

Explicit Obedience – the Biblical Mindset of His People

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 they gave *before Adonai* spoke in *Ex. 19:8*. The *Torah* records for us that subsequently *Moses* wrote *all* of the words spoken by *Adonai* followed by the reading of the just written Words of *Adonai* in the audience of all of the people. What was their response to the newly documented portion of the *Torah*? They said “*Na’ase V’Nishma* (*Ex. 24:7*)” which the *Artscroll TNK* and the TLV translate as “*We will do and we will obey.*” The first part of the response phrase is identical to the previous two references (*Ex. 19:8 and Ex. 24:3*) and comes from the Hebrew verb *Oseh* (עשה), meaning to do. But now, having heard the words orally and written they add *nishma* {the first-person plural future tense of the Hebrew verb *sh’ma* (שמע)} – which means to prove that one has heard by one’s actions (i.e., *intrinsic* and *explicit obedience*). This was a complete and binding endorsement of a covenant. The text shows that *Moses* 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. Notice the Biblical mindset of His people. It is vastly different than our Western outlook. In our world everyone attempts to *understand* and *rationalize* matters before taking action. Our civilization follows the Greek philosophy model of elevating the mind above all action. While this serves us well in practical matters it is far from Biblical *ethos*. When it comes to *Adonai* the desired response is to do (take action) *first* and follow that with explicit and implicit obedience (demonstrate we heard by doing what was asked). Mental understanding is neither *mentioned* nor *required*. This is the Biblical Trust (Faith) model spoken of by the writer of Hebrews: “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of realities not seen... ‘Now without faith it is impossible to please God. For the one who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him’*” (*Heb. 11:1, 6*). When we come into the full understanding of becoming *Messianic Jews* we must adopt and appropriate this Biblical Mindset and do and obey *Adonai* even when we do not have complete understating of His words and *mitzvot*. Therefore, I strongly believe that we in *Kol Simcha* must agree with our ancestors that we have been grafted into so that our response to His written instructions is to be nothing less than *Na’ase V’Nishma*.

If we are able to discern what the statutes and judgments mentioned in *Exodus 21-24* teach us about *Messiah Yeshua*, 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 illustrate in our everyday life concerning *Messiah*, His sacrifice for us and our identity in Him, e.g., 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*. But rather we do everything by God’s grace (*the desire and the power to do His Will*). In doing so we live out what *Adonai* intended the *Torah* to be: His *instructions* for righteous living.

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 wrote: “*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’*” (*Ex. 24:12*). Thus, *Moses* wrote *all of the words that God spoke*.

The text is careful to say that *all of the words that God spoke* were written down without specifying which kind of words they were. By stating it as the text does, we can assume that *everything* that God spoke to *Moses*, he wrote down. There does not appear to be any room here for the presence of any extra *oral (verbal) revelation* designed to be passed down to future generations referred to in Judaism as the *Oral Torah*. Since the text indicates that *Moses* and the Lord both *wrote everything down*, it seems rather difficult to find any such *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 in every generation, or He would have written it just as everything else was written. This passage of itself presents 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. The two sacrifices offered were the *whole burnt offering* and the *peace* or *well-being* offering. Subsequent to the sacrifices, Moses then did a very unusual thing. After the people confirming again their intention to keep the covenant, Moses 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*" (Ex. 24:8).

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 and 32 states) for being faithless to their commitment being made here at the foot of Mount Sinai.

It is not without accident that *Yeshua*, the Deliverer and Redeemer in like manner (the one greater than *Moses*) 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.

A Messianic level of interpretation for these written instructions in *Parashat Mishpatim* is given by *Yeshua* Himself in Luke 24:44-45. Here *Yeshua* teaches that the *Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim* (the *Torah, Prophets (Nevi'im)*, and *Writings (Ketuvim)*, (the *TNK* or the *Hebrew Scriptures*) – the whole of the *Tanakh* – speak of Him! Note particularly verse 45: "*Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.*" In this passage, *Yeshua* was giving us a very important *hermeneutical* principle. Without negating the *halachic* value or application (in fact, it presumes that *halacha* is being carried out) *Yeshua* was saying that we could look at the *Torah* to see what it teaches concerning His person/work. If we are able to see what the specific statutes teach concerning the *Messiah*, that in itself, will provide much of the basis for the doing of them. In other words, we live out these laws because they picture in everyday existence our life in *Messiah*, what He did for us, and who He has made us to be (*our identity*). Practicing these precepts is a way of becoming a walking testimony of what *Messiah* did and who He is. Moreover, obeying these instructions in this fashion will preclude all tendencies to legalism, where one receives merit for the doing. Legalism is not what the God of grace intended *Torah* should be.

Mishpatim ends with a beautiful picture of the relationship that Moses had with God, because he was God's friend (Exodus 33:11): "¹⁶ The glory of Adonai settled upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. Then on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. ¹⁷ The appearance of the glory of Adonai was like a consuming fire^[c] on the top of the mountain in the sight of Bnei-Yisrael. ¹⁸ So Moses entered into the midst of the cloud and went up onto the mountain. Moses was on the mountain 40 days and 40 nights" (Ex. 24:16-18). We are also His friends since He said: "¹³ No one has greater love than this: that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ "I am no longer calling you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. Now I have called you friends, because everything I have heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:13-15) Let us enter into the midst of His cloud go up onto His mountain. And then, let us stay in His Presence many days and many nights because we love Him so. *Shabbat Shalom!*