בס"ד

14 FEBRUARY 2026 | 27 SHEVAT 5786 VOLUME 39 | #23

DAF HASHAVUA

מִשְׁפָּטִים | MISHPATIM

SHABBAT ENDS:

London: 6.01pm
Birmingham: 6.07pm
Bournemouth: 6.13pm
Cardiff: 6.17pm
Dublin: 6.23pm
Edinburgh: 6.08pm
Glasgow: 6.13pm
Hull: 6.04pm
Leeds: 6.03pm
Liverpool: 6.14pm
Manchester: 6.08pm
Nottingham: 6.07pm
Sheffield: 6.08pm
Southend: 5.58pm
Southport: 6.14pm
Jerusalem: 6.02pm

Shabbat Shekalim

Shabbat Mevarechim

Rosh Chodesh Adar is on Tuesday and Wednesday

The United Synagogue

"The choicest first fruit of your land shall you bring to the House of Hashem, your God" ***(Shemot 23:19)***

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
Koren Sacks p.509
Soncino p.471

MAFTIR (SHEKALIM):
Artscroll p.484
Hertz p.352
Koren Sacks p.581
Soncino p.540

HAFTARAH (SHEKALIM):
Artscroll p.1213
Hertz p.993
Koren Sacks p.1655
Soncino p.1191

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.

MAFTIR (SHEMOT 30:11-16)
The special reading for *Shekalim* is from the beginning of parashat Ki Tisa, instructing the Israelites to bring a compulsory annual half-shekel contribution for the offerings brought in the *Mishkan*. This also acted as the means of conducting the national census in the desert.

HAFTARAH (II MELACHIM 12:1-17)
King Yehoash ascended the throne aged only seven. Guided by the *Kohen Gadol*, Yehoyada, he successfully organised a national fundraising initiative to repair and maintain the Temple.

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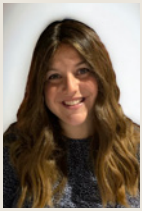


NA'ASEH V'NISHMAH – SIMULTANEOUS LIVING AND LEARNING

BY: **DANIELLA NEIFELD**
Community Participation Manager, United Synagogue

Looking down from above, we see the entire nation gathering towards the centre of the encampment. A man rises in the middle, clearly the leader, and the crowd falls silent. People press forward, eager to hear what their trusted guide will say. He takes a deep breath, his voice steady yet filled with purpose, ready to project his words to every corner. What he is about to share will shape their lives for generations. He announces that they should follow the laws of the Almighty, the Creator of the world who brought them out of Egypt. These laws will be demanding, but they are for the good of all. For a moment, there is complete silence. Then, as if with one voice, the people cry out two words that echo through history: *Na'aseh V'nishmah*, "We will do and we will hear."

This is the scene I imagine each year when reading *Parashat Mishpatim*. It may be dramatised, but it captures the power of that moment. Yet, when we look closely, this vision is not entirely accurate.

Parashat Mishpatim follows the revelation at Sinai and begins with detailed laws: civil justice, ethical behaviour and care for others. These include how we treat workers, protect property and safeguard the vulnerable. It is in this context that we encounter the phrase *Na'aseh V'nishmah*. At first glance, it seems puzzling. If the people had already heard the laws, why say "we will do and then we will hear"? Shouldn't it be the other way round?

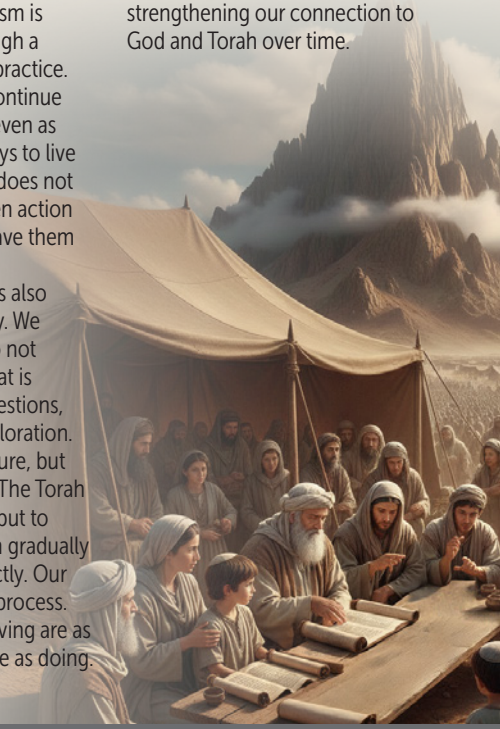
The classic explanation is that the Israelites expressed complete trust in God, committing to action even before full understanding. But the Hebrew does not say "then"; it says "we will do **and** we will hear". This suggests that doing and hearing are not sequential but simultaneous. Jewish life is meant to be a process where action and learning go hand in hand.

This principle speaks to something deeper: our relationship with God and with Judaism is not static. It is built through a lifetime of learning and practice. Even when we act, we continue to seek understanding; even as we learn, we look for ways to live what we learn. Judaism does not ask us to choose between action and meaning, but to weave them together.

"*Na'aseh V'nishmah*" is also an expression of humility. We acknowledge that we do not know everything, and that is okay. Judaism values questions, curiosity and honest exploration. Not knowing is not a failure, but an opportunity to grow. The Torah was not given to angels but to human beings who learn gradually and sometimes imperfectly. Our tradition celebrates this process. Asking, studying and striving are as much a part of Jewish life as doing.

We do not wait until we have all the answers before living Jewish values, and we do not stop learning once we have begun. This ongoing cycle keeps Judaism vibrant and personal: rooted in tradition, yet always deepening through study and reflection. Every question we ask and every mitzvah we perform brings us closer to understanding and to God.

As we read *Mishpatim*, filled with laws that shape a just and compassionate society, let us embrace this dual commitment: to live our Judaism with sincerity, and to hear, learn, question and grow, strengthening our connection to God and Torah over time.



In loving memory of Chaya Rachel bat Moshe Ben-Tzion z"l

PURIM - THE BIGGER PICTURE: FROM EXILE TO RESTORATION

BY: **RABBI BARUCH DAVIS**
Editor-in-Chief, Daf Hashavua

Plots, intrigues and a remarkable sequence of "coincidences" save the Jews of the Persian Empire from annihilation at the hands of the wicked Haman, whose genocidal decree was endorsed by King Achashverosh. Through the courage and wisdom of Mordechai and Queen Esther, the Jewish people are rescued, the events are recorded for posterity in *Megillat Esther*, and the festival of Purim is established with its mitzvot and enduring joy.

Yet the story both opens and closes with Achashverosh as ruler of this vast empire. Even after Haman's downfall, Achashverosh remains an unpredictable monarch, and the Jews are still living under his dominion, still in exile. This raises an important question: if *Tanach* (the Hebrew Bible) consistently directs us toward living a Torah life in *Eretz Yisrael* with the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple) at its centre, why is Purim such a central and celebrated moment?

The Megillah itself hints at the *Beit HaMikdash*. Shushan is continually called *Shushan HaBirah*. Today *birah* means a capital city, and the Megillah is the likely source of that usage. However, in *Divrei HaYamim* I (Chronicles) 29:1, the same word refers to the *Beit HaMikdash*! Esther's fear of approaching the king in his innermost chamber echoes the awe surrounding the Holy of Holies, which only the *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest, could enter, and only on Yom Kippur.

The Purim story is, therefore, far more than a standalone tale of survival against an existential threat. It is a crucial turning point in the long and complex process of Jewish renewal and the building of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.

This process begins with King Koresh (Cyrus the Great), who permits the Jews to return and rebuild the *Beit HaMikdash* (*Ezra* 1). Hope surges - but opposition soon follows. Non-Jewish populations settled in the land after the Babylonian exile are opposed to Jewish restoration. They accuse the Jews of planning rebellion. Their campaign succeeds. The order to halt construction is issued by none other than King Achashverosh, in the first year of his reign (ibid. 4:6).

Two years later, in the third year of his reign, the drama of Purim begins (*Esther* 1:2). The Jewish people have begun returning to the land, but in small numbers. The Temple remains unfinished, and Jerusalem is weak and exposed.

Purim, then, is not only a story of physical salvation. Esther's position as queen and Mordechai's rise to power restore morale, strengthen religious identity, and elevate Jewish political standing.

Yet Achashverosh continues to uphold the decree against the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash*. After his death, his son - born to Queen Esther and known in *Tanach* as Artachshasta/Daryavesh (Darius) - initially continues enforcing it. Yet, likely influenced by his mother and Mordechai, he eventually reverses policy. In *Ezra* 6, he authorises and even funds the completion of the Second *Beit HaMikdash*.

> **"Purim is not only a story of miraculous rescue, but a decisive step on the path toward rebuilding the nation, its Temple, and its spiritual centre.**

Some years later, Nechemiah enters the stage. The *Beit HaMikdash* has been built, but now there is a need to fortify Jerusalem's shattered walls (*Nechemiah* 2), still threatened by hostile neighbours. When Nechemiah appeals to King Darius for protection and resources, the king agrees - and the verse notes that the Queen Mother was sitting beside him. *Chazal* (our sages) identify her as Esther herself, still shaping Jewish destiny.

In this light, Purim is a vital link between the initial return under Koresh and the eventual restoration of Jewish life in *Eretz Yisrael*. It is not only a story of miraculous rescue, but a decisive step on the path toward rebuilding the nation, its Temple and its spiritual centre.

THE ANATOMY OF HEBREW - PART 6

EYES AND EARS

BY: **RABBI DAVID LISTER**
Edgware United Synagogue

The Hebrew words for our eyes and ears are not merely physical designations; they carry hidden associations that guide us in using these senses well and understanding them spiritually.

Hearing in Judaism is a reflective, thoughtful process. It is not just receiving sound but weighing and understanding its meaning.

Bereishit 23:1-16 shows this in the story of Avraham and Efron. Efron was selling the cave of Machpelah as a burial plot and initially claimed he would not accept money. Yet he casually mentions a price: "Between you and me, what is a piece of land worth four hundred shekels?" Avraham "heard" Efron and understood that the offer to give the land was a pretence. The mention of money revealed that Efron expected payment. So, Avraham paid, and Efron accepted without a murmur.

Thus, listening in Judaism is inseparable from thought. In fact, the Hebrew word for ear – אֹזֶן (*ozen*, *Shemot* 21:6) – is linked to מֹאזְנַיִם (*moznayim*, *Vayikra* 20:36), the word for scales. Hearing requires weighing what we hear, discerning truth, and deciding how to respond.

Seeing, by contrast, is more immediate and powerful. Visual impressions flood in upon us and are harder to weigh. The Hebrew word for eye – עַיִן (*ayin*, *Shemot* 21:24) – is also used for a spring of water (*Bereishit* 24:13). Just as a spring flows continuously, the impressions we receive through sight stream into our minds. This is why the Torah strictly commands us to guard our eyes (*Bemidbar* 15:39); sight requires extra protection.

Judaism promises a reward for mastering one's sight. At the end of days, those who have learned to see rightly will witness "eye to eye" as God returns to Zion, experiencing vision in its purest and most meaningful form.

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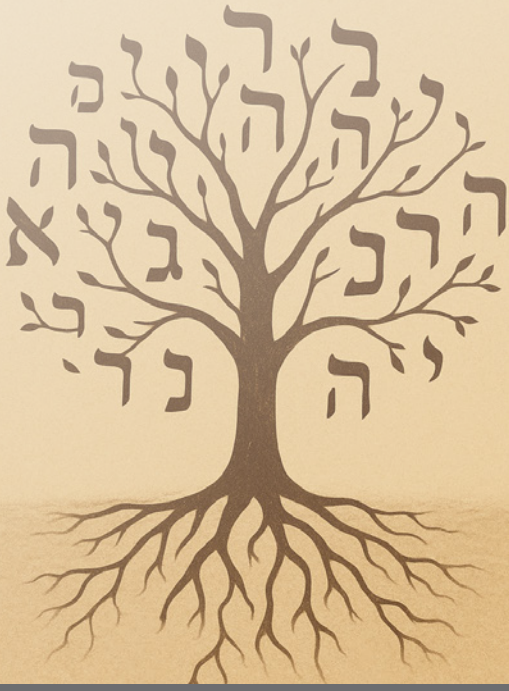

THE CREATION OF THE MODERN CHIEF RABBINATE - PART 2

CHIEF RABBI DR J.H. HERTZ (1872-1946)

BY: **RABBI MICHAEL LAITNER**
US Director of Education, Interim rabbi at Belmont US

After the murderous attack at Bondi Beach, Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis travelled to Sydney, in his capacity as Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth, to express condolences, kinship and pay tribute from him and our community to those heroic people who helped to save lives. His visit was greatly appreciated.

Given the strength of Australian Jewry, the idea of a London-based Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth for communities such as Australia might seem outdated, yet this position, even if only in a titular sense for the most part, is not contested. In no small measure, this is due to seeds planted by Rabbi Hertz over a century ago in the aftermath of World War One.

On 23 April 1920, the United Synagogue president, Lionel de Rothschild, wrote to Rabbi Hertz to invite him, on behalf of the United Synagogue Council, to embark on "a *pastoral tour... of the Overseas Dominions and Dependencies. It is felt this... would be of the utmost value in helping to bind together the Jewish communities of the Empire...*" The letter also asserted that it would stimulate religious activities and help to examine the problems faced by communities around the Empire, many of which lacked the infrastructure and leadership which they have today. Rabbi Hertz's first position had been in Johannesburg, giving him first-hand experience to draw on.

Acutely aware of the isolation faced by many communities, as well as the Jewish and non-Jewish soldiers who had fought and died in the war, Rabbi Hertz readily acquiesced, particularly aware of the pastoral importance. He was accompanied by Albert Woolf, who was raising funds for the Jewish War Memorial.

This was no small undertaking. They were away for a gruelling 11 months, taking in 42 communities and travelling over 40,000 miles.

The Chief Rabbi, seen as both a rabbinic leader and a quasi-governmental representative from London reaching out to the Empire, was enthusiastically received. In town after town, local non-Jewish dignitaries joined community events to welcome the Chief Rabbi.

In Winnipeg, the City Hall was illuminated for three nights with the words, "*Welcome to Dr Hertz*". Throughout the tour, there was extensive press coverage. In Salisbury (now Harare), the three Jewish families from the outpost of Que Que had travelled for 10 hours to meet Rabbi Hertz briefly on the train platform. When, as the train pulled away, he asked them if they had a set of Talmud, they replied they had two, to which he thanked them for coming and said they were therefore safe as Jews even without the visit of a Chief Rabbi.

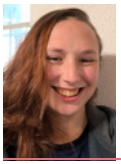
Rabbi Hertz took the opportunity to speak of the heroism of troops during the war, of the place of Jews in British life, their contribution to their countries of residence and of the importance of Jews maintaining and developing devotion to religious practice as the bedrock of their lives, preaching "*the unity of God, of Israel and the eternity of the Torah*".

His lecture, *People of the Book*, was repeated in many locations, on land and at sea. It is estimated that the lecture was heard by at least 30,000 people, many of them non-Jews for whom it was an important eye-opener about Judaism.

The tour ended in September 1921. Several weeks later, Rabbi Hertz and Albert Woolf were invited to a private audience with King George V at Buckingham Palace in appreciation of the tour. The significance of that visit was etched in the memories of Empire- and then Commonwealth- communities, setting the stage for the impact made by subsequent Chief Rabbis when visiting these countries.

THE TRIBE WEEKLY
PARASHAT MISHPATIM 13-14 FEBRUARY | 27 SHEVAT

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS



BY: **TAMARA COLEMAN**

Tribe Madricha

Mishpatim takes place directly after *Matan Torah* (the Giving of the Torah), arguably the most foundational event in Judaism. After such a majestic showing of God's might, and the meaningful pledge of *Na'aseh V'nishma* ("We will do and we will listen") from the Jewish people, one would likely come to the conclusion that the following *parasha* should be filled with further miracles and foundational aspects of Judaism.

Instead, we are met with a long list of ways to live our life, the laws of how to treat workers, how to act when someone is injured, and how to act in business. Why is this the case?

This was done intentionally by God to show us that it is not just big spiritual moments that Judaism is founded upon, but also the smaller, mundane aspects of life where we might not expect to find God.

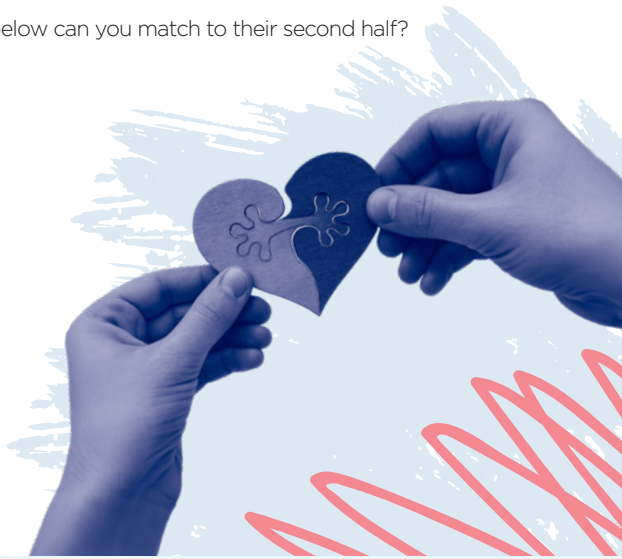
This week's *Maftir*, *Shekalim*, details the way that God is found in the small details of Jewish practice. In order to build the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), a half shekel was contributed by each man from age 20 onwards. The request, not for a whole shekel but a half, indicates the presence of God in the minor details of Jewish life by showing that no Jew is complete without the rest of their community and people. The half must be met with another half in order to become whole.

When taken together, we understand that there is not only holiness between ourselves and God, but also between human beings. The way we treat each other does not just affect people around us, but our interactions with others also help strengthen our relationship with God.

Parasha Word Match Game

How many of these *parasha*-related words below can you match to their second half?

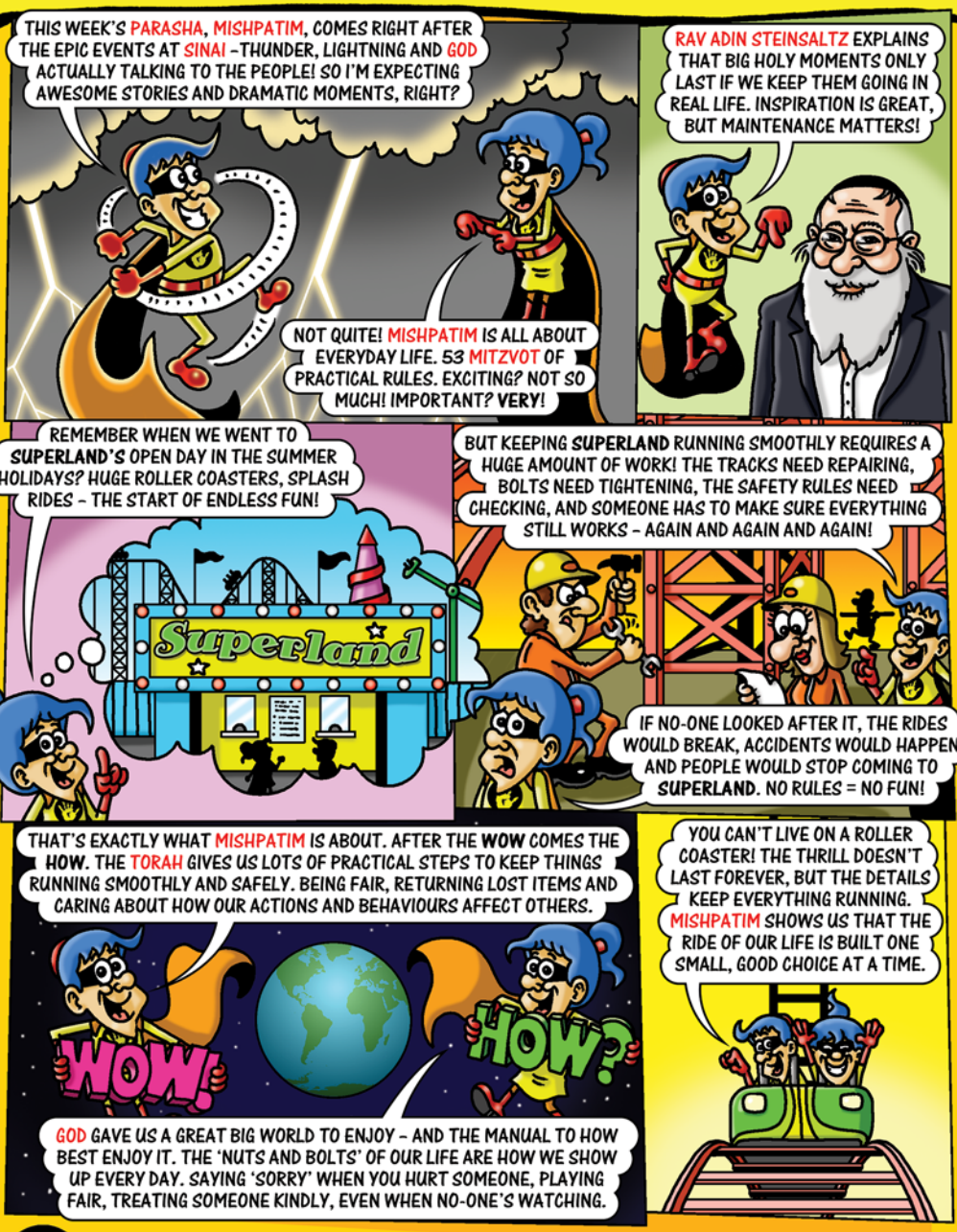
1.	KIND	NITY
2.	HON	DING
3.	FAIR	KAN
4.	MON	NESS
5.	MISH	TING
6.	COMMU	NESS
7.	COUN	ESTY
8.	BUIL	EY



Answers: 1. Kindness 2. Honesty 3. Fairness 4. Money 5. Mishkan 6. Community 7. Counting 8. Building

THE TRIBE SCRIBE

MISHPATIM: FROM WOW TO HOW!



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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.