



Parshas Mishpatim

A Parsha Story for the Shabbos Table

In parshas Mishpatim the Torah teaches many different halachos, following immediately after the story of the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai. The first thing we learn about after that momentous event is the laws of slaves. The Torah is teaching us the importance of the obligation to treat properly even people who may have a lower status than we do.

Mr. Gutnick was buzzing around the entrance to the school, half on his cell phone and half shouting directions at the people surrounding him. As the mayor's personal assistant, it was his job to make sure everything was ready for the mayor's big visit to the school. He was going to be speaking to the students at the assembly today – at the very school he had attended as a child! – and Mr. Gutnick wanted to make sure it went off without a hitch.

The pressure was on now, as the mayor was due to arrive any moment, and he was still trying to smooth out last-minute details. He barked orders to his staffers as they hurried this way and that, racing to finish the preparations.

Finally the mayor arrived. He rolled up in a shiny black car and stepped out of the back seat. He thanked the driver as he got out and walked briskly towards the school.

“Morning, Gutnick!” he said cheerfully. “Looks like you’ve got everything under control as usual!”

“Yes Sir, Mr. Mayor!” he replied brightly as he tried to return to a state of semi-calm. “Should be all set in there! And your coffee should be waiting in the principal’s office.”

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“Fantastic, thanks for thinking of that, Gutnick,” said the mayor. Mr. Gutnick nodded, then spun around and marched towards the front doors. “Open the door for the mayor!” he snapped at the nearest worker, who jumped to attention and scrambled to open the door.

How would you describe the mayor’s attitude?

Mr. Gutnick strode into the building confidently, with the mayor a few steps behind. They headed for the principal’s office, with Mr. Gutnick brushing aside students and teachers who were in the way. Suddenly he saw the janitor coming around the corner down the hall with a wet mop hanging off the side of his rolling supply cart. He was horrified! It did not befit the dignity of the mayor to have to walk around the janitor mopping the floor! He hurried ahead and started pushing the janitor’s supply cart off to the side while demanding to the janitor that he get out of the way.

Shaking his head, he continued briskly on towards the main office. As they approached, he called behind him, “Here we are, Mr. Mayor, it’s right around this corner... Mr. Mayor?” Mr. Gutnick looked around him. He didn’t see the mayor! He ran back to the last corner he’d turned and found the mayor warmly clasping the hand of the old janitor. “Mr. Jenkins, what a fine job you’ve done this morning. It looks spotless in here!” The janitor was beaming. “Can you believe this, Gutnick?” exclaimed the mayor. “Mr. Jenkins was the custodian here when I was a kid. And he’s still at, taking care of the school all these years later. Way to go, Mr. Jenkins!”

Finally he let go of Mr. Jenkins’ hand and carried on towards the office, past a befuddled Mr. Gutnick.

What was the difference between the way Mr. Gutnick and the mayor acted towards people?

How was Mr. Gutnick’s behavior change when he spoke to the mayor vs. when he spoke to other people?

Why is important to pay special attention to how we treat those who are less powerful or important?

Good Shabbos!

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