



## **Around the Shabbat Table**

**Shabbat Mishpatim 5763  
February 2003**

**Israel Education Month**

*This week's writer: Chaim Lauer, Executive Vice President, Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York*

### **Introduction**

This week, we read the *parasha* of Mishpatim, in the book of Shemot (Exodus). It has been estimated that some 53 mitzvot are given in this portion. Among them are laws pertaining to:

- Jewish slaves, maidservants
- manslaughter, murder, kidnapping,
- injuring a parent, cursing a parent.
- killing of slaves, injury to slaves,
- personal damages, including penalties for stealing, damage by grazing or fire
- personnel issues, both paid and unpaid
- occult practices and idolatry
- lending money.
- Accepting authority, justice
- Livestock (ownership and damages)
- the Sabbatical year (every 7th year)
- Shabbat and holidays
- prohibition against milk and meat.

Following the many laws, the Torah instructs us to respect the authority of His messengers, understood by history to include the Prophets and Rabbis. There is a promise to chase out the seven nations who inhabited Canaan and forewarned us against making a treaty of peace with them, or being influenced by their practices and values.

In this *parasha*, the borders of the Land of Israel were defined. The conclusion of the *parasha* returns to the aftermath of the Revelation at Sinai. Moshe built an altar, offered a sacrifice, and the nation proclaimed "we will first obey God's commands and then attempt to understand".

Moshe, Aharon, Nadav, Avihu, and 70 elders of the community have a shared vision, and then Moshe ascends Mount Sinai, where he would remain for 40 days and nights.



### **Questions for Your Family's Discussion**

This week, as your family sits together, try the following exercise:

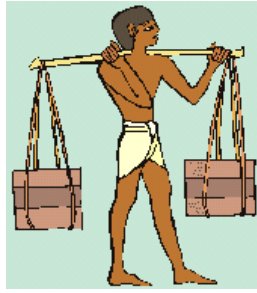
#### *If you were God: An Immediate Response and a Long-Term Strategy*

**Background:** You are trying to nurture a large group of people who have spent the last period of their national existence -- perhaps as much as four hundred years -- as slaves to a foreign king. You have miraculously freed them from that existence. Yet, despite their having seen such incredible things as blood turning to water or their having felt darkness, or even having walked between walls of water, they continue to demonstrate vestiges of a slave mentality.

You recognize they need to grow, but know also that things don't happen immediately. You feel that they need to be responsible for themselves. And you understand also that anything done now will be a precedent for the eternal future. So what would you do?

#### **Activity:**

1. Begin by thinking deeply about what slavery meant to these people – *not only on theoretical terms*, but also in terms of very practical, daily-life issues. Go around the table to see what items your tablemates will put on the list. (Suggestions: whipping/ violence; sexual aggression/ constant fear and loss of personal esteem; lack of autonomy/ no sense of a grounded identity. There is a LOT more!)
2. What do they need to help them begin to change their prior existence to one that has a different structure and worldview?
3. Address: "What should that new worldview contain?" (Possible approach: What counters the views learned as a slave?)
4. Look over the *parasha* summary. It includes a quick summary of the laws and discussions in the portion. Think about and discuss how these rules respond to the challenge of creating a noble people out of a rabble of slaves.



## **Towards an Action Agenda**

- The borders of Israel are set in this week's *parasha*. Learn more about the Biblical borders of Israel, by going to: <http://www.wzo.org.il/juice/map/map.htm>
- You can then see more about modern borders of Israel by going to: <http://www.jajz-ed.org.il/100/MAPS/index.html>
- Even today, some people choose to resolve disputes based on the laws which are presented in this week's *parasha*. In some situations, parties would come to a panel of arbitrators or mediators (which might be a rabbinical court, or have rabbinical representation). Ask your congregation's rabbi when s/he plays this type of role or whether s/he refers people to other professionals to serve as arbitrators.
- Reminder: This Sunday is Super Sunday for UJA Federation. Volunteers throughout the area will join together in calling upon members of the community to ask their support of the important work of UJA-Federation. Be sure to respond generously if you are called. For further information, go to: <http://www.ujafedny.org/supersunday/03/index.htm>

## **Shabbat Shalom!**

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to [RavADS@bjeny.org](mailto:RavADS@bjeny.org)

If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: [www.bjeny.org](http://www.bjeny.org)

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