



# Mishpatim

Exodus 21:1-24:18

Ceaser

# Mishpatim

Exodus 21:1-24:18

- Following the revelation at Sinai, G-d legislates a series of laws for the people of Israel. These include the laws of the indentured servant; the penalties for murder, kidnapping, assault, and theft; civil laws pertaining to redress of damages, the granting of loans, and the responsibilities of the "Four Guardians"; and the rules governing the conduct of justice by courts of law.
- Also included are laws warning against mistreatment of foreigners; the observance of the seasonal festivals, and the agricultural gifts that are to be brought to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem; the prohibition against cooking meat with milk; and the mitzvah of prayer. Altogether, the Parshah of Mishpatim contains fifty-three mitzvot -- 23 imperative commandments and 30 prohibitions.
- G-d promises to bring the people of Israel to the Holy Land, and warns them against assuming the pagan ways of its current inhabitants.
- The people of Israel proclaim, "We will do and we will hear all that G-d commands us." Leaving Aaron and Hur in charge in the Israelite camp, Moses ascends Mount Sinai and remains there for forty days and forty nights to receive the Torah from G-d.

# Mishpatim

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- Following the revelation at Sinai, when the people of Israel committed themselves to upholding the Torah and received the Ten Commandments, G-d proceeds to communicate to Moses the rest of the mitzvot ("commandments") of the Torah. The greater part of the *parshah* of *Mishpatim* consists of this communication, containing 53 of the 613 mitzvot.
- *And these are the laws (mishpatim) which you shall set before them...*
- If you purchase a Hebrew slave, our *parshah* goes on to instruct, he should work for you no longer than six years; on the seventh, he must be set free. (The Hebrew "slave" would thus be more accurately termed an indentured servant.) If the servant does not wish to go free but prefers to remain in the service of his master,
- *His master shall bring him to the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost. His master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall serve him forever.*
- (But even this "forever" is interpreted by the Sages as extending only until the Jubilee, which occurs every 50th year. At this time all Hebrew slaves go free, regardless of their desire to remain indentured.)
- The indenture of a slave girl carries additional limitations. She can be kept in service only until she attains maturity, and she may be freed earlier than that, if her master wishes to marry her himself or marry her to his son. (Here the Torah also makes mention of the three basic duties of a husband towards his wife: food, clothing, and conjugal rights.) The slave girl, or her family, also retain the option of "redeeming" her by remitting to her master the value of the remaining years of her indenture (the Hebrew slave also has this right).
- Non-Jewish slaves do not have limits on their periods of indenture, but a series of laws protect them against abuse. A slave that has an eye or tooth knocked out by his master must be set free, and a master who causes the death of a slave is liable for the death penalty himself.

**And these are the laws which you shall set before them (Exodus 21:1) The phrase "and these" (ve'eileh) implies that they are a continuation of what is written before. This is to teach us that just as the laws written above (the Ten Commandments) are from Sinai, these too are from Sinai.**

**(Mechilta; Rashi)**

**If you purchase a Hebrew slave... (21:2)**

**There is nothing more difficult for a person than to be subjugated to another person. This is why the parshah begins with the laws on how the Hebrew slave is to be treated.**

**(Ibn Ezra)**

**The law that the Hebrew slave must be set free in the seventh year is reminiscent of the Exodus from Egypt referred to in the first of the Ten Commandments. As the Torah says regarding the Hebrew slave: "You shall remember that you were a slave in the Land of Egypt, and G-d redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today" (Deuteronomy 15:15). It is also reminiscent of the work of creation, because, like the Shabbat, the Hebrew slave gains respite from serving his master on the seventh year... All time cycles are ordained as cycles of seven -- to refer to the seven-day cycle of creation. Thus it is fitting that this mitzvah should come first in our parshah.**

**(Nachmanides)**

**His master shall bore his ear through with an awl (21:6)**

**Why the ear? The ear that heard at Mount Sinai, "For the children of Israel are My servants" (Leviticus 25:55) -- yet this person went and acquired a [human] master for himself -- that ear should be pierced.**

**(Rashi)**

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- Criminal Assault
- The penalty for premeditated murder is death. Unintentionally causing a death is penalized with exile. Kidnapping a person and selling him into slavery is a capital crime.
- Retribution is exacted also from one who assaults another person: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot; a burn for a burn, a wound for a wound, a bruise for a bruise." According to the traditional interpretation of Torah (handed down by Moses from Sinai together with the "Written Torah") these words are not to be understood in the literal sense, but as a judgment of monetary compensation that must be made by the perpetrator to the victim in five areas: (a) actual damage inflicted on the victim; (b) pain and suffering; (c) medical expenses; (d) lost workdays and productivity; (e) redress for the insult and humiliation involved.

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- Laws of Damages
- A person is also responsible for damage inflicted by his property:
- If an ox gores a man or a woman, so that they die, the ox shall be surely stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be acquitted.
- -- since he had no way of foreseeing such behavior on the part of his ox. "But if the ox was wont to gore from yesterday and the day before, and his owner had been warned, yet he had not kept him in, and it killed a man or a woman," the owner verges on forfeiting his own life, and must pay a "ransom" to the heirs of the victim.
- If an ox gores another ox fatally, the owner of the goring ox pays half the value of the killed animal; if the goring ox has a history of three past offenses, full damages must be paid.
- If a man shall dig a pit... and not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it -- the owner of the pit shall pay; he shall return money to its owner....
- If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, having allowed his beast to go forth and feed in another man's field -- of the best of his field, and of the best of his vineyard, shall he make restitution.
- If fire breaks out, and catches in thorns, so that the sheaves, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed -- he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.

***If a man did not lie in wait [to kill], but G-d caused it to come to his hand, I will appoint for you a place to which he shall flee (21:13)***

***Of what case does our verse speak [when it says that "G-d caused it to come to his hand"]? Of the case of two persons who had killed, one in error and another with intent, there being witnesses in neither case [so that neither receives his prescribed penalty from a human court]. G-d appoints them both to meet at the same inn; he who had killed with intent sits under the ladder, and he who had killed in error comes down the ladder, falls, and kills him [in the presence of witnesses]. Thus, the one who had killed with intent is slain, while the one who had killed in error is exiled.***

***(Talmud, Makkot 10b)***

***If men strive together, and one strikes another with a stone or with his fist... (21:18)***

***A person is always liable [for damage he causes], whether inadvertently or willfully, whether awake or asleep: if he blinded his neighbor's eye or broke his articles, full compensation must be made.***

***(Talmud, Bava Kamma 26a)***

***He shall pay for the loss of his work, and he shall fully heal him (21:19)***

***From here is derived that a physician is allowed to heal [and we do not say that since G-d afflicted the person, it is forbidden to cure him].***

***(Talmud, Bava Kamma 85a)***

***If an ox gores a man or a woman, so that they die, the ox shall be surely stoned (21:28)  
Just like a person can be sentenced to death only by a sanhedrin (tribunal) of 23 judges,  
so an ox that kills can be condemned to death only by a sanhedrin of twenty-three.  
(Mechilta D'Rashbi)***

***He shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep (21:37)***

***Said Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai: G-d is considerate of a person's dignity. For an ox,  
which the thief leads on foot and is not thereby degraded, he pays fivefold. For a  
sheep, which the thief had to carry on his shoulders, he pays only four times its  
value, since he was degraded by it.***

***Said Rabbi Meir: See how valuable work is. For an ox, whose theft deprived the owner of  
its labor, the thief pays fivefold. For the theft of a sheep, which caused no such loss  
of labor, he pays but four times.***

***(Mechilta; Rashi)***

***If a man... allowed his beast to go forth and feed in another man's field (22:4)***

***Goring is not normal behavior for an ox, so the owner pays only half-damages, unless this  
ox has gored three times in the past, in which case he pays full damages. On the  
other hand, eating and trampling is common behavior for an ox, which the owner  
should have anticipated; so for damages thus inflicted, he must pay full  
compensation.***

***(Talmud, Bava Kamma 2a ff.)***

***Of the best of his field... shall he make restitution (22:4)***

***This is to teach us that if he wishes to pay with land for damages he or his animal caused,  
he must pay with prime land. (A debtor, on the other hand, can settle his debt with  
land of average quality.)***

***(Talmud, Bava Kamma 7a)***



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- Laws of Theft
- If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it -- he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep...
- If the theft be at all found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or donkey, or sheep -- he shall restore double.
- But the Torah also legislates laws protecting the life of the thief. What if a person kills an intruder breaking into his home? Is he liable for murder, or is it an act of self-defense? As a rule, the homeowner is justified in seeing his life threatened. But if the circumstances were such that it was clear that the thief in no way posed a threat to the homeowner's life ("if the sun shone upon him," as the verse puts it), the thief's life enjoys the full protection of the law, like any other person.

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- The Four Guardians
- The parshah discusses four types of circumstances in which a person is responsible for the care of another's property, and delineates the extent of responsibility of each type of "guardian."
- (a) An unpaid guardian looking after another's property purely as a favor is duty bound to care for the object, but his responsibility in case of mishap is minimal. If the object is damaged or lost as a result of outright negligence on his part, he must pay; but as long as he has provided the reasonable care to which he had obligated himself, and takes an oath to that effect, he is absolved.
- (b) A paid guardian assumes a greater degree of responsibility. He must compensate the owner in the case of avoidable damages such as loss or theft, but is absolved (by oath) from payment for unavoidable damages such as armed robbery and natural death.
- (c) A borrower is responsible to return what has been given to him intact, or make good on its value, regardless of the degree of his fault or the cause of the damage. He is absolved only if "the owner was with him" at the time of the mishap.
- (d) The parshah also mentions a fourth case in which a person is responsible for the property of his fellow -- the renter who pays for its use -- but does not specify the degree of his responsibility. (The Talmud cites two opinions on the status of the renter: Rabbi Judah rules that he is like an unpaid guardian, while Rabbi Meir is of the opinion that his obligations are identical to those of the paid guardian.)

***If a man shall deliver to his fellow money or vessels to keep (22:6)***

***There are four guardians: the unpaid guardian, the borrower, the paid guardian, and the renter. The unpaid guardian swears on everything [and is absolved]; the borrower pays for everything; and the paid guardian and the renter swear in the case of breakage, robbery, and death, and pay for loss and theft.***

***(Talmud, Bava Kamma 93a)***

***"Who is the author of this mishnah, who maintains that there are four guardians?"***

***Said Rav Nachman: "It is Rabbi Meir."***

***Said Rava to him: "Why? Does not everyone say that there are four guardians?"***

***Said Rav Nachman: "This is what I mean: who is the one who holds that a renter pays like a paid guardian? -- this is Rabbi Meir."***

***"If so, there are not four, but three, classes of guardians!"***

***Said Rav Nachman: "There are four classes of guardians, but only three sets of laws that apply to them."***

***(Talmud, Bava Kamma 93a)***

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- Rape
- A man who seduces a young, unmarried girl must pay a dowry and marry her. If her father refuses to allow the marriage, the seducer must nevertheless pay the customary dowry as a fine.
- Witchcraft is a capital offence, as are bestiality and offering sacrifices to alien gods.
- You shall neither vex a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.
- You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you at all afflict them, and they cry to Me, I will surely hear their cry; and My anger shall be inflamed...
  
- Lending Money
- When you lend money to My people, to the poor person [who is] with you, you shall not behave toward him as a creditor; you shall not impose interest upon him.
- If you at all take your fellow's garment as a pledge [for a loan], you shall deliver it to him by sundown. For that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin: in what shall he sleep? It shall come to pass, when he cries to me, that I will hear, for I am compassionate.
- It is forbidden to revile a judge, or to curse "a ruler of your people."
- All firstborn sons must be dedicated to G-d. A newborn animal must remain with its mother for at least the first seven days of its life before it is fit to be offered to G-d.
- The meat of an animal that is tereifah -- "torn" in the field by a predator -- may not be eaten, but must be "thrown to the dogs."

**When you lend money to any of My people (22:24)**

**Wherever the Torah says the word im ("if" or "when"), the implication is that we are speaking of an action that is optional, except in three instances, where the spoken action is obligatory; this is one of them. (In other words, a person is obligated to loan money to a fellow in need of a loan.)**

**(Mechilta; Rashi)**

**You shall not act toward him as a creditor (22:24)**

**Do not show yourself constantly to him... Do not press him for payment when you know that he is unable to pay.**

**(Mechilta; Rashi)**

**Neither shall you eat any meat that is torn of beasts in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs (22:30)**

**This is to teach us that G-d does not deprive any creature of its just reward. Because the dogs did not bark at the Israelites when they came out of Egypt (see Exodus 11:7), G-d said: Give them their reward.**

**(Mechilta)**

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- Judicial Procedures
- "Distance yourself from falsehood." Do not accept false testimony, collaborate with a false witness, accept a bribe (which "blinds the clear-sighted and perverts the words of the just"), or in any way unjustly influence the outcome of a trial, even to convict the most villainous criminal or to favor the most destitute pauper.
- Follow the majority opinion; do not, however, "follow a majority to do evil."
- It is forbidden to kill a person who has been acquitted by the court, or whom the court was unable to convict, regardless of how convinced you are of his guilt. In such cases, G-d says, leave justice to Me, "for I shall not exonerate the guilty."

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- Avoiding Prejudice
- Exercise your duties toward your fellow man, regardless of your feelings toward him:
- If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again.
- If you see the donkey of your enemy collapsing under its burden, and are inclined to desist from helping him, you shall surely help along with him.
- And yet again, the Torah warns:
- You shall not oppress a stranger; for you know the feelings of a stranger, since you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

***You shall not hear a false report (23:1)***

***This is also to warn against hearing a true report in a manner that results in falsehood, such as when a judge agrees to hear one litigant without the other being present.***

***(Mechilta)***

***Put not your hand with the wicked to be a corrupt witness (23:1)***

***Even to retrieve monies that are justly yours.***

***(Mechilta)***



**Follow the majority (23:2)**

**[Rabbi Eliezer and the Sages debated a point of law regarding the ritual purity of a certain type of oven.] Rabbi Eliezer declared it clean, and the Sages declared it unclean...**

**On that day, Rabbi Eliezer brought forward every imaginable argument, but they did not accept them. Said he to them: "If the law agrees with me, let this carob-tree prove it!" Thereupon the carob-tree was torn a hundred cubits out of its place. (Others say, four hundred cubits.) Said the Sages: "No proof can be brought from a carob-tree."**

**Again he said to them: "If the law agrees with me, let the stream of water prove it!" Whereupon the stream of water flowed backwards. Said the Sages: "No proof can be brought from a stream of water."**

**Said Rabbi Eliezer: "If the law agrees with me, let the walls of the study hall prove it!" Whereupon the walls inclined to fall. But Rabbi Joshua rebuked them, saying: "When scholars are engaged in a halachic dispute, what have you to interfere?" Hence they did not fall, in deference to Rabbi Joshua, nor did they resume the upright, in deference to Rabbi Eliezer; and they are still standing thus inclined.**

**Finally, Rabbi Eliezer said to them: "If the law is as I say, may it be proven from heaven!" There then issued a heavenly voice which proclaimed: "What do you want of Rabbi Eliezer? The law is as he says!"**

**Rabbi Joshua stood on his feet and said: "The Torah is not in heaven!"... We take no notice of heavenly voices, since You, G-d, have already, at Sinai, written in the Torah to follow the majority.**

**Rabbi Nathan subsequently met Elijah the Prophet and asked him: "What did G-d do at that moment?" [Elijah] replied: "He smiled and said: My children have triumphed over Me, My children have triumphed over Me."**

**(Talmud, Bava Metzia 59b)**

***If you see the donkey of your enemy collapsing under its burden, and are inclined to desist from helping him, you shall surely help along with him (23:5)***

***The Hebrew for "donkey," chamor, also means "material." Thus, this verse also instructs us as to the proper attitude toward the body and physicality:***

***"When you will see the chamor of your enemy" -- initially you will see your material self as your enemy, as something that obstructs and hinders your spiritual growth.***

***"Collapsing under its burden" -- in such a state of animosity between body and soul, that the body resists the Torah and its commandments, making them an unbearable burden for it...***

***One's first inclination may be "to desist from helping him" -- to shun the body, suppress its instincts, and deny it its wants.***

***Says the Torah: "you shall surely help along with him." Aid the material self with its "burden," by training it to recognize that the Torah is the vehicle for its own refinement and elevation.***

***(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)***

***If you see the donkey of your enemy collapsing under its burden... you shall surely help along with him (23:5)***

***If the owner of the animal went and sat down and said to him, "Since the obligation rests upon you, if you desire to unload, unload," he is exempt, because the verse says, "You shall surely help along with him." (If, however, the owner was old or infirm, one is bound to do it himself.)***

***(Talmud, Bava Metzia 32a)***

***Do not take a bribe (23:8)***

***An impoverished widow once came to the bet din (courthouse) of the great sage Rabbi Yehoshua Kutner. Weeping bitter tears, she begged him to summon to the court a man she accused of having wronged her.***

***Rabbi Yehoshua summoned the man to appear before the court, but referred the case to another rabbi, refusing to preside over it himself. "The Torah forbids the taking of bribes," he explained. "Do you think that a bribe is only a gift of money? Tears can also be a bribe that 'blinds the clear-sighted' -- especially the tears of a poor widow."***

***(Maayanah Shel Torah)***

***Do not cook a kid in its mother's milk (23:19)***

***Meat stems from the divine attribute of justice, milk from the attribute of mercy.***

***(Shaloh)***

# Mishpatim

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- The Sabbatical Year and the Three Pilgrimages
- Six years you shall sow your land, and shall gather in its fruits; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat, and what they leave, the beasts of the field shall eat...
- Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your ass may rest, and the son of your handmaid and the stranger may be refreshed...
- Three times a year you shall celebrate a festival to Me:
- You shall keep the Festival of Matzot: for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread as I have commanded you, at the appointed time of the month of springtime, for then you left Egypt...
- And the Festival of Harvest [=Shavuot], the first fruits of your labors, which you have sown in the field.
- And the Festival of Ingathering [=Sukkot], which is at the end of the year, when you have gathered in your labors out of the field.
- [These] three times in the year, all your males shall appear before the Lord G-d.
- The "legal section" of Mishpatim concludes with another four mitzvot: not to slaughter the Passover offering while leaven is in one's possession; not to leave an offering overnight; to bring the first fruits of the land to the Holy Temple, and not to "cook a kid in its mother's milk" (the prohibition against mixing meat and milk).
- Mishpatim also contains a reference to the mitzvah of prayer: "You shall serve the L-rd your G-d, and He will bless your bread and your water."

**The commentaries differ as to the timing of the events described in the closing verses (Exodus 24:1-18) of Mishpatim.**

**According to Rashi, the Torah now returns to fill us in on the events that occurred before the revelation at Sinai and the speaking of the Ten Commandments (recounted in chapters 19-20 above). Moses' summons to the top of the mountain mentioned here is that of the 4th of Sivan, two days before the Giving of the Torah. On that day he relayed to the people of Israel (as mentioned in verse 3) "the words of G-d" commanded in chapter 19 above (to fence in the mountain and to sanctify themselves in preparation for the Giving of the Torah), as well as the "laws" which they had already received in Marah; he also "wrote all the words of G-d" (v. 4) -- i.e., from the beginning of Genesis until the middle of Exodus, bringing the Torah "up to date" until the Revelation. The altar mentioned here (verses 4 and 6) was built, and the sacrifices (verses 5-8) were offered, on the 5th of Sivan, which is also the day on which the people of Israel made the famous proclamation: "We will do and we will hear" (verse 7). Then the Torah describes how they "saw the G-d of Israel" at the Giving of the Torah on the 6th of Sivan. Finally we read how, following the (general) Giving of the Torah, Moses is summoned to the top of the mountain for 40 days to receive the detailed communication from G-d (including the laws we just read in the earlier chapters of Mishpatim). This is consistent with the rule that "there is no earlier and later in Torah" -- i.e., that the Torah does not necessarily relate events in the order in which they occurred.**

**According to Nachmanides, the Torah is following chronological order. All the laws that we read in the earlier chapters of Mishpatim were communicated to Moses immediately after the Giving of the Torah on Sivan 6th -- before the events related in chapter 24, which occurred on the 7th of Sivan, the day after the Revelation. Hence, "the words of G-d" and the "laws" which Moses related to the people (v. 3), and the divine words which Moses transcribed (v. 4), are the Ten Commandments and the laws we just read in the earlier part of Mishpatim. Following that, Moses ascended the mountain for 40 days to receive the rest of the Torah.**

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- The Promise of the Land
- Behold, I send an angel before you, to guard you on the way, and to bring you to the place which I have prepared... to the [land of] the Emorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I will destroy them...
- I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate, and the wild beasts multiply against you. Little by little will I drive them out from before you, until you increase and inherit the land.
- I will set your boundaries from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the river... You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.

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- Moses on the Mountain
- In the closing verses of Mishpatim the Torah returns to the revelation at Sinai, to complete its description of G-d's giving of the Torah to the people of Israel.
- Moses builds an altar at the foot of Mount Sinai, upon which the people offer sacrifices to G-d. Moses then reads "the book of the covenant" to the people,
- and they said: "All that G-d has spoken, we will do, and we will hear."
- Moses then takes the blood of the sacrifices and sprinkles half on the altar and half on the people, as a sign of their covenant with G-d.
- They saw the G-d of Israel; and under His feet was a kind of paved work of sapphire stone, and like the very essence of heaven for purity.



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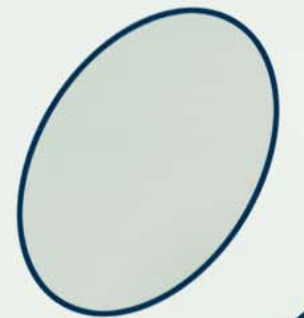
- Moses on the Mountain
- Following which,
- G-d said to Moses: "Come up to Me to the mountain, and be there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, and the Torah, and the commandments which I have written, that you may teach them."
- Moses rose up, and his servant Joshua; and Moses went up into the mount of G-d.
- To the elders he said: "Wait here for us, until we come back to you. Behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a case, let him come to them."
- Moses went up into the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain... The sight of the glory of G-d was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain before the eyes of the children of Israel.
- Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and went up onto the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

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**Fig. 10. The profile of Har Karkom covered by a cloud of sand, a frequent phenomenon that sometimes completely obscures the landscape. (Site HK 2; ISR-EA95: XVIII-34; WARA W05873).**



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**Fig. 44. A view of  
Jebel Arif el-  
Naqe at dawn.  
The profile of the  
mountain is  
visible from Har  
Karkom through  
a sea of clouds.  
(Site HK 155;  
photo ISR 83  
XXXI-28; WARA  
W05903).**

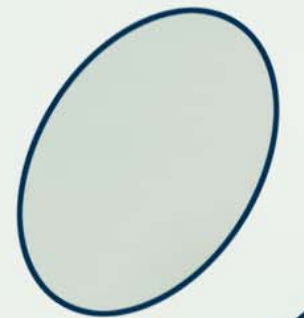


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**Fig. 14. Islamic-period structure protected by an overhanging rock. The Bedouins built such shelters to store and guard the objects they did not carry on their migrations. Some of the structures are of Roman/Byzantine origin, but most were built in the Islamic period. (Site HK 317; RR90: XXIX-28; WARA W05875).**



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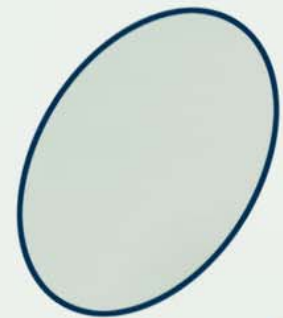
**Fig. 48. The site of the twelve standing stones at the foot of the mountain. (Site HK 52; photo ISR 84: XXXIII-22; WARA W05906).**



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**Fig. 91. Paved platform with an altar stone facing east. (Site BK 463; photo ISR 84: IL-19; WARA W05946).**



Mishpatim  
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Staff  
and a  
Snake



Mishpatim  
Exodus 21:1-24:18



The 4<sup>th</sup>  
Plague



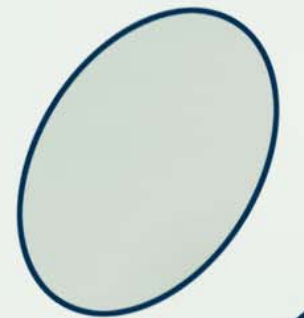


# Mishpatim

Exodus 21:1-24:18



**Fig. 31. Along the access trail, a stone is engraved with two worshipping figures beneath an abstract sign. (Site HK 3b; photo ISR 82 C-16; WARA W05892).**



# Mishpatim

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## The Ancient Hebrew Letters (Paleo-Hebrew Alphabet)



**Aleph**



**Beyt**



**Gam**  
(Gimel)



**Dal**  
(Dalet)



**Hey**



**Waw**  
(Vav)



**Zan**



**Hhets**



**Thet**



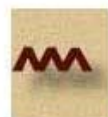
**Yad**



**Kaph**



**Lam**  
(Lamed)



**Mah**  
(Mem)



**Nun**



**Sin**  
(Samehh)



**Ahn**  
(Ayin)



**Pey**



**Tsad**  
(Tsadey)



**Quph**



**Resh**



**Shin**



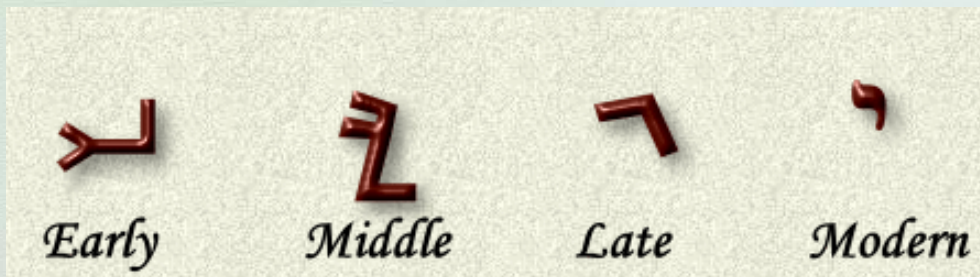
**Taw**



**Ghah**  
(Ayin)

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The Early Semitic pictograph of this letter is , an arm and hand. The meaning of this letter is work, make and throw, the functions of the hand. The Modern Hebrew name “yud” is a derivative of the two letter word “yad” meaning "hand", the original name for the letter.


The ancient and modern pronunciation of this letter is a "y". In Ancient Hebrew this letter also doubled as a vowel with an “i” sound. The Greek language adopted this letter as the “iota”, carrying over the “i” sound.




The ancient pictograph , was turned 90 degrees to become the in the Middle Semitic script. The letter continued to evolve into the simpler form in the Late Semitic script. The Middle Semitic form became the Greek and Roman I. The Late Semitic form became the Modern Hebrew י.

# Mishpatim

Exodus 21:1-24:18






The original pictograph used in the Early Semitic script is a , a picture of a tent peg. The tent pegs were made of wood and may have been Y-shaped to prevent the rope from slipping off.

The Modern Hebrew name for this letter is “vav”, a word meaning “peg” or “hook”. This letter is used in Modern Hebrew as a consonant with a “v” sound and as a vowel. If the Modern Hebrew letter appears as , it is the vowel sound “ow” and if it appears as , it is the vowel sound “uw”. When used as a vowel the ancient pronunciation was also an “ow” or “uw”. In each of the consonant/vowel letters of the Ancient Hebrew language the pronunciation of the consonant is closely related to the pronunciation of the vowel such as the letter “hey” (See above) is “h” and “eh” and the pronunciation of the letter “yud” (See below) is “y” and “iy”. For this reason, it is probable that the original pronunciation of the letter  was with a “w”. In Modern Arabic language, this letter is also pronounced with a “w”. Therefore, the original name of this letter would have been “waw” instead of “vav”.

As the pictograph indicates, this letter represents a peg or hook, which are used for securing something. The meaning of this letter is to add or secure.

This letter is frequently used as a prefix to words to mean “and” in the sense of adding things together.

The Early Semitic  evolved into the  in the Middle Semitic script. This letter then became the  of the Late Semitic script and evolved into the Modern Hebrew ו. The Middle Semitic letter was adopted by the Greeks and the Romans to be the letter F but was dropped from the Greek alphabet later. The Late Semitic form of the letter became the number 9.

# Mishpatim

Exodus 21:1-24:18



*Early*



*Middle*



*Late*



*Modern*

The original pictograph for this letter is , a man standing with his arms raised out. The Modern Hebrew and original name for this letter is “hey”. The Hebrew word “hey” means “behold”, as when looking at a great sight. This word can also mean “breath” or “sigh” as one does when looking at a great sight. The meaning of the letter is behold, look, breath, sigh and reveal or revelation from the idea of revealing a great sight by pointing it out.

The Modern Hebrew sound for this letter is “h”. Originally this letter doubled as a consonant, with an “h” sound, or as the vowel sound “eh”. When the Greeks adopted this letter it became the “epsilon” with an “eh” sound.

This letter is commonly used as a prefix to words to mean “the” as in “ha'arets” meaning “the land”. The use of this prefix is to reveal something of importance within the sentence.

The Early Semitic evolved into the Middle Semitic by rotating the letter 90 degrees to the left. This letter then evolved into in the late Semitic script that developed into the Modern Hebrew ה. The Middle Semitic was adopted by the Greeks and the Romans to become the E (reversed due to the direction of writing). This Middle Semitic letter also became the number 5.

# Mishpatim

## Exodus 21:1-24:18

**YHWH (יהוה YHWH, Strong's #3068):**  
Virtually all translations from Judaism and Christianity use "the LORD" for the Hebrew name of God - **יהוה**. The original pronunciation of the name can never be determined with complete accuracy but in Hebraic thought it is the meaning of a name that is more important than its pronunciation. The Hebrew **יהוה** is the verb *hawah* meaning "to exist" with the prefix *y* meaning "he." Therefore, the word **יהוה** means "he exists." **יהוה** is the one who exists every where every time.

**יהוה =**

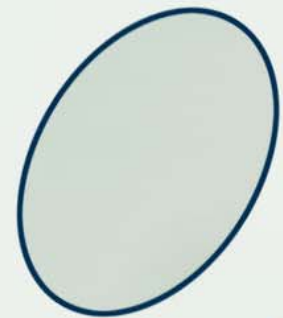
**the one who exists every  
where every time**



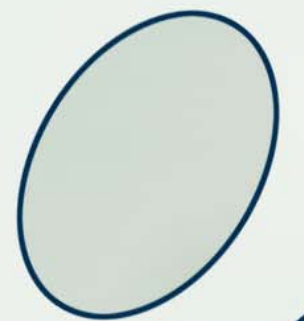
יהוה

=

יהוה



Mishpatim  
Exodus 21:1-24:18



***[Moses] took the book of the covenant, and read in the hearing of the people; and they said: "All that G-d has spoken, we will do, and we will hear" (24:7)***

***When the people of Israel gave precedence to "we will do" over "we will hear," a heavenly voice issued forth and exclaimed to them: "Who revealed to My children this secret, which is employed by the angels?" As it is written (Psalms 103:20), "Bless the L-rd His angels, those mighty in strength, who fulfill His word, who hear the voice of His word" -- first they "fulfill" and then they "hear"...***

***There was a certain Sadducee who saw Rava engrossed in his studies while the fingers of his hand were under his feet, and he ground them down, so that his fingers spurted blood. "You rash people," he exclaimed, "who gave precedence to your mouth over your ears, still persist in your rashness! First you should have listened, and if it is within your powers, accept; if not, you should not have accepted!"***

***(Talmud, Shabbat 88a)***



- **Productive Use of Time**

- *The Talmud relates that the great Sage R. Yochanan ben Zakkai wept before his death, saying: "There are two paths stretching before me, one to Gan Eden [Heaven] and one to Gehinom. I know not on which I shall be led." It goes without saying that R. Yochanan ben Zakkai was concerned as to whether he had attained a sufficient level of holiness to enter Gan Eden. Why did he voice his apprehension only on his deathbed? His spiritual status should have been an ongoing concern.*
- *Every Jew is entrusted with a unique Divine mission that he is to accomplish during his lifetime. He is allotted a specific time in which to accomplish that task - not one day more and not one day less.*
- *When a Jew fails to make use of a day, an hour, or even a moment, in pursuit of his mission, he not only fails to achieve his fullest spiritual potential, but more importantly, he has failed - during those moments - to accomplish his entrusted task.*

## • **Productive Use of Time**

- *R. Yochanan ben Zakkai spent every moment of his life totally immersed in his mission, so much so that he simply did not have time to pause and contemplate his own spiritual level. It was only at the conclusion of his mission - just prior to his demise - that he was able to ponder his own status.*
- *The importance of absolute dedication to one's mission is also alluded to in the Torah portion of Mishpatim, wherein Scripture states: "You will serve G-d... No woman will miscarry or remain childless in your land; I will make you live out full lives."*
- *In spiritual terms, the above verses mean that when performed with proper intent, Divine service leads to ever greater spiritual heights - it "bears children." When, however, a person is self-satisfied in his service, it fails to produce the desired results - he "miscarries" and is spiritually "barren."*

## • **Productive Use of Time**

- *One can guard against this by "living out a full life." I.e., a person should realize that he is granted a specific number of years. Every moment wasted on something other than his appointed task constitutes an act of rebellion against G-d, who entrusted him with his sacred mission.*
- *When a person realizes this, he will gladly sacrifice all sense of ego, and concentrate solely on completing his assignment. Eventually he will become so absorbed that he will even forget that it is he who is fulfilling it; the mission in general and the task at hand will fill his mind completely.*
- *When someone else inquires about such a Jew's spiritual state, he will respond: "How can I possibly think about myself when I have been granted only a limited number of days in which to fulfill my purpose in life? I must constantly be on guard to assure that not one precious moment is lost; I simply do not have time to think about my spiritual achievements!"*

- ***Productive Use of Time***

- *When a Jew attains this level of self-abnegation, G-d blesses him with "a full life"; even if there were days in which he did not fulfill his mission, or worse yet, acted in a counterproductive manner, G-d promises him that the missing days will be made up. Ultimately, all his days become whole.*

# Final Thoughts

Ceaser

**All of what we are, we see, we did and will do, is the  
Work of HaShem**

**This we celebrate fifty-two times a Year on Shabbat.**

**“May it be Your Will, HaShem, that the Holy Temple  
be rebuilt speedily in our days and grant us our  
share in Your Torah....”**

**Shabbat Shalom**