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From Revelation to Responsibility: Parshat Mishpatim as a Call to Action

Parshat Mishpatim opens with a quiet word that is easy to miss: “*Ve’eleh hamishpatim asher tasim lifneihem*”— “And these are the laws that you shall place before them.” After the thunder, lightning, shofar blasts, and earth-shattering revelation of Sinai, the Torah shifts abruptly into legal detail. Oxen that gore. Property damage. Slavery. Loans. Court systems. At first glance, it feels almost anticlimactic.

But Mishpatim is not a descent from inspiration. It is the point.

We love moments of spiritual intensity — the awe, the uplift, the feeling that something big just happened. But Torah does not measure spirituality by how moved we feel. It measures it by what we do next. Mishpatim is the Torah’s insistence that revelation must translate into responsibility.

Every experience we have in life is tailor-made for us. If I saw it, heard it, or lived it, then it was meant for me. Otherwise, it wouldn’t have crossed my path. The question Torah keeps asking is: what are you doing with that?

Am Yisrael has just experienced the most overwhelming revelation in human history at Har Sinai. G-d spoke. The nation heard. So

what’s their call to action?

Not meditation. Not poetry. Not lingering at the mountain.

Mishpatim.

The laws that govern how we treat workers, strangers, the vulnerable, our neighbors, and our enemies. The Torah’s answer to Sinai is not “feel holy,” but “act holy.”

The first law in the parsha sets the tone: the laws of the *eved ivri*, the Jewish servant. Freedom has barely been tasted, and the Torah already insists that power be limited, dignity preserved, and human beings never be reduced to property. A nation freshly redeemed from slavery is told: your suffering obligates you. What you endured now defines how you must behave.

Again and again, Mishpatim grounds lofty ideals in daily behavior. Justice is not theoretical; it’s procedural. Compassion is not emotional; it’s structural. Faith in G-d is tested not in moments of ecstasy but in how honestly you handle money, how carefully you speak, how responsibly you resolve conflict.

This is where inspiration is either honored or wasted.

It’s easy to be moved by a powerful shiur, a meaningful Shabbat, a life-altering event. Much harder is to ask: What changed because

of it? Did I speak differently afterward? Treat people differently? Make different choices?

Torah assumes that inspiration without action is incomplete — even dangerous. It creates the illusion of growth without the substance of it. Mishpatim refuses to allow Sinai to remain a spiritual high with no practical consequences.

The haftorah sharpens this message painfully.

In Yirmiyahu chapter 34, the prophet rebukes the people of Jerusalem for freeing their Jewish slaves — and then taking them back. Under pressure, they did the right thing. They followed the law. They were inspired... briefly. But when it became inconvenient, they reversed course.

G-d's response is chilling. You proclaimed freedom with your mouths, but not with your lives. So I will proclaim a different kind of "freedom" — freedom for the sword, the famine, and the plague.

The haftorah exposes a truth Mishpatim already taught: doing the right thing temporarily is not the same as being transformed by it. A moment of moral clarity that doesn't endure is not redemption — it's performance.

Inspiration is meant to bind us to action, not excuse us from it.

This reframes how we understand our own lives. If I encountered an idea that moved me, a moment that shook me, a truth that unsettled me — it wasn't random. It was given to me because I am capable of responding to it. If I do nothing, it's not neutral. It's a missed obligation.

At our Binyamin's funeral, I had asked people to take upon themselves a mitzvah or act of kindness to help bring about the complete Redemption. Following the "revelation" of October 7th, our nation was charged. Shaken. Awake. Ready to take on the world. And I

was afraid of losing that moment. At the shiva house and months following, there was a notebook with a sign: write down your personal Kabbalah. People filled that notebook. And another. And then Google Docs. And messages sent directly to me.

Large and small commitments poured in. Learning one mishna a day, saying Shema at night, dressing more modestly, learning the laws of Shmirat haLashon, only listening to Jewish music, davening maariv, saying Modeh Ani, bentsching from a bentcher, working intentionally on parent-child relationships, and dozens and dozens more.

Still now, over two years later, I still receive messages from people saying that they are still keeping to their commitments. More than a few people made Aliyah after being inspired by Binyamin and his passion for the Land of Israel. That is Mishpatim in real time: revelation becoming responsibility and inspiration becoming action.

Judaism does not ask us to live on spiritual mountaintops. It asks us to bring Sinai into the courtroom, the workplace, the kitchen, the WhatsApp message, the way we speak and the way we choose.

So the next time we feel inspired — by Torah, by an experience, by something we "happened" to see or hear — Mishpatim whispers its challenge: That wasn't random. That wasn't for nothing. What will you do with it?

Because in Torah, the truest measure of inspiration is not how high it lifts us — but how deeply it changes the way we live. ■

The **Airleys** have built **Beit Binyamin**, a retreat center in Tzfat for those directly affected by the war. Soldiers, Zaka members, security forces, bereaved families and widows can come for respite, relaxation and rejuvenation. For more information and to donate, visit Beitbinyamin.org