

Yitzchak

Yitzchak Tuvia ben David Aharon v'Rachel

Parashat Mishpatim

(Exodus 21:1-24:18) <http://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.21?lang=bi>

February 8, 2018

Summary

This week's Torah portion is *Parashat Mishpatim*. We are reading *Sefer Shemot*, the Book of Exodus, Chapter 23, verses 1-3. *Mishpatim* are laws or rules. The Torah portion begins with a law about freeing a Hebrew slave after six years of serving. In the seventh year the Hebrew slave goes free, unless he wants to stay with his master, in which case he is brought to the door or doorpost and his ear is pierced by his master.

Other laws include not cursing one's parents; laws about what to do if someone gets hurt and laws that help us understand how to treat people with less power--like widows, orphans, and strangers. We also read laws that help us understand the responsibilities of witnesses, people who find lost items, and people who see an animal that is working too hard. We learn that we are supposed to help such an animal--even if it belongs to our enemy.

Parashat Mishpatim also teaches us not to go along with a majority opinion if it is wrong or unjust. We learn laws of the Sabbatical year--a year of rest from farming the land--and the rule against boiling a goat in its mother's milk.

God promises to be there for Israel if Israel is loyal to the covenant. The Israelites agree to be loyal and say all together: "נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע" All that God has spoken we will **do** and we **will hear** or understand." (Exodus 24:7).

Questions

1) When a Hebrew slave--after 6 years--chooses to remain a slave, the master takes him to the inside of a doorway, and pierces his ear, but why do you think someone would *choose* to be a slave and refuse to live a free life?

<<Pick 3>>

Maybe the master is nice and treats the slave and family like his brother. Maybe they sleep in the same house or even eat together. Maybe the slave is nervous that he'll never be able to live as well as he does with his master.

2) I was surprised to learn, from this week's *parasha*, that--according to *Shemot 23:5*, when you see the donkey of someone who hates you bent over under its load, you must restrain yourself from leaving him--instead you must lighten the load on the donkey with him. It was surprising to me that the Torah teaches us to help the animal of a person who hates you. Why might the Torah want us to help the donkey even if it belongs to someone who hates us? **<<Pick 3>>**

The donkey is a living thing and there is an important *mitzvah* called **צַעַר בְּעַלֵּי חַיִּים**.

According to this *mitzvah*, we are never supposed to cause unnecessary suffering to animals. My father explained to me that even when an animal is brought for kosher slaughter, the people responsible for this are also responsible for making sure that the animal is treated with respect the whole time.

3) When we help this overburdened animal, we are really helping the person who hates us, too. I was also surprised that the Torah would want us to help someone who hates us. Why do you think that the Torah would tell us to help someone who hates us?

<<Pick 3>>

The early commentary on *Pirkei Avot*, *Avot DeRabbi Natan* asks, “אִיזוֹ גִבּוֹר שֶׁבְּגִבּוֹרִים”--who is the hero of heroes? It then continues on to say that one answer is, “מִי שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה שׂוֹנֵא אוֹהֵבוֹ” “one who turns a person who hates him into a person who loves him.” The Torah seems to recognize that sometimes people do hate each other--maybe even for good reasons, but the Torah won't let us get stuck in the hate. We have to work on repairing relationships. It takes strength to make someone who hates you into someone who loves you because you have to make up your mind to decide to do it and then you have to do things with your body and words to actually help them.

I think that the Torah is saying that the goal is to be friends again.