Adapted from a drash given on February 21, 2020.

Parshat Mishpatim, which we read this year during the week of February 16-22, is positioned powerfully in the Torah. Found in the second book, Exodus, chapters 21-24, it is the 18th of the 54 weekly parshiot.

The previous week, in Parshat Yitro, we all stand at Mount Sinai, an enormous troop of recently enslaved people. We are given a sacred and fundamental structure for becoming not only a people, but also self-governing. With the words of the ten utterances or Ten Commandments, we become aligned and banded together by an ethical framework as a free people. Yitro, Moses’ father in law, supports him to set up a leadership structure so that Moses does not wear himself out (a good idea for all of us to remember). Amidst thunder, lightning and shofarot blasting, we receive the Ten Commandments.

The following week, in Parshat Trumah, Moses receives Gd’s blueprints for the mishkan, the tabernacle, our first temple. As if Moses and Gd are publishing for Architectural Digest, Parshat Trumah goes into opulent detail regarding the use of gold and silver, dolphin skins, and lapis lazuli, all so that Gd may dwell among us. Exodus 25:8 reads:

ח וְעָשְׂוֻ ליִ, מִקְדָּשׁ; וְשָׁכַנְתִּי, בְּתֹכָם

And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.

Down to the cubit we begin to dream of not only our arrival into a Holy Land, but also the building of what will eventually be our magnum opus, the mikdash (the Holy Temple in Jerusalem).

In Mishpatim, we find ourselves between a mountain and the mishkan, our portable mini-temple, between the natural awe of Mt Sinai - Gd’s charge for oneness and ethical living - and next week’s architectural feasibility meeting on the materials and metrics of our planned, earthly home for Gd. In light of these two topics – Sinai and the Ten Commandments on one side, and our temple prototype on the other -- how do we understand the location and purpose of Parshat Mishpatim?

I understand Parshat Mishpatim, as a critical opportunity to integrate Sinai into our everyday lives, to teach us how Sinai can guide our interactions with each other, even miles from or millennia after we were all at the mountain together. As a people woven together by narrative, Parshat Mishpatim is our first opportunity to integrate the thunder and lightning of Sinai into our day-to-day lives. Here’s how.

In Parshat Mishpatim we are given a list of several dozen more laws -- or sacred charges: civil, ethical, criminal law, ritual and spiritual. Mishpatim literally means rules, laws or judgments, and is often contrasted with hukkim, from the Hebrew root meaning to engrave or inscribe. Hukkim are decrees or legal fictions or ways that are often somewhat unclear in their rationale. Classic hukkim include the rite of the red heifer where the ashes of a sacrificed young cow are used to purify a person who has come into contact with a corpse, the prohibition against shaving the corners of one’s head or beard, and shatnes, the prohibition against mixing linen and wool. Mishpatim are considered clearer, more concrete and explainable laws.

Parshat Mishpatim includes four entire chapters of rules, a massive list, especially relative to last week’s laconic ten. Here is a sampling of the mishpatim we receive:

- Firstly, and profoundly considering we are coming out of slavery, we learn that if we acquire a Hebrew slave, in the
seventh year we must let our slave go free, without payment.
- We must not subvert the rights of our needy in their disputes.
- We must not bring death upon those who are innocent and in the right.
- If we see the donkey of our enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, we must raise it with them.
- If there is an ox that has habits of goring people, and his owner was warned, and failed to guard it, the ox should be stoned and killed with its owner.
- We should not tolerate sorcery or charge people interest on loans.

We live in the everyday realities spoken of in this week’s parsha. In many ways I believe this Torah portion to be the most important of all our parshiot, our Jewish contribution to global civil society. We learn how to be sacred in the everyday. These mishpatim, these rules and laws, help us function in the most concrete ways – how to treat people and animals, keep a calendar, and ultimately try to bring Gd into the everyday details of life.

The Ten Commandments are Gd’s shorthand list for how we are to imitate Gd, or live in the ideal way. The description of the temple is Gd’s dream home and blueprint to funnel all our precious resources towards community. In between Sinai and the mishkan, we have reality, the details of daily life that help us bring Gd, holiness, and civility into our everyday relationships and reality.

The parsha begins, אֲנַלָּה, הַמִּשְׁפָּטיִם, אֵלֶּה, הַמִּשְׁפָּטיִם. "and -- these are the rules that you shall set before them." (Ex 21:1). While our covenant began on a mountaintop, its implications reach our streets, our farms, our families and how we count time to mark meaning in our lives. These laws are not simply a list of laws, but the continuation of a liberation narrative, reminding us of the experience of being the outsider, setting limits on servitude.

The tiny little “v” that vav, just a single letter in the Hebrew, didn’t have to be there, but it is. It serves to remind us that our structures -- civil, ritual, spiritual -- are all part of the whole.

From civil and criminal law, this Torah portion then glides to the centrality of the Sabbath: rest for the land, rest for the people and creatures dependent on the land, and then into the ritual offerings of our festivals. It’s a remarkable juxtaposition that they are presented together.

And then, just before the close of this reading, after a hint at what will become foundational to our laws of kashrut, sacred eating, “do not boil a kid in its mother’s milk,” we read, Exodus 23:20:

Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee by the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.

This parsha, so rooted in the practical and the earthly, leaves us in the realm of mystery and sacred accompaniment. We are not alone in our becoming free. It is a daily process and project and we need both mishpatim and malachim, laws and angels. We receive laws of civility towards our neighbors and our animals, laws of humility and rules that require fairness, justice, kindness, and stewardship of one another. And we are also reminded that we are accompanied by angels, malachim, who are here to support our becoming more just, more kind, more accountable to the earth and each other.
REFLECTIONS ON MY WEEKEND WITH NEW SYNAGOGUE PRESIDENTS

Jay Jacobs, President

I am still buzzing from the Union for Reform Judaism’s Scheidt Seminar in La Jolla from Feb 6-9 for new and incoming synagogue presidents from all over North America. 47 leaders attended with the smallest congregation of 55 families and the larger congregations of 700+. The long weekend started with an icebreaker where everyone placed a flag on the map. Over the next few days we learned about each other and our synagogues and met with URJ leadership.

Part of the seminar was an opportunity to reflect on leadership with daily quotes. On Friday, the quote was, “A community is too heavy to carry alone.” (Deuteronomy Rabbah 1:10) This reminded me of BCC volunteers and all the upcoming events you are planning. From the rituals of Purim and Passover to more personal events like “Tell Me A Story” and our Palm Springs travel adventure.

After a brief Friday morning service, I was grouped with small congregations and participated in workshops on philanthropy, mobilization, audacious hospitality, and appreciative inquiry. Shabbat services were wonderfully uplifting and it felt like a group twice the size. Even chanting the birkat ha’mazon, grace after meals, was a chance to bond as a group.

On Saturday, we had a Shabbat torah service. Presidents had the opportunity to meet with URJ staff, share stories, and learn together. We all chose leadership values. Mine were inspired by our word clouds: Betzelem Elohím (in the image of G-d), Empathy, and Joyfulness. These are qualities that are important to me and that I try to bring to all my meetings at BCC. To end this workshop, we were all given miniature Torah scrolls made of cinnamon sticks and crowns of cloves as we moved into havdalah.

On Sunday, I was given an opportunity to offer my reflections on the weekend, which I want to share with you. Part of the Shabbat torah service included Dan Nichols’ setting and translation of asher yatzar. Cantor Juval taught this to the choir a few years ago. Two of the lines really stuck with me, so my reflection was a mashup of the lyrics and the qualities I learned.

“I am perfect as I am”
1. Be yourself
2. Be brave
3. Learn from others’ experiences

“And a little broken, too”
1. Be vulnerable
2. We are not alone and stronger together
3. Failures have value, too, when we learn from them

“But most of all it’s the connections and friendships I made here that will last.” This is also what I treasure most about BCC — connecting with all of you and the many strengths you bring to our House of New Life.

L’hitraot!
—Jay

BCC President Jay Jacobs with Dr. Andrew Reinfeld and Rabbi Rick Jacobs at Scheidt Seminar. (courtesy of Joanie Margulies.)
PURIM PALOOZA
WITH DRAG KING STORY HOUR
AND MORE ON MARCH 7

Come one, come all for a family-friendly day of fun for all ages at Purim Palooza 2020!
Wear a costume – or make a mask in the craft station in time for story-time with a very special guest!
Join Baby Kibbutz, Ohr Chayim, and Teen Track at BCC for…
• A wacky Mad Lib retelling of the Purim Megillah!
• Activity stations including cooking, arts and crafts, text study, and games (including a special Purim encounter in our Dungeons & Dreidels game!)
• Drag King Story Hour with PJ Library!
Bring your friends and be prepared for a joyous celebration with a heavy dose of Purim silliness!
Tentative Purim Palooza Schedule:
10:00-10:30 Welcome, Mixers, and Mad Lib Megillah
10:30-11:45 Palooza Stations!
  Purim Cooking
  Purim Games
  Purim Arts and Crafts
  Purim Text Study
11:45 Drag King Story Hour with PJ Library
12:15 Closing Circle, Schmooze, Nosh on Hamantaschen
BCC is thrilled to offer our Holiday Palooza programs to anyone in the community with kids ages 0-18, regardless of membership or participation in any of BCC’s other Youth and Family programs. Drag King/Queen Story Hour and other special guests at our Palooza programs are only possible with the generous support of our community sponsors! We offer our Palooza programs free of charge to make them accessible to the community, and your donations help make that possible.
Go to https://bcc-la.org/support/make-a-donation/ and type “Holiday Palooza” in the note. For more information, email Rae Antonoff Portnoy, Director of Education: rae@bcc-la.org
We are looking forward to seeing you there!
BCC’S COMMUNITY SECOND NIGHT SEDER  
THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 7–9 PM

Join your BCC community for a delicious and spiritual Passover Seder on the second night of the holiday. We will share food, music, and the spoken word as we gather to celebrate the season of spring, the precious gift of freedom, and our role in the larger project of redemption. Rabbi Alyson Solomon and Cantor Juval Porat will lead the seder. Doors will open at 6:30. Watch for further announcements of details regarding the cost and how to reserve your place at the table.

BCC TO HOST VEGAN PASSOVER SEDER

BCC’s Vegan Havurah is pleased to announce that it will be a co-sponsor of the second annual vegan Passover Seder, to be hosted by the Los Angeles chapter of Jewish Veg. The event will be held on April 5, from 5 - 9 p.m., at BCC. The Seder will celebrate freedom from oppression and cruelty with 100% delicious plant-based food. We will delight in a four-course vegan meal and learn about Passover’s connection with plant-based diets. Last year’s Seder was Jewish Veg’s most successful event, with 70 people in attendance. Early-bird tickets can be purchased at https://jveg.ticketspice.com/la-vegan-seder-2020. Sponsorship opportunities are available. Please write to LA@JewishVeg.org if you have any questions or would like additional information.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON LIBERATION

In anticipation of our First Friday Shabbat in April, please send us your description or definition of liberation as it relates to your own life.

BCC OBSERVES YOM HASHOAH WITH D’VAR TORAH AND PRIVATE MUSEUM TOUR

Join your BCC community to observe Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, with the following two events.

Friday Night, April 17, Shabbat D’var Torah by BCC member Aviyah Farkas “No One Would Believe Me,” in Yom HaShoah.

Sunday, April 19, 9:30-11:00 am - BCC Private Tour led by docents Aviyah Farkas and Ronnie Wexler
Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust
100 S. The Grove Drive
Los Angeles 90036

Join BCC members Aviyah Farkas and Ronnie Wexler for a private tour of LAMOTH, in observance of Yom HaShoah. The tour will be confirmed once we have six committed RSVPs. RSVPs are required by April 7th to bcc@bcc-la.org. We are grateful to Aviyah for her generous invitation.
We are visiting our BCC friends in Palm Springs!

Join Rabbi Alyson & Cantor Juval in the desert for the opportunity to be with friends, enjoy Shabbat and good times.

* Friday night worship at our hotel & dinner on your own
* Saturday morning gentle hike with services
* Picnic lunch
* Optional tour at the Palm Springs Art Museum
* L’hitra’ot, See You Again Songs

To be on the Palm Springs E-list for additional details including registration, itinerary updates click here or send an email to bcc-la.org with “Palm Springs” in the subject line.

SAV E THE DATE

BCC Travel Adventure to Palm Springs
FIRST FR IDAY IN THE DESERT!

May 1 & 2, 2020
(Friday, 7pm – Saturday, 2pm)

We are visiting our BCC friends in Palm Springs!

Join Rabbi Alyson & Cantor Juval in the desert for the opportunity to be with friends, enjoy Shabbat and good times.

* Friday night worship at our hotel & dinner on your own
* Saturday morning gentle hike with services
* Picnic lunch
* Optional tour at the Palm Springs Art Museum
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To be on the Palm Springs E-list for additional details including registration, itinerary updates click here or send an email to bcc-la.org with “Palm Springs” in the subject line.

YOUR BCC TZE DAKAH HELPS WITH FOOD AND SCHOOLING

It’s time again to share what the BCC Tzedakah Council has been doing of late. Our newest round of organizations we support are doing good works and filling in the gap where government falls short in California, Israel, and Africa.

This round we’re giving to Latet Israel, School on Wheels, and One Acre Fund. Each of these tax-deductible organizations is committed to helping Individuals and Families who might otherwise fall through the cracks. We are happy to announce that BCC members continue to honor the tradition of setting a little bit aside each day to make large totals and that our congregation will donate at least $250 to each of the charities. We say “at least,” because we will add to that the money we collect at Purim.

Firstly, Latet is an organization that helps populations in need throughout Israel. It is the largest food distributor in Israel and gives away food to 60,000 food-insecure individuals and families and 1000 Holocaust survivors throughout Israel each month. Latet is the largest non-governmental organization combating poverty and food insecurity in Israel. Acting as an umbrella organization for 180 local associations, Latet operates the leading national food bank and runs impactful aid programs, providing monthly assistance, regardless of religion, race, gender or culture. Find out more at https://www.latet.org.il/en/.

Secondly, every child deserves a quality education. Children without permanent housing lack a safe or quiet place to study and do homework. They live in shelters, cars, motels and on the street. School on Wheels is a local organization that pairs volunteer tutors with homeless children in Southern California. School on Wheels also provides vital school supplies and backpacks for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. You can volunteer your time or donate supplies. Read more about this great organization at: https://schoolonwheels.org

And finally, families in rural areas across Sub-Saharan Africa are hungry and can’t provide for themselves. One Acre Fund addresses both problems. It enables family farmers and other small holding farmers to succeed by 1) providing the farmers with supplies, including seeds, fertilizers and solar lights; 2) delivering those supplies; 3) providing training; and 4) helping the farmers market their products. The Fund provides the supplies on credit, with flexible repayment terms: a sustainable model to create sustainable farmers. One Acre Fund works at the community level, including by making loan repayment a communal obligation. The result is families and communities that break out of the cycle of poverty and flourish. In the countries where it operates, One Acre Fund produces a measurable improvement in farm income. Donations to One Acre Fund also have a measurable effect. A gift of $25 is enough to provide a family a service package for a year. Find out more at https://oneacrefund.org.

Your Tzedakah Council: Angela Brown, Steve Hochstadt, Bonnie Kaplan and Jim Potter. (New members welcome!)
TORAH STUDY AND WORSHIP LAB
TUESDAYS FROM 7:15 TO 8:45 PM

Please join us on Tuesday evenings at BCC for a refreshing dip into the Sea of Torah, or for a session of our Worship Lab that will foster greater literacy and skills to take on leadership roles during Shabbat services, ritual creation and enhance one’s personal prayer practice. For more info and to RSVP for the Worship Lab, click here.

Upcoming dates:
Mar. 3rd - Worship Lab
Mar. 10th - Torah Study
Mar 17th - Worship Lab

SIGN UP TO IMPROVE YOUR HEBREW COMPREHENSION

Introduction to Hebrew Comprehension, Wednesdays, April 22 and 29, May 13 and 20, 7:15 to 8:45 pm at BCC.

For those who can read Hebrew, but want to achieve more fluency and begin to understand what we are saying, this is a great opportunity. Perennially well-received Hebrew educator Todd Shotz, founder of Hebrew Helpers, returns to BCC to teach basics in how to break down Hebrew words from three-letter roots to learn some key vocabulary. We will practice reading and basic comprehension by looking at prayers such as Shema and Torah blessings as well as some modern poems, songs and stories. For those who took the Introduction to Hebrew Reading, this is the next step.

To reserve your spot, email todd@hebrewhelpers.com by April 3. (8 students are needed for the class to proceed.) The cost is $100 for the four-session series.

BCC BOOKS AND BAGELS

Larry Nathenson

BCC’s Book Group (Books and Bagels) has been meeting continuously since January 1995. The group meets monthly in members’ homes for a bagel brunch and discussion of a book selected by the group. We read a variety of books: fiction and non-fiction, American and Israeli, historical and contemporary. The only requirement is some Jewish content (LGBT content is a plus, but not required). Our next two meetings are as follows.

Sunday, March 29, 10:00 am
Gateway to the Moon, by Mary Morris

This novel is about hidden Jews in New Mexico, outwardly Catholic, as revealed by encounters with Ashkenazi American Jews who share similar customs.

Sunday, April 26, 10:00 am
The Red Tent, by Anita Diamant

This 1997 novel, later released in a 20th anniversary edition, centers on Jacob’s only daughter Dinah and offers a window into the lives of women in Biblical times through tales of the “red tent” in which women temporarily form a separate community from their male relatives during their menstrual periods.

The group is open to BCC members and non-members, and you are welcome to join us for a particular book that may interest you. RSVP is required for location and to ensure enough food. For more information, contact Larry Nathenson at Larrynath@aol.com.

SECURITY TASK FORCE

On Wednesday February 26, 2020, the board established a Security Task Force to improve our security plans at BCC. The board is asking for volunteers who would like to serve on this committee. Please contact Jay Jacobs If you are Interested. President@bcc-la.org

NEED A MORALE BOOST? TRY BCC’S LIFE TRANSITIONS SUPPORT GROUP

If you could use some help dealing with the stress of relationships, careers, economics, social life, family life, health or bereavement, you might want to give the BCC Life Transitions Group a try. The goal of the BCC Life Transitions Group is to enhance participants’ spiritual and emotional growth. Participants have the opportunity to share their experiences, give and receive mutual support, and exchange coping skills with one another in a confidential atmosphere. Everyone is welcome - members and non-members alike. The group meets twice a month on the first and third Wednesdays from 7:00 - 9:00 pm.

This support group is facilitated by Shirley Hirschberg, Social Worker. Shirley is also available for individual sessions. For more information, please call the BCC office at (323) 931-7023, ext. 205.
MAZEL TOV

We wish the following BCC members and staff a hearty “mazel tov” on their recent or upcoming accomplishments.

Judge Dean Hansell, a long-time BCC member and previous Vision Award recipient, was recently appointed to the Board of Overseers for Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. In addition to serving as ambassadors for HUC, the Board of Overseers is involved in fundraising, providing strategic advice, working with students on job searches and participation in the admissions process. HUC has campuses in Jerusalem, Los Angeles, New York and Cincinnati.

Tim Goad is coming up on his 25th anniversary as BCC’s building manager. Tim has done an exceptional job maintaining both our old building prior to 2011 and our new one during the past nine years. We will have two opportunities to honor and celebrate Tim and thank him for his tremendous love and care for our congregational facilities.

Wednesday, May 6, 12:00 noon to 2:00 pm at Twin Dragon for lunch. All who appreciate and love Tim are invited. Lunch is Dutch treat, except for Tim). RSVP to BCC@BCC-LA.org by April 29th so we can book a table large enough to accommodate all.

Friday night, May 8, at Shabbat services, we will offer Tim a special blessing and our gratitude for 25 years of dedication and service to BCC.

NA’AVOR (TRANS HAVURAH) MONTHLY MEET AND GREET

BCC’s Trans Havurah (Na’avor, Hebrew for “let’s cross”) will meet monthly at Cuties, located at 710 N. Heliotrope Dr., Los Angeles. Upcoming dates are March 14th, April 11th, and May 9th (in conversation with Rabbi Solomon, BCC’s interim rabbi), from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. Connect with BCC’s trans/nonbinary community over coffee or tea! Contact Bobbi Meilen with questions or for information: njmeilen13@gmail.com

PLAYGROUND SUNDAYS

Donna Quigley Groman, Board Member and Athletic Director

On the fourth Sunday of each month, from 1 to 4pm, the BCC parking lot is transformed into a playground. We now have a basketball hoop and a net for volleyball, badminton and pickleball. With no cars inside, the parking lot has ample room for sidewalk games such as Foursquare or jump rope. Please join us for an opportunity to make friends while having fun. This is meant to be a non-competitive event for all skill levels and all ages (including children). Just bring your game! Upcoming dates: March 22 and April 26.

BCC members enjoy Playground Sunday in BCC parking lot, January 26 (courtesy of Donna Groman)