

זכור אתיום השבת לקדשו.
ששת ימים תעבד ועשית כל-מלאכתך,
יום השביעי שבת לה'

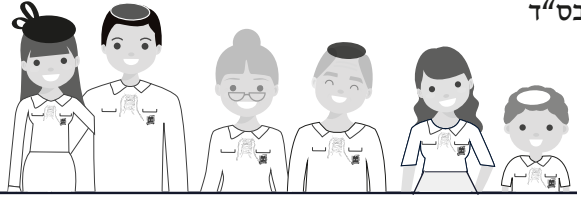
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בס"ד

SHABBAT LASHEM

THE VOICE OF BNEI AKIVA UK



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LUCY WEINIGER
SHEVET OROT

The Jewish people have reached a critical juncture in their history: the agreement to become God's people via the

Ten Commandments. We would assume that the next set of laws would be just as fundamental in creating a "goy kadosh" - a holy nation. Nevertheless, the fifty-three *mitzvot* contained within *parashat Mishpatim* appear to be a random selection. Rav Menachem Leibtag reveals the didactic message that arises from *Mishpatim*'s structure that goes to the core of what it means to be a Jew today.

Structurally, *perakim* 20-23 can be divided into three sections. The first and last focus on *mitzvot bein adam lamakom* (between us and God), while the middle section discusses *mitzvot bein adam lachaveiro* (between people). The linguistic differences in the middle section reveal how God wants His "goy kadosh" to act. Firstly, we are faced with a set of civil laws, primarily concerning *nezikin* (damages), e.g.

... **כִּי יַבְעֲרֵאִישׁ שָׂדֵה אוֹיְבָרָם** (If you let your livestock graze in a neighbour's field);

... **כִּי תִצָּא אֵשׁ** (If you start a fire that spreads);

... **כִּי יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶל־דֵּעָוָה בְּקֶרֶב** (if you give someone goods for safekeeping and they are stolen);

Note how all these instances begin with the word 'כי', loosely translated as 'if' or 'when'. This is the heart of a *נושפט*: cases that can only be judged by a court, brought forward by a claimant.

This can be contrasted with the following *pesukim*:
וְגַר לֹא־תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ כִּי־גֵרִים כִּי־יִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

'You shall not wrong or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.'

כֹּל־אֱלֹמְנָה וְיָתוֹם לֹא תַעֲנוּן:

'You [communal leaders] shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan.'

In contrast to the 'case' laws, when dealing with 'ethical' laws, God provides them as imperatives. These imperatives are intended to shape the 'goy kadosh': as Jewish people, we are expected to abide by a higher ethical standard. We can see this as the punishment for violating the 'ethical' laws will come directly from God, as seen in the following command:

אִם־קָבַל תִּקְבַּל שְׁלֹמֹת רֶגְדְּ עַד־בַּא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ תֵּשִׁיבֵנּוּ לוֹ... כִּי־יִצְעַק אֵלַי וְשָׁמַעְתִּי

'If you take his garment as a pledge, you must return it by sunset... [if you don't then] when he cries out to me, I will hear [him]... (*Shemot* 22:25-26).'

The emphasis placed on being a good citizen is demonstrated out of this contrast. Judaism takes active measures - beyond the prior 'case' law - to ensure ethical behaviour. This should also serve as a guide to living in civil society. As free social agents, we are expected to demonstrate exemplary behaviour. For example, returning an item to a neighbour quickly is seen as going 'above and beyond' what is expected of citizens in civil society. For Jews, this is just a benchmark to represent God.

We cannot discard the context of where these laws are placed - between two sets of laws which are *bein adam lemakom*, and after *ma'amad har sinai*. As opposed to the general commandments, *Mishpatim* provides the moral fabric of Jewish behaviour. Finally, being 'sandwiched' between *mitzvot bein adam lemakom* epitomises a key message: while we can focus on building a relationship with God, it can only be meaningful when rooted in a society that acts in an exemplary fashion. *Mishpatim* as a whole instructs Jews how to worship God; we can conclude that the manner by which we treat our fellow man stands at the centre of our relationship with God.

LUCY IS IN SHEVET OROT AND WAS CO-ROSH NETURIM ON WINTER MACHANE

London	In 17:04 Out 18:08	Leeds	In 17:07 Out 18:15	Birmingham	In 17:11 Out 18:18
Manchester	In 17:10 Out 18:18	Nottingham	In 17:07 Out 18:14	Liverpool	In 17:13 Out 18:21
Thaxted	In 17:03 Out 18:09	Brighton	In 17:08 Out 18:12	Bristol	In 17:16 Out 18:22
Cambridge	In 17:04 Out 18:10	Oxford	In 17:10 Out 18:16	Jerusalem	In 16:51 Out 18:05

SHALIACH'S CORNER: UNDERSTANDING OUR ROOTS

RABBI AKIVA PART 2 - ORIGIN STORY



"What were the origins of Rabbi Akiva? They say that he was forty years old and had still not learned anything. Once, he was standing at the mouth of a well and he said: Who carved a hole in this

stone? They said to him: It is from the water, which constantly [falls] on it, day after day... Rabbi Akiva immediately applied this, all the more so, to himself. He said: If something soft can carve something hard, then all the more so, the words of Torah, which are like steel, can engrave themselves on my heart, which is but flesh and blood. He immediately went to start studying Torah.

He went with his son and they sat down by the schoolteachers. He said to one: Rabbi, teach me Torah!... The teacher wrote down *alef* and *beit* for him, and he learned them. And he went on studying until he learned the whole Torah... When they told him one law, he went off and sat down to work it out for himself; this *alef* – what was it written for? That *beit* – what was it written for? Why was this thing said? He kept coming back, and kept asking them, until he reduced his teachers to silence." (*Avot D'Rabbi Natan* 6:2)

From the above, just a small piece of the full story of Rabbi Akiva's beginnings as a Torah scholar, we can see so many of his defining character traits that, as we shall explore, come to the fore in other of his stories.

First, we learn that Rabbi Akiva was dedicated to the truth, in all its breadth and depth. He did not accept the simple picture he was presented with. Rather, he thought, questioned, and investigated the world before him. He did not merely ponder the occurrence of the hole in stone – he voiced his question and sought out an answer. He did not merely learn by rote the lessons of his teachers, he demanded to fully

comprehend and gain deep understanding as to why each matter was the way it is.

Second, like Moshe Rabbeinu who noticed the peculiarity of the 'burning bush that was not consumed', Rabbi Akiva lived with his eyes open, sensitive and responsive to all that occurred around him. In all likelihood, this was a well that Rabbi Akiva visited often, such that day by day, year by year, he had watched as the hole in the stone slowly began to develop. But whilst everybody else let nature take its course without giving it another thought – he noticed, he cared, he was bothered by it. He didn't take his reality for granted.

But mostly, we see that Rabbi Akiva believed in the power of change – not just in nature, not from others, but of oneself, and by one's own hands. He was a radical believer in the power to change – and of the responsibility each individual bears to bring about that change. He did not let his age, nor his humble beginnings distract or dishearten him. Making this crucial realisation – triggered by a seemingly trivial observation at a plain old well – that if the cold, hard stone can be transformed, how much more so the thinking, feeling, live heart of flesh and blood beating in his chest could also be renewed.

"RABBI AKIVA BELIEVED IN THE POWER OF CHANGE - NOT JUST IN NATURE, NOT FROM OTHERS, BUT OF ONESELF, BY ONE'S OWN HANDS... AND OF THE RESPONSIBILITY EACH INDIVIDUAL BEARS TO BRING ABOUT THAT CHANGE."

Bnei Akiva as a *tnuva*, a movement, embodies this idea of the inexhaustible strength to change. For the individual, we champion the ability and duty to grow – through questioning, seeking, and striving always for depth and truth. But also towards the *tnuva* as a whole – that through sensitivity and awareness of the society and times in which we live, we have a duty to adapt and to respond to the reality in which we find ourselves to further our values of *Torah Va'Avodah*.

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TORAH FROM AROUND THE WORLD

ABRAHAM BEN MEIR IBN EZRA | NAHALA 1ST ADAR

Heading north from Kotzk we end up in Warsaw, from where we catch a flight from *Lotnisko Chopina w Warszawie* [WAW] to *Flughafen Frankfurt Main* [FRA], which connects us to *Aeropuerto de Sevilla* [SVQ]. Then it's a short bus to Santa Justa Station, from where we catch a train to the Jewish Quarter of Córdoba.

Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra was a man of many talents and indeed many places. He wandered in poverty across the Jewish world, travelling as far as Baghdad in the east and London in the west; speaking of which, he compared the Biblical plague of darkness to living in foggy London – apparently not much has changed in 900 years. Ibn Ezra was born in Tudela, but later moved to Córdoba which he claimed as his birthplace. He had a tragic life, in which four of his five children died, the fifth converted to Islam, his wife died young and then the fifth son died as well. So severe was his poverty that he viewed himself as 'destined' to be poor. In a poem, he wrote that were he to go into selling burial shrouds, the angel of death would retire, and were he to sell candles, the sun would never set. He was a great friend of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, and some traditions have it that ibn Ezra's wife was Halevi's daughter. The exact details of death are not known, but from the closest contemporary evidence it appears he died in England, possibly having been killed by crusaders.

To adequately portray every facet of this individual is far beyond the scope of this article, so we shall examine a few points that mark out ibn Ezra's thought.

Ibn Ezra the Grammarian

Ibn Ezra wrote multiple works on grammar, and crucially translated from Arabic the works of Yehuda Hayyuj, the founder of the current Biblical Hebrew grammatical system. Hayyuj introduced the idea of a three-letter root system from Arabic into Hebrew, and ibn Ezra made this work available to the wider Jewish population. When earlier Ashkenazi commentators had relied on less precise understandings of grammar, ibn Ezra was highly critical of them.

Ibn Ezra the Poet

Ibn Ezra was a prolific poet, composing on the topics of astronomy, nature and love as well as 'religious' topics. Some of his compositions are still sung to this day, such as *כי אשנור שבת*, which hides within it anti-Karaite polemic. For example, the Karaites did not accept the Rabbinic obligation to have three meals on shabbat and therefore would sometimes fast; hence the line *על כן לא יתענות על פי נבוניו אסור לבוד מיום כפור עוני*, that it is forbidden to fast on Shabbat besides for Yom Kippur. Ibn Ezra also wrote a scathing critique of Elazar HaKalir, whose work he called unintelligible, his language an ungrammatical mix of Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew, his Biblical constructions invalid and his content entirely and inappropriately dependent on Midrashic interpretations.

Ibn Ezra the Philosopher

Yesod Mora veSod HaTorah is a philosophical work, penned towards the end of ibn Ezra's life. It surveys the

relative worth of all sciences, including religious studies, and evaluates their use in ascending the ladder towards 'true wisdom', the form of the 'soul' that survives death. Most avenues of study – including religious, and especially Talmud study – are deemed insufficient for full spiritual development; the only way to reach the final goal is via philosophy, maths and natural sciences. Some of his philosophical ideas would appear also in Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*.

Ibn Ezra and the Secret of the Twelve (coming soon to a cinema near you!)

One of the most controversial comments of the ibn Ezra relates to the 'secret of the twelve'. Concerning the final eight verses of the Torah, which relate Moshe's death: the Gemara (*Bava Batra* 15a) discusses whether these were authored by Moshe or Yehoshua. According to Rabbi Yehuda, since it writes 'and Moshe died', Moshe could not have written it, and it must have been Yehoshua. Ibn Ezra extends this principle to all twelve verses at the end of *Devarim*, and this became known as his 'Secret of the Twelve', i.e. the twelve verses added after Moshe. At certain glosses or introductory passages that seem to reflect a later date of authorship, ibn Ezra says that those who 'understand the secret of the twelve' will 'recognise the truth', i.e. that these few *pesukim* were written after Moshe.

Ibn Ezra the Commentator

As a commentator, ibn Ezra is known for his intensely *peshat*-oriented approach. He has an interesting relationship with the *derashot* of *chazal*; he will not accept any reading of Torah that differs – even on a *peshat* level – from the *halakha*, where that *halakha* is a '*kabbala*', meaning a received tradition. For example, he strongly rejects Rashbam's assertion that the *peshat* of the *pesukim* regarding *tefillin* is simply metaphorical. However, he does explain *pesukim* according to their *peshat* when the *halakha* that differs is a *din mufla*, and the rabbis are recasting a verse with a new halakhic meaning; ibn Ezra signifies this by referring to *chazal* in these instances the *ma'atikim*, those who 'transmit' the teachings. He is also incredibly scathing and witty in his commentary regarding those opinions he rejected. For example, when a Karaite scholar name 'Yitzchaki' suggested that a whole list of Edomite kings was added later to the Torah, ibn Ezra wrote that 'his name is indeed Yitzchak, and anyone who hears him will laugh [*yitachak*] at him.' Similarly, when Ben Ephraim (בן אפרים) explained the *pasuk* *לְאֵה רַבּוֹת*, 'the eyes of Leah were tender' as missing the letter *alef*, such that it should read *אֲרָבוֹת* meaning 'long', ibn Ezra's response was that Ben Ephraim is the one missing an *alef* (→ בן פרים).



WHAT'S GOING ON?

- **Birmingham SBM** continues this **Monday 20th February!** Join us at the usual location.

- **Lishmah** for bogrot and sixth-form women continues this **Tuesday 21st February!** Join this **dynamic makom torah** for women!

- **London SBM** continues next **Thursday 23rd February** from 7pm at Kinloss! Make sure to sign up so that we can order enough food.

- BA will be running a **Women's Megillah Reading** on **Purim night!** Sign up to attend or to *lein a perek* at tinyurl.com/womens-megillah.

- Our renowned **Purim Seudah** returns! Join us for a **school uniform-themed** bogrim seudah at the **Goodmans**, starting with *mincha* at 17:00. Sign up now at bauk.org/seuda.

- **Young Families** are invited to a **Manchester Purim Seudah!** Starting at 14:00, sign up at mizrachi.org.uk/class/purim.

- **Shabbat Bogrim** is happening on **17th March!** Join us for a Shabbaton in Coventry catered by **Met Su Yan!**

- **Summer Machane** applications are open! Visit bauk.org/camps to sign up.

- **Tafkidim** for **Summer Machane** are open! Visit bauk.org/tafkid to sign up.

- **Mazkirut applications** are now open! Email mazkir@bauk.org for an application form.

- To give any **comments** or **suggestions** to Bnei Akiva, please visit bauk.org/feedback.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ANY OF THESE EVENTS, PLEASE CONTACT BEN AT CHINUCH@BAUK.ORG

Join us for Shabbat in Coventry

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Join us for Purim Seuda at the Goodmans

Mincha starts at 5pm

Dress code: School Uniform

SIGN UP ASAP www.bauk.org/seuda

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לע"נ נחמה מינדל זלמה בת דוד הלוי