



CONGREGATION AGUDATH ACHIM  
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## **Parshat Mishpatim** **February 13, 2021 – 1 Adar 5781**

We come to Parshat Mishpatim immediately following the Ten Commandments. The first five commandments are related between G-d and Humanity. The second five are between humans and their fellow humans. In Mishpatim, we find something unique with relationships between people.

We find the information concerning the treatment of the stranger (the “ger”). It is interesting to me that we teach our children not to talk to strangers because we are concerned for their safety, but the Torah treats the stranger differently. How does the Torah treat the stranger? The simple answer is “fairly”.

The treatment of the stranger, the foreigner, and the immigrant is an issue today, and has been worldwide for many years. People are in general “afraid” of foreigners, immigrants, and strangers.

Jewish tradition, taken from Mishpatim, teaches; “And you shall not treat the stranger unfairly, nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt”. Our Sages teach us from the Gemara Bava Metzia that this is one of many (some 35) phrases where the Torah tells us to be kind to the stranger.

What is a stranger (a “ger”) in the Torah? Rashi says; “any time the Torah uses the word “ger” it means someone not born in a specific country but came from elsewhere to live there”. Even though they are not natives they must be treated well. This is simple. You can move from country to country and have “a life”, hopefully being a contributing member of society.

The overwhelming fact that Jews have often been strangers in strange lands and have not always been treated with equanimity lends great credence to the way the stranger should be treated. When Bnei Yisrael came to Egypt they expected “reasonable” treatment. The enslavement by Pharaoh and the Egyptians was evil, wrong in every sense. When Haman and Achashverosh mistreated the Jews of Persia it was an abomination. They (the Jews of Persia), as strangers, expected fair treatment. The Torah is clear. Natives do not have the right to oppress strangers.

People migrate from place to place. This is just fact. The reason for migration is not as important as what happens after. Immigrants or strangers, treated fairly, become part of a just and civil society. Yes, there are laws in place that protect both the native and the immigrant, and when they are followed there are no longer strangers, there are “countrymen” and thereby making thing better for everyone.

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Nathan W. Langer

