

Dvar Torah by

Rabbi Chanoch Yeres

to his community at

Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

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MISHPATIM

In this week's parsha of Mishpatim we are presented with a long list of commandments V'EILEH HAMISHPATIM ASHER TASIM LIFNEIHEM. Yet, we were introduced to mitzvot already from Parshat B'shalach (at Mara) and in Parshat Yitro at Matan Torah.

What is the difference, if any between the mitzvot given before Mount Sinai and those given afterwards? According to the Kuzari, Israel became a nation at Mt. Sinai. This fact would impact upon the character of the mitzvot given to Israel.

The pre-Matan Torah mitzvot, as such were given to individuals. The singular language used in B'shalach confirms this.

In Mishpatim, the plural is used LIFNEIHEM - "before them", to denote that the mitzvot are being transmitted to the community. Furthermore, in Parshat Mishpatim there are laws that stress the idea of equality. No one is to be considered or treated greater than another.

The Hebrew servant, for example, was only permitted to work for six years. Should he desire to remain in

servitude, he may only remain until the Jubilee year. No Jew may ever be a servant of another Jew forever. The Talmud points out that the master must treat his servant as well as he treats himself.

Another example of the demand of equality is found by the Sabbatical year. On this year, poor and rich, landed and unlanded were treated equally in the fields.

Another illustration is the discussion in Parshat Mishpatim about the Shabbat day. The reference hereto Shabbat, stresses this day of rest as a great equalizer. Not only do you rest but all that work for you must rest. Both laborer and boss must rest, both master and servant refrain from work

"...in order that your ox and your donkey shall rest, and your maid-servant's son and the stranger shall be refreshed." (23:12)

The Shabbat, as once quoted, can be seen as an "embodiment that all men are equal and that equality of men means the nobility of men".

This is how this week's parsha is something new and fresh. It relates commandments to us as a new nation, stressing equality to all. This was a new concept then, but remains with us even today. We need to always remember that, yes, they were commandments to keep for G-d but they also helped mold us into a nation. 🛐