



PARSHAS MISHPATIM – MEIR COOPER

There is a general perception that "Mishpatim" are those Laws of the Torah for which there is a logical explanation as opposed to "Chukim" with no logical explanation which nonetheless must be observed for so we have been commanded. The most well-known example of a chukka is the "para aduma" about which Shlomo Hamelech wrote "I said I was wise and yet it is distant from me". [Kohelet 7:23] and he continues in the next Passuk "what preceded it is extremely deep, who is able to expound it". In other words even the preceding mishpatim are beyond human comprehension.

Whilst referring to Shlomo Hamelech my father Rabbi Dovid Cooper z.l. once asked why was it so special that Shlomo Hamelech in his dream asked to be blessed with wisdom. Surely any G-d fearing person would consider wisdom the most important tool in fulfilling his Torah learning and performance of the mitzvot. The answer given by Rabbi Cooper is that Shlomo Hamelech gave his reply whilst in a dream. All his defences were down and then the true inner person came out in all its glory.

It is with this introduction that we may proceed to Rashi on the first Passuk in the Parsha where he says "The Almighty said to Moshe do not even consider teaching the Halacha as a set text two or three times till it is fluent in their mouths, but explain the reasoning behind each Halacha until it is like a set table laden with food ready to be eaten".

Moshe Rabbeinu was unsure as to whether he should expound the reasoning even for those mitzvot which are mishpatim and for which a certain logic exists because it would still be beyond the comprehension of man to delve their true depths. The Almighty responded that notwithstanding, Moshe should explain the mishpatim till they are so clearly understood that they may be compared to a set table laden with food ready to be eaten.

The Gemara in Eruvin (54b) states "how do we know that the talmidim have to be taught till the "subject matter is arranged in their mouths" which Rashi explains "to teach it and explain the reasons as far as possible, and it is forbidden for the teacher to say thus I have heard now search the reasons for yourself", therefore the Torah writes "These are the Laws which you shall *place before them* which Rashi explains as meaning "it is not written *which you shall teach them* but *which you shall place before them* [the teacher] must arrange the underlying reasonings leading to the final output".

The influence of the teacher and spiritual leader is all important to the extent that even his presence in the room can have an effect - see Gemara Taanis (23a) when Choni Hameagel entered the Beit Hamidrash after sleeping for seventy years.