



Dvar Torah for Parshat Mishpatim Based on *Likutey Moharan I*, Lesson #62:2

"These are the laws that you shall set before them" (Exodus 21:1). Rashi comments: God told Moshe, "Don't even think that you'll just teach them the basics of each law two or three times, without going into the whys and wherefores. Study it with them till it's clear, as if it were set on the table in front of them, ready to eat."

There's a debate going inside you. Maybe it's a little formal, like candidates standing at podiums, maybe it's an informal give and take, like in your dorm room. The subject is: Is God really there listening when I speak to Him? The reflexive answer of the pious one, is "for sure." The impious one replies, "Yeah, right."

As long as the debate continues, your heart is divided. Your enthusiasm is dampened and your words are not well-aimed. Rebbe Nachman teaches that you resolve this debate by studying halakhah (Jewish law). Reading, analyzing and comparing the opinions of our Sages, coming to appreciate the nuances and subtleties of how a mitzvah is presented to us textually, and what the ramifications are for how we define and live in the world, provide the payoff of increased faith. The mind-sharpening that halakhah study engenders gives you the tools to deal with the subtle and subversive arguments of the impious one within. Although challenges will always remain, your faith grows stronger.

God told Moshe Rabbeinu: It's not enough for My people to "know the rules." Get them to look past the externalities (even though this means more work for you as teacher). For halakhah study to be mind-sharpening we need to be students hungry enough to look past the superficiality of "following the rules." To really be Jewish, we need a genuine desire to understand how the various aspects of the world are structured and defined. For example, we need to study Torah to learn: What is ownership? How is it determined? How is it transferred? What are my rights/responsibilities as an employee? as an employer?

When we begin to become aware that God's intellect and compassion—His Torah—extend to the marketplace and to the kitchen, to the bedroom and the examining room, then when we speak to Him, we should have no doubts that He is there listening.

agutn Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

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