THE WORLD OF RABBI S. R. HIRSCH

THE NINETEEN LETTERS About Judaism

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Synopsis of the Eleventh Letter

Through the observance of *Toros* we acknowledge, as basic principles guiding us in life, our faith in God and our duty to serve Him and to fulfill all the obligations that flow from these principles. First and foremost, we have to use our God-given faculties to practice justice. The commandments grouped as *Mishpatim* deal with the duty to accord proper respect to our fellowmen and their belongings. *Chukkim* are concerned with the correct treatment of all creatures and objects in general.

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*Toros.* The *Toros* call us to principles that should be revealed by history:

— that God is your God, feelings, words and deeds, the
— that He is One, which every aspect of your life and means and circumstances in the
— that all His creatures join their ranks to labor in His
— that His Will was revealed all times; and that your fate, you to this end;
— that the insight gained you to the fear of God; the
— and the recognition of God;

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1 *Shemos* 20:2.
2 *Devarim* 6:4, 4:39, 18:13; *Shemos*.
3 *Devarim* 4:19-20.
4 *Devarim* 4:9, 5:19.
5 *Devarim* 8:2.
6 *Devarim* 6:12-13, 4:40, 6:16, 7:3.
The Eleventh Letter
TOROS, MISHPATIM, CHUKKIM

Toros.¹ The Toros call upon us to take to heart, as principles that should govern our lives, the truths revealed by history:

— that God is your God, i.e., the guide of your thoughts, feelings, words and deeds, the mainspring of your whole life;²
— that He is One, which challenges you to give thought to every aspect of your life and to unite all of your faculties, means and circumstances in the service and for the purposes of the One from Whom they all derive;³
— that all His creatures are His servants, and you, too, must join their ranks to labor in His service;⁴
— that His Will was revealed to you for this purpose and for all times;⁵ and that your fate, too, should guide and educate you to this end;⁶
— that the insight gained into God’s greatness should lead you to the fear of God; the perception of His kindness, to love of God; and the recognition of His faithfulness, to trust in God;⁷

¹ Shemos 20:2.
³ Devarim 4:19-20.
⁴ Devarim 4:9, 5:19.
⁵ Devarim 8:2.
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—that you are to ennoble your inner life so as to cleanse it of anything that might detract from your holy mission,\(^6\) divesting yourself of pride and lust;\(^8\)

—that you are to develop empathy with the pains and joys of all beings and embrace them all with love, because they are God’s children.\(^1\)

The Toros, then, are but a restatement, for practical application, of the truths that God reveals to us through His deeds. As principles of action, they are commanded; as ideas they are merely revealed, not imposed\(^2\) upon us. Whoever desires the truth will accept them.

**MISHPATIM.**\(^3\) All these insights, however, are of value only if you truly live your life according to what you, as man and Yisraelite in God’s world, with your God-given powers, have recognized. The first requirement is, therefore, that you practice justice:

—Respect every being in your surroundings, as well as everything within yourself, as a creation of your God.

—Respect whatever is theirs as given to them by God or as having been acquired according to Divinely sanctioned law. Let them keep, or have, whatever they are entitled by right to call their own; do not be a source of harm to others!

—Respect every human being as your equal. Respect him, his inner self as well as his outer garment—his body—and his life.\(^1\) Respect his property, too, as a legal extension of his

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\(^8\) Devarim 8:11, 5:18.

\(^1\) Devarim 15:7; Vayikra 19:18.

\(^3\) Shemos 20:13; Devarim 25:1, 27:24; YD; CM.

body.\(^k\) Respect his claim to property; to render to him,\(^l\) properly. Respect his claim to compensation for harm to his property.\(^n\)

—Respect his right to human freedom, happiness, peace of existence.\(^8\)

—Never abuse the frailty of a fellowman; never misuse your legal power.

**CHUKKIM.**\(^4\) The same justice is shown to every lower being, to everything, to vegetation and body, your mental powers, to anything else, you can call “mine.” The demand for justice is based on the fact that it belongs to God, Who represents arbitrariness. The demands of your mind and the conditions your mind and the conditions

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\(^k\) Vayikra 19:11,13; Shemos 22:1; Devarim 25:15.

\(^l\) Vayikra 25:14; Shemos 22:6,9,13.

\(^m\) Vayikra 19:35; Devarim 25:13; CM.

\(^n\) Shemos 22:4-5, 35:1, 12:18; Devarim 27:20.

\(^o\) Shemos 23:7; Vayikra 19:11; CM.

\(^p\) Shemos 22:20; Vayikra 19:34, 25.

\(^q\) Vayikra 19:16; Bamidbar 17:5.

\(^r\) Vayikra 19:14; Devarim 27:15, 15.

\(^s\) Shemos 20:16, 23:1,6,8; Vayikra 19:11.
inner life so as to cleanse it for your holy mission,¹

exhaling with the pains and joys of love, because they are

present, for practical reasons to us through His commandments; as ideas impressed upon us. Whoever

however, are of value only if you, as man and as God-given powers, have illustrated, therefore, that you

surroundings, as well as your God.

given to them by God or as Divinely sanctioned law. Let you entitled by right to call yourself to others!

as your equal. Respect him, his garment—his body—and his legal extension of his body.² Respect his claim to property or services that you have to render to him,³ properly measured or counted,⁴ as well as his claim to compensation for harm done to his body or property.⁵

—Respect his right to know the truth⁶ and his right to freedom, happiness, peace of mind⁷ honor and a peaceful existence.⁸

—Never abuse the frailty of his body, mind or heart,⁹ and never misuse your legal power over him.¹⁰

CHUKKIM.¹¹ The same justice that you owe to man should be shown to every lower being, from the earth which bears everything, to vegetation and the animal world, to your own body, your mental powers, your own self that, more than anything else, you can call "yours." In the case of Mishpatim, the demand for justice is based upon the equality of all men, whereas here it derives from the principle that everything belongs to God, Who represents its interest against your arbitrariness. The demands of Mishpatim are clearer to you because to a large extent you only need to know your own feelings in order to identify with the feelings of your fellowmen. If you had the same knowledge of your body and your mind and the conditions for their harmonious interaction,

¹ Vayikra 19:11,13; Shemos 22:1; Vayikra 5:21; Devarim 24:14; CM.
² Vayikra 25:14; Shemos 22:6,9,13; CM.
³ Vayikra 19:35; Devarim 25:13; CM.
⁴ Shemos 22:4-5, 21:35,33,18; Devarim 22:8; CM.
⁵ Shemos 23:7; Vayikra 19:11; CM; EH.
⁶ Shemos 22:20; Vayikra 19:34, 25:17, 19:17; CM.
⁷ Vayikra 19:16; Bamidbar 17:5.
⁸ Vayikra 19:14; Devarim 27:18, 13:12; OC; CM; YD.
⁹ Shemos 20:16, 23:1,6,8; Vayikra 19:15; Devarim 1:16; CM.
and if you were able to put yourself also in the place of any other creature, then *Chukkim* would be as intelligible to you as *Mishpatim*.

The *Chukkim* require of you:

—respect for all that exists, as God’s property: do not destroy anything! do not misuse it! do not waste! use everything wisely!\(^1\)

—respect for all the species: their order was established by God—do not intermingle them;\(^u\) respect for all creatures: they are servants in the household of Creation;\(^v\) respect for the feelings and instincts of animals;\(^w\) respect for the human body, even after the soul has departed;\(^x\) respect for your own body: maintain it, as it is the repository, messenger and instrument of the spirit;\(^y\)

—limitation of your own instincts and animal-like actions: subordinate them to God’s Law, so that, truly human and sanctified, they can help you attain the holy goal of mankind—and will not turn you into a mere animal;\(^z\)

—respect for your soul, when you nourish its tool, the body: supply the body only with such nourishment that will enable it to act as a pure and willing messenger of the world to the spirit, and of the spirit to the world, rather than giving it food that will induce sluggishness and sensuality;\(^aa\)

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\(^1\) *Devarim* 20:19; *Vayikra* 22:24; *Hilchos Melachim* 18; *Taz* to *YD*; *Shabbos* 67b; EH.

\(^u\) *Vayikra* 19:19; *Devarim* 22:9-11; *Shemos* 23:19; *YD*.

\(^v\) *Devarim* 22:6; *Vayikra* 22:28; *YD*.

\(^w\) *Shemos* 23:5; *Devarim* 25:4; *OC*; *CM*.

\(^x\) *Devarim* 21:22; *YD*.

\(^y\) *Bereishis* 9:5; *Devarim* 4:9, 14:1; *Vayikra* 19:28; *CM*; *YD*.

\(^z\) *Devarim* 23:10, 22:22-23, 9; *Vayikra* 18:4-24; *YD*; EH.

—concealment and sublimation of the animal in you, rather than according it too much respect and attention: only thus will the conflict within you ultimately be resolved, and the animal in you will also aspire only to the truly human;\textsuperscript{bb}
—lastly, respect for your own person in its purest expression—your power of speech.\textsuperscript{cc,6}

\textsuperscript{bb} Vayikra 23:10, 19:27; Bamidbar 31:21; Devarim 22:5; YD; OC.

\textsuperscript{cc} Bamidbar 30:2; Devarim 23:20; YD.