

All the Words Adonai Has Spoken We Will do

When our people in *Parashat Mishpatim* heard the all the words of *Adonai* and all the judgments (*mishpatim*) the response by all of Israel was “*All the words Adonai has spoken we will do*” (Ex. 24:3). This is practically the same response given before He spoke in Ex. 19:8. But the *Torah* records for us that now *Moses* writes all of the words spoken by *Adonai* and then he read them in the audience of all of the people. What would their response be now that they know all the requirements and they are written down? They all said “*Na’ase V’Nishma*,” which the Artscroll TNK and the TLV translate as “*We will do and we will obey*.” The first part of the response is identical to the previous two references (Ex. 19:8 and 24:3) and comes from the Hebrew verb *Oseh* (עשה), meaning to do. But now, having heard the words written down, having heard orally and heard the written covenant (*b’rit* or *ketubah if you would*), they also add the first person plural future tense of the Hebrew verb *sh’ma* (שמע) – to prove that one has heard by one’s actions (i.e., intrinsic obedience). This was the complete endorsement of the covenant and the text shows that *Moses* then went on to perform the ancient ritual ratification of a covenant that was the practice of his time. We also have His written Word before us. We in *Kol Simcha* have agreed that our response to His written instructions are to be nothing less than ‘*Na’ase V’Nishma*.’

If we are able to see what the statutes mentioned in Exodus 21-24 teach us about *Messiah*, that in and of itself provides much of the basis for doing them. In other words, we can live out these instructions because of what they picture in our everyday life concerning *Messiah*, what He did for us, and who He has made us to be. Living by these precepts, therefore, becomes a way of exemplifying who *Messiah* is and what He did for us. Moreover, obeying God’s Word in this fashion precludes all tendencies to legalism, where one receives merit for the doing. Instead we do everything by God’s grace. In doing so we live out what *Adonai* intended *Torah* to be.

Right after the *high* of being in the presence of God, our people needed (and we also need) reminders on how to treat each other and how to conduct our daily lives. We must always get back to the *real* as long as we are on this planet. When we understand who God is and what His Ways are like, we also understand that He wants us to act righteously and justly with our fellow human beings.

The Categories

In which areas of life does this *Parasha* tell us to dispense justice and live righteously?

1. First is the area of **human slavery**, Exodus 21:1-11. Notice that the *Torah* does not forbid slavery. On the contrary, it recognizes that human servitude can be a beneficial socio-economic institution. However, the *Torah* *does* regulate slavery. It provides for fair, honorable, and humane treatment of all slaves. In fact, the *Torah* eliminates everything about the institution of slavery that would characterize it as *slavery* and, instead, elevates it to being *voluntary servitude*.
2. The second area of concern has to do with people physically **fighting** with each other. Exodus 21:12-27 present several possible scenarios where guidelines are given for dispensing fair judgments when people strike each other.
3. Chapter 21 concludes with instructions pertaining particularly to people **living in the rural areas** who might have oxen or other animals.
4. The next set of regulations (verses 22:1-16) is about **making restitution**. Restitution is making a money payment (restoring value) to whom it is due resulting from damages which have incurred from that person’s property or family. This payment is to be the full value of the item *plus* some more added on. Sometimes the restitution was paying double, as in the case of theft. Other times

it is different. The *Torah* here presents various situations that required making restitution; included are theft, fire, borrowing, and the seduction of women.

5. The remaining regulations have to do primarily with instructions to avoid doing what the **pagan idolaters** do. These teachings cover everything from being forbidden to practice bestiality and sorcery to the prohibition of boiling a kid in its mother's milk, a Canaanite mourning practice.

These are the main categories of the instructions. This summary is not meant to be all-inclusive.

Covenant Ratification

There is a particularly interesting account in these verses of how Moses wrote down what God told him to write. We read, for example, in Exodus 24:4 that, Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. What he did not write, the Lord Himself did: ¹² *“Then Adonai said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and stay there, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the Torah and the mitzvot, which I have written so that you may instruct them” (Exodus 24:12).*

Then, Moses wrote all of the things that God spoke. The text is careful to say that all of the "words" that God spoke were written, rather than specifying which kind of words they were. By stating it as the text does, we can assume that all that God spoke to Moses, he wrote down. There does not appear to be any room here for the presence of extra verbal *revelation* designed to pass down to future generations labeled as *Oral Torah*. Since the text indicates that Moses and the Lord both wrote everything down, it seems that it is rather difficult to find any *Oral Torah* given here, as the Rabbis claim. Whatever the Lord communicated orally to Moses was apparently applicable to that particular generation. God did not intend for it to be authoritative for every generation, or He would have written it just as everything else was written. Thus, this passage provides a serious challenge to the concept of *Oral Torah* discussed in rabbinical commentaries.

It was also significant that Moses wrote these words down because the commitment to writing was an essential part of the ratification process of treaties in the ancient Near East. It made a treaty a legal reality. Finally, as is the custom with the ratification of ancient treaties, the appropriate sacrifices are offered finishing with a national covenant meal. Two sacrifices offered were the whole burnt offering and the "peace" or "well-being" offering. After he made the sacrifices, Moses then did a very strange thing. In Exodus 24:8, after the people once again confirmed their intention to keep the covenant, he sprinkled sacrificial blood on the people and said:

“Behold the blood of the covenant, which Adonai has cut with you, in agreement with all these words.”

Actually, the blood was split in half. One half presumably was for the Lord; the initiator of the covenant and the other half was for the people. In doing so, they equally shared the responsibility of this covenant. If it was not kept, the life of the faithless one was at stake. This is symbolized by the use of the blood, which the *Torah* later tells us contained the life of the soul. God would never fail to keep His part of this covenant. But Israel certainly will have problems through the centuries keeping it. Appropriately, they will suffer (as Deuteronomy 28-29 states) for being faithless to their commitment here at the foot of Mount Sinai.

It is not without accident that *Yeshua*, the Deliverer and Redeemer in like manner, but greater than *Moses* also said: *“This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20)* when at His Seder He ratified the New Covenant with His people. The Sinai ratification ceremony comes to a close having both the Book of the Covenant (the Word) and the Blood of the Covenant to be a reminder for them and for us forever of what we have covenanted to do. Shabbat Shalom!