



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

MISHPATIM • משפטים / Abi M'lebt?!

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SERMON TITLE:

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MISHPATIM**ABI M'LEBT?!**

Not long ago Lipa, a Chassidic singer produced a song called "Abi M'leibt" which means "as long as I'm alive". In the song he describes himself getting pulled over while driving his car, but instead of getting upset about it he gets out of the car and begins to dance with the police officer (don't try this at home!) to the words "abi m'leibt." It doesn't matter that I got a ticket, I'm still alive and well, thank G-d!

Next he runs to the bank to cash a check - just as the bank is closing and the bank manager shuts the door in his face! Most of us would get upset and perhaps begin screaming and cursing, but him, he just smiles and sings "abi m'leibt"!

Then, late one Friday afternoon, he's just finished his shopping and he's carrying his packages out to the car when some guy comes barreling into him and knocks him down, spreading his Shabbos goodies all over the parking lot! Well, what should he do now? The other guy begins to apologize, but him? He just grabs the man's hands and begins to dance "abi m'leibt"!

This song is based on that famous Yiddish saying "abi gezunt". Whenever you hear Jews kvetching about their business, if you stick around long enough they will inevitably conclude their complaint with a big sigh and a decided, "Nu, abi gezunt!" which means It doesn't matter so much that I'm not a millionaire, "At least I'm healthy".



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The question is, is health the most important thing to worry about? And as long as you are healthy – life is now perfect? Or is there something more to life than just being healthy?

In this week's parsha we read about the mitzvah of tzedakah. The verse says, "When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you..." Rashi explains that with this verse the Torah is setting the priorities, telling us to whom we should give Tzedakah first. "If a Jew and a gentile apply for a loan the Jew takes preference. If a poor person and a rich person apply for a loan, the poor person takes preference. If the poor of your city and the poor of another city apply for a loan, the poor of your city take preference."

We were lucky enough that G-d should set our tzedakah priorities straight for us. If it hadn't been written we probably wouldn't have figured out ourselves. Quite the contrary, when we ask people to help out a needy neighbor they are always indignant! Why can't he get a job! But when these same people hear that somewhere in a far away place, across big oceans, in a country they have never seen, in a town they have never heard of before, there is a family they have never met who needs help, for some reason they are more than willing to give generous donations.

Thank G-d for setting our priorities straight.

The Ten Commandments also help to set right our priorities. The first five are commandments which characterize man's relationship with G-d. After we have



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learned that we must believe in G-d alone, worship no other being and keep the Shabbat holy, only then does the Torah go on to regulate man's interpersonal relationships; No theft, murder or envy etc.

So, when it comes to tzedakah or the broader Torah picture we've been spared the priority setting by G-d's infinite wisdom. However when it comes to setting the priorities in life, how should we know what come first and what comes later? So long as the Torah has not written clear instructions, with every new situation that will develop the same question of, "what is more important" will arise.

Let's look again into the parsha.

The parsha opens with the laws of owning slaves. It seems strange though that immediately after the Ten Commandments the Torah should talk about slavery. It would seem more fitting for the Mitzvos at the end of the parsha to be written first. The mitzvos at the end of the parsha, such as, "stay away from falsehood", "do not take interest" and as mentioned earlier "lend money to My nation", are all practical lessons for every day life. The laws of owning slaves, on the other hand, are not applicable to most people, especially at that time. When the Jews left Egypt every one of them was wealthy up to his ears. No Jew was a slave then. Why then does Torah choose to place these unlikely laws immediately following the revelation at Sinai?

The answer comes in Leviticus. G-d says, "The people of Israel are my servants". Why must we be *servants* of G-d, what would be wrong if we were employees of



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G-d? The difference is, an employee will put in a day's work, from nine to five, and then go home and forget about his boss and the business entirely. He's got his own life. A slave on the other hand, has no agenda of his own. His life revolves around his master, and aside from the master he has no life, no existence.

G-d didn't want us to serve Him as hired help, praying and studying from six to nine in the morning and then forgetting about Him. G-d wants His nation to serve Him with every breath. The Jew's agenda in his eating, working and hanging out with friends should be to fulfill that which G-d asks from him. In other words, Judaism must be the Jew's life, aside from which he should have no existence.

Rabbi Israel Jacobson relates that in 1845 he traveled to the previous Rebbe at his home in St. Petersburg for the High Holy days. Upon entering the prayer hall he noticed that not a single bench had been prepared in the sanctuary for the upcoming holiday. Finding R' Elya Chaim Althaus, a member of the Rebbe's inner circle of Chassidim he asked, "R' Elya Chaim, it's *erev* Rosh Hashanah and there still is nothing in the Shul?"

R' Elya Chaim looked up and mimicked Rabbi Jacobson's question right back at him, "Yisroel, it's *erev* Rosh Hashanah and there still is nothing in the shul?"

"These words brightened my eyes, although it took ten years for me to understand what he meant," Rabbi Jacobson said later, "Here was an older Chassid, one who was devoted and entirely committed to the Rebbe's household teaching a younger



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Chassid to be as devoted and committed, to feel personally responsible for the Rebbe and his household.”

This story demonstrates how a Jew must feel about his Judaism. The rabbi already knew what the problem was and what had to be done, yet he was missing the feeling that it was his own problem, his task to do. It's like the husband who complains to his wife that their home is a mess. Hey! Why are you complaining to your wife? The house is yours just as much as it is hers, so grab a broom and start cleaning!

The Torah can't clearly set up priorities for every single situation that may arise. So too we can't possibly teach our children priorities for each and every situation. But what we can and must do is impart in our children a feeling that Torah and Judaism is who they are. We must teach them that Judaism is *their* business, it's *their* "thing", that it is the single most important thing our lives. If we can make our children feel personally responsible for Judaism, then the next time they are find themselves not knowing "what's more important" they will automatically make the right choice, because it's their business.