

Right after the Ten Commandments we learn about freedom. No Jew is supposed to be a slave. G-d said we are to be His servants no one else's. If a Jew ever says he wants to be a servant his ear is pierced. He is told you who heard the Ten Commandments, you who have heard, you are only to serve G-d. By wanting to become a slave you have shown that you do not really want to worship G-d. Only a free man can worship G-d because only he has the opportunity to choose. In Jewish law even a Sefer Torah can be sold to buy a person's freedom. Freedom is a very precious commodity. There are two types of freedom, freedom from and freedom of. Freedom of speaks of freedom as an absolute. Freedom of worship, freedom of the press. This type of freedom does not tell anybody what to do. It just says we must have freedom. There is another type of freedom called freedom from. Freedom from hunger, freedom from oppression, freedom from fear, freedom from tyranny. This type of freedom tells us what we must do. Unfortunately, there are many people who in their zeal for freedom from forget that we must have freedom of also. This is what happened in Iran. In their zeal for freedom from oppression, freedom from domination they did not hesitate to take away someone else's freedom. In the Jewish concept of things we do not want to defeat our enemies. What we want them to do is to bless us. This is what happened when Jacob had the encounter with Esau's guardian ange. Dawn broke and the angel said let me go. Jacob said he would only if he would bless him. We do not want to destroy anybody else's freedom. We do not want to say death to any group. We just want to live with them in peace, to bless them and have them bless us. This is a difficult thing. In the Torah portion, Mishpoteem we learn how Moshe Rabbeinu went up to Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights to receive the Torah. The question could be asked why did he have to go up and spend forty days on the mountain? G-d created the whole world

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in six days. This is to teach us that it is a lot easier to create physical things than to create human relationships. We can build beautiful buildings. We can build great industries but unless we learn the lessons of freedom of and freedom from we will only destroy them and ourselves.

The story about a man who loved golf. He went to heaven but they had no golf course. He heard from Gabriel that there was a golf course in hell. He then asked Gabriel if he could go to hell. He went down to hell and found the most beautiful golf course. The best he had ever seen. He then turned to one of the residents there and said, "Where is the golf club? I want to get busy". The resident looked at him and said, "There is not any." That's why this is hell". We seem to be doing the same things. We seem to be creating beautiful technologically superior environments but we are forgetting about interior relationships.

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Right after the Ten Commandments we learn about freedom. No Jew is supposed to be a slave. G-d said we are to be His servants no one else's. If a Jew ever says he wants to be a servant his ear is pierced. He is told you who heard the Ten Commandments, you who have heard, you are only to serve G-d. By wanting to become a slave you have shown that you do not really want to worship G-d. Only a free man can worship G-d because only he has the opportunity to choose. In Jewish law even a Sefer Torah can be sold to buy a person's freedom. Freedom is a very precious commodity. There are two types of freedom, freedom from and freedom of. Freedom of speaks of freedom as an absolute. Freedom of worship, freedom of the press. This type of freedom does not tell anybody what to do. It just says we must have freedom. There is another type of freedom called freedom from. Freedom from hunger, freedom from oppression, freedom from fear, freedom from tyranny. This type of freedom tells us what we must do. Unfortunately, there are many people who in their zeal for freedom from forget that we must have freedom of also. This is what happened in Iran. In their zeal for freedom from oppression, freedom from domination they did not hesitate to take away someone else's freedom. In the Jewish concept of things we do not want to defeat our enemies. What we want them to do is to bless us. This is what happened when Jacob had the encounter with Esau's guardian ange. Dawn broke and the angel said let me go. Jacob said he would only if he would bless him. We do not want to destroy anybody else's freedom. We do not want to say death to any group. We just want to live with them in peace, to bless them and have them bless us. This is a difficult thing. In the Torah portion, Mishpoteem we learn how Moshe Rabbeinu went up to Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights to receive the Torah. The question could be asked why did he have to go up and spend forty days on the mountain? G-d created the whole world

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One of the most perplexing problems in religion is the problem of fate. If we believe that everything is from G-d, how can we ever want to change our fate? We should accept whatever G-d gives us and never try to improve our condition. Recently someone came to me and said, "Rabbi, I know that I can get an artificial limb and learn to walk again but since G-d has decreed that I be without one leg, I have decided not to get an artificial limb". I looked at him incredulously and I said, paraphrasing the words of Rabbi Akiva, "Aren't you sometimes hungry?". The person answered, "Yes". I said, "If G-d made you hungry, why do you eat? Aren't you, also, changing your fate by eating?"

Eventually, I was able to convince him to go and get fitted for an artificial limb, but his question raised a whole slew of other questions with which we have to deal. To many thinkers of the modern world, religion is portrayed as a force against man's betterment. Religion, they claim, causes people to become passive and to accept any fate which they have been given. That's why Karl Marx called religion the opiate of the people. He was following Ludwig Feuerbach who claimed that the more power we give to G-d, the less we have left for man, that the more we extol G-d's love and kindness, the more we accentuate man's sinfulness. He operated on some sort of scarcity principle which states that the more power G-d has, the less we have, the more love G-d has, the less we have. This type of analysis might be true of other religions but it certainly is not true of Judaism.

We do not believe that we must accept things in life which we can change. We do not believe, as others do, that it is our purpose in life to bear crosses. It is true that we all suffer in life, but it is a sin to suffer if we do not have to suffer. Each of us is meant to be free and to live life to the fullest extent possible while discharging our responsibilities to man and G-d. In fact, the Talmud teaches us that we are actually going to be held accountable in the after life for not enjoying anything in this life which we could have enjoyed but which we failed to have enjoyed because we did not want to make the effort. In Judaism, we do not extol suffering. We extol simcha, joy.

Obviously, there are many things in life we just must accept like death, human limitations of time and space, inevitable frustrations, storms, earthquakes, etc., but there are many

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things which we can change and which we should change. We, in Judaism, believe in fate only after we have done everything possible to make sure that ~~the terrible things that~~ <sup>what happened</sup> ~~have occurred~~ <sup>is</sup> are not our fate. If we absolutely cannot do anything about it, only then must we accept it and even then we should still pray to G-d and never give up hope that someday it will be changed.

We would not even fully agree with the prayer which states "G-d give me the courage to change the things I can and to accept the things I cannot change and the knowledge to know the difference between these two cases". We are always to hope and to pray that even those things which we cannot change eventually will be changed. That is the meaning of the concept of the coming of the Messiah. When he comes things will be different. There will be no evil, neither physical evil like storms, death, pain nor moral evil, the evil we do to each other. There will be no death or pain. That is what we say in the Kaddish. "May He establish His kingdom speedily and soon and say ye amen." That is why mourners say the Kaddish because they are affirming in the midst of their grief that they are not giving up hope, that eventually they believe that pain, suffering, and even death will be overcome.

In the Torah portion, Mishpoteem, which comes right after the Ten Commandments, we have many of these ideas spelled out. We are told Rapoh Yerapeh which means "heal thoroughly heal". G-d not only gives permission to physicians to heal, he commands them to heal. We are supposed to go to doctors. It is against Jewish law to even live in a city which does not have a doctor. We cannot say, "G-d made me sick, let Him cure me". We are G-d's junior partner in creation. G-d wants us to act. He wants us to do things in this world. Just as He wants us to feed ourselves, He wants us to take care of ourselves, to heal ourselves, to organize our society ourselves, and to live in peace with each other. G-d can intervene and He does intervene in history in very subtle ways, but He wants us to take the initiative. We all know, as modern science has taught us, that almost all the laws of science are probabilities and G-d can act without even seeming to act. He, though, wants us to act first. He does not want us to be resigned to our fate. In fact,

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotz used to say that all resignation and despair stem from ignorance. Resigning ourselves to our fate is actually one of the worst sins. The Rabbis teach us that G-d's presence cannot be felt where there is despair. Life can be very good and we should try to make it good. G-d's presence can only be felt where there is joy.

In this Torah portion we learn how a Jewish bondsman who refused to go free at the end of six years service had his ear pierced. No Jew should ever accept slavery. No Jew should ever be satisfied with that type of fate. We learn, too, how we are to organize society. We do not have to have a society in which murder is now the leading cause of teenage deaths. We are killing close to a thousand people a year in the Houston area. We do not have to accept this. Poverty is not inevitable. We are taught how we are to make provisions for the poor. We are not to say that it is G-d's will that I am rich and G-d's will that he is poor. If G-d did not want him to be poor and starve and suffer, He would not have made him that way. That is a false concept.

It is true that there are certain limits upon us, but it is equally true that if we band together we can overcome most of them. In this Torah portion, we also learn about the Covenant that G-d made with our people in which the people said, "We will do and we will understand". We all must act, ~~must do~~. We should never become resigned. Resignation does not bring understanding but action does. If we all band together to help each other, then we will be able to understand our problems and overcome many of them. After this Covenant, Moshe and Aron, Nadav and Avihu and seventy of the elders of Israel see a vision of G-d. G-d's presence comes to them because the people are united. They see, so to speak, under G-d's feet "a paved work of sapphires which was like the very heavens for clearness". There must have been millions of sapphires which were all placed together in a beautiful paved work. Each sapphire, of course, represents each of our potentialities. Each of us, by working together with others, can solve many of the problems which confront us. G-d has assured us that if we begin to act and if we act together, we will be able to enjoy the good life.

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The 19th century philosophers were wrong, at least when they speak about Judaism, when they say that religion debilitates a people and causes them to forsake the knowledge and unity of purpose which will allow them to overcome many of their problems. G-d, in Judaism, tells us all "you work individually and together to solve as many problems as you possibly can and <sup>then</sup> ~~then~~ I will send the Messiah who will complete the job and solve the rest". <sup>H</sup> Let none of us ever despair and let us all do everything possible which allows us to lead a full and a good life. Let none of us ever say that it is G-d's will that we are to accept or <sup>our</sup> fate without ever trying to do anything about it.

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In the Torah portion, Mishpoteem, we learn how when the Jewish people were presented with the Torah they said "all which G-d spoke we will do and we will understand". In the preceding Torah portion, Yisro, we learn how it says "and they answered all the people together and they said all which G-d spoke we will do". In this Torah portion, Yisro, it does not say "we will understand". It says "and they answered all the people together" while in the Torah portion, Mishpoteem, it does not mention the people together, it says "we will do and we will understand". According to the Rabbis there is a Midrash which says that before a person is born an angel teaches him the whole Torah and then right before he is born the angel taps him on the mouth and he forgets all the Torah he learned. It is now in the subconscious but he is not consciously aware of it. This, of course, explains how we can recognize what is truth. The Rabbis also tell us in the Zohar that man has two different kinds of understanding. He has a Ratzon Elyon and a Ratzon Tachton, a higher level of understanding and a lower level of understanding. When we come to make decisions, the real important decisions in life, we do it with our Ratzon Elyon which is mainly intuitive. When we come to choose a wife or career or faith or ideology we do not do it like a bookkeeper putting all the pluses on one side and the minuses on another. Then we would never get married. If there are 4 billion people in the world we would have to interview 2 billion of the opposite sex before we could make a choice. This, of course, we do not do. Our choices on the really great matters of this world we make intuitively. The secondary choices about whether I should take this route or that route to a city are determined by Ratzon Tachton. That's why the Jewish people said "we will do and we will understand". But how are we to know whether our intuitive insights are correct? Perhaps they are wrong. That's why the Rabbis say "we will do and we will see". If the results of your intuitive insights lead to evil then what you have done is wrong. We Jews do not speak too much about love. We speak about loving kindness because love can many times be destructive. The story of the French woman who, in order to prove her love for her second husband, threw her child from her first husband out a five-story window. That love is wrong. If love does not

result in loving kindness then that love is wrong. Also, do our intuitive grasps bring us closer? "And all the people answered together." They increased togetherness. If they do not they are wrong. One of the major problems today is that many people have lost faith in their Ratzon Elyon. They are using only their Ratzon Tachton. They are acting like bookkeepers. They say they do not know enough to make a commitment. People are not sticking to careers or getting married or having children because they say they are afraid and do not know enough. Especially the men are having a failure of nerve but they are ending up in the deadend. The Ratzon Tachton, the reasoning will, the purely deductive cannot bring people together and cannot even really give values in life. It only can manipulate values. We have a good message to give the world. Unfortunately, we are not being heard because the Ratzon Elyon is not being used. Families are important. Without family we cannot really grow and we need not despair because we suffer from frustration. Frustration is an inevitable part of life and nothing is perfect, but by concentrating only on frustration we become paralyzed and never recognize our true natures. The macho image does not result in happiness. It results in 1000 murders a year in Houston. We have to tell people what we have to offer. The story about the fellow who went broke. His friend asked him, "Why did you go bankrupt?" He said, "Too much advertising". The friend said, "But you never spent any money on advertising", and he said, "I know, but my competitor did". Sometimes because of our failure to advertise our ideas we have allowed false ideas to crop up. We have allowed the Ratzon Tachton to be supreme and not the Ratzon Elyon.

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In the Torah portion, Mishpoteem, we have enunciated one of Judaism's basic messages, a message which is hard to put across in the modern world, a message which says that you must set limits in order to grow. In our day and age we believe in a society without limits. The worst crime a person could commit is to limit himself, to deny your potential. We are supposed to eat everything and see everything and do everything. To be limited in any way is wrong. In our day and age anybody who sets limits for himself is considered to do the worst possible thing. That's why marriage is in a lot of trouble because people do not want to limit themselves. They do not want to limit themselves to one partner. Judaism, of course, believes in stating messages not by talking about them but by practicing them. We believed in John Dewy's philosophy way before John Dewy. We believe your ideas are formed by what you do. Ideas follow practice. That's why kashruth and Shabbos teach us that there are limits. We cannot eat everything and do everything and have a full life. We can understand this very well by the modern concern for keeping our weight down. We know that if we eat everything without limits we know we will be fat. By becoming fat we are going to actually restrict our activities and not be able to live the kind of life we want. Our failure to set limits actually causes us to lead a more limited life. This is true in all aspects of life. In this Torah portion we learn how we are not to charge interest to the poor. By limiting ourselves we actually improve the economy. Many of the most successful Jewish businesses in America were formed by people who got a loan from the Hebrew Free Loan Society who took out a loan to get a horse to peddle their wares. Limiting ourselves actually allows us to grow. When the Torah was given on Mount Sinai there were two pre-conditions: one, that the people would have to be as one and, two, that they were limited. They could not go all the way up the mountain. Only Moshe was allowed to go all the way up the mountain. The Torah stresses that our limits are to allow us to grow closer to each other. When Moshe went up into the mountain it says that he went through Hosech, Av, and Arofel, three kinds of darkness. Moshe, by limiting himself, looked like he was going into darkness, one darker than the other, but when he emerged his face shown. We, too, when we limit ourselves actually grow. If we want to be a doctor we have to study hard. We have to limit ourselves to our studies.

We cannot do everything we want. We cannot decide that we are going to go to this place and do that thing, but we must concentrate on our studies. This does not mean that occasionally we cannot read a magazine or other literature, but our primary emphasis must be on our studies ten, twelve, sometimes more hours a day in class and application. The same thing applies to marriage. By limiting ourselves to one partner we actually grow. In life there are not too many different experiences. Our trick is to learn how to deepen the experiences we have and to make sure that our excesses do not limit us. We are to concentrate on deepening our experiences with each other in marriage. It does not mean that we cannot talk with other people or be with other people, but your whole focus of attention shifts. When a person gets married a person's loyalties change. A spouse's first loyalty is to the other spouse. All the other loyalties fit around. It is hard work and as Rodney Dangerfield once said when he told his wife that he was not getting older, he was getting better like wine. She agreed with him and locked him in the cellar. This, of course, is not what we mean but it is true that limiting yourself allows you to grow. So many people today are afraid of marriage because it will limit them. We know, though, that as Moshe, if you make the effort and although it may sometimes be hard and difficult you will end up, though, shiny and bright with your life illuminated.

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MISHTAPIM 1984  
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

On this Shabbos we are honoring Cantor and Millie Dean. This reminds me of the story they tell about a Rabbi and a Cantor. They tell how one Kol Nidre the congregation was sitting waiting for the Cantor and Rabbi to show up. They waited one hour, two hours, and they did not show up. They did not know what to do. Finally, one man in the back said, "My dog can conduct services." They were taken aback, but they did not seem to have any choice so they said, "All right, let him do it." He came up to the bema and he did a wonderful job. He sang beautifully and gave a wonderful speech. At the end of the services the president came up to the owner of the dog and said, "You know, your dog did a wonderful job. He should either become a Cantor or Rabbi." The owner said, "I know, but what can I do? He wants to be a doctor." This story, of course, illustrates how many times the prevailing view of many people is that a Cantor or Rabbi is not really a profession for a nice Jewish boy. Cantor Dean has spent 24 years with our congregation inspiring and teaching a whole generation of youth. Many times effort like this is not fully appreciated. Many times people would say, "Well, if he could have done something else he would have." This is not the proper way to think. The Cantor and Millie should be honored for the years of service to our community. They have given many years to devoted service. The Cantor sang on the radio many years before he became a Cantor, and he chosen this profession because he wanted to serve his people. It is not easy to be the wife of a Cantor. Not only are you called on to do many things, but when you sneeze people ten blocks away say, "Gezundheit." We live in a fish bowl. We commend Cantor and Millie for all the wonderful things they have done for our congregation the past 24 years, and we hope that they will continue to serve our congregation for many, many more years in the future. In the Torah portion, Mishpatim, we learn about how we are to implement the Ten-Commandments in practice. Agreeing to principles is easy. Implementing them in practice is a different story. Underlying all these laws is a paradoxical principle which is hard for our generation to understand. That principle is that in order to fully

experience life you have to limit yourself. If someone goes overboard and exercises all the power he has he will damage not only others but also himself. This is one of the main teachings of kashruth. It says, "Holy people, you should be to Me the flesh that is torn of beasts in the field you shall not eat." All the laws of the Torah are meant to elevate and make us holy, but three especially were set out to inculcate holiness. One was the laws of kashruth. The other was the laws of sexual morality. The third was not worshipping idols. In life there are many drives. Whole psychological systems have been built on these drives. We all know about the drives or will to pleasure or sex which Freud talks about. We have the will to power which Jung talks about. We also have the will for security. Some people, by their wholehearted concentration on one of these drives, destroy the rest of life for them. This concept of limiting yourself in order to enjoy life fully is very difficult. Perhaps in our generation we can understand it through dieting. People know that if you indulge yourself too much with food you are going to get fat and then you can get sick or become so heavy you cannot do many things. By limiting our food intake we actually enhance our lives. In this country, too, we should appreciate this concept because the great wealth of this country was actually formed because we were willing to limit wealth. In the 1860's the Homestead Act was passed which allowed everybody to get 160 acres. By dividing up the wealth we produced much more wealth. In Latin America where they left these tracts in the hands of one or two people poverty ensued. Today is also Hebrew Free Loan Shabbos. By limiting our own wealth and giving other people loans, we insure the common good and much more wealth. Most of the big department stores in the United States were started by people who received loans from Hebrew Free Loan societies for a horse and wagon to go peddling. In order to be holy we must learn how to limit our drives for pleasure and limit our drive for security and our drive for power. Idolatry is, of course, the drive for power gone mad. Our drive for security also must be limited. I remember going visiting someone and asking for a charitable

contribution. The person said, "How can I do it? I only have \$125,000 in my bank account and I used to have \$150,000. It is impossible." That person, of course, was so intent on the security that later he even failed to pay his phone bill, light bill, and eventually was evicted because he could not let his funds go below a certain level. We all need to have meaning in our lives. The will to pleasure turns out to be just selfishness. The will to power ends up making us cruel. The will for security can just make us paranoid. In order to be holy people, people who really feel the meaning of life, we must learn how to limit these drives.

At the end of this Torah portion we learn about a mystical experience that the people had. It is strange that in a Torah portion devoted to laws we have a mystical experience, but if we will examine it carefully, unless you have a firm belief, unless your heart believes as well as your mind, a person will never follow through on these principles. Many of you may be even impressed by what I said about limiting for the sake of adding to life. We all know how drugs and alcohol have become a part of the Jewish scene when kashruth stopped being kept; and when Jewish family laws stopped being kept divorce skyrocketed. However, very few of you will probably actually implement the teachings. I mention this many times from the pulpit, but all of you know smoking causes cancer. It has been proven. Everyone knows it is bad for your health, but probably half of you smoke. Your mind knows it, but your heart does not feel it. In order for Judaism to be operative we need the mind but also the heart. That's why a Chazan and music are so important in a synagogue. Those synagogues which have given up Jewish chanting and music have given up a great deal. Judaism can only exist if the mind and the heart are together, if we have heaven and earth together. Sixty years ago Judaism was in great trouble because it was almost impossible to believe in G-d. We had the feeling but not the mind. Today our problem is almost the exact opposite. Today, because of modern science, we can believe in G-d again. We have the mind but we are in danger of losing the heart. That's why we are so fortunate to have Cantor Dean who gives us the music

which stirs the heart. The heart and the mind must always go together if Judaism is to survive. I am reminded of a story of a preacher who came into a town where he was to speak at the town hall. He did not know how to find it so he stopped some boys and asked them for directions to the town hall. The boys told him and then one of them said, "How come you want to go to the town hall?" The preacher answered, "Well, I am going to give a talk there on how to get to heaven. Do you boys want to come?" One of the boys looked at him and said, "Are you kidding? You don't even know how to get to the town hall." Our minds and our hearts, heaven and earth must go together if Judaism is to have meaning in our lives.

MISHPOTEEM 1985  
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

The underlying theme of the Torah portion Mishpoteem is dignity. One of Judaism's major messages is to always preserve dignity. If we do not preserve human dignity, even when we mean to do well, it will just end up causing hatred and rancor. In this Torah portion we learn about the importance of freedom. A slave loses his dignity. We Jews are not supposed to be slaves. The slave that is talked about here in the beginning of the Sedra is that when a person stole something, and after he was caught, he was obligated to pay double. If he stole \$100 he had to return \$200. If he did not have the money he was indentured to someone else until his debt was paid. It was a form of penal system, but even then dignity had to be maintained. That's why it says, "Eem B'Gapo V'O B'Gapo Yeitzei" which has been translated by many rabbis as, "If it was his dignity he will come in with his dignity he will go out." In other words, only if he would lose his dignity would he even want to remain as a slave. This whole Torah portion is really concerned about maintaining a person's dignity. In Eastern Europe, especially, they were very concerned about this. Before Pesach every head of a household was required to enter a small room alone. There was a table. If a person had money he would leave money. If a person needed money for Pesach he would take money. We all know how the expenses increase dramatically for Pesach. No one, though, ever knew who was taking money and who was giving money. In the same way, there are always Gemillas Chasodim, Hebrew Free Loan Societies, which ensured that a person's dignity would be maintained, that a person could receive a loan without having to grovel. In this week's portion we learn, "If money you will loan my people you should not be as a creditor to the poor." You should treat them with dignity and respect. The word "Noshe" can mean "to weaken" or "demasculinize." This Shabbos we are honoring the Hebrew Free Loans for all the good work they do in our community. It is important that we always preserve a person's dignity. Many times parents make mistakes with their children, especially their teenage children, by not letting them express their opinions. They, in this way, destroy their dignity. That's why the rabbis tell us that until a person is bar or bas mitzvah, he does not have the "Yetzer Tov," but afterwards he does, which means that he has things to give, and we should let him express and give them over. We are not supposed to grovel

even before G-d. A Jew is not supposed to bow. On Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur when we do so, the rabbis did not like it and insisted that there be a rug over the stones. We say, "G-d, Zokaif K'Vuvim," "G-d makes us stand straight." Dignity is one of the hallmarks of Judaism. One of the reasons why we also do not believe in asceticism is we could not believe in a G-d Who would only help us if we degraded ourselves. We should always at all times strive to maintain our own and other people's dignity. The story about a man who took his girlfiend on a date. He gave her a ring and said, "Marry me." She answered, "I can't do that." He wanted to know why not and she said, "Because I love another." He demanded to know who it was but she refused to tell him. He asked, "Why won't you tell me?" and she answered, "Because I don't want to have a fight." He said, "Who wants to fight? I want to sell him the ring." He may have preserved his dignity, but he didn't do too much for hers. We should always preserve the dignity of everyone with whom we deal.

MISHPATIM 1986

Rabbi Joseph Radinskky

The story about a rabbi who meets one of his congregants on the street and says to him, "I want you to come to Shul this Shabbos. I'm giving a speech about Noah and the flood." The man replied, "Rabbi, I'm busy. I can't make it." The rabbi said, "Please. You'll enjoy it." The man said, "Really, Rabbi, I can't come, but if it will make you feel any better, I'll send in a donation for the survivors."

This illustrates the abysmal ignorance of much of the Jewish people today when it comes to Jewish matters.

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

I just have returned from a conference of Israel Bonds. The important problem of tourism was highlighted. Last year 1,400,000 Jews visited Israel, and this year tourism is way down. We must not let the terrorists win. Dr. Yosef Berg also spoke to us. He is a fine human being who represents all the ideals modern orthodoxy stands for: an openness to western culture, and a desire to cooperate with everyone; a very positive attitude toward the State of Israel. I can understand why certain people today are afraid of orthodoxy even in our own shul because since the Vietnam War, certain segments of orthodox Jews have become counter-culture instead of pro-culture. They have become isolationists, but as long as you and I and people like Dr. Berg are active we will make sure that orthodoxy always maintains its position of openness and caring concern for all Jews and humanity. As Dr. Berg pointed out in the prayer that we say every day which is a quote from the Torah portion Beshalach, we read, "Tevi Amo Vesita Amo, you will bring them and you will plant them." First the Jewish people have to be brought to the land and made secure, and then we can argue about religious differences. As the Rambam said, "Make sure you take care of everyone's physical being before you worry about their soul." We can disagree on religious philosophy but still maintain a posture of care and concern for every Jew and every human being.

In the Torah portion Mishpatim we learn about making free loans. Today is also Hebrew Free Loan Shabbos. We know the importance of making interest-free loans to destitute people. If you saddle destitute people not only with having to repay a loan but also to pay interest which accumulates so rapidly, you sentence them to perpetual poverty.

In Judaism the highest form of charity is not to give a person money outright but to give him a loan. This helps to preserve his dignity. This mitzvah is one of the most important mitzvahs, yet in this Torah portion it says, "If money you will loan my people, the poor with you, you shall not be to him as a creditor. You should not put upon him interest." The problem is, why does it say "if" you will loan my people money. It should say "when" you will loan my people money. There are many answers to this. The first answer is that if we will all organize society correctly and everyone does his duty, then maybe there will not be any poor. Another answer given by Ebin Ezra is that if you do not have any money yourself, you cannot lend it to anyone else. Another answer given is that if you will lend money you will feel G-d's presence, the one being explained as every human being. If you will loan money then G-d will be with you always. You will feel the meaning of life. Another explanation is that the only thing that really accompanies a person after he leaves this world is the good deeds he does. Instead of reading the word "Talveh" you read it "Tilveh" the money will accompany you. In other words, the good deeds you did in this life will accompany you into the next life. We also have a Jewish principle that you must take care of your own poor before you take care of other poor. You first must take care of the poor in your family, then the poor in your city, then the poor throughout the world.

We Jews are called upon today to help Israel with a loan. Israel Bonds pays comparable interest. If we will help Israel we can be assured that she will make good use of this money and overcome all of her economy crisis. The reason why it is so important to give

loans to the poor is because it not only allows them to maintain their dignity and self-respect, but it prevents them from sinking to lower levels and losing all their self-confidence. If they lose all their self-confidence they become a public charge forever and then, of course, they are a prey to all the problems that self-hatred causes; for example, crime, abusive behavior, etc.

Let's all help when we can help not only to preserve the poor's dignity but also to preserve a healthy and wholesome society. I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who walked into a bagel shop every day and placed 25¢ on the table for a bagel and then walked out. He did this every day. Finally one day the owner grabbed him. The man said, "I bet you want to know why I don't take the bagel." The owner replied, "No, I just wanted to let you know that the price has increased." If we do not help now those who need it, especially Israel, the price will increase and it will cost us a lot more later.

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Mishpoteem we learn how Moshe took the Book of the Covenant, and he read it in the ears of the people and the people said, "All which G-d spoke we will do and we will listen. We will understand." In the Torah portion Yisro it says, "And they answered the people together and they said, 'All which G-d spoke we will do,' and Moshe returned the words of the people to G-d." Why do we have these two different statements by the people? In the statement in Mishpoteem it says, "And all which G-d spoke we will do and we will understand," while in the statement in Yisro it says, "And they answered all the people together and they said, 'All which G-d spoke we will do'." What is the difference between the two statements, and why do we need both of them?

Perhaps the answer could be that the statement in Yisro took place before the Jewish people received the Torah. One of the prerequisites for the Jewish people receiving the Torah was that they had to all be united. They all had to realize that they shared a common destiny and common bond, and they had to be willing to help each other and do for each other. They also had to have common Jewish ideals: that there is only one G-d; that idolatry was wrong; that the purpose of man in this life is to be a partner with G-d in creation; that by doing deeds of kindness we not only come closer to man but closer to G-d; that man should always occupy himself with deeds of kindness. This was the perception that the people had of their religion before the Torah

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky was given, and it was a true perception. That's why Rabbi Soleiveitchik said the Jewish people had to endure slavery in Egypt before they would be worthy of receiving the Torah. They first had to become a people who realized the importance of Rachmones, the importance of compassion, and they had to be united. They had to realize that they had to help each other and be with each other, and they should not look down their noses at each other. This was a statement the people had to make before they were given the Torah.

The statement made in Mishpoteem was made after the Jewish people received the Torah in which the people said, "All which G-d has spoken we will do and we will understand." Here the people were exclaiming that they were going to implement the ideals and values of Judaism in Torah terms. Today we still have the same problem. Today we have many Jews who are very good Jews. They believe in Jewish ideals. They believe in Jewish unity and helping their fellow Jews throughout the world. They are very good people, but many of them are not committed to the Torah perception of how it is that we should act. That seems to be the dispute today: how we implement the values of Judaism in daily life. How do we implement the common shared aspirations of the Jewish people? What should be our guide? To the orthodox, of course, Torah is our guide. To others, they are not so sure. They share a Jewish vision of the world, but they are not sure how to implement this Jewish vision. In fact, some of them are even afraid of the Torah. We always have to remember, though, that we Jewish people are descended of Abraham. There was a Jewish people even before there was a Torah, and even though certain Jews do not follow everything in the Torah, they are

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still Jews and they still share the Jewish destiny and Jewish dream. It is our job to convince them to not only want to fulfill Jewish ideals, but to use the Jewish means to implement these ideals. That's why Jewish education is so important. Without Jewish education then Jewish ideals cannot be implemented Jewishly because the people do not have enough knowledge to do it.

Of course, it is very important how you implement your ideals, too. If you don't implement them the right way it can even betray your ideals. This, of course, we can see in politics and in many things around us. Certain politicians spout off certain ideals but their underlyings implement these ideals in such a way that they even destroy the principles of democracy and openness and discussion which the leader espoused by adopting all sorts of means which are, themselves, illegal and wrong. You cannot really further just goals through using unjust means. It ends up corrupting your just goals. This, of course, is why it is so important that people study Torah.

On the other hand, we should always remember the prerequisites of Judaism is Jewish unity and for Jews to work together and for Jews to share common goals and aspirations. The Jewish people had all these things even before they had the Torah. The Torah came after the Jewish people were a people. That's why it says they answered all the people "Yachtov - together". That's why it stressed this Jewish unity in Yisro. Yachtov, when it talks about Nased and Nishma it doesn't say Yachtov. Sometimes the Jewish people cannot be together when it comes to implementing Jewish values, but we can still be together when it comes to

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helping each other and doing things for each other. That is a  
very important ideal that we must all work for, and that is to  
make sure we always help each other.

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In the Torah portion Mishpotim, we have 54 mitzvahs listed. This is more than<sup>n</sup> most Torah portions. This Torah portion comes immediately after the giving of the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments need to be implemented. They are the ideals of Judaism, but ~~not~~ <sup>they are</sup> ~~actually practiced~~ <sup>not specific enough</sup>. Many more details are necessary. The Torah portion Mishpotim fills in many of these details.

However, that is not all that is necessary. Judaism is composed of not only lofty ideals and laws which implement these ideals, but it also has a mystical side which allows us to connect with man and G-d. In fact, this spiritual side is emphasized in this Torah portion. We learn that when the Jewish people were given the Torah, it was not enough for G-d that they said, "We will keep all its laws." G-d also wanted them to not only NaAseh, but also to Nishmah, which means to learn, to listen, to be able to connect with Him. Immediately after we learn how the Jewish people said, "We will do and we will understand," we learn about a mystical vision that the Jewish people beheld. Judaism is about ideals and practices and also about spirituality. Right before we learn about this spirituality, we learn how G-d told Moshe, "Behold, I am sending an angel before you to guard your path and to bring you to the place which I have prepared." It seems strange that G-d mentions here that He is going to send an angel. After the Jewish people sinned at the sin of the golden calf, G-d told Moshe that He would send an angel to lead them to the land, and Moshe protested. G-d later relented and said He would lead the Jewish people into the land of Israel. Here Moshe does not protest.

The Ramban said that this angel was not the angel G-d was going to send after the sin of the

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golden calf but a different one. The rabbis argue about when was this special covenant that was mentioned here in this Torah portion to occur and when did this mystical vision happen? Rashi says that this special covenant, in which sacrifices were slaughtered and half the blood was put on the altar and half sprinkled on the person, occurred before the giving of the Ten Commandments. The Ramban says no; this happened after the giving of the Ten Commandments. He says that this had to happen after the giving of the Ten Commandments because it says that "Moshe came and he told the people all the words of G-d." What Moshe told them was what is recorded in the Torah portion Mishpotim; all these laws and mitzvahs. Rashi, on the other hand, said no. He said he told them <sup>about</sup> the Book of Bereishis and the Book of Shmos until the Exodus, and also the mitzvahs which were given at Marah before the Jewish people came to Mount Sinai: the mitzvahs of honoring your parents; Shabbat; and civil laws. Rashi said there is no fixed chronological order in the Torah, so, therefore, events that happened before can be recounted later.

What actually is the argument between the Ramban and Rashi? Rashi states that when the Jewish people were now about ready to enter the land of Israel, they were whole. They had Jewish ideals; they had the mitzvahs to implement these ideals; and they had spirituality. The Ramban said no, that when the Jewish people were going to enter into the land of Israel, they may not have all these three elements together in good measure. That's why it says that an angel was coming to lead them, because when the Jewish people <sup>would enter</sup> ~~went~~ into the land of Israel they would be whole. The truth of the matter is, every time the Jewish people entered

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the land of Israel, they were lacking something. The first time, they had not circumcised themselves since they left Egypt 40 years before, and they had not celebrated Passover for 39 years. The second time, they also were lacking things. There was much intermarriage and assimilation; they did not treat the Temple service with respect, etc.

In our day, too, Jews have come to Israel lacking some of the elements of Judaism. Some had great ideals; some had mitzvahs; some had spirituality; but they had not coalesced into a whole. I have just returned from Israel, and I can tell you that Israel is undergoing a great transformation. They are becoming Americanized, adopting American values. In Israel up to now, the group was the important thing. You belonged to a group, and everybody sought their own chevra, or group. In fact, in Israel you could not buy land in a moshav or be part of a kibbutz unless the group voted you in. There are still many communities in Israel in which you cannot live unless the members of the community vote you in. This is changing, but it is a period of transition. I remember when my wife and I lived in Lafayette, Indiana, and many of the intellectual bigshots came to spend a year on sabbatical at the university, my wife knocked herself out doing things for them. They always told us when we would come to Israel, we would see how they were going to pay us back and treat us royally. In 1971, when we went to Israel they treated us by ignoring us. It was too embarrassing for them to entertain us. After all, I was an orthodox rabbi, and ~~that~~<sup>we</sup> did not fit in with their chevra, their group.

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Today, this idea of group still holds sway, but is relenting. In Israel, a group of ultra orthodox settled in Pardes Chana. They built a school. The secular people in that area did not want them there. They did not fit in, and they even burnt their school. This, of course, created an uproar in Israel. There is a case now, too, before the Israel Supreme Court in which an Arab claims he was unjustly prohibited from buying land and a house in a Jewish moshav. The Supreme Court is going to have to decide this case, and probably it should decide in the favor of the Arab, but it will mean the end of this group consciousness which has pervaded Israel.

Right now, the big battle in Israel is between those who want to retain their privileges under the socialist economy and those who want to support a free enterprise economy. Egged bus drivers in Israel make \$70,000 a year. They know if Egged would be opened to competition, they would not be able to do this. When I was in Israel, they just changed the rules. It used to be that only one person could import an item and nobody else. The rationale was that person would keep a large warehouse of spare parts. This, of course, drove the price up tremendously. The government wants to let everyone import anything they want whenever they want. The extremes in Israel are also moderating. There is not much difference now between the Likud and Labor position on territories. The middle is growing. We know that in Israel there is a spiritual revival going on. The gap between the religious and secular is also narrowing, although there are still people on the extremes who still voice harsh positions.

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Rashi says that the Jewish people before they go into the land of Israel, must be whole.

Therefore, the angel that is referred to in our Torah portion as the angel that G-d was going to send because of the sin of the golden calf, but G-d later, at Moshe's urging, changed His mind. The Ramban said no. The angel actually led them into the land at the time of Joshua because they were not whole. Some had Jewish ideals, some had mitzvahs, some had spirituality, and the same is true today. Israel is slowly developing all these three things, and eventually we know that we will become a light unto the nations. Slowly, a unity and a wholeness are taking shape. Israel is changing. Some of the changes will be positive, and some will not. After all, if Israel becomes completely individualistic like America, the family will disappear and people will not join the army, etc., but I am sure that a correct balance between group and individual will be founded. Israel now is interested in becoming a community based on free enterprise and harmony.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a woman who came up to her fiance and said, "Honey, I have to return the ring." He asked why. She said, "Because I no longer love you. I love somebody else and want to marry him." Her fiance asked, "Who is he? Tell me who he is." She replied, "No, I won't tell you because I don't want you to fight him." He replied, "Who wants to fight? I just want to sell him the ring." In Israel today, nobody wants to fight. They all want to live lives of prosperity, happiness, and harmony. May they be able to do so, so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

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In the Torah portion, Mishpotim, we learn how the Jewish people said, "We will do and we will understand." This phrase has been repeated countless times in Jewish tradition about the great merit of the Jewish people, that they are willing to do G-d's will even before they understand it thoroughly. However, this interpretation does not wholly fit the facts because just four sentences before, in sentence three of chapter 24, the people answer with one voice and they say, "Everything which G-d spoke we will do," but this did not satisfy G-d. Here they did not even say about understanding. They just said, "We will do everything that G-d said." G-d does not really want this. G-d wants us to do what He has told us to do, but He wants us to reach up to Him, to try to get close to Him, and that is what Nishma means. It is not enough just to do what G-d wants. We have to do it in a way so that we are reaching up to Him.

In this week's Torah portion, too, we learn in chapter 32, verse 30, that, "You shall be holy men unto Me, and you shall not eat the flesh of an animal that was turned in the field. To the dog you should throw it." In other words, we are not to eat treif food. Rashi comments on this, "If you are holy, you shall separate yourself from treif food, and you will be Mine; if not, you are not going to be Mine." What could this possibly mean? After all, there are many

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mitzvahs, 613. Why was only keeping kosher and two others singled out as making you holy? The other two have to do with sexual immorality and worshipping idols. In other words, if a person keeps kosher and does not engage in incest or in worshipping idols, he will be holy, and, thus, be able to reach up to G-d. Keeping the holidays, keeping Shabbat, and giving lots of charity apparently are not in the same category as keeping kosher and not worshipping idols and not getting involved in incest or adultery.

There are, according to Rashi, two different levels of holiness. This is similar to what we find in last week's parsha where right after the Ten Commandments when we speak about building an altar, the Torah speaks about the fact that, "You shall not cut the stones because a sword should not be waved upon them, and you should not make steps upon My altar." We know that the sword is a symbol of war, that G-d's holy place must be the product of ethics and peaceful relationships, but that is not enough. We should not build a ramp to the altar which has steps, and the reason for this is not because you are going to reveal something, to reveal your sexual parts. After all, the priests wore pants, and, as Rashi clearly said, this means that you are not to create an altar in which you

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will act disrespectfully. You should not think you are at a certain level of piety, and everybody else is below you. You have reached a higher stage than them.

Here, too, holiness is divided in two parts. You are supposed to act religiously and morally and ethically correct. No sword should cleave the stones.

However, that is not enough. You have to act in a refined manner. You also have to have what we would call in English today, soul. Many Jews observe all the commandments, but they forget they have to have soul, a certain refinement of character, and without this refinement of character, you cannot reach up to G-d and feel spirituality. You only obtain the first level. It is an important level. It is the first level when the Jewish people said, "We will do." G-d wants us to do the commandments, but He wants more from us than the commandments.

The rabbis ask the question, why do we have to keep kosher? Does it make any difference to G-d if we eat kosher or non-kosher food, if we eat food slaughtered by a shochait or just butchered? The rabbis say it does not make a difference to G-d; it makes a difference to us. These commandments were

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given to refine us, and, the truth of the matter is, those who do observe these three areas are usually more refined people. Those who keep kosher, those who are sexually restrained, who do not worship idols have a more refined character. We all know people who do a lot of good deeds, but they are very coarse, and sometimes it is difficult to deal with them. We also know people who do keep kosher, etc., but who would be much worse if they did not. Rashi is commenting on the fact that if a person limits his appetites and has to take into consideration other people's feelings, that he has to learn how to be sensitive, that he will be able to reach up to G-d. A person must always act in such a way as to make sure that he safeguards his dignity and the dignity of others.

That's how the rabbis explain the sentence that if a person was sold into slavery, if he comes with gapo, he should go out with gapo. A person, because of external poverty, could sell his services for six years, but he should never lose his dignity or self-respect or act in a coarse manner. That's how they explain gapo. There are many people who because of either self-destructive drives or inferiority complexes act in a very coarse manner. Usually, a p

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person, if he learns from the mitzvahs of keeping kosher and sexual limitations and prevents himself from worshipping idols, the ideologies of his mind, he will act in a restrained and fine manner. That's the key to a spiritual life. G-d was very happy when the Jewish people said, "We will do," but that is not enough. We also have to learn Torah which refines us, and we also have to realize that the key to a spiritual life is to do the mitzvahs, but if we want to obtain spirituality and get close to G-d, we must do it in a refined manner. That is the key to living a satisfying Jewish religious life. There are many people who try to keep the commandments, but they have no meaning for them because they do not understand that it is not enough to do them. We also have to learn Torah and live and develop ourselves into refined human beings. That's the key.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a dog who came to a butcher shop with a purse. The butcher looked at the dog and said, "Did you want to buy meat?" The dog said, "Woof, woof." The butcher said, "Do you want hamburger, liver, or steak?" When the butcher said liver, the dog woofed, woofed. The butcher said, "Do you want one pound, two pounds, or three pounds?" The butcher came to two pounds, the dog woofed, woofed. The

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butcher said, "How are you going to pay for it?" The dog gave him the purse. The butcher took the money out and put the liver in the purse. The dog then went home. The butcher was so amazed, he decided to follow the dog. When the dog got to his house he scratched on the door. The owner yelled at the dog. The butcher said, "Why are you yelling at the dog? He's the most intelligent dog I have ever seen." The owner said, "What do you mean, intelligent? That's the third time in six months he forgot his key." No one of us should ever forget the key to a meaningful Jewish life. We must do the commandments, but we must also learn Torah so we can do the commandments in a refine way. Let us all hope we will do so, so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.