

① The *parasha* of *Mishpatim*, with its detailed rules and regulations, can sometimes seem an anticlimax after the breathtaking grandeur of the revelation at Sinai. It should not be. *Parashat Yitro* contains the vision, but God is in the details. Without the vision, law is blind, but without the details, the vision floats in heaven. With them, the Divine Presence is brought down to earth, where we need it most.

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

② "Then¹⁹ God said to Moses, 'I heard *the sound* of the words of this people, that they have spoken to you' (ibid. v. 25), בי לך אמור להם שובו לכם לאהליכם" – *Go say to them, 'Return to your tents'* (ibid. v. 27)." והנה שבו לאהליהם ועשו שמחה ומשתה ויום טוב ביום – They thus returned to their tents and conducted themselves with joy and feasting and festival²⁰ because it was on the day of receiving the Torah.²¹ ומשה כתב ביום ההוא – On that day (6 Sivan) Moses wrote down in "the Book of the Covenant" everything he had been commanded by God – "statutes, monetary

(civil) laws and teachings,"²² ולקח הספר ההוא להיות בידו עד למחרת – and he kept that book, to be in his hand until the next day (7 Sivan),²³ כי לא היה באותו היום כדי לבנות המזבח ושתיים עשרה מצבה – because there was not enough time on that day to build the altar and the twelve pillars and to offer the burnt-offerings and the peace-offerings and all those many acts described in that passage.²⁴ ועוד, שטוב ונכון הוא להמתין להם הבירה עד – Furthermore, it was beneficial and appropriate to delay the forging of the covenant for them until the next day, to give them time for deliberation and caution about the matter, לדעת הישגם אהבים לעשות בן בבל לבכם ובכל נפשם – to know "if they truly loved to do so (i.e., to forge the covenant) with all their heart and with all their soul."²⁵ וכל ישראל השכימו לרגליו – So he rose early the next morning (v. 4) to forge the covenant with [the Israelites] concerning all of these words, – and all of Israel rose early along with him,²⁶ וחזרו במקום שעמדו בקבלם עשרת הדברים – and returned to the place where they had stood to receive the Ten Commandments.²⁷ ושם בנה – And there he built the altar mentioned below (v. 4) and offered the sacrifices (v. 5), and he put half the blood upon the altar of God and half the blood he placed in basins (v. 6). ולקח הספר שכתב מאמש וקראו באזניהם – He then took the Book of the Covenant, which he had written the night before and "read it in their earshot" (v. 7), וקבלו עליהם עוד לבא בבירה עמו – and they accepted upon themselves further to enter into a covenant with [God],²⁸ ואמרו "כל אשר דבר ה' לנו נעשה, ונשמע אליך בכל" – and they said (ibid.), "everything that HASHEM has said to us we will do, and we will also obey you, concerning everything that you commanded – or will command – us from Him, may He be blessed."²⁹ ואז זרק עליהם חצי הדם, כי זאת אות הבירה לבא – He then threw half the blood upon [the people] (v. 8), for this is the sign of a covenant, for the two parties to the covenant to enter it with equal parts of something.³⁰

Ramban
לכ: פסוק

③ would then mean: like the preparation of, or like the shape of, a sapphire brick. They saw that "at His feet" — i.e., for the building of His throne — a brick had been laid by means of this covenant. When they were forced עבדי פרעה, they were forced to prepare bricks to build up the might of the Pharaohs, whereas now, as עבדי ה', they are to make "bricks" for the upbuilding of God's kingship on earth. "נעשה ונשמע," which they uttered in unison, constituted the first brick for the building of this covenant. And they saw that such a brick is "sapphire." Everything material, earthly, that is brought in faithful service to this Divine building becomes fused with the heavenly and permeated with heavenly purity, becomes part of the heavenly, and becomes like heaven itself in purity — וכעצם השמים לטהר.

Rav Hirsch
לכ: פסוק

④

We think that a man, when he commences to speculate, ought not to embark at once on a subject so vast and important; he should previously adapt himself to the study of the several branches of science and knowledge, should most thoroughly refine his moral character and subdue his passions and desires; when, in addition, he has obtained a knowledge of the true fundamental propositions, a comprehension of the several methods of inference and proof, and the capacity of guarding against fallacies, then he may approach the investigation of this subject. He must, however, not decide any question by the first idea that suggests itself to his mind, or at once direct his thoughts and force them to obtain a knowledge of the Creator, but he must wait modestly and patiently, and advance step by step.

In this sense we must understand the words "And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God" (Exod. iii. 6). This act of Moses was highly commended by God, who bestowed on him a well deserved portion of His goodness.

But "the nobles of the Children of Israel" were impetuous, and allowed their thoughts to go unrestrained: what they perceived was but imperfect. Therefore it is said of them, "And they saw the God of Israel, and there was under his feet," etc. (Exod. xxiv. 10); and not merely, "and they saw the God of Israel": the purpose of the whole passage is to criticize their act of seeing and not to describe it. They are blamed for the nature of their perception, which was to a certain extent corporeal -- a result which necessarily followed, from the fact that they ventured too far before being perfectly prepared. They deserved to perish, but at the intercession of Moses this fate was averted by God for the time. They were afterwards burnt at Taberah, except Nadab and Abihu, who were burnt in the Tabernacle of the congregation, according to what is stated by authentic tradition. (Midr. Rabba ad locum.)

If such was the case with them, how much more is it incumbent on us who are inferior, and on those who are below us, to persevere in perfecting our knowledge of the elements, and in rightly understanding the preliminaries which purify the mind from the defilement of error: then we may enter the holy and divine camp in order to gaze

Rambam

Guided by Prophecy

1:5

⑥

11. וְאֵל אֲצִילִי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שְׁלַח יָדוֹ — And upon the nobles of the Children of Israel He did not send forth His hand... to suspend their senses so that they might prophesy, as is the case with other prophets when the hand of HASHEM is upon them, as it says of Ezekiel, וְהָפַל עָלַי, the hand of HASHEM fell there upon me (Ezekiel 8:1), for then the functioning of one's senses ceases, as it occurred to Saul when he prophesied, as it says, וַיִּתְּשֶׁטְ גַּם הוּא בְּגָדָיו, And he also stripped off his clothes and he himself also prophesied before Samuel, and lay down naked all that day and all that night (1 Samuel 19:24). However, to these nobles He did not send forth His hand to

suspend their senses in order for them to apprehend (grasp) what they then saw.

וַיַּחֲזוּ אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים — And they beheld God... in a prophetic vision.

וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ — And they ate and drank. They made a feast afterward, without changing their senses, and this they did to rejoice in their (spiritual) attainment.

Sifra

1:25 JW

⑤

The following was a familiar [lesson] in the mouth of Rav: — לא עוֹלָם כְּזֶה עוֹלָם הָבָא — The World to Come is not like this world. — הָעוֹלָם הָבָא אֵין בּוֹ לֹא אֲכִילָה וְלֹא שְׁתִּיָּה — In the World to Come^[a] there is no eating, no drinking, וְלֹא מְרִיבָה וְלֹא מִשְׁא וּמָכָן — no propagation, no business, וְלֹא תַחְרִיב וְלֹא תַחְרִיב — no jealousy, no hatred and no rivalry. — אֵלָּא צְדִיקִים יוֹשְׁבִין וְעֶרְוֹתֵיהֶם בְּרָאשֵׁיהֶם — Rather, the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads, וְהִשְׁבִּיחַ — and delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence, — וַיַּחֲזוּ אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ — as it is stated: — וַיַּחֲזוּ אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ — they gazed at God, and they ate and drank.^[a]

Bechos 17a