

Parashat Mishpatim

Exodus 21:1-24:18

FEBRUARY 21, 2020



SUMMARY

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 this 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 someone who hates us.

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.

G'd 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 G'd has spoken we will **do** and we **will hear / understand**.” (Exodus 24:7).

From Our Commentators:

Tur HaAroch

ושמור האחוה ותשכח השנאה

. . . attend to / be watchful of
“brotherhood” and forget “hate.”

FOR DISCUSSION:

1) Chapter 23, verse 2 teaches:

לֹא־תִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵי־רַבִּים לָרֹעַ

Do not follow after the majority to do bad.

Can you think of a time in your life when this felt like an important rule to follow?

2) What do you think can give people strength to stand up for what's right when they are surrounded by others who are not?

3) Chapter 23, verse 5 teaches, “When you see the donkey of one who hates you crouching low under its burden, do not let yourself leave it to him--help the animal with the one who hates you.” If someone hates you, why in the world would the *Torah* tell us that we have to help that person's suffering animal?