

# Parasha Meditation Mishpatim

**Shemot 21:1-24:18**

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

## Transforming the Brick of Pain to Become a Source of Joy and Delight

### Introduction:

#### Gazing at G\*d through Eating and Drinking

This week's parasha contains one of the strangest "visions" in the Torah. When Moshe, Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, together with the seventy elders of Israel ascended the mountain they saw an amazing vision of G\*d.

וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַתַּחַת רַגְלָיו כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לִבְנֵת הַסַּפִּיר וּכְעֵצִים הַשְּׁמַיִם לְטָהָר (ספר שמות פרק כד: י)

"They saw the G\*d of Israel; and under His feet was like sapphire brick-work and the likeness of *shamayim* (the heavens) for clearness..."<sup>1</sup>

The following verse describes how G\*d "did not lay his hand on the Nobles of Israel, although they beheld G\*d, while eating and drinking."<sup>2</sup> These two Torah verses, juxtaposes the seemingly mundane (bricks, eating and drinking) with a description of "seeing" Hashem. Although even the "mundane" must be sanctified, and as I'm teaching during my current North America tour – eating and drinking can be a deep way of connecting to Hashem. Yet, Rashi explains, "They [Nadav, Avihu and the Elders] deserved that G\*d should stretch forth His hand against them, because they gazed at G\*d intimately as [though their association with Him was] a matter of eating and drinking."<sup>3</sup>

#### Approaching Hashem through Pain and Weakness

Let us try to understand the vision of these beautiful "sapphire bricks" in Hashem's presence, "below His feet." According to Rashi the vision of a serene image of Hashem becomes a stark reminder of the harshest realities of Jewish suffering in the world. He explains that Hashem had placed the bricks before Him during the slavery in *Mitzrayim* (Egypt), to remember the sufferings of Israel.<sup>4</sup> Although it is comforting to know that G\*d feels our pain, there is no escaping the reality of suffering in this vision. The vision reminds us that we do not connect to Hashem by losing touch with reality – even the most painful reality, of this world. Rather those very experiences are themselves "before Him," and we can approach G\*d through our pain and weaknesses.

<sup>1</sup> *Shemot* 24:10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 24:11.

<sup>3</sup> Rashi *ad. loc.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 24:10.



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### The Beauty of the Brickwork of Suffering

Yet, this brickwork being a stark reminder of *Mitzrayim* is only half the story. The brickwork itself is shining and clear like the heavens! Why is this brick so beautiful? Rashi explains that when the Jews were redeemed from Egypt, there was joy and light before Him.<sup>5</sup> This very brickwork, which had been dark, coarse and a source of suffering and enslavement, itself, began to shine a brilliant light – to radiate joy. This is so important. This is salvation.<sup>6</sup>

### Infusing Every Mitzvah with Awe and Love of G\*d

Contrary to Rashi’s interpretation, *Netivat Shalom* notes that “They saw the G\*d of Israel” is actually a praise for the Nobles of Israel.<sup>7</sup>

After the amazing revelation at Sinai, when all the Seven Heavens were opened, everyone experienced how there is none but Hashem – אין עוד מלבדו / “*Ein Od Milvado*.”<sup>8</sup>

After such a holy revelation how could they lower themselves to be involved with matters of this world such as eating and drinking? The answer is that it is possible to return to the elevated state of receiving the Torah at Sinai through infusing every mitzvah, and Torah-learning in this lower world with both awe and love of G\*d.

### In Praise of the Nobles of Israel

The Nobles of Israel understood that even when we are involved with the pleasures of this world, we must permeate them with awe and love of G\*d. Therefore, it states “They beheld G\*d, while eating and drinking.”<sup>9</sup> The word for G\*d used in this verse האֱלֹהִים / *haElokim* is a name associated with judgment and awe. The word וַיַּבְחִינוּ / *Vayechezu* – “they beheld” alludes to love of G\*d as we sing in the *Yedid Nefesh* Shabbat hymn:

הַדוֹר נֹאֵה זֵיו הָעוֹלָם. נַפְשִׁי חוֹלֵת אַהֲבָתְךָ. אָנָּה אֵל נָא רַפָּא נָא לָהּ. בְּהַרְאוֹת לָהּ נוֹעַם זִינְךָ...  
 – *Hadur na’eh ziv haOlam. Nafshi Cholat Ahavateicha. Ana ke-l na, refa na la, beharot la noam zivecha.*

– Majestic, Beautiful, Radiance of the universe – *my soul is sick for Your love. Please, O G\*d, heal her now by **showing** her the pleasantness of Your radiance.*

The Nobles of Israel teach us to integrate being preoccupied in the matters of the physical world represented by “eating and drinking” with awe and love of G\*d as is learned from the phrase “They beheld G\*d...” Therefore the meaning of “[G\*d] did not lay his hand on the Nobles of Israel”<sup>10</sup> is that the impure extraneous forces did not have power over the Nobles of Israel, because “They beheld G\*d”<sup>11</sup> – through awe and love.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>6</sup> Adapted from “A Vision of G-d’s Bricks” (5759) by David H. from Yeshivat Bat Ayin.  
<sup>7</sup> Based on Unkelos’s translation of *Shemot* 24:11.  
<sup>8</sup> *Devarim* 4:36.  
<sup>9</sup> *Shemot* 24:11.  
<sup>10</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

## Internalizing Hashem's Presence before Us

Awe of G\*d must always precede love, as it states; "The beginning of wisdom is awe."<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, the Rama, opens his first statement of *Shulchan Aruch* with how we can awaken awe of G\*d – the beginning of everything in this world, and the beginning of all the matters of the *Shulchan Aruch*, by stating, "I have set Hashem before me always."<sup>13</sup> – A person must always put in his heart that the great King Hashem stands before him and sees his deeds. This will immediately bring him awe of G\*d.<sup>14</sup> *Netivat Shalom* notes that it didn't state that a person must put this in his mind but rather in his **heart**. It is not enough to understand that Hashem stands before us, we furthermore need to bring this knowledge deeply into our heart, in order to immediately receive awe of G\*d.<sup>15</sup>

## Meditation:

Sit comfortable with your back straight and close your eyes. Take several deep breaths and clear your mind.

1. Do an internal body-scan and get in touch with any pain or discomfort you may hold in any part of your body. As you continue breathing slowly, get in touch with this discomfort and try to sense the root of your pain. Perhaps a headache could be caused by stress, a stomach pain by not feeling appreciated etc.
2. Breathe deeply while you slowly recite *שְׁוִיֵּתִי הָשֵׁם לְנֶגְדִי תָמִיד / Shiviti Hashem l'negdi tamid* – "I have set Hashem always before me."<sup>16</sup> Inhale *שְׁוִיֵּתִי / Shiviti* exhale *הָשֵׁם / Hashem*. Inhale *לְנֶגְדִי / l'negdi* exhale *תָּמִיד / tamid*. Repeat this sequence four additional times.
3. Imagine Hashem the King of Kings standing before you, seeing everything you do and feel. Visualize His greatness before you, knowing you inside and out. Inhale deeply and allow your heart to get filled with the knowledge that there is a law and there is a Lawgiver. Exhale, while focusing on your heart energy center imagining Hashem standing before you, feeling His presence deeply in your heart.
4. Now before turning to Hashem for help, realize that you are in pain, and/or you experience a lack – an emptiness inside.
5. Recognize that you cannot save yourself from this place. No slave ever escaped Egypt, nor redeemed himself. Get in touch with your smallness and your helplessness!
6. Allow yourself to feel how Hashem's presence is with you within your pain. Keep breathing as you open yourself to feel how even and especially within your deepest pain, Hashem's light is right there.

<sup>12</sup> *Tehillim* 11:10.

<sup>13</sup> *Tehillim* 16:8.

<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Cracow 1520-1572), *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 1:1.

<sup>15</sup> *Netivat Shalom, Parashat Mishpatim*, p. 187.

<sup>16</sup> *Tehillim* 16:8.

7. Now ask Hashem to remove your pain and its deepest root. Imagine your hurt being uprooted like a tree, as Hashem's light fills it with His glorious presence, and the discomfort gets lifted away.

8. Now get in touch with your feelings in the place of your discomfort. Do you feel any lighter, a little relieved? In case you still feel pain, repeat visualizing Hashem's light inside of your pain, removing it – uprooting it. It may take repeated tries several times, as our pain may contain multiple layers.

9. Now imagine the shining brilliant brickwork of sapphire, with sparkling blue colors lucid like the heavens in purity on a bright clear day. Try to hold this vision for five slow breaths or more.

10. Get in touch with the joy of the brilliant sapphire imagery. Allow this joy to penetrate your entire being. Delight in the beauty that you behold. It is the beauty of bringing Hashem into every aspect of your life. Allow yourself to be filled completely with love of Hashem and desire to bask in His light.

When you are ready, slowly tap your feet on the ground and open your eyes.

### Notes:

The sapphire brickwork was made from Israel's suffering. When we try to save ourselves, the best we can do is to make the brick go away – by forgetting, by filling in the emptiness with something fake. In the end, the awareness comes back, and we can choose again whether to forget or try to open up to Hashem, and trust that He can save us in the deepest way. The bricks of Egypt, the place of *tumah* – (impurity), become the building material for the *Beit HaMikdash* – (Temple), the place of joy. The brick becomes “like *Shamayim* (heaven) for *Tohar*.” According to Rashi, “*Tohar* means *barur* (clarified) and lucid.” Clarification is a slow process, the struggle of a life's journey. Yet this is the only way to find the joy that is not merely in spite of tears, but because of them. May Hashem reveal to us the joy within all of our tears soon in our days!

# About Us



## **Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum**

*Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is Founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha also began her practice as a spiritual healer through Emuna, tefila and energy work.*

*For more than two decades Chana Bracha has taught Bible studies with special emphasis on women's issues in Israel and the United States. She creates curricula emphasizing women's spiritual empowerment through traditional Torah values. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin located in the Judean Hills of Israel offers a unique program to women of all ages and backgrounds to learn in a holistic Torah study environment that nurtures the mind, body and soul. Intensive textual study of Tanach, Halacha and Chassidut are woven together with creative spiritual expression, and connection with the land of Israel through organic gardening, herbology, Jewish sources of healing and sustainable living. Classes in Jewish mysticism, Chassidism and Jewish meditation are directed at the spiritual thirst so prominent in our times.*

*In 2010 Rebbetzin Chana Bracha published her first book, *Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion*.*

*Chana Bracha has a married son and several granddaughters. She lives with her husband and younger son on the land of the Judean hills, Israel.*

*If you are interested in:*

*Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin contact [info@berotbatayin.org](mailto:info@berotbatayin.org) or in Spiritual Healing with Rebbetzin Chana Bracha, please contact her at [director@berotbatayin.org](mailto:director@berotbatayin.org)*

*or visit her blog: <http://rebbetzinchanabracha.blogspot.com/2010/11/emunah-healing-for-women.html>*

## **Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin – Holistic Torah Study for Women on the Land of Israel**

At Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin, we weave together Torah studies with creative spiritual expression, connecting with the Land of Israel, and healthy, organic lifestyles. In the heart of the Judean Hills, with its serene beauty, our students experience an approach to Judaism that bridges mind, body and soul. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin is designed as a micro-community within the Village of Bat Ayin where women of all ages and backgrounds engage in intense Torah learning as part of an integrated, participatory approach to Torah living.

## **Come Learn With Us!**

Beginner and advanced levels are offered for women of all ages and religious backgrounds. Whether your interest in Judaism has recently been ignited, or you are seeking a wider perspective, Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin offers the opportunity to improve your learning skills while strengthening your commitment to Judaism within the parameters of Halachah – all while engaging your inner creative spirituality, working the Land, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

## **Support Our School!**

You have the unique opportunity to help us continue to build and amplify the light of Torah on the Land of Israel. With your help we can increase our ability to provide women an extraordinary Torah environment where they can build a solid Jewish foundation which will have an impact for generations to come.

