

לדרוש בשבת

Parashat Mishpatim 5781

February 12 - 13 2021

This week's Lidrosh B'Shabbat is based on Parashat Mishpatim
by Rabbi David Silber

ואלה המשפטים: The first verse of our Parsha begins with a Vav. A Vav is a connection. What does it connect to?

Source: Shemot 20:19-23

These are the first commandments after the Ten Commandments. Why these ones?

While at a surface level they all speak about how to appropriately worship God, a deeper look shows that they reflect the three most important, inviolable prohibitions: idolatry, murder, illicit sexual relations.

To understand the place of these laws we need to understand their context.

Source: Shemot 20:15-18

Imagine if the people had said nothing, not complained about hearing God's voice. Would God have continued to speak to them directly? Would the laws in verses 19-23 have been told to them directly?

These commandments are an embellishment on the ten commandments.

At the beginning of our Parsha, Hashem says, "up to now I have explained something else, but now, these are the Mishpatim." It is a continuation of the end of last week's parsha. The things God might have told the people directly, but instead Moshe has to be told them first, so Moshe goes up the mountain and that's what happens in chapters 21-23.

Source: Shemot 24:3-8

This Parsha is about Kabbalat HaTorah, the accepting of the Torah. It does not fully take place at the ten commandments, it takes place here.

How does this acceptance take place? What is the order of events.

In chapter 24 we have Moshe speaking to the people again. In verse three it says that Moshe told the people both כל דברי ה' and also the משפטים. The Ramban interprets כל דברי ה' as the mitzvot listed at the end of chapter 20 and the משפטים are all the mitzvot in chapters 21-23.

When the people heard it from Moshe, they said נעשה. Moshe then wrote it down. He takes the book that is this week's parsha, the ספר הברית and he reads it to them. Then they say ונשמע. That is when the people are sprinkled with blood. This represents a contract, and it is fulfilled with blood.

This is the second time in the chumash that we have writing and a book.

Source: Shemot 17:8-16

What parallels do you notice between this story and Shemot 24?

כתב זאת זכרון בספר ושים באזני יהושע

Writing. A book. Placement.

ואלה המשפטים אשר תשים לפניהם:

These are the rules that you shall set before them.

Why is this placement necessary?

1. Place before them to see if they accept it.
2. Place it before them so that it actually becomes theirs. Mishpatim is not imposed from without, it's not external, they have to accept.

Source: Shemot 18:13-18

What is Yitro teaching Moshe here about the nature of law? When Yitro says לא טוב הדבר, he is arguing two things: First that Moshe's system was impractical but also, and more importantly, it's not good to do it alone. The people have to assume responsibility.

The idea of law then becomes about acceptance of obligation. Place it in front of them to see if they accept it. And they do: naase v'nishmah. And write it in a book: Amalek and Mishpatim. Why write? To remember it, and to remember what our obligations are.

שבת שלום!