

Mishpatim: A Tale of Two Portions

 Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson
From the Sichos in English Collection

At the conclusion of *Mishpatim* — after almost an entire Torah portion that addresses matters not directly related to *Mattan Torah*, the giving of the Torah — Moshe is told: “Go up to G-d.”¹ *Rashi* explains² that this took place on the fourth of *Sivan*, prior to *Mattan Torah*.

Most of the preparations for *Mattan Torah* are described at length in the portion of *Yisro*. The fact that additional details are provided in *Mishpatim* indicates that a purpose must be served by describing *Mattan Torah* in two portions. What is that purpose?

Mattan Torah accomplished two things: a) G-d gave the Torah — its commandments and laws — to the Jewish people; b) G-d thereby entered into a “covenant of observance” with the Jews — “And you shall keep My covenant.”³ Jews thus became His servants, as the verse states:⁴ “You shall serve the L-rd upon this mountain,” and as *Rashi* notes,⁵ the Jewish people then became subjugated to G-d.

Herein lies the difference regarding the preparations for *Mattan Torah* as described in *Yisro* and the preparations described in *Mishpatim* :

Yisro deals mainly with G-d’s giving of the Ten Commandments. That is why the tale of the Jewish people’s preparation as related in *Yisro* deals with the *commands* that G-d gave them *to prepare for Mattan Torah*.

Mishpatim, however, deals with the covenant and servitude to G-d that *resulted* from *Mattan Torah*. This came about through the events described in this portion,⁶ namely, the Jewish people’s *acceptance* of the Torah by prefacing “We shall do” to “We shall hear” and writing the “Book of the *Covenant*.”

There is an even more profound reason for the details relating to *Mattan Torah* to be given in two separate portions:

The *Midrash* notes⁷ that at the time of *Mattan Torah*, two things were accomplished: “Those Above descended below” — “G-d descended on Mt. Sinai,”⁸; and “Those below ascended Above” — “And to Moshe He said: ‘Ascend to G-d.’”⁹ Man ascended to G-dliness.

The first portion speaks mainly about *Mattan Torah* from the perspective of those “Above”— “G-d descended,” “And G-d spoke.” *Mishpatim*, however, addresses the event from the perspective of those “below” — “Ascend to G-d,” “We shall do and we shall hear,” etc.

The difference between these two aspects of *Mattan Torah* is this: The tremendous degree of Divine revelation that descended from Above at the time of *Mattan Torah* was temporary; the ascent of the Jewish people, however, — becoming G-d’s servants and thereby becoming spiritually elevated — was permanent.

The reason why the second aspect of *Mattan Torah* endured was because it came about as a result of man's own service. It therefore became permanently embedded within the Jewish people's psyche.

Accordingly, we are able to understand why the command of building the Tabernacle — mentioned in the next portion of *Terumah* — follows the second aspect of *Mattan Torah*. For the special quality of Divine revelation that resulted from the construction of the *Mishkan* mirrored the service of man:¹⁰

The revelation of G-dliness within the *Mishkan* came about through the accomplishment of the Jewish people — “You shall make for Me a *Mishkan*.”¹¹ Just as the Jewish people's service at *Mattan Torah* resulted in their permanent spiritual elevation, so did the Divine revelation that resulted from the making of the *Mishkan* permanently sanctify its physical structure.

Based on *Likkutei Sichos* Vol. XXVI, pp. 153-159.

FOOTNOTES

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| 1. <i>Shmos</i> 24:1. | 7. <i>Shmos Rabbah</i> 12:3; <i>Tanchuma, Va'eira</i> 15. |
| 2. Commentary of <i>Rashi</i> <i>ibid</i> . | 8. <i>Shmos</i> 19:20. |
| 3. <i>Ibid.</i> 19:3. | 9. <i>Ibid.</i> 24:1. |
| 4. <i>Ibid.</i> 3:12. | 10. See <i>Likkutei Sichos XXI</i> p. 150ff. |
| 5. <i>Ibid.</i> 20:2. | 11. <i>Shmos</i> 25:8. |
| 6. <i>Ibid.</i> 24:3ff. | |

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