

פְּרָשֵׁת
מִשְׁפָּטִים
Parashat Mishpatim

*Shemot / Exodus 21:1-24:18, Jeremiah 34:8-22, 35:25-26
Luke 7:1-8:3*

Very Relevant Commands for this Day and Age!

In this week's Torah portion the title of the Torah portion is Mishpatim (מִשְׁפָּטִים) from the root word מִשְׁפָּט meaning "judgment or justice." This week's portion of Scriptures describes Civil Law (or Common Law) which consists of the body of laws that govern ordinary private matters, separate from laws presiding over criminal, military, or political matters. These laws govern private or civil rights, providing redress for wrongs by compensating the person or entity that has been wronged in the punishment of the wrongdoer. The Torah text we are looking at for this week is from *Shemot / Exodus 23:1-9*, verse 1 states, אֵל לֹא תִשָּׂא שְׁמֵעַ שְׁוֵא אֶל-תִּשָּׂא יָדְךָ עִם-רָשָׁע לִהְיוֹת עֵד תִּמָּס׃: *23:1 'You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. (NASB)* The phrase לֹא תִשָּׂא שְׁמֵעַ שְׁוֵא means one is not to accept a false report. The Lord God commands us to seek the truth in this command to not accept false reports. Note how many news agencies today are reporting falsehoods, and untruths. They spin the truth so that the truth is blurred and the people do not know what to believe. Note also how the text writes believing in and giving false testimony, joining hands with those who do so, this is coupled with hatred towards someone else. The next phrase in the

sentence states, אל-תִּשָׁט יָדְךָ עִם-רָשָׁע meaning “do not extend your hand with the wicked.” This is a very important concept as describing how one is not to join hands with those who are evil who distort the truth. Note how these things are coupled to לְהִיט עַד הַמָּס that one will be violent, angry, or have hatred, and injustice, forever. Note the significance of the first verse in *Shemot / Exodus 23*. These things speak to the need to first investigate a matter to evaluate what is the truth. We note what King Solomon said that parallels these things according to *Mishley / Proverbs 18:17*, “the first one to plead his case appears to be right, until his neighbor comes and examines him.” This is why Onkelos translates the Torah portion saying א לָא תִקְבֵּל שְׁמַע דְּשָׁקֵר לָא לָא תִקְבֵּל שְׁמַע דְּשָׁקֵר לָא תִשְׁוֵי יָדְךָ עִם חַיִּיבָא לְמַהוּי לִיה סְהִיד שְׁקֵר: לָא תִשְׁוֵי יָדְךָ עִם לָא תִקְבֵּל שְׁמַע דְּשָׁקֵר לָא תִשְׁוֵי יָדְךָ עִם חַיִּיבָא לְמַהוּי לִיה סְהִיד שְׁקֵר “do not receive/accept listening to falsehood” and לָא תִשְׁוֵי יָדְךָ עִם “do not extend your hand with the guilty” and חַיִּיבָא לְמַהוּי לִיה סְהִיד שְׁקֵר “you will be a false witness.” Note the Aramaic translation is emphasizing with a warning to not accept lying which is paralleled in the Hebrew text as being violent, angry, and with hatred.

We also note that the phrase, אל-תִּשָׁט יָדְךָ עִם-רָשָׁע “do not extend your hand with the wicked” as paralleling the ninth commandment in the עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרוֹת, (Aseret ha’Dibrot, Ten Words or Commandments). The ninth command is a warning against falsely testifying against your neighbor (see *Shemot / Exodus 20:12*). As we are warned not to purger ourselves, we are also commanded not to bear false testimony. In fact, here we are not even to listen to false testimony! (לֹא תִשְׁמַע שְׁוֵא) Part of the problem of listening to a lie is when one accepts a lie which leads to the reinforcing of the lie by testifying as they have done. The Targum Jonathan translates we are not to “partner” (תְּשׁוּתָא) with a liar. (לא תִקְבֵּלוּן שְׁוֵא שְׁוֵא לֹא תְשׁוּתָא יָדְךָ עִם) (*Shemot / Exodus 23:1*) This again is a prohibition to one who is about to accept a slanderous statement. These things reveal to us the importance of seeking truth.

The Scriptures we are studying this week are from *Shemot / Exodus 23:1-9*.

ספר שמות פרק כג

א לא תשא שמע שוא אל-תלשת ידך עם-רשע להית עד
 חמס: ב לא-תהינה אחרי-רבים לרעת ולא-תענה על-רב
 לנטת אחרי רבים להטת: ג ודל לא תהדר בריבו: ד
 פי תפגע שור איבך או חמרו תעה השב תשיבנו לו: ה
 ה כפי-תרעה חמור שנאה רבץ פחת משאו וחדלת מעזב
 לו עזב תעזב עמו: ו [חמישי] ו לא תטה משפט
 אבינה בריבו: ז מדבר-שקר תרחק ונקי וצדיק אל-תהרג
 פי לא-אצדיק רשע: ח ושחד לא תקח פי השחד יעור
 פקחים ויסלף דברי צדיקים: ט וגר לא תלחץ ואתם
 ידעתם את-נפש הגר כי-גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים:

Shemot / Exodus 23:1-9

23:1 'You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. 23:2 'You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice; 23:3 nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute. 23:4 'If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. 23:5 'If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him. 23:6 'You shall not pervert the justice due to your needy brother in his dispute. 23:7 'Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty. 23:8 'You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just. 23:9 'You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt. (NASB)

The second verse in *Shemot / Exodus 23* states the following, *Shemot / Exodus 23:2*, לא-תהינה אחרי-רבים לרעת ולא-תענה על-רב לנטת

אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים לְהִטָּת: “*You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice;*” The phrase, לֹא־תִהְיֶה אַחֲרֵי־רַבִּים לְרַעַת, speaks to not following a majority to do evil, to give a false testimony for evil. What the majority is doing is not always the correct thing to do! If “*everybody is doing it*” then it would be a good idea to weigh how what is being done lines up with the Scriptures? The rabbis discuss this verse in relation to the judge giving his verdict and to rule in truth and not falsehood. The second half of the verse states “*you shall not give perverse testimony in a dispute so as to pervert it in favor of the majority.*” This verse speaks to the issue of peer pressure and how it can have an immense hold over the truth. Usually we think about peer pressure as being just for children and young people, but peer pressure remains just as strong through our adult lives too. This reveals to us that we need to develop a mind-set based in truth, strength, and discipline such that we are able to remain strong in our faith, no matter what situation we find ourselves in. When we become follows of Yeshua, we are empowered by God’s Spirit and we can be confident in the truth of the Scriptures! This is sort of what Peter is speaking of according to *1 Peter 4:1-7*.

1 Peter 4:1-7

4:1 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 4:2 so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 4:3 For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. 4:4 In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you 4:5 but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 4:6 For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men,

*they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.
4:7 The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound
judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.
(NASB)*

These things Peter speaks about may be related to the pressure one may receive from friends to sin (i.e. *1 Peter 4:3*) and follow after the lusts of men. Peter speaks of our having done these things in times past but now as being the children of God we do not do so (i.e. *sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, and idolatries*). Peter speaks of the eminence of the return of the Lord, and his judging the living and the dead. He says for this reason the gospel has been preached, so that man may be revived in the spirit according to the will of God. The Gospel message involves the presence of God dwelling in our midst, and this is coupled to this idea of speaking the truth and not going along with the crowd in corruption. We do not live as the world lives, we live as God calls us according to His Word! The Torah goes on saying in *Shemot / Exodus 23:3*, (ס) וְדָל לֹא תִהְיֶה רְרִיבֹו: “*nor shall you show deference to a poor man in his dispute.*” The idea here is one should not be swayed by any persons situation, we always speak the truth! This a matter of righteousness in the eyes of both men and God. The Word of God is to be our guiding principle in life. This is why Peter explains what he does by contrasting the types of behaviors to be avoided, and in parallel fashion what we are reading here on bearing false testimony. This is the crux of the argument, we either live our lives by doing what God wants according to His Word, or we live in the way the world does.

These things are coupled to showing mercy towards others, even our enemy. This is something Yeshua was teaching right out of the Torah according to the following verses:

- *Shemot / Exodus 23:4*, תָּמְרוּ תַעֲנֶה, אוֹ אִיבֶנְךָ אוֹ חֲמֹרֶךָ תִּשָּׂבֶנּוּ לּוֹ: (ס) “*When you encounter your enemy’s ox or ass wandering, you must take it back to him.*”
- *Shemot / Exodus 23:5*, כִּי־תִרְאֶה חֲמֹר שׂוֹנֵא רֵבִץ תַּחַת, “*When you see an ox or donkey lying under a burden, do not add to it.*”

מִשָּׂאוֹ וְחִדְלָתָּ מֵעֲזֹב לוֹ עֲזֹב תֵּעָזֵב עִמּוֹ: (ס) *“When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him.”*

We note how these verses speak to how we are to treat our enemy being kind to them and helping them out! Note also this is how Yeshua taught saying, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,”* (Matthew 5:43-44). Did you think this was a new command? No, it was a Torah command concerning how we should treat our enemies. Being a child of God is not a hobby, it’s not an optional extra to be added one day a week to our lives. Our faith in the Lord God of Israel is a lifestyle of spiritual discipline, and obedience, not something we do simply for a laugh. The Lord God Almighty helps us to live our lives for Him! Peter makes it quite clear in *1 Peter 4:8* that *“Above all, maintain constant love for one another...”* and this includes our enemies. Now granted this may be very difficult at times to do.

The scriptures continue saying in *Shemot / Exodus 23:6*, לֹא תִטֶּה לֹא תִטֶּה מִשְׁפָּט אֶבְיֹנָה בְּרִיבּוֹ: *“You shall not subvert the rights of your needy in their disputes.”* This phrase לֹא תִטֶּה מִשְׁפָּט אֶבְיֹנָה בְּרִיבּוֹ means one is not to subvert the rights of someone who is destitute. This may be related to looking down on those who are less fortunate. The Torah is describing how a judge is not to rule in favour feeling sorry for or against feeling pridefully over a man but that justice is to be served for the man who is in the wrong. It is believed this warning of the Torah is addressed to the judge or judges of the court dealing with his dispute, even though the Torah did not spell this out specifically. The point of not specifically specifying judges, leads to our understanding that we are not to judge others in our hearts either, not this is also a Torah centric principle that Yeshua taught! (Matthew 7:1-2) We read according to *Tehillim / Psalms 82:3* the following, גַּ שְׁפָטוּ-דָל וְיִתּוֹם עָנִי וְרֵשׁ הַצְּדִיקִי: *“Judge the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and destitute.”* The reason this is so important to the Lord is due to how power and wealth corrupts and is able to sway judgement in the direc-

tion of falsehood as opposed to truth. We must live by faith and the testimony or ruling one must give is to be based upon trusting in the Lord God our Father in heaven! We note how it was Moshe's steady faith in God that gave Israel the victory over the powers of darkness that Israel was up against. This parallels our living up our faith in the power of God which was demonstrated by the cross Yeshua hung upon and later was raised from the grave, that gives us victory over the enemy and his schemes.

The text continues saying, *Shemot / Exodus 23:7*, מְדַבְּרֵי-שָׁקֶר תִּרְחֹק, :רָשָׁע: לֹא-אֲצַדִּיק וְצַדִּיק אֶל-תִּהְיֶה כִּי לֹא-אֲצַדִּיק רָשָׁע: *“Keep far from a false charge; do not bring death on those who are innocent and in the right, for I will not acquit the wrongdoer.”* We note what the text states saying, מְדַבְּרֵי-שָׁקֶר תִּרְחֹק meaning *“those who speak lies, put a distance”* between yourselves and them. Distance yourself from a false matter and do not draw near to those who speak lies, and are gossipers. The Lord states, רָשָׁע, כִּי לֹא-אֲצַדִּיק, *“for I will not acquit the wicked.”* This is a heavy warning for those who assume they are getting away with their falsehoods or lies. These words speak to the Lord God not allowing such a person to get away with it even if he is found innocent. What Peter wrote then is a warning to us related to this verse in the Torah as he wrote in *1 Peter 4:5 but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (NASB)*

The Torah also forbids taking bribes according to *Shemot / Exodus 23:8*, וְשֹׁחַד לֹא תִקַּח כִּי הַשֹּׁחַד יְעַנֵּר פְּקוּחִים וַיְסַלֵּף דְּבַר יְצַדִּיקִים: *“You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just.”* The phrase פְּקוּחִים יְעַנֵּר means that bribes will blind one's opinion, and twist/distort (וַיְסַלֵּף) the words of the righteous (דְּבַר יְצַדִּיקִים). This is why Rashi states what he does on this verse saying the following:

Rashi on Shemot / Exodus 23:8 Part 2

יעור פקחים [FOR THE BRIBE] BLINDETH THE OPEN-EYED — *Even if he be well-versed in the Torah and takes a bribe, in the end his mind will become confused, what he has learned will be forgotten, and the light of his eyes will become dim (Mekhilta d'Rabbi*

The Aramaic Targum Onkelos translates וַיִּסְלַף to the word וּמְקַלְקֵל meaning “to ruin or cast down” (ח וְשׁוֹחֲדָא לָא תְקַבֵּיל אַרְי שׁוֹחֲדָא) (חכמים) the eyes of the wise (מְעוֹר עֵינֵי חֲכָמִין וּמְקַלְקֵל פְּתֻגְמִין תְּרִיצִין: and casts down right words (פְּתֻגְמִין תְּרִיצִין). This may be why Rashi warns that bribes will bind anyone, even he who is well versed in the Torah, the one who takes a bribe in the end his mind will be swayed and forget what he has learned.

Moshe concludes saying in *Shemot / Exodus 23:9*, וַגֵּר לֹא תִלְחָץ, וְאַתֶּם יְדַעְתֶּם אֶת-נַפְשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי-גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: “*You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.*” The idea here is not to take advantage of those who are visiting or dwelling in the Land who are not Jewish. This is to be a reminder not to wrong or oppress the stranger because one is to remember being strangers in Egypt. What this is telling us is that we can understand what it feels like to be a stranger in a foreign land. Note how the text is written, it says וְאַתֶּם יְדַעְתֶּם אֶת-נַפְשׁ הַגֵּר “*you know the soul (נַפְשׁ) of the stranger.*” We were brought out of captivity to sin and the Lord has set us free. This again draws us back to the this idea of loving our enemies and doing good to those who persecute us as Yeshua taught saying, “*But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*” (*Matthew 5:43-44*).

How relevant are these commands from the Torah for our lives today especially in our corrupt society? The basic conclusion is that we are called to live counter culturally and not give in to corruption on both levels, (i) our Nefesh (נַפְשׁ), our thoughts) and (ii) our maasim (מעשים, our deeds). We are not to give in to peer pressure to do what others want us to do that is opposed to what God wants us to do. We also are called to put on the love of God, to love our enemies, even those who persecute us. These things come by developing a godly mind-set as a child of God. We develop this by studying God’s Word. We are warned also that studying God’s Word does not prevent us from being twisted by our culture if we are accepting something from our culture, as illustrated in the command not to take a bribe. (*Shemot*

/Exodus 23:9) We note what Peter wrote saying our calling on our lives is connected to a change in lifestyle, making choices to live according to God's Word and rejecting the standards of this world. These things also teach us not to judge others by assuming some kind of piety or superiority, we were at one point in the same situation not knowing the love of God and His great mercy. All of these things should lead to our hospitality towards others, to respect, and to share the love of God to all the nations. When studying the Torah it is pretty easy to observe how much of the NT text is written as a commentary on the Torah explaining how to practically apply God's Word to our lives. These things have NOT passed away! The NT text also reveals to us the love of God in His Son Yeshua the Messiah who gave his life for ours. By believing in Him we receive the presence of God in our lives via His Holy Spirit (*John 14*). And the presence of God in our lives enables us to be consistent in all of these things that were written in the Torah as instruction for a righteous and holy people!