

# *Reflections of Redemption*

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,  
Based on the talks of the  
Lubavitcher Rebbe,  
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Mishpatim, 5781  
(Vol. 18)



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**IN LOVING MEMORY OF**  
 Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** עי"ה  
 ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד  
**Shagalov**  
 Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766  
 Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** עי"ה  
**Ekman**  
 Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765  
 Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** עי"ה  
**Marenburg**  
 Passed away on the second day  
 of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766  
 Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)  
 ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** עי"ה  
**Ekman (Santiago, Chile)**  
 Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769  
 ת. נ. צ. ג. ה.

**AND IN HONOR OF**  
 Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתח'ל  
**Shagalov**

**DEDICATED BY**  
 Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי  
**Shagalov**

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by  
Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann

# Mishpatim

## THE SERVANT THAT'S FREE

*There are three categories of Torah law. Following the revelation at Sinai, the Torah enumerates the Mishpatim, the laws of daily life. The surface reason is that even common-sense laws, such as do not steal, are Divine and must be obeyed not because they are rational, but because G-d gave them. But the law of the Hebrew slave is unique, thereby indicating the inner connection between Sinai and civil law. The three types of servants correspond to three levels of Divine service.*

The Torah portion begins with the words: “*V'eilah haMishpatim* – these are the ordinances which you shall set before them – *ki tikneh eved ivri* – If you buy a Hebrew servant, six year shall he serve, and in the seventh he shall go free . . .” Thus, immediately after the revelation on Mount Sinai, the Torah enumerates the code of civil and criminal laws.

Generally speaking, there are three categories of Torah law: *Chukim*, *Eidus* and *Mishpatim*. *Chukim* are laws that have no apparent rational basis, but are simply Divine Decrees. Keeping Kosher belongs to the category of *Chukim*. There is no logical reason to keep the laws of kashrus; we do so because G-d – the King – commanded the Jewish people to eat only certain animals. By obeying the commandment, we strengthen our relationship with G-d. *Eidus* are laws that are not intuitively obvious, but are testimonials to events in Jewish history and G-d's Divine Providence. Passover, which commemorates the Exodus, is in the category of *Eidus*. Finally there are *Mishpatim* – rational laws of civilization. These laws, such as do not murder or returning a lost object, are basic to human interaction. Even if G-d had not commanded us to have a properly

balanced scale when doing business or had not warned us not to steal, we would recognize that society needs such regulations to function. Since *Mishpatim* – ordinances – are the most common and most easily understood, at first glance it seems to make more sense to start with the *Chukim*. After the lofty spiritual inspiration associated with Sinai and the Ten Commandments, why begin with the mundane laws of every day life?

On the simplest level, we can say that the proximity of the *Mishpatim* – the rational laws concerning the conduct of every day life – follow the revelation at Sinai to tell us that even these are G-d given. We obey them not because they make sense and serve as the basis for civilization, but because they are Divinely ordained. They have the same status as *Chukim* and Eidus; they are part and parcel of our relationship with G-d.

This structure anticipates the time of the final Redemption. One might think that there is no correspondence between religious obligations and laws of society. Kashrus and Passover belong to the realm of ritual – our duties to G-d, while the laws of theft or the Hebrew slave are societal regulations. Thus we might think that some laws of the Torah are less eternal than others, less spiritually inspired. Therefore, when Moshiach comes, the “eyes of flesh” will see and the “whole world will be filled with knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the ocean bed.” This means that the G-dliness within the so-called ordinary and everyday – the G-dliness within those actions governed by the *Mishpatim* – will be visible and obvious. The level of spiritual awareness and elevation achieved at Sinai will penetrate to and be revealed within the most mundane of activities. There will be no distinction between the so-called secular and the religious – between the civil and criminal codes of *Mishpatim*, and the ritual, sacred laws of the *Chukim* and Eidus. Just as the *Mishpatim* were given at Sinai, so too in the times of Moshiach G-d’s Presence

will be perceived in the “acts of goodness and kindness” between people.

This conclusion is reinforced when we address a rather obvious question: why does the Torah reading begin with those rules governing a Hebrew slave? If we want to emphasize that G-d’s commands apply to the mundane, we would expect the first *Mishpatim* to concern activities that occur every day. Acquisition of a Hebrew slave was an extraordinary event. In fact, a Jew could become a slave only if he couldn’t pay his debts. A thief unable to make restitution was sold into servitude, so that his labor would pay back the value of the theft. At the very least, then, the Torah reading should have begun with the laws of theft, which logically precede the laws of servitude. And if for some reason the Torah reading had to begin with the conditions and duration of slavery, at least it could have begun with the more common situation of the Canaanite slave.

However, there is something unique about the laws of a Hebrew slave. This uniqueness has an important lesson for the times of Moshiach. A Hebrew slave who, after six years, refuses to leave his master, is punished by having his ear pierced. As Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai comments: “This ear that heard on Sinai, ‘thou shalt not steal,’ yet he went and stole – let it be pierced. This ear that heard on Sinai, ‘unto Me the children of Israel are servants,’ yet he acquired a master for himself, let it be pierced.”

Precisely and only the law of the Hebrew slave – the *eved Ivri* – demonstrates the inner connection between Sinai and the *Mishpatim*, the laws of civility and society. In general, the Torah does not emphasize a particular connection between the mitzvah and its reward or punishment. For example, the reward for honoring one’s parents is long life. Longevity and honor are not inherently dependent on each other. Similarly, corporal punishment – lashes

– has no specific connection to the transgression in question. But in the case of the Hebrew slave, the Torah does connect the punishment with its cause. The ear that heard is pierced. At Sinai the ear of this Jew heard “don’t steal;” at Sinai the ear of this Jew heard that the Jewish people are G-d’s servants. It is this ear that is punished. Therefore the laws of the Hebrew servant are not secular or mundane. They are from Sinai. And so with all similar laws, all *Mishpatim* – all laws of human conduct are from Sinai. This fact, alluded to in the structure of this week’s Torah reading, will be evident to all with the coming of Moshiach, when “the eyes of flesh will see.”

The law of the Hebrew slave has an inner meaning, an immediate lesson for us, as we prepare the world to greet Moshiach. The purpose of the Torah and mitzvos given at Sinai is to purify and refine the material aspects of the world, transforming the material realm into a dwelling place for G-d. Thus, in the first law after Sinai – the law of the Hebrew slave – we see how we can bring about that transformation and the revelation of Moshiach.

Chassidus explains that there are three levels of servitude: the Canaanite slave, the Hebrew slave, and the Hebrew maidservant. Each corresponds to a level of our Divine service. A “Canaanite slave” is under the jurisdiction of his animal soul and his physical desires. But he forces himself to serve G-d, refraining from violating the positive and negative commandments because he fears his Master.

The “Hebrew slave” (spiritually speaking) is on a higher level: The Divine soul illuminates the animal soul, so that it too longs for G-dliness. True, he has not yet transformed it, but at least the transient pleasures have lost their allure. (This parallels the role of the male slave: he brings into the house the necessities for eating and drinking; but this raw material is not yet fit for human

consumption. They are not cooked and have not yet left their previous existence.) In a spiritual sense, the “Hebrew slave” has begun to change his nature and the world around him.

The “Hebrew maidservant” (again, a metaphor for a level of Divine service) has transformed her desires and animal attributes into holiness. [In parallel with the above analogy, the maidservant transforms the raw material into something edible, cooking, baking and otherwise preparing the food.]

Thus the *Mishpatim* begin with the laws of the Hebrew slave. The process of transforming the world – the purpose of the revelation at Sinai – starts with illuminating the animal soul and our material environment, changing them and bringing them under the jurisdiction of holiness. What follows, when “all the buttons are polished,” is the level of the “Hebrew maidservant,” the level of Redemption and Moshiach, when there will be a total transformation and the world openly becomes a dwelling place for G-dliness.

(Based on *Likkutei Sichos* 16, pp. 251-257)

**IN HONOR OF OUR DEAR FATHER,  
GRANDFATHER AND GREAT-GRANDFATHER  
Reb Chaim שיחי Lerner**  
on the occasion of his birthday, 2 Adar, 5781  
Leorech Yomim Veshanim Tovos

\*

May he go from strength to strength  
in health, happiness, Torah and *mitzvot*.

\*

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