

Mishpatim	Judgments	Dynamic Applications of the Core
Torah:	Exodus 21:1-24:18	
Haftarah:	Jeremiah 34:8-22	
Brit Chadashah:	Matthew 17:1-17	
(Sherri p.43, 45)	<b>Ps. 72</b> Jewish Hero: Beka	

Torah Meditation:

After receiving the Ten Words (*devarim*), the Children of Israel are given their first set of laws (*mishpatim*). Both of these are part of the teaching (*Torah*), which is a document based on the Ten Words, the laws and the stories. It is not a question of which part is more inspired, because it is all equally inspired (G-d breathed). It is not even a question of which part has more authority, because it is a package deal, which is not to be dissected. The question is one of meaning and application, a question of core and application.

In this Torah portion, we are given the first collection of extended jurisprudence so that we can see both how to apply the Ten Words (covenant principles) and also that the Ten Words apply to every detail of our personal and corporate life. In contemporary Judaism, the distinction between the *devarim* (words) and the *mishpatim* (laws) has blurred so that it is incorrectly held that all the mishpatim are equal and that the devarim are just part of the mix.

It is further held that there are 613 mishpatim (laws, judgments), that they are all of equal authority and the concept of *principle* and *application* is no longer clearly defined. It goes further to hold that all the decisions of the rabbis included in the Talmud (commentary on the Torah) are also of equal authority to the Torah and their number rises to around 20,000, with some 430 being daily obligations on modern practising orthodox Jews.

For modern rabbinic Jews, the Law not only includes the Ten Words and the laws given in the Torah, but also all the decisions of all the rabbis. This collection is the burden which is sometimes referred to as the Law, from which we are set free. Now it is true that all the ceremonial stipulations of the Torah are fulfilled in our Messiah, but none of them have been abolished, rather they find their completion and fulfilment in the life and ministry of the Messiah of promise. We are never to take the words or teachings of men as having the same authority as the Word of G-d, because the One is eternal and the other is constantly changing.

The Ten Commandments (Words) are the covenant stipulations which we are shown how to apply. I appreciate both the scriptural applications which are recorded for us and the historical applications which have come down to us, but unless we distinguish between a *covenant stipulation* and its *application*, we will not understand how to apply these stipulations into our own lives and into our own congregational context.

Israel had come out of pagan Egypt as a motley crew and now the L-rd was showing them how to live under the rule of His Law (Covenant Stipulations), so that the bad habits and darkness of Egypt would dissipate and also that the Children of the L-RD would not pick up any of the bad habits of darkness from the Canaanites as they conquered the Promised Land.

The example of how they applied the Ten Covenant Stipulations to their lives gives us enough extended jurisprudence to be able to apply these same devarim into our lives with as much care and precision, without losing the distinction between the stipulations and the application.

Each of the Mishpatim (decisions, judgments, laws) is an application of one or several of the Stipulations and when I teach Torah, one of the exercises I want my students to undertake is to go through these mishpatim and identify the stipulations upon which they were based. It is the Ten Covenant Stipulations which are an indivisible whole and later in the Gospels, the Messiah says that they cannot be divided into greater and lesser commandments; because the one who breaks the least of the Ten will be the least in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the one who keeps them as the core will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Rather than doing my seven verses this morning, I wanted to give a general teaching about the difference between ***devarim*** (covenant stipulations) and ***mishpatim*** (jurisprudence) so we do not see the law as a burgeoning burden, but as a clear light for our feet and as a lamp for our path. After reading all the mishpatim and recording them in a book, both the tablets of the Covenant and the book (scroll) are sprinkled with blood and kept as records which would eventually be part of the ritual contents of the Tabernacle.

The difference was that the tablets of testimony (covenant stipulations) were to be kept in the ark and the scroll was to be kept beside the ark. The Stipulations are the core of the Law which the L-RD wants to write upon our hearts and the applications make sure that it connects with every area of our lives, so that we can shine and be salty and fulfil the righteousness of the Law by the power of the Spirit which is in us. The Ten are never described as a curse from which we need to be delivered, they are the sword which the Redeemer places in our hands to defeat the flesh, the world and the enemy.

The passage ends with an amazing encounter with G-d on top of the mountain where the elders and Moses and Aaron (and Joshua) see the L-RD (His feet - the rest was in a cloud) and they are not destroyed. With Jethro, they ate a ritual meal, to celebrate their deliverance from Egypt and their arrival at the Holy Mountain; with Moses they ate a meal of encounter with G-d to celebrate the Covenant which they had just entered into with G-d.

The Haftarah portion reminds us that the captivity was going to occur because the people had not kept the Law - specifically the sabbatical years of release. There is no room for selective obedience when we walk with the L-RD. The New Testament portion records the transfiguration where the apostles see that the glory of the Messiah is the glory of G-d. There is only one G-d, whose glory does not diminish or change. This glory tabernacled among us in the person of the Messiah and requires the same level of obedience because He is the living Word. We are still called to make dynamic applications of the Core, which His Spirit writes on the tablets of our hearts. How is your core doing? How about your applications?

Sermon: Speaking the Truth in Love:

Ephesians 4:15 (***But speaking [professing] the truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things which is the head [Chief], Messiah***) and Galatians 4:16 (***have I therefore become your enemy by telling you the truth***).

So far in this series we have examined various characteristics of the kind of aggressive

redemptive love which we are called to exercise and indeed grow in as we walk with the L-rd in our spiritually dark world where love is too often confused with sex and sentimentality. I Corinthians outlines this kind of love which Paul says is the solution to their congregational confusion and their infected, carnal spirituality.

Unfortunately, carnal spirituality is still a major concern for both believers and congregations and we need to be aware of what it looks like so that it does not choke us with the cares and riches and pleasures of life. Carnal spirituality is a secular, materialistic counterfeit which wants to infect with the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. One of the most subtle sources of this pollution is that rollicking puppy's breakfast called the internet where you encounter the Clint Eastwood syndrome: the good, the bad, and the ugly. At a future date I want to outline a Messianic Jewish, spiritual approach to this useful and potentially lethal device, but this morning, just before our AGM, I want to talk about speaking the truth in love.

Love and truth should never be seen as options we have to choose between and they should never be seen as being in competition in our lives. The first verse I selected is taken from a description of the glorious body of Messiah, fully empowered and gifted to overcome the world and proclaim the Kingdom as it shines and is salting the world. One of the aspects of this victorious witness is the commitment and the ability to speak the truth in love - to profess the truth in love.

Paul had to deal with some pretty volatile situations in the congregations which he founded because coming to the faith is no guarantee that a believer will grow in the faith. There are so many changes which occur and which need to occur as the focus of our lives changes and as we change direction in every area of our lives. Sometimes, along the way issues come up where believers and even communities are not willing to change and their spiritual growth stalls and even begins to slide backwards into the world out of which they were delivered.

One of the functions of aggressive redemptive love is to be guardians of truth so that when we encounter any proud obstacle or arguments which rise up against the knowledge of G-d we can overcome them, obliterate them and prevent them from having any influence in our lives. Our bodies are equipped to fight infection and to repair damage, but this function never gets in the way of the nurturing which our bodies also need.

Speaking the truth in love may mean that sometimes we become people's enemy by speaking the truth, but we never speak to them without love and we also never speak to them as if they were our enemies. This is not always easy because of the baggage we all have.

Baggage is the set of reactions and memories which we had while we sojourned in the world and the L-RD wants to wean us away from them and heal all the damage we encountered before we came to faith. Part of the process is learning to identify these obstacles to growth and to speak to them in ways that are as full of love as they are full of truth.

Sometimes believers make a clean break with the world. Sometimes it is a gradual process and, sadly, some believers become re-infected with the things of the world and go through periods of spiritual infection and sterility. Speaking the truth in love makes sure that all and any corrections, doctrinal or moral, are made with the central goal in mind - love.

G-d so loved the world that those who hated the darkness came to the light and those who

loved the darkness refused to come to the light. Once we acquire a taste for the light (truth) and for love, we want to integrate these two functions into our lives so that healing and growth can occur.

Now sometimes the reaction to our speaking the truth in love appears to be a blow up or a defeat because it is taken wrongly or because the person is not willing to deal with the obstacles or the arguments which are based in the flesh and not in the spirit. In the process of dealing with the obstacles to truth, we need to make sure that how we deal with it does not become an obstacle to love. It is possible to win an argument and to lose a soul.

I have some pretty strong opinions based on the clear teachings of the scriptures which our society has forsaken and trodden underfoot, but I never want to fall into the trap of considering evolutionists, or abortionists or even homosexuals as my enemies, because they are not. Fighting with people is not productive (2 Tim. 2:24-26 and I Peter 3:15) and it is possible to disagree without arguing.

I want to avoid arguments because in this kind of exchange there always has to be a winner and a loser and it is often the one who can articulate their argument who wins, and too frequently it is the truth and love which lose. I am neither afraid to speak my mind, nor afraid of the houses of cards which our lost society has built, but I am looking for an opening to speak the truth in love and not to show people how smart or articulate I am.

When it comes to congregational standards, the same priorities apply. All of us will go through periods where either our spirituality or our morality (or both) do not measure up to the standard of G-d's Word and when we realize this, we may flare or get grumpy or defensive. Some of us may even pick up our toys and look for someone else to play with, but at B'nai Chayim, we never want it to be because of the way people are treated. We want to speak the truth in love, even if neither the truth nor our love are heard or accepted.

My policy with people has been described as "nice"ing people to death, but I want to change it to say I want to "nice" people to life and build a dialogue, patiently and firmly, because our Redeemer is both patient and firm with me. I may become someone's enemy even when I speak the truth in love, but they will never become my enemy even if they say horrible things or believe horrible things about me - for so they treated the prophets of old and even the L-rd. The L-rd looks at how we treat others and we should only look at how they treat us as a means to determine what kind of reaction our truth speaking and our love should take. The Proverbs are full of discourses on how to deal with fools and with trouble (Prov. 22:3), with opposition and even defamation. The lesson we have to learn is not to be foolish, cause trouble or slip into defamation.

Now we may have to protectively and defensively exclude people from our lives and even at times from our shul, but we do not do this out of anger or even out of hurt, but only out of a commitment to making this a safe sheepfold for everyone. Everyone and anyone is welcome, but we require that standards of spiritual and moral safety are upheld and are adhered to by everyone, from the rabbi down to the newborns in our midst.

There are many kinds of animals which try and sneak into the sheepfold and I want to talk about four of them as I close. There are the wolves that will try and devour the shepherd and scatter the flock as they snarl and howl and hunt down new victims. There are the dogs who

will wag their tail and who love to be scratched and fed, but who will bite and whine if they do not immediately get want they want. They will quite happily bite the hand which feeds them and move on to get a better deal where they are paid attention to more (because they insist on being the centre of attention all the time).

There are also the pigs who want to live like the prodigal son in our midst and commit all kinds of immorality in the name of personal preference and supposed moral freedom and open mindedness which is nothing more than carnality and sinfulness dressed up to look respectable.

Finally there are the sheep. They are willing to follow, and have a strong commitment to the beliefs and values of the community because many of them are former wolves, dogs and pigs. We are not perfect, we all have baggage and we all face challenges, both doctrinal and moral, but the success with which we digest and integrate our baggage will determine what kind of farm animal we are. Our shul will always be a sheepfold and never a slaughter house, because we want to speak the truth in love and guide even those who feel that we are their enemies back into the fold of the Father's love in our blessed Redeemer and Messiah.

It may take time, it may require some wilderness wandering, but all and any are welcome who want to exit the wilderness and learn to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Saviour and L-rd. I may at times talk tough and turn into a tyrannosaurus when I talk about the murder of babies in their mother's womb and the blatant fornication of all kinds which our society now finds acceptable, but I will still reach out in love to speak and to help those who are caught in the snare of the flesh, the world and the enemy.

How about you? Speaking the truth in love is not always easy and flares will still occur. Paul confronted Peter publicly and he told off the High Priest when he ordered someone to slap him, but his heart's desire and his prayer for all those who opposed him was that they should be saved - both eternally and from the twists and turns and rabbit holes we so easily fall into. Mishpocah, we will always be a safe shul where the truth is spoken in love. Let's pray.