

MISHPATIM  
THE SEVENTH POINT,  
HOLY AND FREE

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A  
Only Six Years

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“These are the laws that you should place in front of the Jewish people. If you buy a Jewish servant, he should work for six years. In the seventh year, he will go free without any payment” (Shemos 21:1–2). This *parsha* of Mishpatim has many dozens of laws. Why is the first law discussed in this *parsha* the obscure law of the Jewish slave? After all, this law occurs infrequently. We don’t have slaves at all nowadays. These *halachos* are observed only when we have the cycle of *shmitta* and *yovel*, only in the time of the Beis Hamikdash, which we don’t have now.

Furthermore, the word *eved* is a misleading word. It can mean slave or servant. Sometimes, captives are also called slaves. In view of the respect that the *halacha* affords an *eved ivri*, a Jewish worker is not a slave, but rather a servant. So why is the Jewish servant referred to as *eved ivri*, a term that could be misconstrued as meaning slave? Moreover, why does the Torah set the period of servitude as six years and schedule freedom for the seventh year? There seems to be a parallel to Shabbos. What is the connection?

## **Six-Directional Universe**

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The Shem Mishmuel cites the explanation of his father, the Avnei Neizer, about the meaning of the six years of servitude followed by freedom in the seventh year. The explanation begins with the Chassidic concept of space. According to Chassidus, space can be segmented into six directions: right, left, front, back, up, and down. Within this cube, there is an additional inner point. You can think of space as a huge six-directional cube, and we live in the center. In the middle of that area is a floating central point, suspended in the center of the cube.

According to Chassidus, the numbers six and seven respectively represent the external and the internal.

Every person has an external existence and an internal existence. Much of what we do and experience is an external phenomenon. The experiences don't touch our inner core. There are some experiences however, that do. This is the idea of the six external sides and the one inner point as it relates to the human personality and experience.

The Avnei Neizer says that this Jewish servant/slave is a person who has had a dramatic downfall. According to Chazal, there are two ways in which a Jew can end up as a slave to a fellow Jew. He could be a thief who can't pay the debt he incurred through stealing. Since he can't pay it off, he is sold, and with the money from the sale, he pays back the victims of his crime. The second way is that a person in destitute poverty can sell himself to get out of his desperate situation.

This social and economic breakdown of a Jew can affect him only on the six outer sides of his being. These external sides can devolve into a state of disarray and ruin. His inner core, however, cannot be contaminated. The inner point of even the criminal personality or the social outcast remains pure.

This is why the Torah says the Jewish slave works for only

six years. These years represent the six outer sides of a person's cubic physical reality. This outer personality of the slave is in a state of downfall. But in the seventh year, which represents the inner point, there is no breakdown. Thus, in the seventh year, the year that touches on his internal, free essence, the slave goes free. This is the independence and inner strength that remains intact despite the external breakdown. This is why the seventh year is the year of freedom.

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### Hashem's Introduction at Sinai

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The Shem Mishmuel describes the power of this inner point. It is holy, strong, independent, and indestructible no matter what is going on outside the person. Where does this indestructible point come from?

The Aseres Hadibros engender an important question. The first commandment is, “*Anochi Hashem Elokecha asher hotzeischa mei'erez Mitzrayim mi'beis avadim*. I am Hashem, your God, who has taken you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slaves.” This is Hashem's introduction to the Jewish People and the world. Wouldn't it make more sense for God to introduce Himself as the Creator and say, “I am God who created the world?” Why did He focus on this one event of the Exodus? As incredible as it was, it is still not comparable to the creation of the universe *ex nihilo*. Clearly, creation is more impressive than even the special event of the exodus from Egypt. Why does Hashem introduce and associate Himself with the focus on *yetzias Mitzrayim*?

The Kuzari addresses this question. Hashem wanted to introduce Himself to the Jewish People as the specific God of Israel. *Elokecha*—I am *your* God. Of course, Hashem is king over the whole universe. But He chose to forge a special relationship with the Jewish People. How did this relationship come into existence?

When Hashem took us out of Egypt, He created a unique bond with us. He is *our* God. He gave us 613 *mitzvos*, while the rest of the world has only seven. The demands placed on the Jews are far more extensive than the demands placed on the rest of humanity. By what right does He do this? By taking us out of Egypt, He acquired the right to command us. We have special gratitude to Hashem as well, which motivates us to observe His commandments. Therefore, when God formally introduced Himself to the Jewish nation at Har Sinai, He wanted us to know that he is *our* God.

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### Holiness Absolves All Liens

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The Shem Mishmuel takes a different approach to this question. There is another question that *yetzias Mitzrayim* prompts us to consider: How could the Jews leave Egypt? On what basis did Hashem take them out? The angels, for example, argued that the Jews were idolaters and did not deserve redemption. Why did they deserve this special exodus?

Hashem said, “Now that I took you out, we have a special relationship of a nation with its God.” We know in *halacha* that *hekdeish mafkia midei shibud*. When Shimon owes money to Reuven, if Shimon defaults on his payments, Reuven can collect Shimon’s property (for example, a house). Reuven can go to court and get a collection notice, and the judge can go take the house from Shimon. However, if Shimon sanctifies his house, making it *hekdeish*, then all liens on that house collapse. Had Shimon instead sold his house to someone else, the court still could collect from the buyer. But the holiness of *hekdeish* cancels the lien on the property.

This *halacha*, says the Shem Mishmuel, applied in *Mitzrayim*, too. The Egyptians had the legal rights on their Jewish slaves. But when Hashem said to the Jews, “I am *your* God and You are My

nation,” He put His holy name upon us and created a *kedusha*, a holy attachment to Him. When God established this relationship with the Jewish People, their holiness canceled all monetary claims against them. The Egyptians could no longer make any claims upon them. The *pshat* of the *pasuk* of *Anochi* is, “I am your God, and this gave Me the right to take you out of Egypt and gave you the ability to leave from there.” Hashem’s sanctification of the Jewish nation superseded all other claims.

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## **The Indestructible *Kedushas Yisrael*— the Inner Crux of Freedom**

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Our relationship with God produces *kedushas Yisrael*. The holy Jew cannot have any mortgages placed upon him, because he is God’s property. The Jewish People gained a new level of sanctity, which voided all other claims. From then on, all other claims are absolutely null and void!

This is the essential indestructible point of the Jew. It is the point at which the Jew connects to his God. This holy point is what keeps him free and does not allow him to become a permanent slave. The Jew must be freed in the seventh year because it is the year of that seventh point, of the intense, unwavering holiness, the *kedusha* of a Jew.

At Sinai, the Jewish People said two critical words: *na’ase v’nishma*. Chazal say that the moment the Jews said those words, they became free from subjugation to all empires and kingdoms. They gained eternal national freedom. They also gained freedom from the angel of death. Had they not committed the sin of the golden calf, they would have become an eternal nation whose members would never die.

The Shem Mishmuel explains that this freedom was due to the power of the holiness Hashem bestowed upon them when

they said *na'ase v'nishma*. Their acceptance of the Torah established their connection to Hashem, freeing them from all other domination. Even death has no claims upon a Jew when he keeps the Torah. Death itself is a claim, a form of *shibud*, and Jews are free of any and all claims that contradict Hashem's claim.

The concept of death has to do with the breakdown caused by the sin of the golden calf. We have seven aspects, six plus one. If we would have kept the Torah, we wouldn't have sinned with the golden calf. We would have had the full seven sides of holiness as the dedicated and unwavering nation of Hashem. All seven levels would have been totally free of any claims. This is why no nation or even the angel of death would have been able to dominate us. Unfortunately, though, we did sin with the golden calf. There was a breakdown and disconnect from our true holiness. All external sides of our being were polluted, damaged, and profaned. They lost their special holiness. However, that inner point, the core identity of the Jew, did not become contaminated—even at the time of the golden calf.

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### **Good Intentions Preserve the Inner Point of Holiness**

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The Shem Mishmuel explains that the golden calf itself was an external sin. The Jewish People felt frantic due to Moshe's disappearance. They were influenced by the *eirev rav*, a large group of Egyptian non-believers. The Jews made and served the golden calf because they were deceived. They meant well, but their actions were misguided.

When a person sins with good intentions but with improper actions, he sins only on six levels. His whole external expression may be sinful. His inner core, however, remains unsullied. His true inner self is pure and holy. After the sin of the golden calf, the

Jews lost their external freedom and holiness and became subject to slavery—externally. As a result, foreign nations were able to dominate them throughout history and drive the Jews out of Israel. But that inner, holy core of the Jew is beyond time and space. It is unaffected by our actions. It is not subject to the variations of time and space. The inner core retains its connection to Hashem no matter what and, therefore, the Jew is always free.

Even during the Holocaust and in the concentration camps, the Jew was a slave only externally. But internally, he was the holiest of the holy, as bright as the brightest stars twinkling in the sky. He had the holiness of the people of Hashem. The evil Germans could not touch that. The holy Jewish core was untouched by any external event or circumstance. The Jew, therefore, can never be a slave. He may be forced externally into slavery but, inside, he is free because he is connected to God.

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### **The Freedom to Recover**

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This is why the slave goes free in the seventh year. He may have been a thief, even stealing millions of dollars. Or he experienced a social failure and sold himself into slavery. Nonetheless, he works for only six years, not for seven. This calamity does not touch his inner self. He is a child of Hashem, and he retains the holiness that keeps him free.

This connection to Hashem, which gives us our freedom, is the critical element of a Jew. Maintaining our connection to and feeling the holiness of God takes us beyond time and space. Our occasional downs don't touch our deepest essence.

The thief denies God's vision, he thinks God doesn't see him, and thus he steals. The other kind of slave, the destitute person, has lost hope and thinks he has no future, and so he sells himself. He has fallen into melancholy and depression. Hashem, though,

can always give us strength to accomplish. These two people have had breakdowns, but they are only external breakdowns. Internally, a Jew is still strong because he is a child of Hashem. He comes from Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. He can be a servant only for six years. In the seventh year, he must go free.

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### **Jewish Holiness—Unblemished Throughout Harsh History**

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Much of the world that we live in has been harsh to us, with pogroms, ridicule, and hatred that the wicked of the nations have showered upon us to this very day. This is the experience of the six days of the week, the six sides of reality. The Ramban says that history will have only six sides. According to the Gemara that he cites, the world that we know of, with all of its problems, will exist for only 6000 years. Then, in the seventh millennium, Mashiach will come. He will bring the world to new recognitions, including seeing God's connection to the Jewish People. This is the seventh day of the week, the seventh millennium of the world that will bring with it ultimate, full redemption. The seventh millennium and beyond is an *olam haba*, a future world, which humanity will soon see. Shabbos is the miniature of this redemption epoch.

We now understand why the *parsha* begins with the episode of *eved ivri*. The laws of *eved ivri* explain the very first of the Ten Commandments. This *parsha* explains why Jews must be free. They cannot be both existentially and essentially enslaved. Internally, we are free, because we are the holy people of God.

These words are so powerful, so compelling, and so overwhelming. Let us hope that we will be able to access our inner holy core, our deepest connection to Hashem, our God. When we do, we will access freedom to keep the holy Torah properly and the holy Shabbos properly. With our holy souls connected to Hashem



through the holy Torah and all of its *mitzvos*, we will merit the holy era of the messianic seventh millennium.

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## REVIEW QUESTIONS

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1. What do the numbers six and seven represent in Chassidus?
2. On which levels did the Jews sin with the golden calf?
3. Why does Hashem introduce Himself in the first commandment as the One who took the Jews out of Egypt and not as the Creator of the universe?
4. Can we ever lose hope in Jews? Why or why not?
5. Can we ever lose hope of our redemption? Why or why not?

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## EXERCISE

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1. For a week, look for other people's inner point of holiness and address their inner point in your relationship with them. Keep a chart. Has this chart helped your relationships and feelings towards others improve?



