

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Showing Our Critics How to Fix a Broken World



Some critics of Judaism argue that the Jewish Bible is full of irrelevant laws and regulations that do not advance a relationship with God.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

This false argument is dispelled by the book of Deuteronomy, which contains many powerful spiritual messages.

In the coming weeks, we will encounter passages that explain the nature of God's absolute Oneness. Other passages will explain how finite beings can achieve a personal relationship with our Infinite Creator.

These fundamentals of belief are the tools God provided the Jewish people before they entered the Land of Israel.

These beliefs, along with our trust in God, continually ensure the survival of the Jewish people, especially in difficult times.

Nonetheless, this week's Torah portion, *Devarim* (Deuteronomy 1:1–3:22), seemingly focuses on something very different.

Rather than launching into spiritual motifs, the beginning of the fifth book of the Torah recounts the many challenges the Jewish people encountered during their 40-year journey in the Sinai desert.

This is fitting because overcoming challenges is a preparation for achieving a spiritual connection with God. Challenges humble our spirit and strengthen our character, thereby making us proper vessels to experience spirituality.

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Contrary to what our detractors say, the commandments of the Torah are the connection between us and our Creator. This connection is alluded to in the Hebrew word "מצוה—*mitzvah*," which, in addition to meaning "a commandment," is related to the Aramaic word "צוותה—*tzavta*" which means "a connection."

Another lesson concerning connecting to God is found in the Haftorah [Prophetic reading] associated with this week's Torah reading.

After reproofing the Jewish people, Isaiah advises, *“Learn to do good. Devote yourselves to justice; aid the wronged. Uphold the rights of the orphan. Fight for the rights of widows.”* Then he powerfully proclaims, *“Zion will be redeemed by justice; and those who return, with righteousness [צדקה–tzedakah]”* (Isaiah 1:17; 1:27).

The word *tzedakah* also means “charity.” It is acts of justice, righteousness, and charity that give our lives purpose and hasten the ultimate redemption.

In our day and age, we are witnessing a decline in civility and the rule of law. To counteract this, we must redirect ourselves and society to focus on acts of kindness and charity.

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Doing this can fix a broken world and achieve a more meaningful, healthy, and spiritual life.

In addition to “repairing the world,” King David told us that the act of giving to others [charity] is a means to experience a personal relationship with God, as it says, *“by giving charity, I perceive God's countenance”* (Psalms 17:15).

Remarkably, our sages beautifully demonstrate that when we give a coin to a needy person, we spell God's holiest Four-Letter Name [יהוה–yud-heh-vav-heh].

The small coin corresponds to the small letter [י–yud]; then, the coin is taken in our hand with its five fingers which represent the letter [ה–heh], which has a numerical value of five. Now we stretch out our arm which corresponds to the straight line of the letter [ו–vav] and place the coin into the hand of the needy person, which corresponds to the final letter [ה–heh].

Rather than mere coincidence, this spiritual insight demonstrates the depth and relevance of Jewish wisdom and how it can positively influence our lives.

May this Shabbos provide the opportunity and inspiration to participate in the journey of transforming the world into a kinder and more spiritual place and enhance our personal relationship with God.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

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P.O. Box 351235, Los Angeles, CA 90035 • 310-556-3344
info@JewsforJudaism.org • www.jewsforjudaism.org/donate • www.SMARTalks.com