**11. Justice (Mishpat)**

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| Restore our judges as in the days of old and our advisors as in former times.  Turn away from us sorrow and suffering.  And rule over us, You, Adonai, alone, with kindness and mercy.  And find us innocent in trial.  Blessed are You, Adonai, a king who loves righteousness and mercy. | הָשִׁיבָה שׁופְטֵינוּ כְּבָרִאשׁונָה וְיועֲצֵינוּ כְּבַתְּחִלָּה.  וְהָסֵר מִמֶּנּוּ יָגון וַאֲנָחָה.  וּמְלךְ עָלֵינוּ אַתָּה ה' לְבַדְּךָ בְּחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים.  וְצַדְּקֵנוּ בַּמִשְׁפָּט.  בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מֶלֶךְ אוהֵב צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט: |

This prayer follows the previous berakhah, where we asked God to return us to the land of Israel. Returning to our own land means that we must take responsibility for our own society. As such we need leaders, and especially judges and advisors.

However, we also know that human beings are never perfect. Even as we wish for "our judges in the days of old," we know that they too had their failures. Therefore, we also wish for the compassionate and just rule of God over us. God becomes for us the image of the perfect judge—we wish all of our human judges could be as perfect.

* Why does a society need good judges? Think about what happens when judges pervert justice.
* Today both in the United States and Israel, the Supreme Court has the highest judges in the land. What are the goals of the Supreme Court? What does it try to do? Whom does it protect?
* Who acts as judges in your lives? Upon what basis do they judge? Who appointed them? What happens when they don't act justly?
* In this prayer we ask God to find us innocent. What happens if we are not innocent? Can we ask God to appoint "just" judges, people who always judge based only on the facts and yet at the same time expect mercy?

**Justice in the Jewish Tradition**

**Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 6b**

Moses used to say, "Let the law pierce the mountain." But Aaron loved peace, pursued peace, and made peace between people, as it is said, "The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and did not turn away from sin" (Malachi 2:6).

* How are Moses and Aaron portrayed in this saying?
* Whom does the author prefer? Why? Are both models necessary?

**Pirke Avot 2:4**

Hillel used to say:…Do not judge not your fellow human being until you have reached his/her place.

* What does this saying really mean?
* Why shouldn't we judge others until we have reached their place?
* In your lives, when have you mistakenly judged others before you reached their place?
* Have there been times when you have thought about this and not judged others until you were in their place? How did it help?
* Are there times when we should judge others, even if we have not been in their place?