

# בשבת

BY RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN  
RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT  
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS



## TEACH ME!

**P**arshas Mishpatim follows on the heels of the most amazing occurrence in history, the giving of the Torah. *Mishpatim* is full of *halachos*, from not taking interest on a loan to the obligation to pay restitution for damages caused.

At the end of the *parshah*, Hashem told Moshe to join Him at *Har Sinai*, where Moshe would stay for forty days. Afterwards, Hashem would give Moshe the stone *Luchos*, tablets that were inscribed with the *mitzvos* given at *Har Sinai*.<sup>1</sup>

In describing these *Luchos*, the Torah says, "The stone tablets with the Torah and *mitzvos* that I have written, to teach them." Simply understood, Hashem was giving the *Luchos*, with the Torah and *mitzvos*, to Moshe, and Moshe was to then teach *Klal Yisrael* the Torah and the *mitzvos*.

The Seforno<sup>2</sup> (R' Ovadiah ben Yaakov, 1475–1550) questions why it was necessary for Moshe to teach the Jewish people the Torah. After all, the Torah is not some sort of hidden and inaccessible tome, nor was it written in a language not understood by the populace. The Torah is there for all to see, for all to understand. Why was Moshe's role needed?

The Seforno's answer, of course, is obvious. Though the words may be in front of us, the true meaning and the deeper understanding is elusive. The very nature of Torah is that it needs to be taught, teacher to student. But the Seforno points out that this is by design — even the most intelligent and creative student of the Torah requires the training and guidance offered by a teacher. Though many disciplines will gain by having a mentor, the basic truth is that many disciplines can be learned on the job, or found in books.

However, the position of *rebbe* or *morah* is not like any other teaching profession. The *rebbe* or *morah* is a link in a chain that leads directly back to Hashem Himself. This link is integral to the understanding of Torah, and without it, one will wander aimlessly across the vast landscape of Torah thought.

With this perspective, we can understand the importance and impact of our teachers, and it is our duty to do what we can to maintain and strengthen that relationship.

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### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

It is important to gain everything that we can from our *rebbeim*. What practical things can we do that will augment our relationship with our teachers, and allow us to learn as much as we can?

In general, it is important to note that the more we like and trust someone, the more likely we are to listen and understand what they are saying. Thus, an important step in learning from a teacher is doing our part to develop the relationship.

Respect creates an excellent foundation for a relationship. When the two parties respect each other, there is then room for growth and understanding.

Additionally, a teacher often chooses their profession because of their passion and interest in teaching. Students, however, are often there out of circumstance. Yet, a willingness and drive to learn and understand will not only directly impact one's ability to grow, but will also affect the relationship, as the teacher recognizes an appreciative student.

These two attitudes, respect and a desire to learn, will go a long way in furthering one's learning process.

<sup>1</sup> Shemos 24:12

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* s.v. להורותם

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**It is appropriate to study all Sifrei Mussar, one by one, and repeat them regularly without fail, day by day, and night by night.** - R' Eliezer Papo zt"l, Sefer Pele Yoetz

# QUESTIONS AND CHAOS

I\* didn't know what to expect, but I certainly didn't expect this! The room was bedlam, pandemonium reigned. There were two people off in a corner speaking quickly, while more were shouting back and forth, between them and the teacher. I had never experienced anything like this before.

I was invited by a childhood friend to join him for a day in his *yeshiva*. We grew up together, he had gone to an Orthodox school, and I had not grown up observant, but we were neighbors and the same age, and got along well. However, we had gone our separate ways when we got older, I went to university, and he went on to *yeshiva*. We lost touch, but ran into each other about a week ago. I was curious what he was up to, and when he told me he was in *yeshiva*, full-time, I was shocked. He never seemed the type — and that led to the invitation. "You just have to try it for one day. It will be an experience."

Why not? I didn't have classes on Tuesday, so that's when I went. I suppose I expected something similar to my classroom. A professor, or in this case, a *rebbe*, in the front, with the students in neat rows, listening, perhaps snoozing, as the teacher lectured. Boy, was I in for a surprise!

The moment the *rebbe* walked in, a student asked him a question. As the *rebbe* nodded his head, another student interjected. The conversation quieted down, but after a few minutes of teaching, this happened again. By this time, my head was swimming. The language they were speaking was not quite English, and the topic at hand was clearly over my head. But I don't think I ever witnessed such passion, the students, the teacher, the entire room was shaking with debate.

The class was over, and the students headed to the lunchroom. Many wore smiles, and chatted as if they were not just involved in a battle for their lives. I went over to my friend, who I had known as Jake, but the others were calling Yaakov. "Jake, what in the world just happened?"

He suggested we head to the lunchroom together and talk it over, which we did. A couple of other students introduced themselves to me, and made themselves comfortable at the table. "Ben, I told you it would be an experience. I bet you your lectures are not like that, huh?"

"No, not at all. Can you explain it to me? Does that happen every day?"

"Pretty much," interjected another student, Moshe, "and I'll tell you why. It's part of the learning process. Sure, we can all sit back and passively listen to what our *rebbe* says. But we can do the same by reading a *sefer* — that's a book. This is an active process of learning. By engaging in this debate, we're not simply acquiring knowledge, we're learning how to learn."

*\*Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The explanations of the Torah that have been passed down for generations have the same force and obligation as the words of the Torah themselves.<sup>1</sup>
- A person generally remembers what they learned from a teacher better than what they learn themselves.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Rabbeinu Bachya on Bereishis 18:19, s.v. למען אשר*

<sup>2</sup> *Rabbeinu Yonah on Avos 1:6, s.v. יהושע בן*

**"We're not simply acquiring knowledge, we're learning how to learn."**