

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

Noam *Noam ben Daniel v'Rachel*

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Summary

NOAM: 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.

ANNIKA: 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.

NOAM: *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.

ANNIKA: 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) Noam: In this week's *parasha*--in the second verse of Chapter 23 of *Shemot*, we read, "Do not go after many to do evil." Isn't this obvious? Shouldn't we know to do the right thing? Why do you think the Torah might tell us that we should not follow the crowd to do evil? <<Annika picks 1, Jordyn picks 2>>

Noam: When we were studying together, Jordyn mentioned that the important thing about this teaching is that the Torah is teaching us that when we're in a crowd we can find it difficult to see things the right way. Each of us should always be thinking about how to do what is right and not just follow others to do what they are doing. I think that the Torah is reminding us that it's ok to stand out from the crowd or to act differently if you know what you are doing is right.

Annika: I think the Torah is also teaching us that it's ok to stand up for yourself. If all of us practice standing up for what is right we will all be more confident and strong and we can do more good. One thing that often gets in the way of doing good is peoples' own lack of confidence in themselves.

2) Annika: What do you think would happen if people always stood up for what they thought was good and only did what they believed was good? <<Noam picks 1, Jordyn picks 2>>

Noam: If everyone stood up for what they thought was good--like Rosa Parks or Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.--there would be no racism, we could solve climate change, and people would probably like each other more, because they would see each other doing good things.

3) Noam: In the same verse the Torah says that if it is your job--as part of a court--to listen to different sides argue a case and to give a decision then it is particularly important that you don't just follow the majority. Why do you think it might be particularly important in a court case to stand up and share your thinking if your thinking is different from other people?

<<Noam picks 1, Jordyn picks 1, Annika picks 1>>

Annika: The whole point of a court case is for different people to present their stories and to share information so that the court can figure out what happened and who is responsible. If you don't speak up about how you understand things, an innocent person could get consequences that are not appropriate for them.