



Parashat Mishpatim

February 2023

1 Conversation

This week's portion Mishpatim is about the laws and the court system which of course the topic of intense conversation in Israel this week and during this period. A mustachioed man on the way to synagogue on Shabbat provided quite a different view of the portion. The portion is full of mitzvot and after they are listed the people say "we will listen and we will do". But a person doesn't always hear something and then do it, a person often thinks about it and decides if/how to do what is said. So just viewing it as "we will listen and we will do" misses an important understanding, that this was just a point in a larger process. First the people were told not even to approach Har Sinai because they would die, and afterward they were allowed to approach it and they said no, Moses you go because we are scared. In other words there was an emotional part, a heart part, which was an important aspect of the people coming to the statement "we will listen and we will do". So the people didn't blindly or unthinkingly/unfeelingly make this statement, but rather they had gone through a process in which they had connected, their emotions and their senses had connected with the situation including the thunder/lightening/cloud/fear/etc. and then their minds were able to connect and say, we feel the presence of Hashem and we feel what He is about so with that feeling when Hashem speaks we will listen and we will do. Further, the Rabbis say that all of the People of Israel were at Har Sinai including us so we should sense this emotional element as part of our reading about and thinking about the giving of the commandments - we should feel this process that took place as we read this portion.