

# טעמו וראו

A taste of the  
Rebbe's teachings

Parshat Mishpatim



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## Reincarnation Can Define Your Life's Mission

People are often quick to shrug off communal responsibility. Even Moses himself, when instructed to redeem the People of Israel, made every effort to avoid the mission.

What does Jewish tradition say about this attitude? Is communal work really for everyone? Does reincarnation make an impact?

Dedicated in honor of  
**Chana** bas **Sonya**  
for her birthday, 2 Adar

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# A. Sustaining the World

## Source 1

Exodus 21:1

These are the laws you shall place before them...

וְאֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר תָּשִׂים  
לִפְנֵיהֶם:

## Source 2

Midrash Tanchumah on the verse

**These are the laws:** The Torah says: “With justice a king sustains the land, but a man of *terumah* tears it down.” The king of the Torah rules through justice and thereby causes the earth to endure, but if a person acts as though he were *terumah* which is set aside in a corner and declares: “What concern are the problems of the community to me? What does their judgment mean to me? Why should I listen to them? I do well without them,” he destroys the world. Hence, “a man of *terumah* tears it down.”

When Rabbi Asi lay dying, his nephew visited him and found him weeping. He said to him: “My master, why do you weep? Is there a single law that you have not learned and taught? Indeed, even now your disciples sit in your presence. Is there any kind deed you have not performed? Your greatest virtue is that you withheld from acting as a judge and didn’t

וְאֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים: זֶה שָׁאָמַר  
הַכֹּתוּב: מֶלֶךְ בְּמִשְׁפָּט יַעֲמִיד אֶרֶץ,  
וְאִישׁ תְּרוּמוֹת יִהְרֹסָנָה. מִלְכָּה  
שֶׁל תּוֹרָה, בְּמִשְׁפָּט שֶׁהוּא עוֹשֶׂה,  
מַעֲמִיד אֶת הָאֶרֶץ. וְאִישׁ תְּרוּמוֹת  
יִהְרֹסָנָה. אִם מִשִּׁים אָדָם עֲצָמו  
כְּתֵרוּמָה הַזֶּה שֶׁמִּשְׁלָכֶת בְּזוּיֵת  
הַבַּיִת וְאוֹמֵר מָה לִּי בְטֶרַח הַצְּבוּר,  
מָה לִּי בְדִינֵיהֶם, מָה לִּי לְשִׁמְעַע  
קוֹלָם, שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵיךְ נִפְשִׁי, הֲרִי  
זֶה מִחְרִיב אֶת הָעוֹלָם. הֲוִי וְאִישׁ  
תְּרוּמוֹת יִהְרֹסָנָה.

מַעֲשֶׂה בְּרַבִּי אָסִי, כְּשֶׁהָיָה מִסְתַּלֵּק  
שָׁמְצָאוּ בּוֹכָה. אָמַר לוֹ: רַבִּי, מִפְּנֵי  
מָה אַתָּה בּוֹכָה? יֵשׁ תּוֹרָה שְׁלֵא  
לְמַדָּת וּלְמִדָּת, הֲרִי תִלְמִידֶיךָ  
יוֹשְׁבִים לְפָנֶיךָ. יֵשׁ גְּמִילוֹת חֲסָדִים  
שְׁלֵא עָשִׂיתָ. וְעַל כָּל מַדּוֹת שֶׁהָיוּ  
בְּךָ, הָיִיתָ מִתְּרַחֵק מִן הַדִּינִיּוֹ, וְלֹא  
נָתַת רְשׁוֹת עַל עֲצָמְךָ לְהִתְמַנּוֹת

allow yourself to take a position of control.” Rabbi Asi replied: “My son, that is why I weep. I may have to account for the fact that I refused to concern myself with the affairs of the Jewish people though I was able to do so.” Hence, “a man of *terumah* tears it down.”

על צרכי צבור. אָמַר לוֹ: בְּנִי,  
עֲלֶיךָ אָנִי בּוֹכֶה, שְׂמָא אָתָּו דִּין  
וְהַשְּׁבוֹן עַל שְׁהִייתִי יְכוּל לַעֲשׂוֹת  
דִּינֵיהֶם שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל, הָיִי, וְאִישׁ  
תְּרוּמוֹת יִהְרָסְנָה.

## >> The Rebbe

### Don't Isolate Yourself

On the verse, “These are the laws...” the Midrash comments:

“The Torah says: ‘With justice a king sustains the land, but a man of *terumah* tears it down.’ ...If a person acts as though he were *terumah* which is set aside in a corner, and declares: ‘What concern are the problems of the community to me? What does their judgment mean to me? Why should I listen to them? I do well without them,’ he destroys the world. Hence, ‘a man of *terumah* tears it down.’”

Meaning: *Terumah*, the portion of food set aside for priests, is safeguarded in a corner of the home to protect its sanctity and to ensure it does not mix with the regular produce. If a person follows suit by placing himself in a proverbial corner of society and declaring, “I am holy and must not desecrate my sanctity by associating with others”—G-d says of him, “A man of *terumah* tears it down,” because this was not His intention with the creation of the world. G-d wants us to channel the greatest spiritual revelations to be internalized even in the lowest levels of society.

For this reason, the Chabad Rebbes in general and by my father-in-law, the [Previous] Rebbe in particular, sent out emissaries to engage with people of

all levels. Their mission doesn't only benefit those whom they bring closer to Judaism; it benefits themselves as well, because they fulfill G-d's greatest wish to bring spirituality everywhere.

The above-mentioned Midrash indeed follows on the same note:

“When Rabbi Asi lay dying, his nephew visited him and found him weeping. He said to him: ‘My master, why do you weep? Is there a single law that you have not learned and taught? Indeed, even now your disciples sit in your presence. Is there any kind deed you have not performed? Your greatest virtue is that you withheld from acting as a judge and didn't allow yourself to take a position of control.’ [i.e. the nephew saw it as a virtue]. Rabbi Asi replied: ‘My son, that is why I weep. I may have to account for the fact that I refused to concern myself with the affairs of the Jewish people though I was able to do so.’ Hence, ‘a man of *terumah* tears it down.’”

It is not enough to study Torah and do good deeds as a private individual. One is obligated to serve the needs of the entire community from a leadership position and dedicate himself fully to their benefit.

Hence, the verse says, “With justice a king sustains the land.” When a person assumes leadership and tends to the needs of the community, he sustains the world. But when someone acts like *terumah* and confines himself to his own corner, even if he engages in deeds of loving-kindness, “he tears it down.” His lack of leadership creates a void, and he is therefore considered to have “torn it down.”

## B. The Character Question

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### >> The Rebbe

#### Don't Underestimate Your Ability

However, the Evil Inclination is cunning. He might approach you and argue, “This all may be true, but it doesn’t apply to you... Everyone has their personal path, and your path is to be a *terumah*. Proof of the matter is: you do not have the character of the communal activist!”

The Evil Inclination understands that the individual could counter-argue that he does have the necessary abilities and his reticence is merely a result of self-centeredness. So the Evil Inclination has a new idea: He will persuade you that other people think you don’t have the necessary abilities either. Although communal activism is very worthy indeed, it is simply out of character for you; and since you can utilize your time for all sorts of worthy endeavors, communal activism is clearly not your G-d-given mission.

The response is, first of all, that these thoughts have no validity simply because they probably come directly from the Evil Inclination. It is very likely that in fact, you are inclined to this form of work.

## C. A Mission Reincarnated

### Source 3

Zohar, Exodus 21:1

Rabbi Shimon opened with the words, “These are the laws you shall place before them.” In the Aramaic translation [of Unkelos], he says, “These are the judgments which you shall arrange before them.” This refers to the arrangement of reincarnation, which is the judgments of souls, who are sent back into this world according to their individual judgments.

פְּתַח ר' שִׁמְעוֹן וְאָמַר, וְאֵלֶּה  
הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר תִּשִּׁים לְפָנֵיהֶם,  
תְּרַגּוּם, וְאֵלֵין דִּינֵיא דְתַסְדֵּר  
קְדָמֵיהוֹן. אֵלֵין אֵינוֹן סְדוּרֵין  
דְּגִלְגוּלָא, דִּינֵין דְּנִשְׁמָתֵין, דְּאֵתְדָנוּ  
כָּל חַד וְחַד לְקַבֵּל עוֹנָשִׂיהָ.

### Source 4

Maaseh Oreg, Peah 8:9

Sometimes the Torah's ruling seems to bring about an unjust result, as in the case where someone deposited a large fortune by a friend and went out on a long journey. When he returned, his friend had died and his heirs denied any knowledge of the deposit. They were instructed to swear in Rabbinic court that they knew nothing of the matter and were absolved of the claim. However, everyone knew the claimant to be an honest and G-d fearing man, and the sum of money was far beyond the deceased's means.

עֲנִין לְאִמְתּוֹ הוּא, כִּי כִּמָּה פְּעָמִים  
יֵצֵא מִשְׁפֵּט מֵעוֹקֵל מִדִּינֵי הַתּוֹרָה,  
כְּמוֹ שְׂאִירֵע לְאֶחָד שֶׁהִפְקִיד הוּן  
רַב אֶצֶל אֶחָד וְהֵלֵךְ לְדַרְכוֹ, וְכִשְׁבָּא  
כִּבְר מֵת הִנִּפְקֵד, וְתַבַּע מִיּוֹרְשׁוֹ,  
וְטַעְנוּ לֹא פִקְדוֹ אֲבָא עַל זֶה,  
וּפְסָקוּ לֵהֶם שְׁבוּעָה וְנִפְטְרוּ, וְכֹל  
הָעוֹלָם הָיוּ יוֹדְעִין שְׁזֶה אִישׁ נְאֻמָּן  
וְחָסִיד וִירָא שְׁמַיִם, וְזֶה לֹא הָיָה  
אֲמִיד בְּכַךְ.

They asked the Baal Shem Tov, how could Torah law produce an unjust result? Are we not taught that G-d ensures the justice of Torah rulings? He answered that everything is orchestrated by G-d. In a past life, the claimant owed the deceased this amount of money and never paid his debt, and now he repaid his debt to rectify the situation. It was all orchestrated by G-d—the amount was exact, not a penny more or less. This is true judgement. Even if it seems to you to be unjust, follow Torah's guidelines and don't seek compromise.

ושאלו למרן הרב ישראל בעל שם טוב על זה, האיך יצא משפט מעוקל מדיני התורה? וכתוב אלהים נצב בעדת אל. והשיב: שזהו בהשגחת המשגיח. שבגלגול העבר היה זה חייב לזה ולא פרע לו, וכעת החזיר לו לתקן נשמתו, והיה בהשגחה, לא החסיר ולא העדיף, וזהו דין אמת לאמתו, אף שנראה לך שהוא משפט מעוקל, תדון הדין לאמתו, ולא תחזור אחר הפשרות, וכיוצא בזה בענינים אלו, והמשכיל יבין לאישורו.

## >> The Rebbe

### Your Ultimate Mission

Moreover: Even if it is indeed out of character for you, the very fact that you were asked to engage in communal activism means that this mission has a soul-connection with you.

Does it seem otherwise? In Judaism, there is a concept of reincarnation. Even if it doesn't seem right to you in your current state, it is possible that in a former life this was a mission you needed to accomplish [and it still needs to be carried out].

Interestingly, the Zohar's writings about reincarnation are on this very verse...

This idea is explained in Maaseh Oreg on the Mishna, regarding the Mishnah's reference to the words "emet l'amito, the truth of the truth." What is the difference between that and ordinary truth? To explain, he shares a story of the Baal Shem Tov:

A person once entrusted money in the hands of a friend, and the friend died. When the depositor approached the heirs, they denied any knowledge of the incident. As per Torah law in a case where there are no witnesses, they swore in Rabbinical Court that they had no knowledge of the matter and were excused from the case.

However, it was common knowledge that the depositor was right. Everyone knew him to be an honest man, and they also knew that the heirs inherited a sum of money far beyond their father's means.

They came to the Baal Shem Tov and asked: The Rabbinic judge followed the ruling of Torah, the Torah of truth. If so, G-d surely upholds and supports

that very decision. No doubt, it reflects the truth. But how does it concur with the reality?...

The Baal Shem Tov responded: In a previous incarnation, the depositor owed a similar sum to the deceased or to his children. So the ruling was just. The money does, in fact, belong to them.

Maaseh Oreg thereby explains the term “truth of the truth.” Sometimes, a ruling doesn’t seem correct from our earthly perspective, but it does, in fact, mete out justice, in light of details which are not known to us in this world.

This story is about a material item—there is a possibility that you will know, without a shadow of a doubt, that you do not owe someone money, when in fact, according to the truth of truth you actually do. If so, the same can be true on a spiritual level. The true truth is that based on a previous incarnation, or due to some circumstances that only your soul is aware of, you owe a spiritual debt to your friend. And you are therefore being dispatched to fill that debt.

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## Source 5

Hayom Yom 5 Iyar

The Alter Rebbe received the following teaching from the righteous Rabbi Mordechai, who had heard it from the Baal Shem Tov: A soul may descend to this world and live seventy or eighty years, in order to do a Jew a material favor, and certainly a spiritual one.

רבינו הזקן קבל מרבי מרדכי  
הצדיק ששמע מהבעל שם  
טוב: נשמה יורדת לעולם הזה  
וחיה שבעים-שמונים שנה, כדי  
לעשות טובה ליהודי פעם אחת,  
בגשמיות ובפרט ברוחניות

מיזם של "משרד השלוחים"

נוסד בימי השבעה לזכרון ולע"נ הרב גבריאל נח וזוגתו רבקה הי"ד  
שלוחי הרבי במומבאי, הודו

