

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn



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THE MESSAGE OF KINYAN

Parshas Mishpatim begins with laws of an *eved ivri*, stating: "And these are the laws that you shall place *lifneihem*, before them: *Ki sikneh*, if you will acquire a Jewish slave..."

When examining the grammar of these *pesukim*, it would appear that *Ki yiknu* would have been a more appropriate choice of words. Since Hashem had just referred to Bnei Yisroel in the plural and in the third person (*lifneihem*), it would be logical to continue in the same way by saying *Ki yiknu*, "If they will acquire." Why does the *possuk* state *Ki sikneh*, which is both in the singular and in the second person?

ACQUIRING ATZILUS

The words *Ki sikneh* are expressed in this way because they are referring not only to Bnei Yisroel at large, but also to Moshe Rabbeinu specifically. With these words, Hashem was imparting a message how he was to teach the people Torah, a message hinted to in the word *sikneh*, acquiring.

What is the message of *kinyan*, an acquisition?

Moshe was instructed to teach the Jews Torah until they would *acquire* it. As Rashi explains on this *possuk*, Moshe was told to explain the laws and lay out their details before Bnei Yisroel, so they wouldn't be merely repeating what he had said, but would actually master the information until it became their own. Indeed, this instruction extends itself to anyone who is teaching Torah to another.

Kinyan expresses another idea as well. The spiritual world of *Atzilus* is associated with *kinyan* (as hinted to in *Kiddush Levanah*, where *boruch koneich* refers to *Atzilus*). With the word *sikneh*, Hashem was conveying to Moshe two seemingly opposite ideals. On the one hand, he was to explain the Torah to them until they grasped it, as stated above. But at the same time, he was to imbue them with the feeling that the Torah they were learning is *Atzilus*. The world of *Beriah*, although lofty as well, marks the beginning of Creation. A teacher must instill within his student the realization that the Torah he is learning is higher

than Creation—it is G-dliness.

STARTING WITH SLAVES

This paradox can help us understand another puzzling fact. Parshas Mishpatim begins with the laws of acquiring an *eved*, a slave. This is surprising, because the Torah generally describes situations that arise on a common basis. Yet, here the Torah speaks of an unusual situation, in which a thief who cannot pay is sold in order to repay the theft. There are many other laws in this *parshah* that relate to everyday situations. Why start precisely with this law?

By beginning with the laws of an *eved*, the Torah is teaching us the proper perspective we should have toward *mishpatim*, the subject (and name) of the *parshah*.

Mishpatim are mitzvos we can understand (unlike *chukim*, which are beyond human intellect). Furthermore, *mishpatim* are directives we could have arrived at on our own, even without

the Torah's command (unlike *eidot* which, although comprehensible now that Torah commanded them, would otherwise not have been dictated by human logic). Yet, how does the *parshah* begin its list of *mishpatim*? With the laws of an *eved*. This teaches us that although we are instructed to understand *mishpatim*, at the same time we must approach them with *kabbolas ol*, like an *eved*.

This is the paradox of *kinyan*. The Torah is completely higher than Creation; it is a *kinyan*, *Atzilus*. It is the wisdom of *Hakadosh*

Boruch Hu, which is completely beyond our grasp. Yet, Hashem gives us the ability to study His infinite wisdom until we "acquire" it.

We must remember that the Torah begins with a *beis*. What we understand is not all there is to it; it's no more than the secondary dimension of Torah.

THE ALEF-BEIS CHANGEOVER

The Gemara relates that when the seventy elders translated the Torah into Greek for Talmai Hamelech, Divine intervention arranged for all of them to independently make the exact same emendations to the text. Their first change: they translated the *possuk* of *Bereishis* not as *Bereishis bara Elokim*, but as *Elokim*

bara Bereishis. The reason they did this was because they were afraid Talmai might imagine that there existed some entity called *Bereishis*, and that entity created *Elokim*.

When you think about it, there is more to the emendation than a change in sequence of words. The commentators give various reasons why the Torah begins with a *beis* and not with an *alef*. Yet, in the above translation, it indeed starts off with an *alef*! True, that wasn't why the translators made the emendation; they did it to prevent a possible idolatrous thought. However, since this narration is part of Torah, there must be a reason behind the *alef-beis* change, as well.

THE ALEF-BEIS OF A JEW

As explained above, the Torah is Hashem's wisdom, yet He lowered it to a level in which we can study and grasp it. But we must remember that the Torah begins with a *beis*. What we understand is not all there is to it; it's no more than a *beis*, the secondary dimension of Torah. The *alef* and primary dimension of Torah is that "Torah and Hashem are one."

[This should not be understood in the same way as the common conception of *tzimtzum*, in which a teacher cannot convey the full depth of his understanding to a student, so he merely teaches him a small part of it. One might think that the same applies with Torah, that the Torah studied above is the real Torah, and we are limited to studying a lower level.

However, this is not the case. As we say in the *berachah* before studying Torah, "*venasan lanu es Toraso*, He gave us His Torah." The Torah we study is the same Torah studied Above, and all of the greatest levels and loftiest qualities are concealed within the Torah studied by each one of us.]

This is the *alef* of Torah—that Torah is Hashem's wisdom, essentially beyond human grasp.

But this is only true with the Jewish nation, to whom Hashem

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gave the Torah. When a Jew studies Torah, what he understands is merely the *beis*, an outer layer that contains within it tremendous and infinite depth—the *alef*. However, when a non-Jew studies Torah, what he understands is all there is to it, and there's nothing more hidden inside. What he understands is the *alef*; it's the beginning and end, and there isn't anything higher.

This is why is the elders transposed the Torah's first letter from a *beis* to an *alef*.

When it came to Talmai, a gentile king, there was nothing more to Torah than what he was able to grasp.

APPRECIATING THE INABILITY TO GRASP

This is the double meaning of *Ki sikneh*. On the one hand, it is an instruction to Moshe—as well as to every teacher since then—to explain the words of Torah in a way that enables the student to acquire them. On the other hand, *Ki sikneh* introduces the concept of *eved* and *kabbalas ol*, reminding us that the Torah is inherently *Atzilus*.

When a Jew studies Torah, he's not merely collecting another piece of information. Every teaching that he learns refines him and connects him with a level that is entirely beyond his understanding.

There's another point here: The idea of acquiring is associated not only with the subject matter being studied, but also with the recognition that it is beyond his understanding. Realizing that Torah is essentially beyond his grasp does not dampen his spirits; to the contrary, this realization is something he "acquires" as well, and it gives him *chayus* and energy.

For further study, see *Sefer Hamaamorim Melukat* vol. 3 (Adar-Sivan), pp. 18ff. *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 15, pp. 1ff.



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