit On Your Staircase

Let's say a man is putting away his *Pesach* things – he's carrying down the *Pesach* dishes, and he sees one thing among the dishes that he wants to put with the *chometz* things, to keep it for all year round. So as he's carrying the box of dishes down the stairs, he puts this one thing on the stairs for the time being. Oh no! Stairs are a *reshus harabim* where people are going up and down, the other tenants use the stairs too. You're endangering their lives by putting something there. Nothing is allowed to be put on the stairs! If somebody would step on it, you know what could happen *chalilah*?

Mishpatim means that you can't just do how you please. Do you have workers? You have to pay wages? "I don't have the money right now." "I'll pay you a little bit now and the rest next week, or next month." *Dinei mamonos* puts you on notice: **לֹא תִלֵּין פְּעֻלַּת שָׂכֵיר** – "Before the sun sets you have to pay the wages" (*Vayikra* 19:13). The sun is going down and the worker wants to go home! So you had better pay him.

The *Chofetz Chaim* once hired a man to drive him someplace in a wagon – and soon as he got off the wagon and he saw that the wagon driver didn't have any change, he ran off to borrow money to pay the fare. He wasn't going to wait till sundown! Because if you live by the *dinim* of the Torah so you're always aware of your responsibilities to Hashem. It's not that you're worried about your workers going on strike; you're not worried about unions and union bosses. You're strict with yourself, because there's a big Boss. *Hakodosh Boruch Hu* is the worst

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Keep up the good work! Even if we don't remember and internalize everything we read, it is still raising our outlook of this world and subtly changing our lives for the better. One day at a time!

Mordechai, Brooklyn



I think Toras Avigdor became such a strong learning focus in the Jewish community around the world!! It's amazing! I was just in E"Y and my host was reading the Parsha booklet by the Shabbos table- we sat there talking about how amazing Toras Avigdor is and how much it adds to all our lives! Thank you for all the Torah that we are learning!

Breindy, Brooklyn



Our whole family enjoys Toras Avigdor so much! My students already know that when they are not sure who I am quoting, it will usually end up being Rav Miller. It's making such an impact on our lives!

Chaya, Yerushalayim



This is the best parsha sheet ever! Thank you very much.

Dovid, Cleveland



Thanks so much! I am hooked on the Parsha booklet since I read it the first time on parshas behar. I just have a hard time finding the booklets since they run out so quickly. I would love it if more copies could be distributed...

Yitzchok, Brooklyn



My family loves the kid version. Even my 5 year old reads it. It's the first pamphlet everyone grabs as soon as I come home friday.

Yisrael, Airmont



I greatly appreciate all the work that goes into giving me these daily doses of inspiration. I usually read it at work and it's nice to have an injection of meaning while working. As for the parsha booklets, they've literally made a difference to my way of thinking! Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Chanie, Brooklyn



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THE WORDS ECHO... WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

Keep up the great work
It's a pleasure to see the torah
of Rav Miller so easily accessible

Dov, Yerushalayim



Thank you for all your hard
work. Rav Millers teachings
have been a life changer for me.

Moshe, Toronto



Thank you so much for the
daily e-mails and the parasha
booklets. I so look forward to
reading them!! BH, I feel that
they are molding my mind to
think how Hashem wants me to
think. They have really changed
my life. I am so grateful to all
who are involved. Beracha and
Hatzlacha!!

Barbara, Brooklyn



Keep up the amazing work
you guys do! May Hashem
shower his brocha on you guys!

Michael, Johannesburg



Toras Avigdor has changed,
and is continuing to change, my
life. Thank you. I am eternally
grateful for all that you are do-
ing. You should be Gebentched!

Avrohom, Lakewood



Halevai the whole klal yisroel
would read this authentic and
straight forward daas torah! As
far as I know there is nothing
out there where one can receive
clear answers from a gadol ba-
torah whose every answer is
pure chazal.

Chezky, Givat Ze'ev



I love the shabat sheet, it's my
'oneg shabbat' after we have fin-
ished eating, and I love the daily
questions and answers. Thank
you very much!

Naomi, Telzstone



Thank you so much! Since we
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it's really the only 'inspirational
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so interesting, practical, and
even funny. They are written so
well and we so so much appreci-
ate all the hard work that goes
into each and every one! We
have also spread it to friends
and family who are now fans...

Nechama, Yerushalayim



union boss there is. He sees everything and He's very demanding because everything belongs to Him!

The Real Landlord

לְהֵשֵׁם הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהּ – *The earth and everything in it all belongs to Hashem.* Only that, וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לִבְנֵי אָדָם – *He gave us permission to walk on it, and to use the things in it.* The awareness that you're just passing through a world that doesn't belong to you is the foundation for living a life of awareness of the true Owner in this world.

When you realize that you are walking through a world that doesn't belong to you, and that whatever you do here must be done according to the rules of the Boss, your life becomes a different type of life. Certain places you can't walk, and certain things you can't use. You can walk only where He permitted you to go. You can use only what He allows, and only in the way He allows. If something belongs to somebody else, so you have no right to walk into his territory, or use his property, because Hashem didn't give you permission. Wherever you walk, whatever you use, you must always be careful to follow His guidelines. He gives us permission only with certain conditions, most of which are included in the *mili d'nezikin* of *mishpatim*.

Hashem Is Truly Everywhere

Before any step that you make in this world, any dealings you have with somebody else, or somebody else's property, you must be aware that you're dealing with Somebody much bigger than you imagined. If you eat what belongs to somebody else, you are robbing Hashem. If you walk on somebody's property without permission, so it's also Hashem who didn't give you permission; you're trespassing on Hashem's property. He only permitted that man who made a *kinyan*, the one who acquired ownership, to use His things; anybody else has to be very careful.

And therefore to be aware all the time about how you are treating this man and that man, and about how you are treating your neighbor's property and your friend's objects, means that you are keeping Hashem in mind all the time. Because it's impossible to be as careful as the Torah expects, it's impossible to fulfill the details that the Torah demands of you, unless you are aware that Hashem is always watching and that He is making these demands of you. Once you understand that, you will have to be aware of Hashem all day long!

The Little Details Count

The *gemara* in *Chagiga* (5a) tells us that when a person is brought to judgment, he will be brought up on everything – he'll be charged with things he never even imagined could be problematic. אֶת כָּל מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹקִים

יָבֹא בְּמִשְׁפָּט עַל כָּל נִעְלָם says Shlomo Hamelech in Koheles (12:14). You will be brought to judgement on all the many things that are hidden away from you.

And the *gemara* explains, זֶה הַהוֹרֵג בְּנֶה בְּפִנֵּי חֲבֵירוֹ וְנִמְאָס – “This refers to someone who kills a louse, and someone standing nearby is disgusted by it.” Or, הֵרַק בְּפִנֵּי חֲבֵירוֹ וְנִמְאָס – “If you spit out some spit or phlegm, and the person nearby is nauseated by it.” It wasn’t your fault; you had something stuck in your throat. And you covered your mouth too. And yet, even those minor acts of disregard for your fellow – even if done unintentionally – will be brought up against you on that great day of Judgment. And what that means is that you have to be aware that Hashem is always watching.

When you’re talking to a person and you have a cold, make sure to keep far away from him. If you’ll cough in his face, you’re a *mazik*! You don’t believe in germs? Who cares what you believe in! You’re a *mazik* of the first degree! There are so many things to be careful about. And don’t say, “It’s *min hashamayim*, it’s *bashert*.” No, it’s blood on your head! You are to blame. In every instance it could very well be that you’re to blame, and the only solution is to be aware of Hashem all day long and to thereby be careful with *mili d’nezikin*.

Don’t Bother People!

Not only germs! Suppose you’re talking to somebody in *divrei Torah* and as you’re talking to him, you let loose a flow of polluted air from your mouth. Oh, is it difficult for him to bear your halitosis! Now, he’s too polite to run away from you. But you’re a *mazik*. You’re annoying him.

The one who is always aware of Hashem lives differently. I knew a *tzaddik* whose head was in the heavens all the time; his mind was always occupied with great thoughts. And yet he never spoke to anybody unless he perfumed his mouth first. I knew him very well. And for years he carried a little packet of listerine pellets in his pocket. He never came to speak to anybody unless first he perfumed his mouth. This was a man who lived with the ideals of *mussar*. Number one is don’t injure, don’t bother people. That’s the first rung of the ladder that goes up to heaven.

And we do that because this was the system that Hakodosh Boruch Hu first showed us when He gave us the Torah. It was *Matan Torah*, and right away, *Mishpatim*! Because although these *Mishpatim* might benefit the welfare of man, as well as the perfection of character for the one who trains himself to care about his fellow, yet the most important achievement is that it serves as constant reminders that Hashem is always looking always down at our deeds – even the most subtle of deeds – and that we are always obligated to behave as one behaves in the

presence of a king. And thereby, even the most mundane activities of a Jew are always saturated with awareness of Hashem. And that awareness is your perfection in this world, and your preparation for eternal happiness when you finally come to bask in the true Presence of Hashem in the World to Come.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

Parshas Shekalim **Small Amounts Add Up**

The Big Event

In the ancient days, when the *Beis Hamikdash* still stood, there was a very big event that took place once a year, an occasion that attracted a lot of attention. Our *chachamim* tell us that בְּאֶחָד בְּאֶדָר מְשַׁמֵּיעִין עַל הַשְּׁקָלִים – when the month of Adar came around; big announcements were made in all the towns: “The time has come to collect *machatzis hashekel*.” And every Jew had to contribute a half *shekel* for the purpose of purchasing the *korbanos tzibbur* in the *Beis Hamikdash*. Everywhere, in all of the places where the *Am Yisroel* dwelt, there were officials who acted as *gabba'im* for the purpose of collecting the *machatzis hashekel*. And even though it was only a half *shekel* for each person, it became a huge sum – millions of coins were collected.

Now, once it was collected, it wasn't just sent to *Eretz Yisroel*. Besides for the great tumult of the collection process, the entire procedure of bringing the money to *Eretz Yisroel* was made into a big ceremony, it was a tremendous affair. They made treaties with all the kings whose lands they had to pass through in order to get permission to collect money from Jews along the way. And in order to be allowed to pass through unmolested, they were even provided with military transport – they had with them a small army of soldiers that marched along with them.

And because it was an opportunity for safe travel to *Eretz Yisroel*, thousands of people traveled with the *machatzis hashekel* caravan to *Yerushalayim*. The convoy usually consisted of about ten thousand people who gathered from towns and cities in *Bavel* and other places. First of all, הִנְהוּ דְעִילֵי מִהֶבֶא לְהָתָם – There were many people who wanted to learn in *yeshivos* in *Eretz Yisroel* so they used this opportunity to come along with this caravan. Also, all the *meisim* who died in *Bavel* and wanted to be buried in *Eretz Yisroel* were now exhumed – the bodies were taken out of the ground – and they were carried along with this convoy. The *gemara* says that. They were waiting all year for this caravan,

and the *meisim* were brought to Eretz Yisroel for burial, along with the *machatzis hashekel*.

Who Needs You Anyhow?

Now, what was the purpose of this whole ceremony? Such a tumult to collect money from everyone! You know the *gemara* says that there were wealthy Jews in Eretz Yisroel who offered to pay for the *korbanos* from their own money. Even if a person wouldn't contribute, the same thing would have taken place anyhow because there's plenty of money without his – the *korbanos* would have been brought just the same. Let's say you're a stingy fellow and so every time the *gabbai* came knocking on your door, you told your wife to tell him you're not available; that you're busy, you're in the bathroom. So do you think they wouldn't be able to afford to buy *korbanos* that year? They would have gotten along quite well without collecting from every individual. There was no need for this whole thing!

But we're learning now that there was a tremendous need for it! The big tumult, the commotion of collecting money from everyone, made a great impression on the minds of the whole nation. Because even though a person was miles away in a different country – could be he thinks, "Me? What do I have to do with the *avodas Beis Hamikdash*?" – yet, he was expected to join together with the whole Am Yisroel in the service of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

Put Your Money To Work

When all of the money arrived in *Yerushalayim*, it was used to buy *korbanos* and that way every Jew had a share in all the offerings that were brought on the *mizbeach*. The money was taken into a certain *lishka*, a room, where it was poured out into a big heap and then the *kohanim* came with buckets and they scooped up bucketfuls of coins for *korbanos*. And when they needed more, they scooped up another bucket. And even though you only gave a donation, a small part of the cost of the *korban*, nevertheless you were a part of it all – your money was in those buckets.

And that way, all day long, whatever was done in the *Beis Hamikdash*, you were there too. When they brought the *korban tamid*, it wasn't merely a *kohen* who was offering it to Hashem. It was you! The *korbanos*, the *ketores*, the *hadlakas haneiros* – your money was working for you. And so, even though you were miles away, in a different country – could be you were sleeping too; maybe you were taking a nap – yet you still had a part in the *avodas Beis Hamikdash*.

And that's why the collection of the monies was such a big affair – there was a great commotion! Everybody, wherever he was, knew that it was his opportunity to be *nitpal l'dvar mitzvah*, to attach himself to the *avodas Beis Hamikdash*. When they gave *machatzis ha'shekel* money, they demonstrated that they were joining in with the Am Yisroel – not

just that we don't mind that *korbanos* are offered up; we want to be part of those who bring the *korbanos*. And even though our share is small, nevertheless, by doing that, we show we participate, we identify with the *avodas Hashem*.

Participating in the Great Endeavors

Now we should listen prayerfully to this lesson – don't think it's a small thing. It's one of the reasons we still read *Parshas Shekalim* today. We're reminding ourselves about the necessity to acquire a *ratzon*, a desire, to participate with the *Am Yisroel* in all of their great endeavors. It's a very important subject because we know that most of us cannot achieve great things on our own. Not only do we ourselves not have the *zechus*, but we don't have the influence and the money either. And nevertheless *Hakodosh Boruch Hu* wants us to demonstrate our desire to change the world by means of joining in with the *Am Yisroel*, in their great projects, even if it's on the most minimal scale.

If we join in by means of money, we identify with all of the great ideals, all of the great projects, so *יְשַׁלֵּם שָׂכָר לְנִטְפֵּל לְעוֹשֵׂי מִצְוָה בְּעוֹשֵׂי מִצְוָה* – there will be tremendous reward for the one who join in; *k'osei mitzvah* – like the one who did the *mitzvah*, it's as if we did the entire job ourselves, and we get credit for the entire *mitzvah* (see *Toras Avigdor parshas Noach*).

Now, we're learning from the *machatzis hashekel* an important principle that it pays for us to study, and that is that when you contribute money, you have the *zechus* as if you yourself are doing what your money is doing – that's a big *chiddush*.

The Real Tzedakah

Everyone knows that in the *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur machzor* when it comes to *Nesane Tokef* you say the following words: *תְּשׁוּבָה וְתַפִּלָּה – וַיִּצְרֶקָה מִמַּעַבְרֵיךָ אֶת רַע הַגְּזֵרָה* – *Teshuva, tefillah and tzedakah remove the bad decrees*. So underneath the word *teshuva*, the printer puts the word *צוֹם* – fasting. Why does he say fasting? Because that's the most obvious form of *teshuva* – a person fasts in order to show how contrite he feels. Actually it needs more than fasting, but fasting it's a pretty good indication he means business.

And the second thing on the list is *tefillah* – that's *davening* – that you all know.

Now, the third thing is *u'tzedakah*. What's *tzedakah*? So in the *machzor*, underneath the word *tzedakah*, they put the word *מָמוֹן*. *Tzedakah* is *mamon*, money. It's interesting why they put the word *mamon* there under *tzedakah* – it's the same thing; it seems superfluous.

But actually it's not superfluous because *tzedakah* does not mean *mamon*; *tzedakah* means righteousness. When it says *וַיִּצְרֶקָה תְּצִיל מִמוֹת*

(Mishlei 10:2), it means *righteousness* rescues from death. It doesn't mean money. And even though they bang the *pushkes* with that *passuk*, it's only a *drush* – it's not the *pshat*. The *pshat* in *tzedakah* is *righteousness*.

If a person is a righteous man in everything, that's the real *tzedakah*. That's what Hashem wants. And that's *pshuto shel mikra* – we shouldn't make any mistake about that. *Tzedakah* means *zedek*. It means keeping the Torah, it means learning the Torah. It means guarding your tongue. It means serving Hakodosh Boruch Hu by doing all the *mitzvos* properly. *בֵּין אָדָם לְמָקוֹם וּבֵין אָדָם לְחֵבֶרֶת*. Certainly that's *tzedakah*.

Your Money is an Opportunity

But the *chachamim* came along and told us a *chiddush* – that *tzedakah* is *mamon*. That's a very big *chiddush* – your *mamon*, your money *תַּצִּיל מָמוֹן*. The money that you put in the charity box will save your life because it's considered as if you are doing the good deeds. It's very important to understand the great principle that your *machatzis hashekel*, your *tzedakah*, represents you.

Of course, if you can actually get involved with your body, if you can make somebody into a *shoimer Torah*, or if you can teach him to become a better *oved Hashem*, and as a result of your influence he becomes a better person, certainly there's no greater *tzedakah* than that. *מִצְוָה בּוֹ יוֹתֵר מִבְּשָׁלוּחוֹ* – Better you should do the *mitzvah* with your own body, then to have your money do it for you. But there's no question that for most of us, *mamon*, money is the great opportunity to join in with all the great endeavors of our nation.

Because when you give money to a *yeshiva* and the boys are sitting and learning *gemara* by day and by night, it's your money that's learning *gemara*. Your money is studying *Mesichta Bava Kama* now. If your money is making *ovdei Hashem* into better *ovdei Hashem*, that's you doing it! It's a special *chesed* that Hashem gave us when He told us we have this privilege to be involved by means of our money. It's not just that you gave money, you did a *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* and that's all, now you're finished. No, you're not finished – you just started; you just started accomplishing great things!

Learning In Your Sleep

Even when you go to sleep – you're already wearing pajamas and you're climbing into your bed – your money is still working for you. The people who are learning Torah in those institutions, whatever they are, it's your money that's learning Torah for you. If the *bochurim* are learning late at night in the *beis medrash*, so you're sitting next to those boys and you're there too. You're a *nitpal l'osei mitzvah*!

And even more, when you fall asleep at the end of your days, your money still continues to earn merit for you. You know, we think that when a man leaves over money for a yeshiva so it's just a ceremony: "We got rid of him and now we have his money already. Now we can take him off our mailing list and we can forget all about him."

You maybe forgot about him but Hashem doesn't forget! This man is attached to the yeshiva now! His money continues to earn merit. Absolutely. As they're sitting in the Mirrer Yeshiva or in Lakewood and learning Torah, it's your money participating in all the Torah that is being learned. You're still learning in the Yeshiva Shel Matah, although now you're in the Yeshiva Shel Maalah. No question about it — your money is earning merit for you.

Do Whatever You Can

Of course, the more money you give, so you're demonstrating more participation in the great endeavors. But at least *something* you have to demonstrate. So let's say you're not able to support a big yeshiva. It costs tremendous money to support it and they're coming to you — "Maybe you want to buy the Beis Hamedrash in your name or your father's name. It only costs 100,000 dollars. Or maybe you'll buy a room in the yeshiva for 30,000 dollars." So you look at them like they fell off the moon — "Me?! I can't even pay the *schar limud* for my own children! I'm *patur*! I'm not even interested in thinking about the whole thing!"

Oh no! Don't say that! Not interested?! That's a tragedy because נְטָפֵל לְעוֹשֵׂי מִצְוָה בְּעוֹשֵׂי מִצְוָה — there will be tremendous reward for the one who joins in; *k'osei mitzvah* — like the one who did the mitzvah. The one who gives five dollars to the yeshiva or five hundred dollars to the yeshiva has joined in with the one who gave the hundred thousand dollars! As long as he gave the most he could, he's also a builder — a plaque on the wall he won't get maybe, but he gets credit in *shamayim* because he went all out in participating in the mitzvah; and his *machatzis haskekel* is remembered by Hashem forever and ever in the Next World.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

What is something that we can learn from the character of your rebbi, Rav Isaac Sher, *zichrono l'vracha*?

A:

Well, you have to really know a person well to judge his character. Rav Isaac Sher was the Slabodka Rosh Yeshiva, the last Rosh Yeshiva of Slabodka before they moved to Eretz Yisroel. He was a man of very great intelligence. Everything he said was logical. And therefore I admire him no end and I have very many things to say about him. But right now I'll say this: We can learn from Rav Isaac Sher the importance of learning and understanding the Torah and the Gemara *al pi seichel hayashar*, in ways that are founded on logic. *Seichel hayashar* is very important. That was his *derech*.

It's called learning through *dvarim hamiskablim al haleiv*, with ideas that people can grasp and understand. In order to convince people, to teach people, you should talk about *dvarim hamiskablim al haleiv*, things that are more convincing. Some people like to say *sisrei Torah*, things that are mysterious, things that we don't understand. Nothing wrong with that; there are a lot of mysteries in Torah too. But if you want to be effective, you should follow the system of saying *dvarim hamiskablim al haleiv* – practical things that people understand.

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