

## Shabbat Times

	Ⓜ	Ⓝ		Ⓜ	Ⓝ
London	17:17	18:20	Cambridge	17:12	18:23
Manchester	17:22	18:29	Leeds	17:16	18:24
Birmingham	17:19	18:26	Liverpool	17:22	18:35
Oxford	17:18	18:29	Jerusalem	16:56	18:09

# SHABBAT



# LASHEM שבת לה'

פרשת משפטים

PARASHAT MISHPATIM

תנועת בני אקביא  
BNEI AKIVA UK

The most widely distributed weekly Torah periodical written by our youth in the United Kingdom.

### Absolute Morality?

Aaron Wunsh

When I was 5, a friend and I began an expedition in my back garden to dig to China. We had finished watching an episode of Pokémon and got confused. My mother was less than pleased with our antics and told me that 'you can't just go digging up the garden!' I then began to wonder if there would be any situation which would permit me to do so.

It is interesting to note the differences between Jewish thought and philosophers of the past few centuries. Immanuel Kant, for example, discusses absolute duties – the idea that some actions remain constantly prohibited regardless of the situation. The concept of absolute duties also appears in Judaism. Kant would argue that lying would be wrong, not just some of the time, but all of the time. Judaism, however, contains cases where we are lenient and 'break' absolute laws. For example, one can break Shabbat in order to save a life.

In this week's parasha, it says that 'You shall not take a bribe' (Shemot23:8), and Rashi comments, 'do not take a bribe – even to judge truthfully'. He assumes that this must be what the Torah is referring to because it will say later in Shoftim (16:19) 'Do not pervert justice' through bribery. The question arises – why can't one take a bribe to judge truthfully? Surely we should be doing all we can to improve our legal system, and therefore if bribes are used positively, then what is the problem?

The answer comes from the continuation of the passuk, and Rashi explains that 'it will blind those who can see – even a Torah scholar... his vision will become dim'. We often believe that making one or two small exceptions to a rule is not such an issue – we justify our actions by saying that even though it wasn't necessarily the right thing to do, in this case it was different. In drawing a parallel to Kant's categorical imperative, we see that an action is not just defined by the means, but also by the ends.

### Coming up....

-Limmud continues at the London Bayit Monday night at 7:30

- Next week is the Barnet and Woodside Park Ha'irgun. Contact Zechariah on Svivot@bauk.org for more details

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### Shabbat Debate

Every week we will be writing weekly debates to discuss over Shabbat. The debates will then be continued on facebook, after Shabbat.

Who cares about laws?





The Godliness of our Laws

The Bronze Age relates to a period spanning some two-millennia, when the early features of organized civilization began to develop to what we know today. Perhaps the most sophisticated society that emerged at that time was in the empire of the First Babylonian Dynasty that took control of much Mesopotamia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

Building upon the advancements of the Sumerians, the Babylonians were torchbearers in the realms of architectural, scientific and cultural developments. They built brick houses, developed the family structure, had schools and organized city-states – all remarkably ahead of their times. It was here that alphabetic language was demised, that the hour was divided into sixty minutes (and the minute into sixty seconds), and that the circle was divided into 360 degrees.

Upon this backdrop, in the city of Ur Kasdim, Avraham grew up; his process of soul-searching and spiritual discovery was born out of the cultural and scientific advancements of his time. A contemporary of Avraham was the sixth king of this Babylonian Dynasty, Hammurabi. Hammurabi reigned from 1792-1750 BCE, and in addition to his extensive geographical conquests he also made invaluable contributions in the realm of modern judicial systems. The Code of Hammurabi – a doctrine of several sets of laws pertaining to matters of business, damage, slavery, personal status, sexual matters and more – was discovered in 1901 and is one of the earliest known legal codes.

There are many similarities between the Code of Hammurabi and the Torah, a fact that lead many scholars to suspect that the Torah was not God-given, but rather was written based on the Code.

Rabbi Joseph Hertz argues that, although there are some twenty-four instances in the Torah of analogies and resemblances to the Code there is a fundamental thematic difference between the two codes, one that indicates the divine nature of the Torah. The prime example is from the beginning of our *parasha*.

Parashat Mishpatim is a continuation of the description of the revelation of the Torah at Sinai. It opens with the Jewish slavery laws (Shemot 21:2-6):

**“If you buy a Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve; and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing ... But if the servant shall plainly say: I love my master ... I will not go out free; then his master shall bring him to God, and shall bring him to the door, or unto the door-post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever.”**

The slave is destined for freedom. Every single person has the right to personal liberty and dignity; this is the foundation of our faith ever since the exodus from Mitzrayim. The slave who chooses not to exercise this right is frowned upon and must perform an act indicating this misdemeanour. Indeed, Rashi points-out that the piercing of the slave's ear represents that they didn't listen well when Hashem proclaimed all human beings should be free.

Compare this to the Code of Hammurabi (law 282):

**“If a slave says to his master: ‘You are not my master’ – if they convict him, his master shall cut off his ear.”**

This is the absolute inverse of the law found in the Torah: Whereas the Torah punishes the ear of the slave who protests against their freedom, Hammurabi punishes the slave who believes in their freedom! Rabbi Hertz writes:

**“There is not a trace of the Biblical ideal of personal holiness in the Babylonian Code, or of the beneficence and consideration for the poor and needy, which is so characteristic of the Mosaic legislation. Deeper still is the abyss between this Code and the Mosaic Law in their respective attitudes to human freedom. The words of Henry George ... still hold true ... ‘It is not the protection of property, but the protection of humanity, that is the aim of the Mosaic Code.’”**

The similarities between the Code and the Torah are perhaps due to the similar cultural backgrounds both were introduced into. But they share nothing in common when it comes to the values that motivate them. What does it mean for the Torah to be God-given? The Torah carves the path for each individual to find the divinity within themselves; it is the first doctrine to claim that every human being is created “in the image of God”.

The Torah guides humanity on a journey of personal liberty, dignity and divinity; it is a journey we have yet to complete. We yearn for the day that these values are fully realised.

The Week that Was...

Last week was the Borehamwood Shabbat Ha'irgun, thank you for all those involved involved making it such a great success. Shabbat shalom to all those at the Finchley and Bushey Ha'irgun!!

# Hello Hachshara

## Catching up with our hachshara programme in Israel

It's been a crazy 5 and a hal months. It doesn't feel like it's been this long but at the same time, just thinking back I realise how fast the time has gone. September saw the start of some fun packed few months however now we have reached that quiet time of the year where we are recovering from the activities of the first half of the year and starting to prepare for what is yet to come. A few weeks ago Torani spent a wonderful Shabbat in Modi'in whilst being hosted by a whole variety of bogrim of the movement from those who made aliyah whilst on their Torani to those who returned, obtained a degree, worked for a few years and then made aliyah. All in all there were maybe between 5 and 10 ex-members of several mazkiruyot present for the Shabbat. Over the weekend we had several sessions where the bogrim spoke to us about their experiences in the movement and what led them to where they are today. After Shabbat we returned back to our respective institutions with a bit of the usual karaoke to keep us awake after such an adventure packed Shabbat. In addition we have had several degel sessions where we have learnt a variety of useful leadership techniques such as how to run a discussion and how to be ourselves and comfortable when talking to large groups and commanding the audience. As of now we are not only getting ready for the upcoming Chief Rabbi Shabbaton, with all the British students on their gap years, but also we have recently started preparations for seder night which is rumoured to be the highlight of the year.

Quick sum up- Been a rollercoaster ride till now which I hope won't ever end.

Shabbat Shalom

Eli Gordon is in Shevet Ne'eman and is on Torani at Yeshivat Hakotel!



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