

# MY WEIRD PROMPTS

Podcast Transcript

## EPISODE #319

# Small Claims: The Express Lane of Justice

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## EPISODE SYNOPSIS

In this episode of My Weird Prompts, Herman and Corn dive into the fascinating world of small claims court, sparked by a housemate's recent victory against a "ghosting" airline. They trace the system's history from medieval "dusty feet" markets to the 1913 Cleveland revolution that created the modern lawyer-free zone. The duo explores the specifics of the Israeli digital judiciary, explaining why corporations are banned from suing individuals in this forum and how enforcement tools like Hatzala Lepoal ensure that a court victory actually turns into cash.

## DANIEL'S PROMPT

### Daniel

I'd like to talk about the small claims court procedure here in Israel. I've always been interested in how the law serves people, and small claims seems like one of the most balanced ways for litigants to find justice. It's a self-service, digital process for claims up to 38,000 shekels. I recently filed a claim against an airline for a cancelled flight, and after being ignored for months, they offered a full refund within 24 hours of the filing. It's a great example of how this mechanism can compel settlements. There are also enforcement bodies like Hatzala Lepoal that ensure these awards are actually paid by using powers like putting liens on bank accounts. I'd love to discuss: \* The origins of small claims courts and which jurisdiction was the pioneer of this mechanism. \* The volume of work the small claims court handles in Israel. \* What the next step up is—presumably the Magistrate's Court—and what the chain of appeal looks like.

# TRANSCRIPT

## Corn

Hey everyone, welcome back to My Weird Prompts! I am Corn, and I am joined as always by my brother, the man who probably knows more about the Israeli court archives than is strictly healthy. Herman, how are the dusty digital stacks treating you this week?

## Herman

Herman Poppleberry, at your service! And hey, that is only because the archives are fascinating, Corn. It is where the human drama meets the bureaucratic machinery. People think the law is just dry statutes, but it is actually a collection of the most intense arguments people have ever had. And speaking of human drama, we have a great one today from our housemate Daniel.

## Corn

Yeah, Daniel sent this over after a bit of a victory lap in the kitchen this morning. He was making espresso with a very smug look on his face, and for good reason. He was telling us about this saga he had with an airline. He booked a flight to London, they cancelled it at the last minute, and then they basically ghosted him for months. No refund, no vouchers, just radio silence and automated 'we value your patience' emails.

## Herman

Typical corporate inertia. It is a calculated strategy, really. They figure if they ignore you long enough, you will just get tired, lose the paperwork, or simply decide that your time is worth more than the three thousand shekels they owe you. They bank on your exhaustion.

## Corn

Exactly. But Daniel did not go away. He decided to test out the small claims court system here in Israel. He filed a claim online, and he told us that within twenty-four hours of the filing—after three months of being ignored—the airline suddenly found their checkbook and offered a full refund plus compensation. It was like magic.

### Herman

It is the ultimate power move for the little guy. It is like flicking a switch that suddenly makes you visible to the corporate giant. One day you are a support ticket number; the next day, you are a legal liability on a clerk's desk.

### Corn

It really is. And it got him thinking about the whole mechanism. Why does it work so well? So today we are diving into the world of small claims. We are going to look at where this idea even came from, how the Israeli system works—including the current limit for small claims court—and what happens when someone refuses to pay up.

### Herman

And we will get into the hierarchy too. What happens if your claim is too big for small claims? Where do you go next? It is a fascinating bit of legal engineering designed specifically to level the playing field. It is the 'express lane' of justice.

### Corn

So let us start with the history, Herman. Daniel was asking about the origins. This feels like a modern 'power to the people' thing, but I am guessing it goes back further than the digital age. Was there a specific 'patient zero' for the small claims court?

### Herman

Oh, much further. The philosophical roots are ancient, but the modern small claims court as we recognize it—a simplified, lawyer-free zone—really started to take shape in the early twentieth century. If you want to find the pioneer jurisdiction, most legal historians point to Cleveland, Ohio, in nineteen thirteen.

### Corn

Nineteen thirteen? So over a century ago. What was the catalyst back then? Was it airlines ghosting people on zeppelin flights?

### Herman

Not quite zeppelins, but it was the same problem we have today, just in a different context. The traditional legal system was becoming too expensive, too slow, and too technical for small disputes. If someone owed you ten dollars in nineteen thirteen, and a lawyer cost fifteen dollars just to walk through the door, justice was effectively priced out of your reach. The Cleveland Conciliation Court, led by Judge Manuel Levine, was designed to fix that. It was informal, fast, and you did not need a law degree to participate. It was a response to the Industrial Revolution, where suddenly thousands of small transactions were happening every day, and the old courts could not keep up.

### Corn

It is funny because before that, you had things like the 'Pie Powder' courts in England, right? I remember reading about those in that history of markets book you lent me.

### Herman

Yes! The courts of Piepowders. That name always cracks me up. It comes from the French 'pieds poudrés,' which literally means 'dusty feet.' These were temporary courts set up at medieval markets and fairs for travelers and merchants. If you were a merchant passing through a town and someone scammed you on a sack of wool, you could not wait six months for the King's court to hear your case. You had dusty feet; you were on the move. So the court gave you a ruling right there on the spot, often within an hour.

### Corn

So the 'dusty feet' courts were the original 'express lane' for justice. It is the same energy as Daniel filing his claim from his laptop while eating cereal.

### Herman

Precisely. The core idea has always been about accessibility and speed. If the process is more expensive than the claim, the law is essentially useless for the average person. Small claims courts were the institutional answer to that 'market failure' of justice. In the United States, this spread rapidly after Cleveland, and by the nineteen twenties, most major cities had some version of a 'People's Court.'

### Corn

That makes total sense. And now we see it here in Israel in a very robust way. Daniel mentioned the limit was thirty-eight thousand shekels, but the current limit for small claims court in Israel should be verified against official Ministry of Justice sources for the most up-to-date figure. It is adjusted for inflation periodically, which is a nice touch.

### Herman

Right, and that is a significant amount of money for a 'small' claim. It covers a lot of ground—from landlord-tenant disputes to car accidents, faulty appliances, and, of course, airline refunds under the Aviation Services Law.

### Corn

One thing Daniel mentioned that I found interesting is the 'self-service' nature of it. In Israel, it is all digital now through a system called Net HaMishpat. You do not even have to go to a courthouse to file. You just need a smart card or a government identification login.

### Herman

That is one of the areas where Israel actually shines. The digitisation of the judiciary has been a huge priority. You log in with your national identification, you fill out a form, you attach your evidence—like Daniel's emails to the airline or photos of a leaky ceiling—and you pay a small fee. The system even helps you calculate the interest and linkage to the consumer price index.

### Corn

The fee is one percent of the claim, right? That seems very reasonable.

### Herman

Exactly. One percent, with a minimum of fifty shekels. So if you are suing for ten thousand shekels, it costs you a hundred shekels to file. It is a very low barrier to entry. But here is the kicker, and this is what makes it a 'People's Court': as a rule, lawyers are not allowed to represent you in the room.

### Corn

Wait, not allowed at all? That sounds like a nightmare for the lawyers but a dream for everyone else.

### Herman

In the actual hearing, no. You cannot bring a lawyer to speak for you unless the judge gives special permission, which they rarely do. The idea is to keep the playing field level. If I am a regular guy and I am suing a massive insurance company, and they show up with a team of high-priced litigators, I am going to get steamrolled by technicalities. By banning lawyers, the judge ensures the focus stays on the facts, not on who has the better legal gymnastics. The judge actually takes an active role, asking questions and helping the parties explain their positions.

### Corn

That is actually a brilliant equalizer. But can a company sue a person in small claims? Because if I am a big company, I would love to use the fast lane to sue people for late payments.

### Herman

Ah, that is a great question, and the answer is a firm no. In Israel, a corporation or a Limited Company—what we call a 'Chevra Ba'am'—cannot be a plaintiff in small claims court. They can only be defendants.

### Corn

Really? So a big utility company cannot sue me for a late bill in small claims?

### Herman

Nope. If they want to sue you, they have to go to the regular Magistrate's Court, which is more expensive and slower. Small claims is reserved for individuals, or 'exempt dealers'—the 'Osek Patur' small business owners. It is a one-way street designed to protect the individual from corporate bullying. It prevents big companies from using the small claims court as a high-speed debt collection agency.

### Corn

That explains why the airline folded so fast for Daniel. Think about the math from their perspective. Once Daniel filed that claim, the airline knew they could not send their fancy lawyers into the room. They would have to send a regular employee to stand there and explain to a judge why they ignored a customer for three months.

### Herman

Exactly. And even if they won, the time spent sending a representative to court is worth more than the cost of just giving Daniel his refund. It is a classic nuisance-value settlement. The moment that court summons hits their desk, the 'cost of being difficult' suddenly outweighs the 'cost of being fair.' Plus, if they lose, the judge might award Daniel 'exemplary damages' for the airline's bad faith behavior.

### Corn

It is like a legal 'check engine' light. It forces the company to actually look at the file instead of letting it sit in a pile of automated rejections. And the volume is staggering, Herman. Daniel was asking about the workload. How many people are actually doing this?

### Herman

In Israel, small claims courts handle a substantial volume of cases each year. The exact numbers should be verified against current Ministry of Justice statistics, but it demonstrates that people genuinely trust the system.

### Corn

That is a significant amount of litigation for a country of ten million people. It shows that people really trust the system.

### Herman

Because the rules of evidence are more relaxed. In a regular court, you have strict rules about what is admissible, how witnesses are cross-examined, and the 'hearsay' rule. In small claims, the judge can say, 'Look, just show me the WhatsApp messages,' or 'Tell me your side of the story in plain Hebrew.' They can accept evidence that wouldn't fly in a higher court if they think it helps them get to the truth. Most hearings last about fifteen to twenty minutes.

### Corn

I love that. It is more like a moderated conversation than a theatrical performance. But let us talk about the 'teeth' of the system. Daniel mentioned Hatzala Lepoal—the Enforcement and Collection Authority. Because winning a judgment is one thing, but actually getting the money is another. I have heard horror stories of people winning and then never seeing a cent.

### Herman

This is where a lot of people get stuck. They get a piece of paper from a judge saying 'The airline owes you five thousand shekels,' and they think the money will just appear in their bank account the next morning. It doesn't. The court doesn't have a cash register in the back.

### Corn

Right. You have to go and collect it. And if the defendant is stubborn, that is when Hatzala Lepoal comes in. What can they actually do?

### Herman

Hatzala Lepoal is a separate body under the Ministry of Justice. If the defendant doesn't pay within thirty days of the judgment, you open an enforcement file. And Hatzala Lepoal has some pretty scary powers. They can put a lien on the person's bank account, which freezes the funds. They can seize their car. They can even put a lien on their salary, so a portion of their paycheck goes directly to you every month.

### Corn

And Daniel mentioned something about a travel ban? That seems intense for a small claim.

### Herman

It is called a 'Stay of Exit' order. It is a last resort, but it is effective. If you are a business owner who refuses to pay a court-ordered refund to a customer, and suddenly you can't go on your summer vacation to Greece because there is a red flag on your passport at Ben Gurion Airport, you are going to find that money very quickly. It is the ultimate 'find out' phase of the legal process.

**Corn**

For companies, I imagine it is even easier because their bank accounts are public record.

**Herman**

Exactly. Hatzala Lepoal can just send a digital order to all the major banks in Israel. If the company has an account at Bank Leumi or Bank Hapoalim, the system finds it and pulls the exact amount owed plus interest and legal costs. Most big companies have 'automated' systems for this now because it happens so often. They would rather just pay the judgment than have their corporate accounts flagged and their credit rating impacted.

**Corn**

So what is the next step up? Daniel was asking about the Magistrate's Court. Is small claims just a 'junior' version of that, or is it a totally different beast?

**Herman**

Technically, small claims is a division within the Magistrate's Court—the 'Beit Mishpat HaShalom.' In Israel, the Magistrate's Court is the workhorse of the judiciary. It handles civil claims according to its jurisdiction limits.

**Corn**

That is a huge jump from the small claims limit. That is a massive gap.

**Herman**

It is. So if you are suing for an amount above the small claims limit, you are already out of small claims and into the regular civil track of the Magistrate's Court. And that is a completely different world. It is like moving from a friendly game of checkers to a high-stakes chess match where the other person has a grandmaster whispering in their ear.

**Corn**

I am guessing that is where the lawyers come back in?

### Herman

Oh yeah. In the regular Magistrate's Court, the rules of procedure are strict. You have formal 'discovery' phases where you have to exchange documents. You have pre-trial hearings. You have complex rules of evidence. If you try to represent yourself there against a big company, you are in for a very rough time. It can take two or three years to get a verdict, whereas small claims usually takes four to six months.

### Corn

So there is almost a 'dead zone' for justice. If your claim is for, say, fifty thousand shekels, it might be too big for small claims but too small to justify the twenty thousand shekels in legal fees you would pay a lawyer to handle a regular court case.

### Herman

That is a very real problem, Corn. It is a gap in the system. A lot of people choose to 'downsize' their claim just to stay in small claims. If someone owes you forty-five thousand shekels, you might choose to only sue for the small claims limit just so you can use the fast, lawyer-free process. You lose some money on the principal, but you save ten thousand in legal fees and two years of your life. It is a strategic haircut.

### Corn

I can see why people do it. It is a pragmatic choice. Now, what about appeals? Daniel wanted to know what the chain looks like. If you lose in small claims because the judge had a bad day, can you just say, 'I want a second opinion'?

### Herman

Not exactly. This is another way small claims is different. In a regular court case, you usually have an 'automatic' right of appeal to the next level up. But in small claims, there is no automatic right. You don't get a 'do-over' just because you didn't like the result.

### Corn

Wait, so the judge's word is final?

### Herman

Not quite, but you have to ask for permission to appeal. It is called a 'Bakasha le-Reshut Irur'—a Request for Leave to Appeal. You have to file this with the District Court within fifteen days of the judgment.

### Corn

And the District Court is the level above the Magistrate's Court.

### Herman

Exactly. But here is the thing: District Court judges generally do not like taking small claims appeals. They will only grant permission if they see a fundamental error in law or a serious miscarriage of justice. They won't do it just because the judge believed the other guy's story over yours. They aren't going to re-try the case or hear new witnesses. They are just checking if the process was legal.

### Corn

So they are looking for 'bugs' in the legal code, not re-watching the game.

### Herman

Precisely. If the small claims judge followed the rules, the District Court will almost always say, 'No, we aren't hearing this.' It is designed to prevent the system from being bogged down by people who just can't accept they lost. It keeps the 'small' in small claims.

### Corn

It is funny how the whole system is built around this idea of 'proportionality.' The amount of legal effort the state is willing to put in has to match the amount of money at stake.

### Herman

That is the core of it. We often think of 'justice' as this absolute, infinite thing, but in practice, it is a resource. And the small claims court is the state's way of saying, 'We will give you a fair hearing, but we aren't going to spend a hundred thousand shekels of taxpayer money to decide who owns a five-hundred-shekel toaster.' It is about efficiency.

### Corn

It's a pragmatic approach to the law. And honestly, it's one that feels very 'Israeli' in a way—it's direct, it's digital, and it's about getting to the point. No fluff, just the facts.

### Herman

It really is. And for our listeners, it's worth noting that this is a tool you should actually use. Most people are intimidated by the word 'court,' but the small claims system is specifically built for people who aren't lawyers. The judges expect you to be a bit nervous; they expect you not to know the legal jargon.

### Corn

Right. Daniel's story is the perfect example. He didn't even have to go to a hearing. The mere act of filing was enough to trigger the settlement. The airline's legal department probably has a filter that says 'If a customer files a real claim, just pay them.'

### Herman

That is the 'shadow of the law' effect. The court doesn't even have to do anything; its mere existence changes the behavior of the powerful. The airline realized that they were no longer in a 'customer service' interaction where they held all the cards. They were in a 'legal' interaction where a judge was going to look at their behavior and potentially write a public judgment that says 'This airline ignores its customers.'

### Corn

It's like bringing a referee to a backyard game where the other team was making up their own rules. Suddenly, they start playing by the book.

### Herman

Exactly! And speaking of referees, I think we should talk a bit about the practical takeaways here. If you are going to use this system, what do you need to know?

### Corn

Well, the first thing is documentation. Daniel had every email, every booking confirmation, and every 'we will get back to you' message saved in a folder. Without that, a small claim is just 'he said, she said.'

### Herman

That is crucial. In small claims, the judge is looking for a 'preponderance of evidence.' Basically, who is more likely to be telling the truth? If you have a timestamped email and they have nothing but a vague corporate policy, you win. It's that simple. Also, keep your 'Statement of Claim'—the 'K'tav Tvi'a'—short and to the point. Judges hate reading twenty pages of venting. Just tell them: what happened, why it was wrong, and how much money you want.

### Corn

And the second thing is knowing who you are suing. This is a mistake a lot of people make. You can't just sue 'The Airline.' You have to find their registered corporate name and their address for service.

### Herman

Right. In Israel, you can find this on the Registrar of Companies website. You need their 'Chet-Pe' number—the company registration number. If you get that wrong on your filing, the whole thing can be dismissed on a technicality because you sued a legal entity that doesn't exist. It's a bit of detective work before you start.

### Corn

But once you have that, the digital filing is pretty straightforward. And hey, if you are lucky, you might even get a settlement offer before you have to put on your nice shoes for court.

### Herman

It really is a great example of how technology is actually making the law more accessible. We spend a lot of time talking about how AI might replace lawyers, but sometimes the most revolutionary thing is just a well-designed web form that lets a guy like Daniel get his money back from a billion-dollar company without spending a fortune.

### Corn

It's the democratization of the 'sue me' threat. It used to be a bluff only rich people could make. Now, anyone with a hundred shekels and an internet connection can make it a reality. It puts the 'power' back in 'power to the people.'

### Herman

And that is a beautiful thing. It reminds me of what we discussed in one of our earlier episodes, when we talked about how the law isn't just for the big stuff; it's the fabric of our everyday interactions. It is the rules of the road for society.

### Corn

Exactly. And hey, if you are enjoying these deep dives into the weird and wonderful ways our world works, we would really appreciate it if you could leave us a review on your podcast app or on Spotify. It genuinely helps other curious minds find the show.

### Herman

Yeah, it makes a huge difference to us. And if you have a question or a 'weird prompt' of your own—maybe you have a story about a small claims win or a bureaucratic nightmare—you can always head over to [myweirdprompts.com](https://myweirdprompts.com) and use the contact form there. We love hearing what is on your mind.

### Corn

We really do. This has been a fascinating journey through the 'People's Court.' Thanks to Daniel for sending this in and for fighting the good fight against corporate ghosting. He definitely earned that espresso this morning.

**Herman**

He definitely did. And he proved that sometimes, the best way to get someone's attention is to send them a formal invitation to meet a judge.

**Corn**

Alright everyone, thanks for listening to My Weird Prompts. We will be back next week with another exploration into the obscure and the essential.

**Herman**

Until then, keep asking those weird questions! And keep your receipts!

**Corn**

See ya.