

WORDS OF WISDOM FROM RABBI YITZI

PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Serve Hashem and No Other

The Haftorah for Parshas Mishpatim is from the book of Yirmiyahu. We read how Tzidkiyahu King of Yehuda made a proclamation to free all Jewish slaves after six years in servitude. Although this is mandated by Torah law, the powerful and the rich made it their custom to keep Jewish slaves perpetually. After initially listening to Tzidkiyahu and freeing them, they had a change of heart, recaptured their Jewish slaves, and placed them back into servitude.

Hashem then gave Yirmiyahu a prophecy, that because they are enslaving their brothers and sisters against Hashem's will, they will suffer horrible consequences. These consequences were to include the sword, pestilence, and famine. Tzidkiyahu and his nobles would be placed in the hands of their enemies, namely the king of Babylonia, who would also capture Jerusalem and burn it.

The connection to our Parsha is that Parshas Mishpatim opens with the laws of Jewish slaves and that they go free after six years. However, there are many other topics discussed in the Parsha. Being that the Haftorah chooses to focus on this specific point, this must be the central theme of our Parsha.

How is the law of Jewish slaves the central theme of our Parsha? And what lessons are here for us, in a time when there is no more slavery?

Our Parsha comes after Parshas Yisro, where we were given the Ten Commandments. We then come to Parshas Mishpatim, where we start learning the general laws between people. Most of these laws are understandable, as common sense dictates them as well. It begs the question, why did Hashem choose to begin these laws with the laws of Jewish slaves?

The question becomes stronger when you consider

that at the time that the Jews were given this law, there was no possibility of owning a Jewish slave. For there are two ways that a Jew can become a slave. Either he is so destitute, he sees no way to survive, other than selling himself as a slave. Or, if he steals and does not have the money to pay back what he stole, the court would sell him as a slave for the amount he owed.

When the Jewish people left Egypt, they all left with tremendous wealth. Seven days later, after the splitting of the sea, they became even richer. The Egyptians would adorn their warhorses with gold, silver, and gems, and after they drowned in the Sea, Hashem made all the valuables wash up on the shore. There was so much that even when it was time to continue on to Sinai, they didn't want to leave.

Just 43 days later they received the Torah at Mount Sinai. Right after that, they were given these laws. So no one was destitute, and if someone stole, he would surely have been able to pay back.

On top of that, during the 40 years in the desert, Hashem took care of all of their basic needs. There was the manna from heaven, water from the well of Miriam, and the clouds that surrounded them took care of their clothes. So no one was destitute.

With all this said, why did Hashem choose to begin these laws with the laws of Jewish slaves, something which was totally irrelevant at that time?

We must conclude that there is something so basic found in these laws that it serves as the foundation

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of all the laws that follow. What is this basic idea?

We know that our forefathers learned and kept the Torah and mitzvahs even before the Torah was given at Sinai. So what was unique about the Sinai event?

The Midrash tells us that the main thing that happened with the giving of the Torah, was that the decree, "that what is above can't go below and what is below can't go above," was abolished. In other words, before the giving of the Torah, although they did mitzvahs, it didn't affect the physical world. Now, when we do mitzvahs, it does affect the physical world, infusing it with G-dliness. That was what happened in last week's Parsha, Yisro.

In this week's Parsha, the actual work of refining the world, making it into a dwelling place for Hashem, by infusing it with G-dliness, begins. It has the most mundane laws, because Hashem wants to dwell in the most mundane, and he wants us to make it livable for Him. Not to change it, but to bring out its true potential. This is our main service to Hashem. To bring Him into every part of our lives.

When a Jew becomes a slave, or when a Jew forces another Jew to be a slave, he is undermining the fundamental purpose of a Jew. Namely, to serve Hashem in every aspect of his life.

It is one thing when a person is destitute, or when he finds himself in a position where he has no way to feed himself and his family, other than stealing. For this, Hashem made a provision. He could become a slave, but for no more than six years. After that, if he wants to stay longer, the owner is to pierce his right ear. As Rashi explains in the name of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, "...This ear that heard on Mount Sinai, 'the children of Israel are Mine, they are My servants,' and yet he went and acquired for himself (another) master, should be pierced,"

The fundamental idea in this law which comes before any other, and is the foundation of all the rest of the mitzvahs in the Parsha, and for that matter, the whole Torah, is that we have to be free to serve Hashem and no other.

In the Haftora, when the powerful were enslaving their Jewish brothers and sisters, keeping them for more than six years, Hashem says that they will be given into the hands of their enemies and the city would be captured, in other words, they will be in exile. This is not a punishment; it is the consequence

of their actions. Since the Jewish people were enslaved, they couldn't serve Hashem properly and make a dwelling for Him. This dwelling would have brought redemption. Therefore, the opposite would happen. They would go into exile.

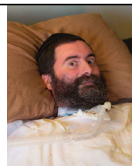
Although there is no slavery today, there are those who enslave themselves to their business affairs. They forget that it is only a means to a greater end, serving Hashem. They are so indentured to their business, that even during times of prayer, Torah study, and Shabbos, when one is supposed to serve Hashem, they are thinking of how to get ahead in the rat race. They have chosen to remain slaves, even after the time of business is up.

Hashem wants us to be free to serve Him, and not any other. Not even to our desires or false notions.

The Haftora ends on a positive note. Even though they will go into exile, Hashem will never forget the covenant He made with the Jewish people. He will return them to their land and have mercy on them.

May we soon see the completion of our service to Hashem, when He will dwell openly in the home we created for Him, through our Torah and mitzvahs, and through bringing Him into every aspect of our lives, with the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.

Despite facing one of life's most difficult challenges, Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz continues to spread joy and faith to thousands around the globe. Diagnosed in 2012 with ALS, Rabbi Yitzi is now 95% paralyzed and no longer able to speak or breath on his own. Thanks to the miracle of technology, Rabbi Yitzi continues to spread his wisdom through his eyes, focusing on each and every letter of these Torah articles. Rabbi Yitzi, his wife Dina and their seven children are the Rebbe's Shluchim to Temecula, California.



"Rabbi Yitzi, I listen to Chabad radio occasionally and twice over the last few years I have heard your wife's testimony. I listened to a specific recording where she spoke openly about the experience before and after you were diagnosed. It is one of the most powerful Chabad talks I've ever heard. I pray for your healing and I pray for your blessing as you continue in your walk with HaShem."

- Kevin B, Dallas, TX

RABBI YITZI WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU! SEND YOUR MESSAGE TO:
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