

# Mizmor 119

## 007 - The Mishpatim

### Key Concepts (Aleph 7)

When a person lives under a system of law that seems arbitrary and unfair he does not take his legal obligations at face value. Instead he looks for loopholes and tries to interpret the law to his own advantage. In contrast, if he respects the authenticity and fairmindedness of the law he will have a positive attitude to it. Because he trusts its validity he will be conscientious about complying with every fine point of its enactments.

The mitzvos of the Torah are essentially a collection of laws governing the way Hashem wants us to live our lives. If we trust in their validity and authenticity we will be inclined to observe them conscientiously. However, Hashem has challenged our faithfulness by not revealing the rationale to all the mitzvos. Those aspects of the mitzvos whose rationale corresponds to our inborn sense of fairmindedness are referred as Mishpatim or Ordinances. Those aspects for which no rationale is given are referred as the Chukim or Decrees.

It is our duty to fully and conscientiously observe every mitzvah because it is the will of Hashem, whether or not we have insight into its rationale. David touches on this challenge by acknowledging with gratitude the insight the many Mishpatim have given him into Divine thinking. This insight strengthens his devotion and it is that devotion which he hopes to draw upon when he is challenged by those mitzvos for which the rationale is concealed.

### Exploring the Mizmor

(ז) אוֹדֶה בְּיָשָׁר לִבִּי בְלִמְדֵי מִשְׁפָּטֶי צְדָקָה:

*I will give thanks to You with a conscientious heart, when I study Your righteous ordinances.*

In this pasuk David focuses on the Mishpatim, those aspects of mitzvos for which a clear rationale may be immediately evident. If it is not evident immediately it becomes apparent after the individual has had a chance to give it some thought and study.

These Mishpatim are described as righteous ordinances (מִשְׁפָּטֵי צְדָקָה) since they

ring true to a person's basic sense of righteousness or virtue. That sense of righteousness originates with Hashem and was granted to man in the act of creating him. Thus, David describes it as "Your righteousness."

In acknowledging his gratitude to Hashem, David refers to his attitude as a conscientious heart (יֵשֶׁר לֵבָב). This means he respects the law and is not motivated to adjust its interpretation to suit his own concerns. He has gained this attitude from his in-depth study of the Mishpatim and he feels that this renewed respect for the will of Hashem can enable him to observe every detail of the Decrees conscientiously.

## Learning the Mizmor

(ז) אֹדֶד בְּיֵשֶׁר לֵבָב  
בְּלִמְדֵי מִשְׁפָּטֵי צְדָקָה:

**I will give thanks to You with a conscientious heart** – אֹדֶד בְּיֵשֶׁר לֵבָב for helping me overcome the challenges inherent in the Decrees whose rationale is concealed. I am grateful for the insight You grant me **when I study Your righteous ordinances** – בְּלִמְדֵי מִשְׁפָּטֵי צְדָקָה. It is this understanding that strengthens my love and respect for the entire body of mitzvos so that I can serve You conscientiously.

## Additional Insights

Some insights illuminating this pasuk are presented here. The numbers identifying the insights refer to the listing of sources below.

- (1) The process of learning the מִשְׁפָּטֵי צְדָקָה will teach me how to thank You properly בְּיֵשֶׁר לֵבָב.
- (2) The meaning of יֵשֶׁר (straightness) is directly related to בְּיִנְיָה, that is, understanding. Once a person has gained a breadth and depth of understanding through learning the mitzvos he is enabled to fulfill them conscientiously, without deviation.
- (3) By learning and appreciating the יֵשֶׁר that is inherent in the Mishpatim, and by thanking You for them without reservation, I will realize and know that the Decrees are also designed with wisdom.

## **Sources**

The primary sources used for the additional insights illuminating this pasuk are listed below.

(3) המאירי

(1) - מצודות

(2) - מלבים