In memory of all those brutally murdered in the war on Israel, including the fallen soldiers of the IDF

בס"ד

22 FEBRUARY 2025 | 24 SHEVAT 5785 VOLUME 38 | #22

DAF HASHAVUA

מִשְׁפָּטִים | MISHPATIM

SHABBAT ENDS:

London 6.15pm
Birmingham 6.21pm
Bournemouth 6.26pm
Cardiff 6.31pm
Dublin 6.38pm
Edinburgh 6.24pm
Glasgow 6.30pm
Hull 6.19pm
Leeds 6.18pm
Liverpool 6.29pm
Manchester 6.23pm
Nottingham 6.22pm
Sheffield 6.23pm
Southend 6.11pm
Southport 6.30pm
Jerusalem 6.09pm

Shabbat Mevarechim

Rosh Chodesh Adar is next Friday and Shabbat

"If you see the donkey of someone you hate crouching under its burden... you shall surely help with him"
(Shemot 23:5)

The United Synagogue

February is Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month (JDAIM)

SIDRA BREAKDOWN

מִשְׁפָּטִים
MISHPATIM

6th Sidra in:
שְׁמוֹת
SHEMOT

By Numbers:
118 VERSES
1,462 WORDS
5,313 LETTERS

Headlines:
CIVIL LAWS, YOM TOV, REVELATION

MISHPATIM:
Artscroll p.416
Hertz p.306
Soncino p.471

HAFTARAH:
Artscroll p.1156
Hertz p.323
Soncino p.497

Sidra Summary

1ST ALIYA (KOHEN) – SHEMOT 21:1-19
The sidra contains many mitzvot, of which a selection has been included here. It starts with the laws of a Jewish servant. He is to work for six years, after which he can go free. Alternatively, he can decide to stay on as a servant forever.

2ND ALIYA (LEVI) – 21:20-22:3
The penalties for physically injuring others are listed. An ox that gores a person to death is stoned. One may not dig pits in the public domain. Stealing an animal and then selling or slaughtering it incurs an extra penalty.
Point to Consider: *Why is there no death penalty for a person who kills a thief in self-defence? (see Rashi to 22:1)*

3RD ALIYA (SHLISHI) – 22:4-26
The laws governing guardians and borrowers of objects are listed – the level of responsibility for losing or damaging the object varies according to the nature of the contract. Special emphasis is placed on not mistreating a widow or an orphan. It is forbidden to take interest when lending money to the poor.

4TH ALIYA (REVI'I) – 22:27-23:5
The mitzvah of *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first born) is repeated. It is forbidden to eat an animal which died without *shechita* (kosher slaughter). One must not favour the destitute in court. A stray ox or donkey should be returned to its owner.

5TH ALIYA (CHAMISHI) – 23:6-19
A judge has to avoid showing favour or taking bribes. For six years the land is worked; in the seventh year *(shemittah)* it is prohibited to work the land. The three pilgrim festivals – Pesach, Shavuot and Succot – are listed. There is a mitzvah to bring one's first fruits *(bikurim)* to the Temple. It is prohibited to cook meat and milk together.

6TH ALIYA (SHISHI) – 23:20-25
God says that He will send an angel to guide the nation in their conquest of the Land, helping them to destroy the host nations. They are warned not to emulate the idolatrous ways of those nations.

7TH ALIYA (SHEVI'I) – 23:26-24:18
The narrative now switches back to three days before the giving of the Torah (Rashi). Moshe builds 12 altars at the foot of Mount Sinai, one for each tribe, on which offerings are brought. Moshe sprinkles the blood of the offerings on the people, who famously proclaim "we will do and we will listen" *(na'aseh ve'nishma).* Moshe, Aharon, Nadav, Avihu and 70 elders see a very pure 'vision' of God. Moshe remains on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights.

HAFTARAH (YIRMIYAHU 34:8-22, 33:25-26)
King Tzidkiyahu had finally reached an agreement with the people to release their servants, as stipulated in the first *aliyah* of this week's sidra. However, the people quickly renege on the pact and recapture the freed servants. God tells the prophet Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) that this terrible act of treachery will leave Yehudah (Judah) vulnerable to the Babylonian invaders.

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The Key to Transcendence

RABBI DR YONI BIRNBAUM

Finchley United Synagogue

Bill, Jim and Scott were at a convention together sharing a large suite at the top of a 75-story hotel. Following a long day of meetings, they were shocked to discover that the lifts in their hotel were broken, and they would have to climb 75 flights of stairs to get to their room.

Bill said to Jim and Scott, "Let's break the monotony of this unpleasant task by concentrating on something interesting. I'll tell jokes for 25 flights, Jim can sing songs for the next 25 flights and Scott will tell sad stories for the rest of the way." At the 26th floor, Bill stopped telling jokes and Jim began to sing. At the 51st floor, Jim stopped singing and Scott began to tell sad stories.

"I will tell my saddest story first," he said. "I left our room key in the car."

In the latter part of this week's parasha, further details are given regarding the Giving of the Torah. This serves to augment our understanding of this momentous event in the history of our people. There is a noticeable difference, however, between the description of the events preceding the Revelation at Sinai in this week's parasha and the primary account in *Parashat Yitro*. There we find a strong emphasis on the requirement to build a "fence around the mountain" (Shemot 19:12). There are successive warnings not to approach too closely, directed towards the people themselves as well as the leaders. In *Parashat Mishpatim*, however, this element is notably absent. Instead, we find the following remarkable words:

"Moshe (Moses) and Aharon (Aaron), Nadav and Avihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel ascended, and they perceived the God of Israel, and beneath His feet was like the forming of a sapphire brick and like the appearance of the heavens for clarity" (Shemot 24:9-12).

To resolve this apparent discrepancy, Rav Soloveitchik (1903-1993) explains that the two descriptions are meant to complement one another. The stress on the boundaries around the mountain in *Parashat Yitro* conveys the need incumbent upon all mankind to treat the Torah with utmost awe and respect. In *Parashat Mishpatim*, the emphasis is on the potential for spiritual elevation that the Jewish people in particular are able to achieve through the observance of the Mitzvot.

Rav Soloveitchik suggests that this uplifting possibility of Divine connection is deliberately recorded in the Torah only after the *Mishpatim*, the civil law code which forms the main theme of this week's parasha, had been transmitted to the people. In doing so, the Torah is conveying the message that it is these laws in particular which contain the key to removing the boundaries that exist between us and God. Treating other people and their property in an appropriate manner may seem an unlikely pre-requisite for achieving a transcendent spiritual experience. Yet, as we climb our own mountains - or tall buildings - in life, it is essential that we carry with us the correct room key to unlock the door at the top. *Parashat Mishpatim* shows us what that key is.

Deeply missing our mother Shirley Tucker z"l

Torah-Inspired Accessibility

DANIELLA NEIFELD

US Community Participation Manager

With introduction by:

RABBI MORDECHAI WOLLENBERG

Woodford Forest US & Jewish Hospital Chaplain, Barts NHS Trust

At a dinner to mark his retirement as Rosh Beth Din (Head) of the London Beth Din in 2008, the late Dayan Ehrentreu zt"l shared some reflections on his life in the Rabbinate. The Dayan commented on the fact that King Solomon had been credited with establishing *Netilat Yadayim* (requirement of handwashing for certain ritual purposes) and the *Eruv* (joining together of properties and other areas to allow carrying on Shabbat). The Dayan posed the question as to what was so wise about these two precepts; after all, King Solomon is known as the "wisest of all men". The Dayan explained that they represent two opposites – *Netilat Yadayim* is exclusive, separating the pure from the impure, whereas *Eruv* is inclusive, bringing together people and towns and cities. There is a time for exclusivity and a time for inclusivity. The Dayan reflected that he hoped he had found the balance throughout his ministry.

We live in a time when inclusivity is certainly the order of the day. The basic premise is that every human being is created in the image of God and this surpasses any differences - be they physical, psychological, social, familial or spiritual - that apparently set us apart. *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) tells us, "Beloved are human beings for they were created in the image [of God]". If every person is beloved by God, then every effort should be made to make them a part of our communities. To be acknowledged, recognised and have their needs met as much as possible, especially within our shuls and spiritual spaces, is our task and privilege.

This article highlights some of the Torah's teachings and their practical application in developing communities that embrace inclusivity and accessibility.

Torah Connection 1:

"*Lifnei Iver Lo Titen Michshol*" – "Before a blind person, do not place a stumbling block" (Vayikra 19:14). While this advice is valuable in its literal sense, the Talmud in *Bava Metzia* (62a) expands this principle to mean that one should not cause another person to stumble, whether physically, morally or spiritually. This teaching encourages proactive measures to prevent harm and ensure the well-being of others.

Examples of Proactive Accessibility:

1. **Accessibility Should Be Accessible:** It sounds straightforward, but many places operate on an 'access upon request' basis. This means that if someone needs something to participate in communal events or services, they must ask for it instead of it being readily available. This approach is reactive rather than proactive. Communities are encouraged to make all accessibility features available to whoever might need them without requiring a request on the spot.

2. **Find Your Way:** Clear signage highlighting accessibility features reduces anxiety about unfamiliar locations and demonstrates proactive accessibility.

Torah Connection 2:

The giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai is a moment that encompasses generations past, present and future. The *Midrash* (*Shemot Rabbah* 5:9) explains that the voice of God at Sinai was heard in multiple ways, tailored to each person's capacity to hear and understand. This interpretation highlights the inclusivity of the Revelation.

Examples of Tailoring to the Needs of the Community:

3. **Multiple Ways to Convey the Message:** For those who are hard of hearing or deaf, provide a written copy of the Rabbi's sermon, guest lectures or talks. This can be a full transcript or bullet points of the main ideas, especially useful in large rooms or when the speaker's mouth is obscured.

4. **Circle Up:** For discussions or meals, use circular tables instead of rectangular ones to facilitate easier lip-reading for those who need it.

Torah Connection 3:

Jewish texts emphasise the importance of caring for one's possessions. The *Midrash* explains that Yaakov (Jacob) left his family to return to their previous encampment to retrieve some small jars he had left behind (Bereishit 32:25). In Devarim 22:1-3, we learn the importance of returning lost property, and in the Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 42a), we are advised to regularly check our possessions to ensure they are in good condition. These examples highlight the significance of looking after our physical belongings, no matter how small.

Example of Community Efforts in Safeguarding Belongings:

5. **We've Got You Covered:** A designated covered area for parking mobility scooters, wheelchairs and buggies will encourage those who use them to attend synagogue/ events, knowing that their valuable equipment has been considered and protected.

Torah Connection 4:

The concept of *B'tzelem Elokim* (being created in the image of God) underscores the inherent dignity and worth of every individual. This principle calls for a deep respect for each person's unique needs and abilities.

6. **Everyone is Different:** Everyone is unique. People with disabilities bring strengths that enrich our community. By valuing everyone, we create a supportive place where all can shine.

By embracing these values, we can create a community where everyone feels respected and empowered, truly reflecting the essence of the Torah's message.

In loving memory of Harav Binyamin ben Harav Shalom z"l

Purim Part 1:

The Uninvited Guest

RABBI ELI BIRNBAUM

Head of Community Development, Stanmore and Canons Park Synagogue

Years ago, when I was a yeshiva student, I was invited to join the Purim *Seudah* (festive meal) at my teacher's home. The doorbell rang incessantly with neighbours dropping off *Mishloach Manot* (edible treats customarily given on Purim), people collecting *Tzedakah* (charity) and my fellow students dancing around the heaving table.

Suddenly and quite unexpectedly, with music pumping and wine flowing, our esteemed Rabbi rose to his feet, switched off the music, walked over to his well-adorned bookshelf and took down a volume covering the laws of Pesach.

Much to our amazement, he began to deliver a synopsis of the laws of cleaning the house for *chametz*, something that stood at a jarring contrast to the mess of not-kosher-for-Pesach food all over the dining room. After five minutes, he returned the book to its shelf and raised his glass:

"The Talmud (*Pesachim* 6a) teaches us: thirty days before Pesach, one must begin to study the laws and details of that festival. L'chaim to all."

With that, he sat down.

At first glance, this Talmudic dictum seems eminently sensible. In many households, the mention of the word 'Pesach' inspires sheer panic. Kitchens need scrubbing, food needs buying, and children need conscripting for the annual pantomime of 'The Life of a Pretzel – Boldly Going Where no Leaven Has Gone Before'. So, best get started early, right?

The problem is, and this is what inspired my Rabbi's surprising mid-meal interruption, thirty days before Pesach is…Purim!

Our sages knew this well. Purim occurred barely a few generations before the Talmud was written. Furthermore: the Talmud was compiled in the heartlands of Persia – the location of the entire Purim story! And yet, they insisted that into the manic celebration must step an uninvited guest: Interrupt Purim with a dash of Pesach.

Intriguingly, the interruption is not one-way.

"So Esther said in reply to Mordechai: Go then, assemble all the Jews of Shushan, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days. Night and day, my maids and I will also fast. And then I will stand before the King even though it is unlawful." (Esther, 4:15-16)

The Fast of Esther, nowadays observed on the eve of Purim, commemorates those days of penitence decreed by the heroine of the Purim story as she prepared to beseech Achashverosh on behalf of her people.

But her original fast was not merely one day. It was three. And those three days did not occur in the month of Adar. According to the Talmud (*Megillah* 15a, cf. Rashi there), Esther decreed the fast across the 14th, 15th and 16th days of the month of **Nissan**. In other words: the original Fast of Esther coincided with Pesach!

That year, Seder night simply did not happen. The eve of Pesach as well as the first two days of the festival were marked by intense mourning and abstinence from food or drink, as the need to sow the seeds for the Purim miracle yet to come overrode the desire to celebrate the Pesach miracle long past. Here we arrive at quite the dilemma:

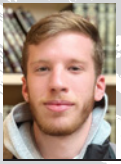
Our sages insist that Pesach must encroach on Purim through the study of its laws. Esther insisted that Purim's penitent prelude encroach on Pesach. To what end are these two festivals so deliberately intertwined?

Stay tuned for more next week.

In loving memory of Chaim ben Moshe Bentzion z"l

THE TRIBE WEEKLY
PARASHAT MISHPATIM 21-22 FEBRUARY | 24 SHEVAT

Learning from Egypt: A Call to Justice



HARRISON COHEN

Tribe Madrich

This week's parasha is full of different laws; there's so much to choose from. Yet, a theme that reoccurs throughout is our ethical responsibility for the vulnerable. Whether for the *ger* (stranger), widow or orphan, the Torah emphasises that we really do have an active duty to help those who need it.

For example, it says: *"You shall not taunt nor oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Shemot 22:20).*

Including Rashi's understanding, this commandment informs us to never purposely upset somebody, whether verbally or in business.

What really stands out is the reasoning the Torah gives: because we were strangers in the land of Egypt. This encapsulates an idea central to Judaism—using the past to inform the present.

The Torah demands that we turn the memory of suffering into empathy. The *Sefer HaChinuch* (written by an anonymous author in 13th-century Spain) explains that we were made to endure Egypt's hardships so that we would never grow apathetic to the plight of the vulnerable. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) adds that this law isn't about pity but about equality: it teaches us to respect the dignity of others because we know what it feels like to be diminished.

Yet perhaps now, we can experience both sides simultaneously. We know what it's like to endure hardship, because we still are. But what makes us a holy nation is our response, to rise above anger and hatred and be a *Kiddush Hashem* in this world, a sanctification of God's name, an example of how to behave and treat others.

Ultimately, this mitzvah calls us to act, reminding us that justice isn't abstract. It lives in how we treat those without power, transforming their lives and our own society.

Shabbat Shalom

Parasha Wordsearch

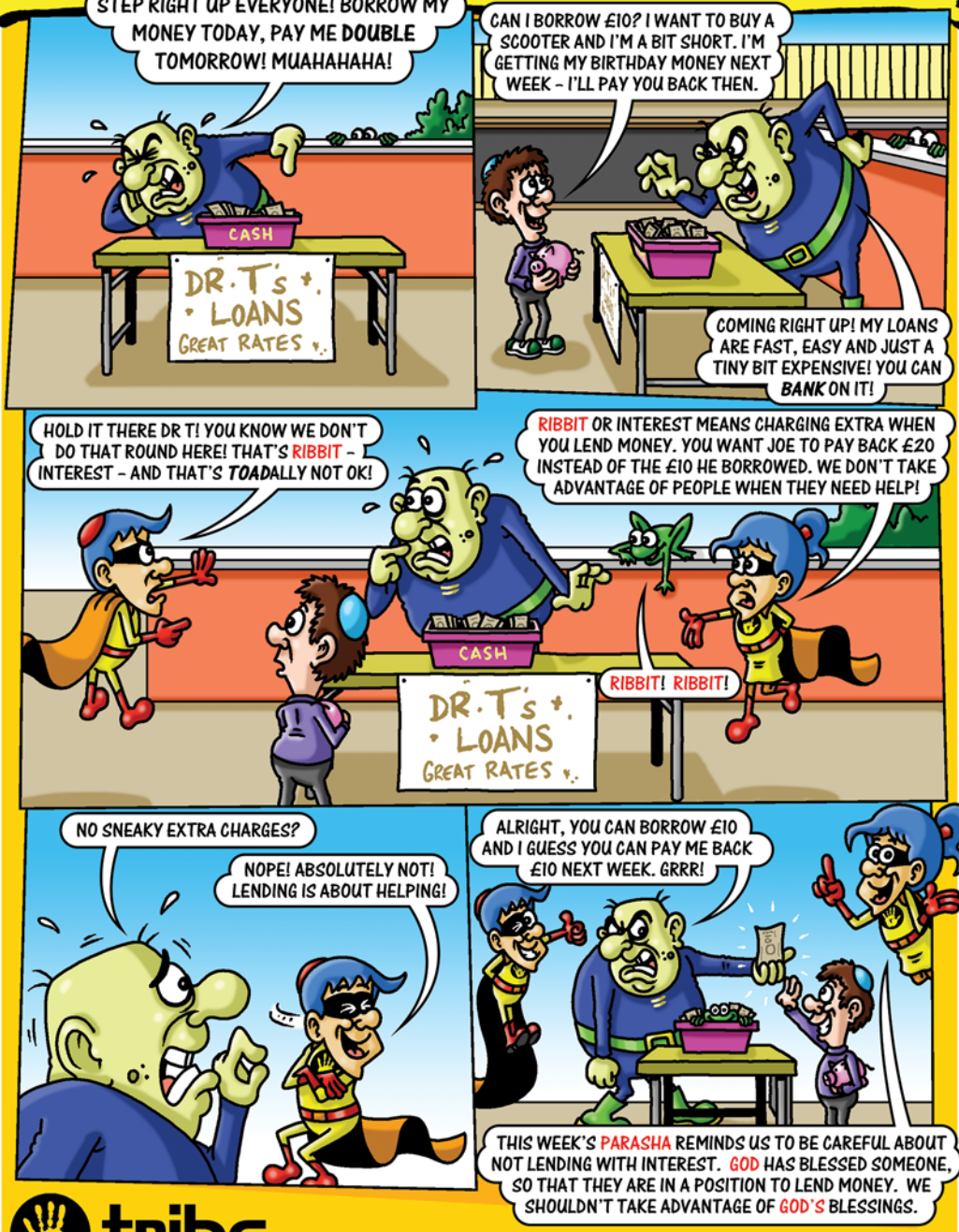
Find these words in the grid. The words can go in any direction and can share letters as they cross over each other.

M	V	E	T	E	B	X	C	I	G	C	J
O	B	B	D	S	J	W	G	Q	C	D	E
U	E	Y	M	O	I	T	X	M	X	P	U
N	Y	T	U	D	E	N	E	M	Y	F	B
T	E	S	L	E	T	M	A	T	X	I	S
A	K	J	W	Z	W	S	O	I	W	B	G
I	P	B	Q	A	O	D	E	N	R	W	T
N	N	D	T	M	L	V	D	G	E	N	N
S	F	D	C	O	E	S	J	C	D	Y	Z
I	R	B	U	M	O	S	H	E	A	U	D
V	Q	P	D	Q	W	T	N	N	H	R	J
J	H	X	O	Q	U	W	H	N	T	G	E

MOUNTAINS
JUDGES
MONEY
ENEMY
MOSHE
SINAI
TOOTH
LAWS
CARE
DUTY
EYE
OX

THE TRIBE SCRIBE

MISHPATIM: POINT OF INTEREST!



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Tribe is the Young People's Department of the United Synagogue: Creating a future for our community through engaging, educating and inspiring the next generation.