



# The Parasha with Rabbi Dweck

*Highlights for*

## Parashat Mishpatim

### SUMMARY

Parashat Mishpatim stands in stark contrast to the drama of Sinai. It moves from smoke and fire into the *mishpatim*—the sensible, civil laws that govern human society. By giving us laws we might have discovered on our own, God signals His deep interest in the minutiae of our lives and invites us to bring our full humanity into His divine covenant.

### The Logic of the Sensible

While some laws in the Torah (*chukim*) elude human understanding, the *mishpatim* are sensible. They are the elements of justice and judgment that we likely would have implemented on our own even if the Torah had not commanded them.

The Sages teach that *derech erez* (the way of the world) preceded the Torah for twenty-six generations (Vayikra Rabbah 9:3). The Torah did not come to establish these norms from scratch; rather, it waited for humanity to develop a sense of justice, community, and civility before speaking to that established context.

### A God Who Sees You

Why does God command laws regarding property damage, theft, and charity? It signals that we are dealing with a God who is not merely a distant deity demanding subjugation, but one who is interested in what is important to us.

A true relationship—whether with a friend or a spouse—requires that the other person cares about the minor elements of your life. By giving us the *mishpatim*, God says that our everyday occurrences have a place in His domain.

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*“You do not need to leave your humanity at the door when you enter into this covenant... Bring your entire humanity into the space.”*

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### The Covenant in Blood

At the conclusion of the Parasha, the people of Israel utter the famous words *Na’aseh V’Nishma* (“We will do and we will hear”) (Exodus 24:7). They enter into an epic covenant for all time, signed literally in blood (Exodus 24:8).

This “National Covenant” is overlaid on the original Abrahamic covenant. While the Abrahamic bond ensures the people’s survival, this new covenant provides the terms—the Torah—for how the nation will develop as an entity in shared space with the Divine.

### In Love with the Details

In Shabbat 88a, there is a story of Rav, who was so engrossed in legal details that he didn’t notice his hand bleeding as he pressed it against the bench he was sitting on. When an observer called out “impetuous people” for

binding themselves to such a rigorous law, Rav cause they felt valued. To hear that God is  
replied: “We were in love...” and we still are. interested in the details of your life is to be  
The Jewish people accepted the covenant be- truly seen and embraced for who you are.

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## Questions for the Table

1. **Humanity as a Foundation:** If humanity had already developed moral codes, why was it necessary for God to repeat them as part of the Torah?
  2. **Being Seen:** God’s interest in small details is comparable to a loving friendship. How does this “micromanagement” feel like love rather than control?
  3. **Na’aseh V’Nishma:** Why do you think hearing the “sensible” laws of civil society inspired the people to commit to the covenant before hearing all the details?
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