

# Live & Laugh

A Swiss guy, looking for directions, pulls up at a bus stop where two Americans are waiting. "Entschuldigung, koennen Sie Deutsch sprechen?" he asks.

The two Americans just stare at him. "Excusez-moi, parlez vous Francais?" he tries. The two continue to stare. "Parlare Italiano?" No response. "Hablan ustedes Espanol?" Still nothing.

The Swiss guy drives off, extremely disgusted. The first American turns to the second and says, "Y'know, maybe we should learn a foreign language."

"Why?" says the other. "That guy knew four languages, and it didn't do him any good."

## What's Nu?!

**The Barmy Boy**  
**Joshua Aron**

Mazal Tov to Craig Aron & Lauren Aron and grandparents Tzoddie & Shirley Aron and Dave Ginsberg.

## Calendar

*Parshas Shekalim*

*Shabbos Mevorchim Adar*

*Molad: Thursday 15:09:03*

- ◆ Shacharis: 8:30 am; Shtibl: 8:45 am
- ◆ Brocha in the Seeff Hall sponsored by **Steve Nossel** in honour of his mother's 86th birthday and her brother & sister-in-law Chaim & Lynne Lacob.
- ◆ **Sushi & Black Label Farbrengen.**
- ◆ Mincha: 6:15 pm
- ◆ Shabbos ends: 7:27 pm
- ◆ **Rosh Chodesh:** Thurs 15 & Fri 16 Feb

◆ **Nathan Fine** of I.deal Furnishers at Midway Mall, Bramley Gardens wishes all congregants a Good Shabbos. Call 011-887-5456/082-854-5706. **Furniture, Bedding & Appliances.**

◆ **Vehicles wanted. Any make, any condition. Best prices. Phone ARNOLD ORKIN 082 823 7826**

- ◆ Acknowledgements: Chabad.org Craig Kessler
- ◆ Please take Good Shabbos Sydenham home if you will only carry it within the Eiruv.

**Sydenham Shul's Learning Launch 2018**

# EDUCATION IN CRISIS!

**Fees Must Fall? Are standards falling? Why Jewish Day Schools? At what cost?**

**Prof Adam Habib**  
Vice-Chancellor  
University of the Witwatersrand

**Rabbi David Hazdan**  
Dean  
Jewish Academy Schools

**Mr Elliot Wolf**  
Director  
King David School's Foundation

**Rabbi Yossy Goldman**  
Moderator - Synagogue Shul  
President of Rabbinical Association

**Monday 19 February 2018, 7:45 pm**  
Sydenham Community Centre, Seeff Hall

Entrance: R50. Tea will be served. Secure Parking  
Pre-paid reserved seating recommended: 011 640 5021 or www.sydshul.co.za

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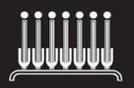
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# Good Shabbos SYDENHAM!

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10 Feb 2018      Parshas Mishpatim      25 Shevat 5778

## Is Religion Still Relevant? by: Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Cyberspace, outer space, inner space. Genome maps, globalization, going to Mars. Smart cards, smart bombs, stem cells and cell phones. Artificial intelligence, robots, and drones. There is no denying it. We live in a new age. Science fiction has become scientific fact. And the question is asked: In this new world order, with science and technology changing the way we live, is religion still relevant? Do we still need to subscribe to an ancient and seemingly long obsolete code of laws when we are so further advanced than our ancestors?

This question reminds me of little old Hymie Levy of London who somehow found himself attending a cocktail party in the company of aristocracy. Poor Hymie was completely out of place mingling with the lords and ladies of British royalty and high society. One Duchess was so irritated by this ordinary Jew's presence that she confronted him directly. Oozing sarcasm, in her finest elocution, she let on to Hymie, *Did you know that my family traces its lineage back to the very people who were personally present at the signing of the Magna Carta!* Hymie Levy was unfazed. He gave a little shrug of his shoulders and whispered straight into the ear of Her Haughtiness, *Un Mein Zayde Moishe vos poisonally present by de giving of de Tzen Commendments!*

Have the Ten Commandments passed their sell-by date? Are Faith and Doubt, Murder, Adultery, Thievery, Lying and Jealousy out of fashion? Notwithstanding all our marvellous medical and scientific developments, has hu-

man nature itself really changed? Are not the very same moral issues that faced our ancestors still challenging our own generation?

Whether it's an ox cart or a Mercedes, road rage or courteous coexistence is still a choice we must make. Looking after aged parents is not a new problem. Whether it was Adam and Eve or Michael and Sheryl the grass somehow always seems greener on the other side. For some inexplicable reason, the other guy's wife, house, horse or Porsche still seem more attractive and desirable than our own.

The very same issues dealt with in the Bible - sibling rivalry, jealous partners, and even murder - are still the stuff of newspaper headlines today. So what else is new? Has anything changed? Yes, today we have astronauts and space stations, laser beams and laptops but the basic issues and choices human beings must face remain identical. Once upon a time the question was do I hit him with my club or slice him up with my sword. Today the question is do I call up the nuclear submarines or send in the guided ballistic missiles?

Technology has developed in leaps and bounds. Fantasies of yesterday are reality today. Communication, automation and globalization have altered our lives dramatically. But the core issues, the basic moral dilemmas have not changed one iota. We still struggle with knowing the difference between right and wrong, moral or immoral, ethical or sneaky and not even the most souped-up computer on earth is able to answer those questions for us.

Science and technology can do wonders for humankind. But they can also blow us all to kingdom

come faster than Attila the Hun could have ever imagined. Science and technology answer How and What. They do not address the question of Why. Why are we here in the first place? Why should I be nice to my neighbour? Why should my life be nobler than my pet Doberman's? Science and technology have unravelled many mysteries that puzzled us for centuries. But they have not answered a single moral question. Only Torah addresses the moral minefield. And those issues are perhaps more pressing today than ever before in history.

Torah is truth and truth is eternal. Scenarios come and go. Lifestyles change with the geography. The storylines are different, but the gut level issues are all too familiar. If we ever needed religion – or in our language, Torah – we need it equally today and maybe more so.

May we continue to find moral guidance and clarity in the eternal truths of our holy and eternal Torah.

## Parsha Pointers

*Mishpatim: Artscroll pg 416;  
Living Torah pg 357*

Following the revelation at Sinai, G-d legislates a series of laws for the people of Israel. These include the laws of the indentured servant; the penalties for murder, kidnapping, assault, and theft; civil laws pertaining to redress of damages, the granting of loans, and the responsibilities of the "Four Guardians"; and the rules governing the conduct of justice by courts of law.

Also included are laws warning against mistreatment of foreigners; the observance of the seasonal festivals, and the agricultural gifts that are to be brought to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem; the prohibition against cooking meat with milk; and the mitzvah of prayer. Altogether, the Parshah of Mishpatim contains fifty-three mitzvot -- 23 imperative commandments and 30 prohibitions.

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G-d promises to bring the people of Israel to the Holy Land, and warns them against assuming the pagan ways of its current inhabitants.

The people of Israel proclaim, "We will do and we will hear all that G-d commands us." Leaving Aaron and Hur in charge in the Israelite camp, Moses ascends Mount Sinai and remains there for forty days and forty nights to receive the Torah from G-d.

receive the Torah from G-d and convey it to them.

## Four Excuses

*By Rabbi Yanki Tauber*

The "That's how G-d made me" excuse:

*Why shouldn't I do whatever I want? After all, if I want it, that means that there's something inside me telling me to want it, right? I'm just being me. Isn't it natural for me to be me?*

The "Sorry, I lost it" excuse:

*Look, I know it's wrong. But I can't control myself. I have this violent streak in me that... well, once you start me off, I can't stop.*

The "I'm special" excuse:

*I'm an artist/business tycoon/holy man/commander-in-chief/heirress/scientist. I have very special talents and abilities and great things to accomplish. The regular rules don't apply to me. I can't be constrained by laws designed to keep the herd in line.*

The "Little me" and "What's the use" excuse

*You know, I used to care about these things and try to right the world's wrongs. But what's the point? The world is what it is, and what I do or don't do won't make much difference anyway. So I just let things take their course.*

The Torah reading of *Mishpatim* ("Laws" - Exodus 21-24) includes much of what can be called the Torah's "civil code" - the laws governing criminal assault, theft, damages, loans and rentals, employer-employee relations, etc. But as the Chassidic masters repeatedly remind us, everything in Torah has both a "body" and a "soul": the most lofty or esoteric concept has a practical application, and the most technical law has a spiritual import.

*Mishpatim* includes the laws of the "Four Prototypes of Damages" (as the Talmud defines them) — "the animal, the pit, the man and the fire." Technically, these describe four basic categories of damages for which a person is responsible: 1) "Animal": damage caused by one's animal or other

possession (e.g., your ox gores your neighbor's cow; your goat eats up your neighbor's tomato plants); 2) "Pit": passive damage caused by one's criminal negligence (e.g., you dig a hole in the middle of the street and someone falls in and breaks a leg); 3) "Man": active, human-inflicted damages (e.g., you break his \$1000 lamp or the only nose on his face); 4) "Fire": damages arising from the failure to control potentially damaging forces that are one's responsibility to control (e.g., you're burning garbage in your back yard and it spreads to your neighbor's property).

The "Four Prototypes of Damages," says the Rebbe, also describe four spiritually damaging phenomena: the tendency to blindly and indiscriminately follow our wiles and desires ("the animal"); the failure to control anger and other destructive forces in our psyche ("fire"); the delusion that everything is permitted in pursuit of a "higher" goal ("man"); and the inertia of the passive, hollowed-out soul ("the pit").

As the laws of *Mishpatim* warn against and prescribe the remedies for the physical "Prototypes of Damages," so does the "soul of Torah" counteract its four spiritual analogs:

Yes, our animal instincts are natural, necessary and desirable, but only when guided and directed by the higher instincts of our G-dly soul.

Yes, volatile forces rage within us; but we have been given the responsibility, and the means, to control them.

No, our highest and most spiritual aspirations are not exempt from the rule of law. On the contrary, when they fail to submit to its higher authority, they become the cause for the greatest evils perpetrated by man.

Indeed, passivity is all too easy a rut to roll into. We must constantly remind ourselves that our actions do make a difference in G-d's world: He created it, He entrusted us with the task to improve it, and He supplied us the resources to do so. We need only scratch the surface of our soul to uncover the faith, the will, the passion and the energy to act.

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## A Different Kind of Spirituality

*By Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum*

Spirituality gets a bad rap. Mention the word to the average fellow and it will probably evoke images of eastern gurus dressed in psychedelic caftans chanting at dawn. Even those more Jewishly inclined will most probably aver that to be spiritual you need to have a long white beard, talk softly and spend full days in prayer and private worship.

Are they right?

If you came to *shul* last week and heard the Torah reading you could be forgiven for thinking so. "G-d descended onto the mountain," an undifferentiated presence of pure G-dliness. Lightning, thunder, fear and trembling seized the world. All creation was silent in awe. Is this not what it takes to be spiritual? Not totally, and sometimes not at all.

This week we read a different *parshah* - *Mishpatim*. If you were to walk into *shul* without prior warning you could be excused for believing that you'd blundered into a public recitation of assorted torts and damages, as rendered in Biblical Hebrew. We read a compendium of logical, commonsensical laws.

This is spirituality? Is this the natural automatic progression — from G-d descending in all His glory and declaiming the lore at Sinai, to becoming a nation of petty shopkeepers and small time farmers? Surely G-d has more weighty matters of state than to waste His time (and ours) committing to posterity the laws of returning pledges, litigating minor injuries and paying workers' entitlements?

That, however, is exactly the point. Religiosity and spirituality are expressed best by conforming to the seemingly petty details of daily life. A truly G-dly man operates as a synthesis of the celestial and the mundane.

First must come the sense of awe and purpose initiated by an all-encompassing sense of G-d's presence, as expressed in the history-shaping events recorded in last week's *parshah*. And then, and of equal consequence, one must translate this sense of mission into each and every interaction of one's routine existence.