

THE WORLD OF
RABBI S. R. HIRSCH

 THE 
NINETEEN
LETTERS

About Judaism

newly translated by
Karin Paritzky

revised and with a
comprehensive commentary by
Joseph Elias



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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.

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;^a

—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;^b

—that all His creatures are His servants, and you, too, must join their ranks to labor in His service;^c

—that His Will was revealed to you for this purpose and for all times;^d and that your fate, too, should guide and educate you to this end;^e

—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;^f

^a *Shemos* 20:2.

^b *Devarim* 6:4, 4:39, 18:13; *Shemos* 20:3; *Vayikra* 19:26.

^c *Devarim* 4:19-20.

^d *Devarim* 4:9, 5:19.

^e *Devarim* 8:2.

^f *Devarim* 6:12-13, 4:40, 6:16, 7:9.

—that you are to ennoble your inner life so as to cleanse it of anything that might detract from your holy mission,^g divesting yourself of pride and lust;^h

—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.ⁱ

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 imposed² 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.^j Respect his property, too, as a legal extension of his

^g *Devarim* 10:12-16; *Vayikra* 11:44, 20:7.

^h *Devarim* 8:11, 5:18.

ⁱ *Devarim* 15:7; *Vayikra* 19:18.

^j *Shemos* 20:13; *Devarim* 25:1, 27:24; YD; CM.

body.^k Respect his claim to property or services that you have to render to him,^l properly measured or counted,^m as well as his claim to compensation for harm done to his body or property.ⁿ

—Respect his right to know the truth^o and his right to freedom, happiness, peace of mind,^p honor and a peaceful existence.^q

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

*CHUKKIM.*⁴ 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,

^k *Vayikra* 19:11,13; *Shemos* 22:1; *Vayikra* 5:21; *Devarim* 24:14; CM.

^l *Vayikra* 25:14; *Shemos* 22:6,9,13; CM.

^m *Vayikra* 19:35; *Devarim* 25:13; CM.

ⁿ *Shemos* 22:4-5, 21:35,33,18; *Devarim* 22:8; CM.

^o *Shemos* 23:7; *Vayikra* 19:11; CM; EH.

^p *Shemos* 22:20; *Vayikra* 19:34, 25:17, 19:17; CM.

^q *Vayikra* 19:16; *Bamidbar* 17:5.

^r *Vayikra* 19:14; *Devarim* 27:18, 13:12; OC; CM; YD.

^s *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!^t

—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,5}

^t *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.

^{aa} *Vayikra* 11, 7:23, 20:25, 3:17; *Devarim* 14, 12:23, 14:20, 12:21, 14:21; *Shemos* 22:30, 34:26; *Bereishis* 9:4; YD.

—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;^{bb}

—lastly, respect for your own person in its purest expression—your power of speech.^{cc,6}

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

^{cc} *Bamidbar* 30:2; *Devarim* 23:20; YD.