

5778 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Mishpatim / פרשת משפטים

### A Three-Tiered Connection

It is generally assumed that a parsha's name reflects its content. Regarding our parsha the connection is clear. The name of the parsha - Mishpatim – refers to laws that a person can rationally understand and the parsha is comprised of dozens of such civil laws.

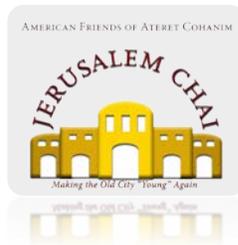
However, the Lubavitcher Rebbe<sup>1</sup> noted that interestingly the parsha concludes on a different note. The end of the parsha relates the events surrounding the giving of the Torah and is highlighted by the Jewish people's declaration "We will do, and we will hear." Famously, the Talmud extols the Jews for expressing their loyalty to God and their commitment to his law, even before "hearing" or understanding the commandments.<sup>2</sup> As such, the end of the parsha emphasizes our suprarational commitment to God's laws, seemingly the opposite of the parsha's name – Mishpatim.

In addition, our parsha is immediately preceded with the story of the actual giving of the Torah – another "top down" event in which, according to one midrash, the Jewish people were coerced into accepting God's commands. What then, is the meaning of sandwiching the rational civil laws with two episodes that highlight the opposite?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explained that the structure of this part of the Torah parallels the development of a Jew's faith. At first, a Jewish child believes in God in a "top down" fashion – he or she is raised as such and has inherited faith from his/her parents and ancestors. As a person grows, matures and develops, (s)he begins to understand and appreciate the sophistication and beauty of a Torah lifestyle, and hence embrace it of one's own accord. This is represented by the civil laws of our parsha. However, after years of intensive study and practice, one comes to the realization that as much as a person knows and understands, there will always be more that is beyond the human mind's grasp. At this moment of self-transcendence comes the final stage of faith, in which a person's

<sup>1</sup> Likkutei Sichos Volume 16, pg. 242.

<sup>2</sup> Shabbat 88a.



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connection to God extends beyond the limits of the rational mind. This is represented by the climax of our parsha in which the Jews declare that they are connected to God even without fully understanding Him or his commands.

It seems that a parallel developmental structure can be traced regarding our relationship with Yerushalayim. At first, many of us are attached to Yerushalayim simply because of the homes that we grew up within and the religious and cultural history to which we are heirs. As children, we are taught about Yerushalayim, sing about it and hence, dream about it.

As we grow and mature we begin to develop our own relationship with the city. We spend time there, soak in its unique atmosphere, learn about its history and uniqueness and begin to understand its centrality to Judaism. As mature adults we can use our God-given faculties to appreciate the city's greatness and our connection to it.

However, at a certain point, we realize that the uniqueness of the city and our connection to it, surpasses the human mind. No matter how much we learn and study, there is something about the magic of Yerushalayim that cannot be captured in a text or formulated in a rational statement. God chose the city and connected us to it and the connection is thus divine and suprarational.