

Torah in All Areas of Our Lives
Reflections on Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l
by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

Parshas Mishpatim has a specific theme running throughout its verses; the Torah applies to all areas of our lives. This is expressed in the first Rashi commenting on the words, 'And these are the Laws.' He states that when the Torah writes *Aileh* these, it means a new subject is beginning, unrelated to what was written before. If the Torah writes *VeAileh* And these, it means it is connected to what is written before. In our case, the parsha opening with 'And these are the laws you shall place before them', the Torah is connecting this whole section of laws with the preceding subject which is the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Just as the Ten Commandments were given to us by Hashem at Har Sinai, so too all the laws which we are about to read were given at Har Sinai. We see many seemingly unrelated laws placed right next to each other as for example in chapter 22:24-27 we see the Mitzvah of lending a poor man money and the prohibition of cursing judges. Another example is chapter 23: 9-10 where the prohibition of oppressing the stranger is placed next to the prohibition of working the ground in the shmittah year. There are many similar examples in Parshas Mishpatim. The point is that the Torah is equating religious law with civil, social and moral law. Unlike Western Society which has the concept that religion is in the house of worship but divorced from daily life, the Torah is all inclusive. The very same Torah teaches us how to live properly in all areas of life because we are taught that all that we do is part of how we serve Hashem.

This Parsha, in particular, reminds me of my Rosh Yeshiva, Harav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, the Rosh yeshiva of Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim. The entire Jewish world knew of Rav Moshe as the posek and halachic authority of our time. His erudition in all areas of Torah commanded respect and reverence from Jews everywhere. But fewer people knew the person behind all of the Torah scholarship. In truth, it should be no surprise to us since our Torah leaders throughout all of the generations were known to be able to combine their Torah knowledge with formation of their personalities accordingly. Rav Moshe taught frequently about how we have to observe the entire Torah because they are Hashem's commandments and not because they seem logical, moral and ethical. Even civil laws which every society has must be observed because they are Hashem's commandments. This is

because an individual or society can always redefine ethics and morality according to needs and wants. But if we do things because they are Hashem's commandments, they are eternal regardless of the circumstances or feelings of the individual or the society.

Rav Moshe stressed this point of how our Torah applies everywhere and at all times. Many years ago, as the rosh yeshiva of the entire institution, he used to test the classes of the boys in the boys elementary school affiliated with Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim. One day, after formally testing the boys he asked them how they were different than non-Jewish boys their age. One of the boys said that if they were not Jewish, they would be playing ball. The Rosh yeshiva then said to them, "But you all play ball at recess. My question is how does the Torah influence the way we play ball?" Not one of the boys was willing to propose an answer. The Rosh yeshiva then explained to the boys that when we play ball we should play fairly, not fight or use foul language. He stressed that even the way a Jew conducts himself during leisure time must not be guided by the standards of society at the time but only by the eternal truths of our Torah. A number of similar anecdotes like these are known in the circle of Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim.

It is important to stress that Rav Moshe was a prime example of everything he taught. It is known how at the end of his life he made a great impression on the non-Jewish staff of the hospitals he stayed in New York City. He was in and out of the hospital many times towards the end of his life. One time, a chaplain at a hospital was addressing a group of nurses there. He mentioned Rav Moshe Feinstein's name in passing and a number of the nurses were familiar with him. Since this seemed unusual that so many non-Jewish nurses would be familiar with a rosh yeshiva, the chaplain did some further inquiry. It turned out that even his conduct in his later years, when he was frail, made a great impression on the staff that took care of him in every hospital he stayed. What made an impact on everyone was when it was time to leave the hospital, he was very particular to have his chair turned around so he could say goodbye to all those who took care of him.

Everyone was so impressed with the respect he showed every person. This was truly a fulfillment of the pasuk [Devarim 28:10] 'and all the nations of the world will see that Hashem's name is called upon you'. Indeed the lessons for all of us are quite clear; when we live our lives according to the torah and the torah becomes part of our beings, we make a

Kiddush Hashem and the entire world sees Hashem's presence resting upon his people, the klal yisroel.