

## *Introduction to Parsha #18: Mishpatim<sup>1</sup>*

READINGS: *Torah:*

Exodus 21:1 - 24:18

*Haftarah:*

Jeremiah 34:8-22; 33:25-26

*B'rit Chadasha:*

II Corinthians 5:9 – 7:1



*Ascend to Me ....*

[Exodus 24:12a]

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is *L'Hodot/V'al Kulam* [the Prayer of Thanksgiving]

*V'eleh ha-mishpatim* – And these are the appropriate restorative courses of action ... Exodus 21:1a.

What just happened? On our first day at this mountain we boldly responded to our Redeemer-King's declaration of His Ambitious Plans for us and His Glorious Vision concerning us with the promise: '*kol asher-diber Adonai na'aseh*' - *i.e.* 'Everything the Holy One says we will build/cause to take shape and form'. Three days later, however, the magnitude of the calling upon our lives began to sink in. We panicked. We stuck our fingers in our ears and ran back to our tents as fast as our feet could fly. Though we had the best intentions, when the Creator's Voice actually touched our ears we found out just how unprepared we were even to share space with Him for a few moments, much less comprehend, much less effectively participate in, the details His Plan. We were still just a bunch of men of unclean lips, who had lived all our lives in the midst of a people of unclean lips. And suddenly our eyes had seen the King, the Holy One of Hosts! Do we ever need a *seraf* with a burning coal – or at least a *prophet with a high calling and a humble heart!*

### *This is Our Story – Such As It Is!*

On the sixth day of the third moon cycle after our Great Adventure of Redemption began, a humble mountain the locals called *Sinai* was transformed into a portal

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connecting Heaven and Earth. A thick, dark cloud, smelling like some sweet incense heretofore unknown to us began to descend from ... well, we weren't quite sure where the cloud came from. In only a matter of seconds the mysterious Cloud-covering had engulfed Sinai's crest – and us along with it. A great *shofar* then began to sound, and we found ourselves pressing ever deeper into what we could only describe as something like a fog. Visibility, as men are wont to think of it at least, immediately went to *zero*. We could not see our neighbor. We could not see our hands, or our feet. We could not see our – or anyone else's – spots, blemishes, or sins. In fact, all we could see was LIGHT. First this LIGHT manifested as something like *flashes of lightning*. Then the flashes of lightning turned into tongues of fire and started changing shape. Then Hebrew letters began to form before our eyes. The first letter we saw taking shape was an *alef* [א]. Then came a *nun* [נ]. Next the tongues of lightning formed a *kaf* [כ]; then the tongues of fire morphed into a *yod* [י]. Hebrew consonants and syllables began form *words – and before we knew what was happening, whole sentences were shining forth at us from somewhere inside the Cloud. The first sentence we saw – and heard – and felt, was **Anochi ... Adonai ... Eloheicha** .... [I am ... THE HOLY ONE ... your God ....]* We gasped. Our knees threatened to buckle; but something that felt like a strong Hand reached out to us, took hold of us, held us up, and kept us from collapsing. All the breath escaped our lungs at once; but then, the sweetest, freshest Wind fell on us, entered into us, and replaced every square inch of the air we had lost. Could this be real? We weren't sure. Our minds wanted to buck and run – but our hearts leapt within our chests. We were both *terrified ... and filled with incredible shalom*. We were simultaneously *disoriented ... and far more focused and centered than we had ever been in our lives*. We began to laugh and cry at the same time. Our diaphragms were vibrating. Our hands were shaking. Our lips were quivering. And whatever syllables and words we saw the tongues of fire forming in the Cloud before our eyes, our vocal cords, tongues, and lips began to reproduce and speak out loud. They did not come out as orders, decrees, or commands; they came out as words of love whispered between a Bridegroom and a Bride.

Lightening flashes kept coming. Tongues of fire kept swirling and morphing into Hebrew letters. Hebrew Words kept forming before our eyes – and totally rewriting the narrative of our lives. Sentences of Divine Speech kept filling the atmosphere and branding themselves on our souls.

### ***You Fill Up My Senses!***

It was not just a visual experience, however. All our senses were overwhelmed. What was that *smell*? We inhaled a strange, wonderful mixture of *frankincense, myrrh, onycha*, and ... is that *galbanum*? These things are *therapeutic oils* – antiseptics, anti-inflammatories, detoxifiers, anesthetics, de-stressers .... Could it be that our Creator is ... HEALING US?

What did we *taste*? We tasted *salt* ... then *honey*. Our taste buds initially registered *bitter* ... then very, very pleasant and *sweet*.

What did we *hear*? First all we could hear was the sound of the great shofar. Then we began to both hear and feel thunderclaps coordinated with the lightning flashes we were seeing. Then, all of these faded, and all we could hear was THE VOICE OF OUR CREATOR, speaking great words of identity, mission, and destiny over – no, I think it was *into* - us. As these syllables, words, and sentences poured into us, something started happening to us at a cellular – even sub-cellular - level.

We were meeting with the Creator of the Universe. He had been our ancestors' God – now He was becoming *our God*! Even more than that, we were changing – and actually becoming *His People*. Just as the Holy One once spoke to Moshe from a burning thorn bush, He has now spoken to each of us from a pulsing *chuppah* of swirling clouds. He has laid out for us the outline of His Amazing Plan for us. He has told us through Ten Prophetic Empowerments exactly why He is investing so much time, so much passion, and so many resources into building a relationship with us.

Oh what energy! Oh, what holiness! Oh, what beauty! Oh, what love!

### ***Too Close, Too Soon?***

The download was, of course, far too wonderful for us to comprehend all at once. The level of love the Bridegroom-King offered us – and was starting to stir in us - was far too intimate for us to embrace ... right now, at least. The beautiful vision He had of our *potential as individuals* and *the impact we could – WERE REDEEMED TO - have on the world* was far too magnificent for us to fathom. The campaign of healing and restoration upon which He plans to lead us seems far too selfless and pure for us to participate in. The huge supporting role He has written for us to play in His Grand Redemptive Plan for Mankind and Creation seems far too magnificent. Becoming the *special-treasure people* of the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth? We shuddered at what kind of responsibility that might entail. Releasing blessing over the world as a *kingdom of priests*? We had no idea what that even *meant*. Reflecting His Light and His Attributes as a *holy nation*? What were we thinking? *US – a holy nation? Us - a rag-tag bunch of recently freed slaves pretty much all still suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder - becoming holy as He is holy? Are You SERIOUS?*

The calling seems far too glorious. We are overwhelmed. We are undone. We can only see our past history – not the vast, un-tapped reservoirs of potential He sees within us. We only see our present uncleanness, unworthiness, and inadequacy; our mind has not grasped one tenth of what the Creator of the Universe could transform us into. When the Holy One finished speaking the tenth empowerment

over us, we shrank back in timidity. Could this be *real*? Did we even *want it to be real*? Was the God of Avraham really talking to *us*? Surely this is a *classic case of mistaken identity*? Surely He is thinking we are *Rachel*, when we are really *just Leah*?

Our Bridegroom-King is, however, taking it all in stride. We are stressed to the maximum; He is patient. We are an emotional train wreck; He is steadfast, steady, and calm. We are distracted by everything; He remains focused and forward-looking. We deceive ourselves into thinking we are intelligent; He is eminently wise. We get offended at the drop of a hat and outraged by the slightest bobble or the most innocuous discomfort; He is ever joyful, ever hopeful, ever confident – and completely un-offendable.

Our Bridegroom-King is not sulking over our immature response to His Grand Proposal. He is not worried about it in the slightest. He knew exactly what He was getting into when He called us out of Egypt. He knows us much better than we know ourselves. He knows that He can overcome our insecurity – and exactly what it will take to do so. He knows that He can fix every one of our flaws. He knows He can make us over - head-to-toe and heart-to-will - into the beautiful, regal Bride-People He designed, created, and brought us forth from bondage at such a time as this to become. He has a Plan to accomplish all that. And He is about to reveal that Plan in real time. He is about to initiate the Ultimate Personal Training Program. And in so doing, He is about to *Unleash the Beauty* - the deep, rich, abiding, atmosphere-shifting beauty that He sees lying dormant in us and intends to gradually bring forth from us for all the world to see.

The Holy One is under no romantic illusions or unrealistic expectations concerning us. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows how woefully unprepared we are to be His co-regent. He knows what it is going to take to get us where we need to be. He has known these things – and more - all along. Now we have begun to realize these things as well. But neither our unpreparedness nor the seeming impossibility of the mission and destiny to which He has called us has slowed down His enthusiasm for the Grand Plan one whit; neither should either of these things deter us.

The Divine Bridegroom has *absolute confidence* in His ability to *get us prepared* by the time of the Wedding/Nissuin He has planned. Moreover, He is wholeheartedly committed to do whatever is necessary to get us ready for the role He has ordained for us since before the foundation of the World. He is 100% committed to pay whatever price it may take to *make it happen*. We will be a pure, spotless Bride. We will appear at the proper time arrayed in *fine linen, clean and bright* - the righteous acts of the saints. Our Divine Bridegroom is going to take it upon Himself to slowly, painstakingly and patiently train us how to become – and

start to behave like – the Bride He created and has called us to become.

### ***The Season of Divine Downloads and Discourses***

With parsha *Mishpatim*<sup>2</sup> the essence of Torah will begin to come into *a whole new level of focus*. In this parsha, you see, the Holy One is about to do something which has never been recorded before - He is about to share with us the way He looks at things pertaining to ordinary aspects of human life.

The Season of Divine Downloads and Discourses is upon us. The 11-month season that we are going to spend at Sinai is going to be the most glorious season of mankind's existence on the planet short of Messiah's Millennial Reign. As the result of what happens here at this remote mountain, the world will never be the same. *We* will never be the same. Our way of looking at ourselves, at other people, at situations, and especially at the Creator Himself, will never be the same. I call this entire season '*Messiah's Magical Mystery Tour*'. This Great Season of Downloads from Heaven will take us all the way through Numbers 10. I see it as consisting of twelve separate components:

1. ***the Great Betrothal Narrative*** [Exodus 19:1 – 20:20];
2. ***'the Mish'patim Discourse'*** [Exodus 20:21 – 23:33];
3. ***the Heavenly Courts Narrative*** [Exodus 24:1-14];
4. ***'the Mish'kan Discourse'*** [Exodus 24:15 – 31:18];
5. ***the Golden Calf Sin Narrative*** [Exodus 32:1 – 35];
6. ***the Midot Narrative*** [Exodus 33:1 – 34:35];
7. ***The Mish'kan Discourse and Narrative*** [Exodus 35:1 – 40:38];
8. ***The Korbanot Discourse*** [Leviticus 1:1 – 7:38];
9. ***The Priestly Consecration Narrative*** [Leviticus 8:1 – 10:20];
10. ***The Kedusha Discourse*** [Leviticus 11:1 – 24:33];
11. ***The Land of Promise Discourse*** [Leviticus 25:1 – 27:34]; and
12. ***The Travel Preparations Narrative*** [Numbers 12:1 – 10:10]

The stunning download of Heavenly Wisdom that will flow through the Sinaitic 'Magical Mystery Tour' comprises the heart and soul of the Torah. What the Holy One releases over mankind while the Redeemed Community is encamped at this mountain is *the epicenter of*, and the *center-of-gravity for*, *all revelation*. This is 'true tone'. It is the 'gold standard' through which all other revelation – or teaching or preaching – ever introduced to the world is to be measured. All rivers of Divine Revelation in Holy Writ flow from this Magical Mystery Tour in one way or another.

During the twelve-phase guided tour of the Mind of Messiah Moshe will be

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<sup>2</sup> In Hebrew, **מִשְׁפָּטִים**.

constantly shuttling between the Cloud of the Holy One's Manifest Presence and the Camp of the Redeemed. While up on the mountain he will give ear to and *sh'ma* the Voice of the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. This is his *rest*. This is his *paradise*. This is his *bliss*. But his exploding mind can only process a limited quantity of the vast supply of Divine Energy and Wisdom at a time. So as soon as he reaches the limit of revelation that he can process at one time, he heads back down the mountain - head spinning, heart aflame – and he excitedly downloads to us the revelation that the Holy One just gave him.

### ***Introducing Us To - and Gradually Making Us Over In the Image of Messiah***

It all begins with the Holy One saying ***V'eleh ha-mishpatim*** – *And these are the appropriate restorative courses of action ... Exodus 21:1a*. What our Bridegroom-King is about to discuss with us are not 'commandments' - they are, instead, case studies - strategic hypothetical situations the Holy One wants to walk through with us one by one in order to teach us to think and behave more like He thinks and behaves - *i.e.* more like a Benevolent Creator, a Good Shepherd, a Wise King, and a Great Physician - and less like the self-obsessed serpentine creatures our ingestion of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge has corrupted us into.

It is time. It is the appointed season for us to start the long, detailed makeover process through which our King plans to conform us to Messianic image He described in the *Aseret HaDibrot* - *i.e.* the *Ten 'words' of Matan Torah*. Radical paradigm shifts are coming! *'Your Kingdom come, Your Will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven'* is happening! Situation by situation, the Creator is describing for us in great detail the way human beings are designed to think, speak, react, behave, and live in order to leave the residue of the Kingdom of Heaven on their generation and His Creation.

Think 'working all things together for good', not 'who can we blame, and how can we dehumanize and hurt them'. Think 'crafting solutions, not fretting over evildoers or stewing over and ranting about wrongs and injustices'. Think *'life must go on, and people must heal* - not 'how disgusted, offended, outraged, and mean we can think ourselves justified in being over a situation.

### ***We have So Much to Learn ... and So Far to Go***

The Holy One's actions toward us thus far – setting us free from bondage to Pharaoh, providing manna from Heaven and water from a rock, giving us victory over our enemies, and speaking words of Divine Empowerment over us about how beautiful and special we are in His eyes – have all been really cool. We loved all that stuff – even if it was a little scary. But what He is doing now - in parsha *Mishpatim* - is different.

Why is the Holy One suddenly getting so personal and specific with us? Why is He starting with the way we think and approach real life? Because His plan is to give us a radical bridal makeover. He plans to make us into a fitting helpmeet and co-regent. He plans on making us *like Him* – in every way. And He knows that if we are going to be like Him, we are going to have to start with thinking and approaching life like Him.

What the Holy One is trying to bring forth from us now requires our relationship to be very, very practical, real, and repeatable. All of a sudden, therefore, our Bridegroom-King is putting His mesmerizing 'sign-and-wonder- show' on the back burner. He is starting to talk to us in very substantive terms about how He wants us to start dealing with mundane situations of ordinary life. The romance factor is still strong, of course; but there is a whole lot more going on here than mere romance. He is training us to walk with Him, to abide in Him, and ultimately, to reign with Him. Suddenly it is not all about *being wow-ed*; now it is about *becoming One*. It is almost as if our Bridegroom doesn't think He has to impress us with great exploits anymore. It is almost as if we have entered a new, more intimate season of deepening relationship with Him. It is almost as if He is beginning to expect something more from us than ooh's, ahh's, and 'don't hurt me!' Why do you think that might be? Think about it, Beloved - we just got betrothed to Him. We just said very plainly, in front of witnesses: ***“Whatever the Holy One says, we will do!”*** See Exodus 19:8. The courtship phase is over; it is time to get down to business. It is time we found out, in real time, and in rubber-meets-the-road circumstances: did we mean what we blurted out on betrothal day in that whirlwind of idealism and emotion ... or not? Let's face it, Dear Reader - our most recent behavior under the Great Chuppah – running away like frightened children in a panic of sensual overload and emotional overwhelm<sup>3</sup> – proved to us all how totally 'not ready' we, as individuals and as a community, to be all the Holy One proclaimed us to be. We have to realize that we have committed to something we are totally unable to accomplish without a major makeover from the inside out.

### ***The Holy One's 'Learn to Think Like I Think' Life Manual***

Our Beloved is going to begin this seemingly impossible makeover process in a *very creative way* – He is going to give us a kind of *life manual*. He will lay out some rather sticky hypothetical fact situations for us to mull over, and then He will actually tell us *how He would handle such situations if He were human*. By learning how He expects US, as His 'help-meet'/Covenant Partner on Earth, to handle hypothetical situations for Him in the *real world* in *real time*, He offers us the opportunity to learn to *think, emote, approach life and human interactions*, and *bring closure to difficult situations* the way He does. The idea is not to 'earn righteousness' – or 'work' our way into some utopia-like afterlife. The idea is not

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<sup>3</sup> See Exodus 20:18-21.

to establish a relationship on the basis of proven merit. The idea is to simply walk with our Creator, think like Him, talk like Him, represent Him accurately honorably to the people with whom we interact, and become more and more like Him – and thus to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth in real-time. What does the Holy One call these explanations of *His thoughts and ways about the rubber-meets-the-road issues that arise in human life*? He calls them *Mishpatim*. Welcome to the *Mishpatim Discourse – our Covenantal ticket to tour the Mind of the Creator and the Kingdom Reign of Messiah!*

### ***Take Note: Divine Seed is Being Sown***

The *Mishpatim Discourse* is introduced by – and will be built upon and around - the literary ‘cue’ ***Vayomer Adonai el-Moshe ...*** In English this phrase is usually translated as: ‘... *and the Holy One said to Moshe ...* This is a very significant literary device used by the Writer of Torah. It is critical for all readers of Torah to know and recognize it. We all need to *familiarize ourselves with* it, learn to be *quicken*ed by it, and *become responsive to* it. If we are really going to learn to distinguish the Voice of our Divine Bridegroom from the ‘voice of another’ we must be able to catch, pick-up on, and work with this textual warning that we are about to set foot on holy ground.

The ***Vayomer Adonai el-Moshe*** introduction clues us in you see that the words we are reading are ‘red-letter Torah’ – i.e. holy words that emanate *straight from the mouth of our Divine Bridegroom*. Such words contain creative, prophetic power. Such words are *Divine ‘seed’* – in which reside Divine Energy and Abundant Life in their purest and most powerful form. When we see the “***Vayomer Adonai el-Moshe***” literary cue we can be assured that the words which follow immediately after the cue are not part of some works-based system of righteousness developed by Moshe or any other man. They are not some legal code. They are not ‘law’ at all – they are life-giving blessings spoken over earth and its inhabitants from the Divine tongue. Such words are *infallible* and *unchanging*. They are *infinite in scope and effect*. They are 100% *eternal in duration*. They are *living and active* words of the Creator of the Universe. That makes them *more powerful than any two-edged sword*.

All words we read in the text that follow the phrase “***Vayomer Adonai el-Moshe***” are special words. They are not the product of human thoughts. They are not tainted by the poison nectar of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. They come straight from the tree of life. They constitute strategically released lightning bolts of *pure wisdom from the Vast Brilliance of the Mind of the Creator of All Things*. Such words are designed for and are fully capable of *discerning the thoughts and intents of every human heart*. Like **guided missiles from Heaven**,



such words *penetrate the human psyche even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow*. They make the bitter waters of life sweet. They carry healing for all humanity's wounds. They release the antidote of *shalom* into the swirling negativity of fallen humanity's toxic soup cauldron. By beginning with ***Vayomer Adonai el-Moshe ...*** the writer of the Torah wants us to know beyond a shadow of doubt that all the *mishpatim* – *i.e.* all the instructions we will read this week as to *how the Holy One thinks*, and *how He wants us to approach various situations that involve His most beloved creation, man* – are ***Vayomer Adonai el-Moshe*** words.

### ***After All, We Are Still At Sinai***

The Holy One began the betrothal ceremony of Sinai last week by calling us all to His Chuppah with the 'great trump'. He then pronounced ten foundational aspects of the relationship He wants to establish with us - His Beloved. We all heard what He said. We just did not know how to process what we heard. The words He spoke were *not words* such as humans speak. We *saw* them – and *felt* them. As each phrase was being spoken over us something inside us *died* – *and something else inside us sprang gloriously to life*. We trembled at each syllable. The words affected our flesh like *lightning bolts*. One by one, each of them struck all 2,000,000 of our hearts, souls and minds simultaneously. We are still pulsing with the energy of each word. They are not external to us – they penetrated our cells. They are now an essential, indivisible part *of us*.

Our Divine Suitor – He whom our soul loved and most wanted to impress – had seen us *in all our ugliness*. Every sin, every weakness, every blemish on our souls, indeed, everything about us had been made naked and *laid open before His eyes*. He knew our trauma. He knew our pain. He knew our weakness. He knew what each of our rebellion-triggers were. He understood exactly what it would take to begin the healing process for each of these things. That is why He spoke. Every word was strategic. Every syllable was an analgesic. Every word was an antiseptic. Every phrase was therapeutic. Every paragraph was an anti-venom. Ten strategic pulses of healing energy issued forth from His Mouth usward. Each one flew through the atmosphere at the speed of light. Talk about *a campaign of shock and awe!* Like guided missiles strategically programmed to strike a different target in our souls, one-by-one they found their assigned targets. One-by-one they pierced all the protective bunkers we had, over the course of our lives in bondage, built around our hearts.

The experience was overwhelming. We were undone. We suddenly realized that He whom our souls loved, and whom we most wanted to love us, was *able to look right through* us and to *see us as we were*. When we realized that, even knowing full well how utterly sinful and unworthy we were, He chose to *love us anyway*,

with a love more powerful than any force we had ever experienced – well, we *just couldn't handle it*. We shrunk back in awe. Undaunted, Moshe *went on alone*. And so instead of speaking all His wonderful *mishpatim* – outlining what effect the lightning bolts would have upon us in the days, and weeks, and years ... and millennia ... to come - directly to us in our hearing, the Holy One spoke them instead to Moshe, who agreed to stand and receive them on our behalf. And so even though the great *shofar* of Heaven has now fallen silent and the Voice of the Creator know longer thunders from Heaven in our ears, the experience of *Har Sineh* is *really just beginning*. The Divine Betrothal has just *entered another phase*. It is now time for our Beloved to rebuilding our identities and world-view - from the rubble of our former lives up.

### ***Eavesdropping on the Conversation of the Bridegroom and the Bridegroom's Friend***

All week long we will eavesdrop in awe as the Holy One explains to Moshe – on behalf of us all – what the *Aseret HaDibrot* really mean, in *real life*. They are not impossible utopian dreams or *goals to shoot for*. They are prophetic and creative words of the Most High God which affect every aspect of His Creation just as much as the words ***'Light, BE!'*** They are supernatural *empowerments*. They are the spiritual DNA of who we are as new creations in Him. And they are but the preamble – the *table of contents* as it were – of our betrothal covenant.

The mountain where the revelation of what God/man relationship and man-upon-man interaction are supposed to look like in real time was first revealed may have fallen silent now. Moshe may be dead. Yeshua may have come, died, risen from the tomb, ascended into the Heavens, and poured out the *Ruach HaQodesh* upon all flesh. But the revelation that was released here at this mountain in the days of Moshe is still every bit as stunning and wonderful – and every bit as fresh, new, and necessary – as it ever was. The Words of the Holy One are eternal – and do not change. Much less do they become obsolete. As Messiah taught His Disciples:

***Do not think that I came to destroy – i.e. make obsolete or abnegate –  
the Torah or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy – i.e make obsolete/abnegate -  
but to fulfill – i.e. make full/bring to life/bring into fullness of operation and impact.  
For assuredly, I say to you, until the Heavens and the earth pass away  
not one yod nor scribal mark at the end of a Hebrew letter will by any means  
pass from the Torah until all is made full/brought into fullness of operation/built out.  
Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these mitzvot, and teaches men to do so,  
will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven,  
but whoever does and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.***

[Matthew 5:17-19]

As a bride-to-be studies the *shitre erusin* her bridegroom gives her, we are beginning to study and meditate upon - and practice living out - the beautiful

things our Bridegroom-King has spoken over and concerning us. We are trying on a new worldview. We are *learning* a new lifestyle. We are *shedding attitudes, priorities, thought patterns, patterns of speech, and behaviors* that are out of sync with our covenant. We are searching out and pressing delete on every thought, attitude, opinion, and behavior pattern that is inconsistent with the relationship with the Holy One that we now value above everything else on earth.

### ***Defining ‘Mishpatim’***

The most widely used English translation of the Bible, the *Authorized or King James Version*, translates the Hebrew word ***Mishpatim*** as “*judgments*”<sup>4</sup>. The Revised Standard and American Standard Versions both render the term “*ordinances*”. The NIV chooses the coldest and most impersonal term possible, “*laws*”. Of these poor alternatives of translation the King James’ term “*judgments*” is clearly closest to the essence of the word because it at least implies *a personal decision-making process, overseen by a compassionate, trustworthy arbiter or mediator who has no stake in the outcome and can thus be objective*. The other translations – ordinances and laws - imply an *impersonal* legislative process, not based upon relationship but solely upon the pragmatism of *what advances the agenda of government*. But as preferable as it is to “ordinances” or “laws”, the word *judgments* still does not come close to describing or interpreting the Hebrew word *mishpatim*. Let us see if we can get a Hebraic understanding of the word the Holy One dictated to Moshe so we can grasp the essence of what the Holy One is about to declare for us.

The first usage in Torah of the Hebrew word *mish'pat* [singular form of *mishpatim*] is found in Genesis 18, where the Holy One is speaking of His friend Avraham:

***... I have chosen him,  
so that he will teach his children and his household after him,  
and they will keep the way of the Holy One, to do justice and mish'pat;  
that the Holy One may bring upon Avraham that which He has spoken concerning him.***

[Genesis 18:19]

So we see that the idea of a lifestyle of *mishpatim* is a part of the covenant the Holy One made with Avraham long ago. It is not something new or different from the Avrahamic covenant at all. Digging even deeper we find that the Hebrew verb root of the word *mishpatim* is the ancient verb root *sh'fat*<sup>5</sup>. This verb is first found in Torah in Genesis 16:5, spoken by our matriarch Sarai as she was expressing her

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<sup>4</sup> Judgments are proclamations of ‘justice’. *Justice* can be understood as the fair administration of authority, rightly deciding between contestants, rightly rewarding and rightly punishing. Righteous judgments are those that fulfill legal and moral obligation and place the affected parties in as close a state of equivalency as possible and practicable.

<sup>5</sup> Shafat is *shin, peh/feh, tet*. Strong’s Hebrew word #8199, it is pronounced *shaw-fawt*’.

feelings of betrayal by her maid Hagar:

*Sarai said to Avram, "This wrong is your fault. I gave my handmaid into your bosom, and when she saw that she had conceived I was despised in her eyes. May the Holy One sh'fat between me and you."*

In this case the verb *sh'fat* means for the Holy One to *mediate between two people*, counseling them both as to who, in the Holy One's view, has walked in covenant faithfulness in connection with the matter at hand, and who has been disloyal or unfaithful to the covenant in dealing with such matter. The term *mishpatim* thus can be seen as referring to Covenant-consistent responses to all the potentially unhealthy intersections of human lives. For every 'drama' of life we can ever encounter you see the Holy One has a wise and effective plan of response already mapped out - a way to 'work all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose'.

### ***The Ancient Hebrew Pictograph***

Let's delve a little deeper into the Hebrew essence of the concept of *mishpatim*. As we know, Hebrew is a *pictorial language* built upon hieroglyphic word pictures rather than abstract concepts. The hieroglyphic word picture drawn for us by the three consonants of the verb root *sh'fat* is that of *tongues of fire (shin)* [which are the substance of the Holy One's spoken words], touching *the lips (peh)* of man causing him to act in a way that constitutes *bowing in submission to the Holy One's Kingship (tet)*<sup>6</sup>. In a Hebraic sense the verb root therefore means *speech that applies the Holy One's righteousness and essential morality for life issues affecting His covenant people*. *Sh'fat* involves applying the wisdom of the Holy One through direct verbal instructions regarding real-life conduct that is and is not consistent with the kingdom of the Holy One. It is that speech which directs the Holy One's people in how to live our day-to-day lives, and confront real, rubber-meets-the-road situations of life, in ways that are both *consistent with* and *faithful to* the covenant we have just entered into at *Mount Sinai*. The verb ends with the consonant *tet*, which pictures a *man bowing from the 'waist' in a posture of submission before a ruler or king*.

In other words the secret of the word *mishpatim* is in the interaction we have with the Holy One's words of instruction (his tongues of fire - *shin* - with which He touches our lips - *peh*). Our implementation is imperfect, but is focused on the goal, and moving in the right direction. Adding the Hebrew prefix *mem* to the verb root *sh'fat* means that the *sh'fat*-type speech is *flowing*, as part of a *living, breathing relationship with on-going communication*.

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<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew letter *tet* is written by combining a *vav bent forward at its center*, representing a man bent at the 'waist' in a posture of submission, facing a *zayin*, representing a scepter or sword such as is wielded by a ruler or king.

Hebraically the Holy One's teachings on what conduct will bring about good in the world are flowing like a fountain from His Throne. One need merely come to the fountain regularly and drink, and thereby *internalize more and more of the Holy One's mindset regarding human life-choices*. That is what *Mishpatim* means Hebraically. But that brings up another issue, namely what do the *mishpatim* announces this week have to do with the *Aseret HaDibrot* [Ten Commandments] that the Holy One announced last week?

### ***The Inextricable Connection and Unbreakable Relationship Between the Aseret HaDibrot and the Mishpatim***

Last week we were witnesses to a stunning covenant ceremony. Right before our eyes the Holy One gathered all those He had redeemed from Egypt under a Chuppah and prophetically declared over all of them - and us - ten glorious prophetic declarations. We call the ten declarations *Aseret Ha-Dibrot* – i.e. the 'Ten Words'. These were direct communications from the Holy One into the souls of millions of people. This week we will be invited to eavesdrop on something very closely connected with the ten prophetic declarations in substance - i.e. '*Mishpatim*'. These are not 'direct communications' heard by everyone. These are, instead, prophetic declarations delivered to us through Moshe as an intermediary.

The *Aseret HaDibrot* provide the outline – the *mishpatim* and *mitzvot* discourses that follow upon the heels of the *Aseret HaDibrot* provide all the text, color, and images with which the outline is filled in. When He spoke the prophetic utterances directly over all the people the Holy One *exposed a well of living water*. The outflowing of the streams of the waters of this well in all directions from the epicenter are the *Mishpatim*<sup>7</sup>. When the Holy One spoke the ten prophetic utterances directly over all the people Heaven downloaded an eternal spring of living water to earth. What the *Mishpatim* consist of are rivulets of living water flowing outward in all directions from the epicenter of that Heavenly spring.

### ***The 3-Step Process of Radical Re-creation***

The Holy One has His Redeemed Community right where He wants it – fully engaged in a multi-step process of *radical re-creation* - *by reconnecting us with, and reactivating, the eternal nish'mat chayim life-force that He breathed into Adam in Genesis 2:7*.

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<sup>7</sup> Rashi explains this relationship between the *mishpatim* of Exodus 21:1 ff and the *Aseret HaDibrot* of Exodus 20 as follows: *Whenever [the Torah] uses the term eleh [i.e. 'these are'], it means to negate what was mentioned previously. However, where [as is the case in Exodus 21:1] Torah uses the term V'eleh [i.e. 'And these are'], it means to add to what was mentioned previously*. See Rashi on Exodus 21:1. Rashi is emphasizing that the Divine declarations which are the subject of this week's Torah reading are to be considered *a natural outgrowth of the Aseret HaDibrot*.

1. Step one of the Holy One's process of radical re-creation was the transformation of the heart. This step of the process began the instant we experienced an encounter with the Holy One. Instantaneously, we received a new Heart - a heart that is *hypersensitive to*, and longs *passionately for*, the Holy One, for His words, and for His ways.

2. Step two of the process is the gradual transformation of the will, mind, and emotions that begins as we begin to see ourselves as having been engrafted into the covenants the Holy One made with Noah and Avraham. This process involves receiving a *renewed mind* - a *new worldview*, a *new will*, and a *new set of emotions* that causes us to

- yearn to *sh'ma* all the words our Betrothed Bridegroom has spoken or will speak;
- yearn to *sh'mar* [*cherish, treasure, guard, and vigilantly watch over*] the terms of His covenant; and
- yearn to *asah* [*build, mold, shape out of the raw materials of our lives*] His kingdom

3. Step three of the process is the even more gradual transformation of the redeemed's lifestyle. This new lifestyle drastically affects things like how one spends one's *time*, one's *money*, one's *influence*, one's *energy*, and one's *strength*. It is in this third stage of the radical re-creation process that our hands and feet actually start getting put to work doing concrete tasks, as our new heart and new mind propel us toward a radical new way of living and interacting both with our Covenant Partner in Heaven and with other human beings.

In connection with step three, we have to get very, very real ... and very, very physical. It can no longer be a matter of mind and heart at that stage – it must radically reshape everything we focus on, talk about, prioritize, and do.

### ***Let's Get Physical***

To activate and exercise our new Divinely imparted capacity will require much more than just *idealistic thoughts* and *gushy feelings*. The process will not be complete until *concrete actions* conceived in the mind of the Holy One but involving our hands, feet, words, giftings and assets start flowing.

The purpose of the *mishpatim* and *mitzvot* discourses of Torah is to train us in how to see things from HIS perspective and begin to think like our Covenant Partner in Heaven thinks. We are after all mere apprentices, needing to learn at the feet of the Master. We are *complete novices* at making *tikkun* [repair] for and bringing redemption to the world. We still tend to think like *slaves*. We still tend to fix our eyes on base, carnal, and temporal things. We and to be *like children, tossed to*

*and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. We tend to be driven by fleshly appetites, by sensual urges, by our easily manipulated, Fall-corrupted emotions, by narcissistic attitudes, and by woefully uninformed, self-righteous opinions that carry the stench of our fruit-of-the-tree-of-knowledge-of-good-and-evil-diseased flesh. The Holy One has some work to do, for sure. He has to tame this shrew. And so through the educational devices of *mishpatim* and *mitzvot* the Holy One sets about the task of doing just that. And it all starts with Him teaching us how to think like He does so that one day we can actually become who He wants us to be and do what He wants us to do. His *mishpatim* are the creative, empowering decrees/directions that He intends His *sh'ma*-people to apply – and follow-through on - in order to bring healing and restoration into the most difficult situations fallen man has to face.*

### ***The Twin Foundation Stones Upon Which All the Mishpatim of Torah Rest***

It may help you in this new adventure to keep in mind that the foundation stones upon which all the *mishpatim* rest is going to be one of two *mitzvot*. Every *mish'pat* is going to be based upon either the *mitzvah* of loving our Covenant Partner in Heaven with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength, OR the *mitzvah* of loving our fellow human being as ourselves. When you start operating from these two foundational cornerstones you find yourself becoming more and more aware of the fact that your words, actions, and inactions can actually both [a] grieve the Holy Spirit, and [b] *cause other creations of the Holy One great amounts of damage and suffering*.

That is a *stunning* and *sobering* realization. Simultaneously you find it increasingly painful to *see your fellow humans suffering* or even to see them *heading in a direction that you know will lead them toward suffering*. You cannot, of course, prevent everyone in your sphere of influence from experiencing pain. You cannot keep them from pursuing folly or making bad choices. You cannot over-ride their free will. Running other people's lives is neither your *right* nor your *job*. But you can approach every person and every situation in your life with the wisdom and the understanding, the counsel and the strength, the knowledge and the reverence, our Bridegroom-King longs to impart to us. We can learn to always do '*what Yeshua would do*'. How are we supposed to know *what Yeshua would do* in a given fact situation? Ah Dear Reader, that is what the study of *Mishpatim* section of Torah is all about. The *mishpatim* discourse provides us a vital insight into both the personality and essence of the Holy One our Bridegroom. As His chosen Bride-to-be we have been given these *mishpatim* to meditate on and, ultimately, to internalize. Once internalized, over time, the thoughts and ways of our Bridegroom

*change us. They renew our minds and reshape our personalities from within – in order that day-by-day and generation-by-generation we can become the community of holy ones - the kingdom of priests reflecting His glory throughout earth – that He wills us to be.*

### ***Behold a ‘New Thing’***

Up to last week’s stunning revelation of the Holy One at Sinai the Torah has consisted of *a flowing narrative*. The narrative has been one of unmatched beauty – a star-studded chronicle as it were of the interactions between the Creator of the Universe and pre-Sinaitic mankind. *Cameo-like* appearances by well-known personalities like Adam, Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya’akov, Yosef, Yehudah and the brothers, Moshe, Aharon, and Miryam have kept the action flowing fast and furious. But that was all *preparatory* to what happened last week. Our Covenant Partner in Heaven has now done a ‘new thing’ - as humans perceive it at least. The Holy One has now *appeared to and cut covenant with over 2 million people simultaneously*.

The rest of Torah is going to be about what the stunning event we read about last week is supposed to mean to the world – and how what happened on Mount Sinai approximately 50 days after the Exodus from Egypt is going to affect the way human life is to be lived on earth. Oh there will still be some narrative after this point. We have yet to deal with the *golden calf* or the *building and inauguration of the Mish’kan* [Tabernacle], much less the *four decades of ‘wilderness wandering’* yet to come. But starting right now *the center of gravity of the Torah* is going to shift dramatically away from narrative to *specific directions from the Holy One regarding what the lives of human beings the Holy One has redeemed and with whom he has cut covenant are to look like and consist of*. From now on you see most of our study will focus on what subsequent generations of mainstream Christendom have disdainfully – and I believe slanderously - labeled as ‘*the law*’.

Please *hold those stones*. Let me explain. I cannot count the number of times I have heard it shouted from mainstream Christian pulpits – we are ‘*free from the law*’. That kind of vague but emotionally charged statement is what I call an ‘*amen trigger*’. When a preacher wants to make sure his audience is awake he or she can throw out a line like that and count on a *programmed* response. Such statements *tickle the ear* and *stroke the flesh* of the uninformed. And such statements are always shouted in such an authoritative tone that no one ever even thinks about either questioning whether it is true or, for that matter, asking *what on earth such a statement really means*.

If we were to actually be *Bereans* for a change – and check out what we are being



told, I wonder what we might find. There is *one place* – ONE VERSE – in the whole of the B'rit Chadasha where Shaul of Tarsus does say something that sounds something like 'we are free from the law'. The verse is Romans 8:2. It reads as follows: ***For the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua has made me free from the law of sin and death.*** I have a very important question for you. *Is the Torah of the Holy One Really the 'Law of Sin and Death' About Which Shaul of Tarsus Taught in Romans 8:2?* Most theologians have no understanding of the Grand Redemptive Plan of the Creator – or the depth to which fallen man had perverted that Plan. They thus have no idea what the 'law' Romans 8:2 tells us we are 'free of' – which Shaul of Tarsus describes as the '*law of sin and death*'<sup>8</sup> – is. They just automatically assume, without really thinking about it, that what Shaul is referring to when he says 'the law of sin and death' must be the Sinaitic covenant. After all, that is what they were told in Seminary was '*the law*'<sup>9</sup>. Most theologians therefore never notice that the term 'law' is actually used twice by Shaul in Romans 8:2 – and that the first time it is used in that verse, it is a *freeing agent*. *The very agent of freedom from the 'law of sin and death' turns out to be something he calls 'the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua'.*

Did anyone out there besides me notice that there seem to be two very different and distinct kinds of 'laws' involved in Shaul's theology – one being very, very good [*the 'law' of the Spirit and life in Messiah Yeshua*], and one being very, very, bad [the law of sin and death]?

### ***A is Not Equal to B, And B is Not Equal to A***

Most theologians do not understand that the 'good' law – what Shaul is referring to as the '*law of the Spirit of life in Yeshua*', and the 'bad law' – what Shaul is referring to as the law of sin and death – are two totally different things. They do not realize that the 'good law' – the 'law' Shaul is referring to in Romans 8:2 as the '*law of the Spirit and life in Messiah Yeshua*' - is the Torah as the Holy One gave it to Moshe at Sinai. They do not understand that the 'bad' law - the '*law of sin and death*' from which Shaul is telling us the '*good law*' sets us free – has to be something else, and from a totally different and sinister source.

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<sup>8</sup> The 'law of sin and death' is *the Serpent's law*, not the Holy One's Divinely conceived and delivered Torah. Just as the Serpent's message to *Chava (Eve)* was a deceptive twisting and perversion of the Holy One's instructions to Adam, so the message of the Serpent's law of sin and death is *a deceptive twisting and perversion of the message of the Sinaitic covenant*.

<sup>9</sup> In reality neither the so-called "*ten commandments*" nor any *mitzvah*, *mishpat*, or *chuk* of Torah is a "law" or a "command" in the English sense of a directive regarding how people are to conduct themselves '*or else*'. The instructions for living spoken by the Holy One in connection with the Torah are not 'law', but are *creative/prophetic empowerments*. The Holy One spoke these creative/prophetic empowerments over those who entered (or will ever enter) bridal covenant with Him. They thereby become *part of the essence of every new creation*, because they are part of the essence of Messiah, in whose image each new creation is established.

Again, *please hold those stones*. Think with me now. How can the Torah, which *proceeds from the very mouth of the Holy One*, the Holy and Compassionate One, possibly be said to be either ‘*of sin*’ or ‘*of death*’? It does not even make sense. Do ‘sin’ and ‘death’ come from the Holy One? *Heaven forbid!* From whence do ‘sin’ and ‘death’ come, then? Think about it. Was it not *the Serpent’s* twisting of the Holy One’s instructions to man in the garden that introduced those things? Was it not the Serpent stirring in Chava a desire to *look longingly at*, and to *touch* and to *taste, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil* that brought about sin and death? Doesn’t it make sense that the ‘law of sin and death’ has to be something dreamed up by *the Serpent* – *instead of something given by the Holy One as a gift to His chosen covenant partner and Bride-to-Be?* I mean, to call the Torah the ‘*law of sin and death*’ would be like *calling a loving Bride and Bridegroom’s wedding vows the ‘law of adultery and divorce’*. So no - the ‘*law of sin and death*’ *Shaul is talking about in Romans 8:2* can not be the Holy One’s Torah.

But wait ... if the ‘*law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua*’ is the Torah of the Holy One - what then is the ‘*law of sin and death*’? Ah, now we are making progress. And here is the only logical answer. Just as the Serpent twisted the words and meaning of the Holy One’s instructions to Adam in the garden, even so has he twisted the words and meaning of the Holy One’s instructions to His redeemed kingdom of priests – His chosen ambassadors to the nations – at Sinai. The ‘*law of sin and death*’ then has to be *the Serpent’s twisted interpretation of the Holy One’s Torah*. Just as the Serpent cleverly misinterpreted to Chava the good and holy and life-enhancing instructions the Holy One gave to Adam in the garden, and thereby tricked Chava into seeing the words of the Holy One cynically instead of as the nurturing, freeing and wonderfully creative force they were, even so have the agents of the Serpent cleverly misinterpreted to the world the good and holy and life-enhancing instructions the Holy One gave to the Redeemed Community at Sinai, and have thereby tricked most people in the world into seeing the words of the Holy One at Sinai cynically instead of as the nurturing, freeing and wonderfully creative force they are.

The ‘*law of sin and death*’ is not Torah. It is *the Serpent’s perverse misinterpretation of the Torah*. It was the Serpent’s false, perverse misrepresentation of Torah, not the Torah itself, from which Messiah came to set us free<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless for centuries the ecclesiastical authority of the religion called Christianity has by and large chosen to view Exodus 21 through the end of

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<sup>10</sup> If He came to set us free from the Teaching/Instruction of YHVH, the kingdom of Heaven is the ultimate example of a *House Divided*. May it never be.

Deuteronomy as some kind of ‘failed experiment’ – a tragic ‘blunder’ of God in trusting the Hebrew people to be His representatives on earth. Such theologies teach that the ‘new covenant’ we have in Messiah contradicts, renders obsolete, and sweeps away completely such things as the *7<sup>th</sup> Day Sabbath*, the *Leviticus 23 Feasts*, the distinctions the Holy One has drawn between things that are ‘holy’ and things that are ‘profane, and between things that are ‘clean’ and things that are ‘unclean’ - as well as basically everything else in the Sinaitic covenant - including the *Aseret ha-dibrot* and the *mish’patim*.

### ***Are the Sinaitic Protocols Really a ‘Failed Experiment’?***

Institutional Christian theologians would it seems rather portray the Holy One as *fallible* and *capable of incredible blunders* like the ill-fated ‘law’ than consider even the possibility that the covenant God made with Avraham and his natural descendants might just possibly endure forever like He said it would<sup>11</sup>, and that what they choose to characterize as ‘the law’ is actually:

- a tree of life to those who embrace her.* Proverbs 3:18
- the delight and constant meditation of a man who is blessed.* Psalm 1:2
- perfect, restoring the soul.* Psalm 19:7
- sure, making wise the simple.* Psalm 19:7
- right, rejoicing the heart.* Psalm 19:8
- pure, enlightening the eyes.* Psalm 19:8
- true, and righteous altogether.* Psalm 19:9
- More to be desired are they than gold, yes, than much fine gold.* Psalm 19:10; Psalm 119:72
- Sweeter also than honey and the extract of the honeycomb.* Psalm 19:10
- the Truth.* Psalm 119:142
- Holy, just and good.* Romans 7:12
- of God.* Romans 7:25
- good, if a man use it lawfully.* I Timothy 1:8
- perfect.* James 1:25
- of liberty.* James 1:25, 2:12

### ***The Fork in the Road***

Ten general principles of living – the *Aseret HaDibrot* of Exodus 20 - are acceptable to most people (probably because they are general enough to be interpreted just about any way one wants). But the *mitzvot*, *mishpatim*, and *chukim* the Holy One speaks over His Bride from here on out in Torah deal with *everyday situations* – things like business, home life, calendaring, what foods we are and are not to eat, all our interpersonal relations, and just about all aspects of being a part

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<sup>11</sup> Psalm 119:89, 111, 144.

of the species known as “man”. A covenant which sets forth specific instructions on *intimate details of every day life* is more than many people are willing to deal with. So they use vague, emotionally charged but totally misunderstood terms like “freedom from the law” and “living by the Spirit” to justify throwing out whole chapters (indeed whole books) of the Holy One’s Bible.

I believe that if you go on – if you proceed at this point in the study of Torah - you will never be able look at or define “living by the Spirit” the same again. Because, you see, Torah is about to tell you that living *by the Spirit* means living according to the Holy One’s *Mitzvot* and *Mishpatim*. How can that be? Because it was “the Spirit” Who wrote the *Mitzvot* and *Mishpatim* to begin with, and Who caused them to be recorded and preserved as a guide for us. Torah is about to tell us that ‘*living by the Spirit*’ and ‘*living by the Torah*’ – are ONE AND THE SAME – TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN!

### ***Make Up Your Mind***

If therefore you want to hold on to the popular theology that Yeshua – or at least ‘Paul’ the apostle - abolished everything in the “books of the law” and replaced everything prior to ... well, something somewhere in the ‘New Testament’<sup>12</sup>, with a ‘*ye shall pray a certain prayer that Scripture nowhere tells you to pray, and join, attend, and pay a tithe of your income to a local church that Scripture nowhere tells you to have any association with, you probably will not want to go any further with this particular series of studies. If you want to keep reading the Torah with the mindset that the ‘books of the law’ consisted of a plan of salvation that was ‘doomed to failure’, you will just start to see the Holy One as a colossal failure - if not a veritable dunce – for spending so many chapters – indeed whole books – handing down – dare I say it – that silly ‘law’.*

If on the other hand you acknowledge the Holy One’s innate goodness .... If you know that He created all men (including *you*), and if you have experienced His genuine, unfailing love for and covenant commitment to His people (including *you*) .... If you believe with all your heart that He who designed man (including *you*)

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<sup>12</sup> Denominations of Christendom differ greatly in what they hold up as the ‘great event’ that supposedly spelled the end of the ‘age of the law’. Some say the ‘big shift’ away from Torah occurred at the birth of ‘Jesus’. Others say it occurred upon the appearance of John the Baptist. Still others say it was the first miracle at Cana. Others say the Sermon on the Mount (contrary to the Master’s direct testimony). Others point to the crucifixion, or to the resurrection, or to the ascension, or to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, or to the death of the last apostle, or to the canonization of the New Testament. In all these positions however the presupposition is that the Torah – the words of life-instruction and empowerment the Holy One spoke over the people He chose to carry forward His Great Plan of Redemption was an embarrassing mistake, a colossal failure if not a form of cruelty of which the Creator had to repent,, and has now been replaced by some form of ‘do whatever you feel the Spirit is telling you to do and call it the will of God’.

knows best what will bring happiness and fruitfulness to man (including you), and make life meaningful for man .... If you know and appreciate these things, then you will see the *Mishpatim* we will be reading this week as the *wonderful and beautiful gifts of love* that they are. You will then, with great joy, carefully and meticulously “unwrap” each such gift, freeing it from its “wrapping paper”. You will lovingly hold each such gift of the Holy One next to your heart, will slowly and thoroughly inspect each one, and will marvel at the beauty, the craftsmanship, the artistry of the gift and of the Giver. And you will “wear” each such gift joyfully and yet reverently, because each represents a “mark”, a “promise ring”, a “letter jacket”, so to speak, of the one you love.

*But ... if you do not know Him well enough to accept His innate goodness ... If you do not see Him as the one who created you, designed you, planned you, and knows you better than anyone .... If you do not believe He, better than anyone (including you) knows what will make you happy and fruitful, and will make your life meaningful .... If you have not truly entered into lifelong, indeed eternal, covenant with Him, accepting Him as master of your life, entrusting your destiny into His hands .... If that is your plight, *then* you will take one quick look at the *Mishpatim* package the Holy One is having delivered to you this week, will imagine you hear a “ticking” noise, will push the gift away as fast as you can, and will write “*wrong address - return to sender*” in bright red letters across the top. And you will say “That was for someone else”. And, alas, *it will be*.*

Oh yes, Dear Reader, one more thing. The gift being delivered this week really is ticking. But it’s *not a bomb*. The ticking sound you hear is *the beating of Your Bridegroom’s heart*.

### ***A Mishpatim Travelogue***

*Mishpatim* is one of the longest parshot of Torah. It contains 53 separate ‘life instructions’ - 23 of which are framed as positive directives and 30 of which are framed as negative injunctions. These *life instructions* explaining *how the Holy One thinks* cover a wide range of diverse subjects. The broad range of topics is of course intentional. The fact that some of these topics appear to be *completely theoretical* is also intentional. The point is that the Holy One has thoughts and ways for His Bride to be to learn with regard to virtually every aspect of - and every situation which could possibly come up in the course of - life on earth.

The Holy One is saying the equivalent of ‘*now, My Sister, My Bride - if you are ever faced with this situation, or anything remotely similar to it, I want you to know in advance how I think about such things, and what My priorities are, and how I would deal with it if I were walking in your shoes.*’ Put simply you see, the

*mishpatim* of Torah are nothing more nor less than *what Messiah will do when He sets up His Throne in Jerusalem and begins His reign upon the earth*. Do not be surprised therefore if in the course of meditating on, speaking about, teaching one's children, and asking the Holy One [or Moshe] an endless barrage 'but what if ...' questions<sup>13</sup> seeking further clarification and understanding of the Holy One's *mishpatim* you find your mind renewed and your worldview changed. That is the sheer creative and prophetic power that resides in and radiates from every word the Holy One speaks.

As the *Mishpatim* discourse draws toward its conclusion the Holy One will tell us what He, as the stronger partner in the covenant we have just entered into, is going to do *for us*. He promises to *lead us into Eretz Yisrael*, to *safeguard our journey*, to *ensure the demise of our enemies*, and to *guarantee our safety in the land* – if/when we *sh'ma* His Voice, *sh'mar* the Torah and *asah* His *mishpatim* and *mitzvot*.

The covenant the Holy One has made with the Redeemed Community and its progeny will then be confirmed and solemnized by the sprinkling of blood, making it a blood covenant, binding forever. And the parsha of Conforming Us to His Image then concludes with Moshe preparing to ascend Mt. Sinai to receive, and bring back to the Redeemed Community, the full revelation of Torah in a written form.

### ***A Brief Look At Haftarah Mishpatim***

Jeremiah 34:8-22; 33:25-26

This week's haftarah is drawn from the writings of ha-navi *Yirmayahu* [the prophet Jeremiah]. As we have learned before in these studies *Yirmayahu* was a *kohen* [Aharonic priest] from the village of Anatot, in the tribal allotment of Binyamin. He prophesied in the period between c. 626 BCE and c. 585 BCE. His prophetic announcements primarily warned of the upcoming Babylonian captivity of Y'hudah [the Southern Kingdom], but continued through that event and into its immediate aftermath. During the fatal siege of the cities surrounding Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, as Nebuchadnezzar's army was closing in, the Holy One told *Yirmayahu* to go to Y'hudah's king, *Tzidkiyahu* [Zedekiah] and inform him: ***I am about to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will burn it down ... and you will go to Babylon.*** Jeremiah 34:2-3. In response to this frightening word

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<sup>13</sup> By the phrase 'but what if ... questions', the author means questions that change the given fact situation slightly, testing the boundaries of a *mish'pat*. For example, the Holy One has said in Exodus 21:2 ***If you acquire a Hebrew servant, he shall serve for six years, but in the seventh year, he is to be set free.*** A *but what if ... question* might be 'But, Holy One, *what if one of the six years the servant was supposed to be working for his master, he refused to work or ran away?*' In other words, *is the most important factor in regard to release the passage of six chronological years, or is it the completion of six years of labor?*

*Tzidkiyahu* had all the nobles of the land covenant with him that they would proclaim a *yovel* [jubilee] of Hebrew slaves. Everyone was to ‘free his Hebrew slaves, both male and female; no one was to hold a fellow Jew in bondage.’” **Jeremiah 34:9**. Since the attack of Nebuchadnezzar was seen as a punishment for failing to follow Torah’s instructions concerning caring for the poor and observing the *shabbatot* [Sabbaths] of the Holy One, this was apparently conceived of as a way to make amends, and stave off judgment. When Nebuchadnezzar tarried in his attack on Jerusalem, however, the noblemen of Yehudah *reneged on their covenant*. The slaves that they had set free, they forced back into slavery. And that Beloved was the ‘last straw’, so to speak, for the Holy One. He declared:

*... you turned and profaned my name,  
and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid,  
whom you had let go free at their pleasure, to return;  
and you brought them into subjection, to be to you for servants and for handmaids.*

*Therefore thus says the Holy One: you have not sh’ma-ed me,  
to proclaim liberty, every man to his brother, and every man to his neighbor:  
behold, I proclaim to you a liberty, says the Holy One,  
to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine;  
and I will make you to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the eretz.*

It is an unwritten rule of the sages that a haftarah cannot end on a note of judgment [*mish’pat*]. So to conclude the haftarah we add on to the end two verses from chapter 33, which promise a future restoration. The Holy One says:

*If [but only if] my covenant of day and night fails,  
if [but only if] I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and eretz;  
then I might also cast away the seed of Ya`akov,  
and of David my servant,  
so that his seed would cease to rule over the seed of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya`akov!  
But no! I will cause their captivity to return, and I will have mercy on them.*

[Jeremiah 33:25-26]

In His ‘wrath’ - *i.e.* a positive, constructive, ‘common good’ focused Divine attribute that bears no resemblance whatever like the anger or offense of a fallen human being -, the Holy One always remembers *mercy*. And because of the Covenant, for the Holy One’s People *mercy always ultimately triumphs over judgment*.

### ***The B’rit Chadasha Readings Corresponding to Mishpatim***

II Corinthians 5:9 - 6:20

It is believed that Shaul of Tarsus wrote both First and Second Corinthians in the year 55 C.E. It is believed that Shaul wrote the first letter in the Spring, during the days of ‘*Counting the Omer*’ [i.e. the period between *Pesach* and *Shavuot*]. It is believed that he then wrote the second letter in the Fall [i.e. during or around the ‘High Holy Days’] as a ‘follow-up’ to the first letter. The second letter – from which our B’rit

Chadasha reading for parsha *Mishpatim* is taken - consists largely of an ‘apologetic’ of Shaul’s ministry which Shaul wrote in response to those in Corinth who attacked his character and his calling after his first letter was circulated. In the fifth and sixth chapters of II Corinthians Shaul spells out for us what he sees as the proper response of followers of Messiah Yeshua to personal attacks against them. He begins by reminding us that we must keep personal attacks *in proper perspective*. In the great scheme of things it does not matter what other people say about us or of what they accuse us. The real issue with which we need to be concerned is what *Messiah* says about us. As Shaul puts it:

*Therefore also we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.  
For we must all be revealed before the judgment seat [place of mish’pat] of Messiah;  
that each one may receive the things in the body,  
according to what he has done, whether good [tov] or bad [ra].*  
[II Corinthians 5:9-10]

When it gets right down to it Messiah is the only judge [Hebrew, *sh’fet*] that matters. And He knows whether what we do is *tov* – and will bear fruit – or is *ra* – and will be burned up in the fire of His judgment.

*Therefore if anyone is in Messiah, he is a **new creation**. The old things have passed away.  
Behold, **all things have become new**.*

Shaul will then do what for many is a shocking thing. He will define the ‘newness’ of our lives in Messiah Yeshua in light of – of all things – the clean/unclean distinctions laid out by the Holy One in the *Torah*!

*Even as the Holy One said, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them;  
and I will be their God, and they will be my people."  
Therefore, "'Come out from among them, and be separate,' says the Holy One,  
'Touch no unclean thing. I will receive you. I will be to you a Father.  
You will be to me sons and daughters,' says the Holy One Almighty."*

It is of course very interesting that Shaul - who Christian theologians insist did away with the ‘clean/unclean’ distinction as well as the rest of the *Torah* – would quote in connection with his description of the ‘new creation’ lifestyle we are to have as sons and daughters of the Holy One this passage – this passage in which the Holy One passionately urges His people to ‘touch no unclean [Hebrew, *tamei*] thing’.

Shaul knew very well, you see, what theologians have refused to acknowledge – that *Yeshua never intended to – and did not - do away with the clean/unclean distinction set forth in Torah*. Shaul knew that part of the new creation lifestyle of sons and daughters of the Holy One has always involved, and will always involve, ‘touching not the unclean thing’ – i.e. knowing, respecting, and observing *Torah*’s instructions about what is clean [Hebrew, *tahor*] and what is unclean [Hebrew, *tamei*].

Shaul will conclude the thought in II Corinthians 7:1, where he will say:



*Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved,  
let us cleanse ourselves [i.e. make ourselves **tahor** (clean)] from  
all defilement of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Holy One.*

Shaul says we should cleanse ourselves of defilement of the flesh as well as defilement of the spirit? What on earth could he mean by ‘defilement of the flesh’ besides what Torah says defilement of the flesh consists of?

If you do not believe Torah for its own sake, Dear Reader, at least believe Shaul of Tarsus. Torah is alive and well – and just as much a part of the lifestyle of those the Holy One has redeemed as it was when the refugees from Egypt received it on Mount Sinai. The *mitzvot*, *mishpatim*, and *chukim* of Torah were never designed to constitute a ‘way of salvation’, a way to justify oneself, or a way to earn the Holy One’s favor. They are designed to be *the lifestyle of people who are already redeemed*.

*May you know and experience the fullness of each of the Holy One’s indescribable gifts,*

***The Rabbi’s son***

***Amidah Petition for This Week:***

*L’Hodot: The Prayer of Thanksgiving*

***V’al kulom***

*For all/everything*

***Yisborach v’yitromam shemeicha***

*may Your Name be continually blessed and exalted;*

***malkeinu tamid l’olam va’ed***

*You are our King, now and forever, world without end.*

***V’chol ha-chayim yodeicha - Selah!***

*May all living creatures give thanks to You -- Selah!*

***V’ihaleilu et shemeicha b’emet***

*and in truth praise You always*

***Ho-El y’shuahteinu v’ezroteinu - Selah***

*O God, our salvation and our help forever – Selah!*

***Baruch Atah Adonai Ha-Tov shemeicha***

*Blessed are You, O Holy One; Your very Name/Presence radiates goodness;*

***v’lecha naeh l’hodot***

*And to give thanks to You is just and fitting!*