



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

DISTRIBUTION DATE:

TUESDAY JANUARY 25TH, / כ' שבט

PARSHA:

MISHPATIM / משפטים

SERMON TITLE:

Finding G-d in Cambodia

A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE

The author is solely responsible for the contents of this document.

Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family
In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman **ע** ז"ל ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
who loved and supported Torah learning.

MISHPATIM

Finding G-d in Cambodia

Good Shabbos!

As we sit here, something very special is happening in Brooklyn, New York: The International Conference of Shluchos—the “wife” part of the husband-and-wife team that makes up every Chabad outreach couple all over the world. [This explains where my wife is, for those of you who were wondering.]

Currently, over 2,000 Chabad women from all over the world are participating in the convention—and tomorrow, as always, there will be a grand gala banquet.

At last year’s banquet, the Shlucha from Cambodia shared her amazing story.

Yes, you heard that right. It was Cambodia.

Cambodia is a Third-World country. It is 12 hours behind New York—and light-years behind in development. The young shluchah told the crowd how the heat in Cambodia is unbearable, the smells and sights are too hard to bear, and the entire country is backwards.

But there are Jews in Cambodia—less than 100 families, as a matter of fact. And for these Jews alone, this young couple with two kids got up and traveled a distance of a 20-hour flight from New York to a place where you can’t pay for anything with a credit card. Instead, you have to go to big building where you have to stand in line to pay your utility bills in cash.

The young shluchah continued sharing how they had only been there for ten weeks at that time—but at their most recent Shabbos table, they had 30 Jewish guests.

What this speaker achieved with her speech more than anything else was that suddenly, all 2,000 older shluchos had a different perspective on their own life careers. Suddenly, life didn't seem so hard and there really wasn't much to complain about. When you compare where you are with Cambodia, any other place seems like paradise.

Which brings us back to this week's Torah portion: Mishpatim.

In this week's Parshah, we read about a special mitzvah. The Torah (Shmos 23:17) commands us, "Three times during the year, all your males shall appear before the Master, the L-rd." While the Holy Temple stood, every Jewish male over 13 living in the Holy Land (and who owned property) was obligated to travel by foot to Jerusalem three times a year—at Passover, Shavuos and Sukkos.

What's interesting is that this mitzvah, called *Aliyah L'Regel*, or "going up by foot," is only mentioned in the Torah three times.

Now seemingly, it's not understood why the Torah repeats this mitzvah three times. After all, there are some very important mitzvos which are only mentioned by hint in the text—but this mitzvah is explicitly stated three times.

Perhaps we can explain that this repetition is there simply because the mitzvah is hard to do—and so the Torah is really telling you, "This is something that has to get done, even though it's hard."

Let's say a person lived in Tsfat in Temple times. In those days, traveling from Tsfat to Jerusalem would take about two weeks—and leaving your family two weeks before Passover to walk to Jerusalem to celebrate the holiday there, away from your home, would be a very difficult test: You wouldn't have a decent place in Jerusalem to eat or sleep. And then, you'd have to make the journey back home.

We might even say that making this round trip was harder than traveling to Cambodia.

And that's perhaps why the Torah repeats this mitzvah again and again—to emphasize how important this mitzvah is.

But when we look closer at the three places in the Torah where this mitzvah is mentioned, we discover something very interesting.

In our Torah portion, the Torah states: "Three times during the year... before the Master, the L-rd." In other words, the reason for this pilgrimage was to see "*Haadon Hashem*," "the Master, the L-rd"—as in "Adon Olam," "Master of the Universe," the morning prayer we all know.

The second time this mitzvah appears, in the portion of Ki Tisa, the Torah (Shmos 34:23) states: "Three times during the year, all your males shall appear before the Master, the L-rd, the *G-d of Israel*." Here the Torah adds not just "the Master, the L-rd" but also "the G-d of Israel"—He is not the Master of the Universe but we also share a special relationship with Him; He is the "G-d of Israel."

The third time this mitzvah appears in the Torah is in the Book of Devarim, in the Torah portion of Re'ei (chapter 16, verse 16). There it states the following: "Three times in the year, every one of your males shall appear before the L-rd, your G-d..." Here, the Torah states that the pilgrim is not coming to see "the Master" or "the G-d of Israel," but "*your* G-d." Here it gets personal: "*your* G-d," in the singular—the G-d that belongs to *you*.

With this mitzvah, the Torah conveys three relationships with G-d: "Master of the World," "the G-d of Israel" and "the L-rd your G-d." Let's take a few minutes to look at these three modes of relating to G-d.

The first person in the Torah to refer to G-d as "Master" was Avraham Avinu—our Patriarch Abraham.

The Talmud (Tractate Brachos 7b) tells us: "From the day G-d created the universe, there was no man who called G-d 'Master' until Avraham came along and called him 'Master,' as it states: 'My Master, with what shall I know that I will inherit it?'" (That verse refers to G-d's promise to Avraham that he and his descendants will inherit the Holy Land.)

Avraham Avinu was the first person in history to expose the world to the fact that there is a "Master"—that there is someone in charge of the universe.

Regarding "the G-d of Israel," this expression is first found in the saga of Yaakov Avinu, our Patriarch Jacob. Immediately after the story of his fight with Esav's guardian angel—the angel who gave him the name Israel—the Torah tells us in the portion of Vayishlach (Bereishis 33:20) that Yaakov built an altar, and named it "L-rd, the G-d of Israel."

Finally, we come to the expression "your G-d." This phrase is familiar to us from the Aseres HaDibros, the famous Ten Commandments—which, as everyone knows, begins with the immortal words, "I am the L-rd your G-d..."

So what is the Torah trying to teach us with these three expressions—these three modes of approaching G-d, these three understandings of G-d?

What the Torah essentially wants to teach us is that Aliyah L'Regel, the thrice-annual pilgrimage, was not just a physical journey but more than that—a spiritual journey.

In the course of life, a person must complete a certain pilgrimage. We must go from Point A to Point B—and beyond. A person must always rise from level to level—to constantly progress. So now let's take another look at those three words.

When a person begins their spiritual pilgrimage, they must first acknowledge that there is a "Master"—a Higher Power. The person must come to the realization and acceptance that there is something greater than him or her, and that that something guides the universe.

But that's just acknowledgement. That's merely coming to believe that some powerful entity exists. But it doesn't have any impact on the person's day-to-day life.

At the next level, however, the Jewish person comes to the realization that as a Jew, he has a deeper connection with G-d. He comes to the realization that the Jews are not just another group of people out of all the world's many groups of people. There is something unique about the Jewish Nation. They are hated for no reason. They perform more acts of compassion, justice and humanitarianism than any other group of people. As a general rule, they are also more moral people, not to mention smarter people and better businesspeople.

Last year around this time, for you newshounds, Israeli President Shimon Peres had something very interesting to say after attending the elite Davos international economic forum in Europe. In several newspaper interviews, Peres noted that at his meetings with world economists, he discovered to his surprise that they were all Jewish! Peres told the media that it was almost impossible to find a single non-Jew.

This, my friends, is what is meant by the phrase "G-d of Israel"—when one acknowledges that there is a special relationship between G-d and the Jewish Nation.

But the ultimate goal of this pilgrimage, is to get to the level of “I am the L-rd your G-d.” A Jew must ultimately arrive at a personal relationship with G-d—a relationship in which he can personally turn to G-d and know that G-d is listening to him, hears his prayer, feels his pain, and shares his joy.

Sometimes a Jew can find G-d right in his backyard. Sometimes a Jewish man or woman need not look too far to find his or her personal connection with G-d. But we Jews are restless people—we’ll go to the ends of the earth to find meaning.

And that’s where Chabad comes in. Sometimes a Jew will even have to go all the way to Cambodia, where he or she discovers their personal connection with G-d—at the Shabbos table of their local friendly shluchim.

A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE

The author is solely responsible for the contents of this document.

Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family
In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman אה"ל ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
who loved and supported Torah learning.