

Overcoming Negative Patterns and Addiction

Haftorah Mishpatim

Yirmeyahu 34: 8-22, 33:25-26

I'm very grateful to Hashem who showed me this beautiful Shem M'Shemuel about how the keeping the mishpatim safeguards us from needing stain removers for the soul in the afterlife.

Overcoming the Enslavement of Negative Patterns and Addiction

In this week's *haftorah*, Yirmeyahu emphasizes the importance to proclaim freedom to the Hebrew slaves and maidservants in the seventh year, according to the laws described in our Torah reading. After already heading the word of Yirmeyahu and setting the Jewish slaves free, Israel again succumbed to their *yetzer hara* and took back their slaves and maidservants. Yirmeyahu admonishes Israel for this crime and predicts their subsequent downfall. "Now all the princes and all the people who had entered into the covenant heard that every one should let his manservant and everyone his maidservant go free, no longer holding them in slavery; then they obeyed and let them go, but afterwards they turned and brought back the manservants and the maidservants whom they had let free, and forcibly made them into manservants and maidservants" (*Yirmeyahu 34:10-11*). We often have the ability to strengthen ourselves in a certain mitzvah, but unfortunately fall back to our previous negative patterns of behavior. After having received the Torah, we are called upon to strengthen ourselves against the enslavements of addiction and to keep our previous resolutions. Let us make a strong decision right now, to take upon ourselves one positive habit or attitude. Verbalizing this decision starting with "I choose...." seven times a day as a positive affirmation, gives us the ability to overcome any negative thought-pattern or behavior.

The Connection between the Haftorah and the Torah Reading

Our *haftorah* parallels the Torah reading of Mishpatim, which likewise opens with the laws of the slave and the maidservant. Through the performance of the *mishpatim* (laws between people) every Jew is commanded to act with the utmost sensitivity for the honor of his fellow Jew. Just as Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, we must also do so the servant. He works for six years, but in the seventh, we shall grant him freedom. The laws of Hebrew slaves testify to Hashem's creation of the world. The seventh year corresponds to the seventh day when Hashem completed Creation and rested on Shabbath. If we find it difficult to completely overcome our own personal enslavements, we can follow the model of the laws regarding Hebrew slaves. On the seventh day Hashem proclaims our freedom to serve him wholeheartedly. "דרור יקרא לבן עם בת" – *Dror yikra leven im bat* – "Freedom shall He proclaim for son and daughter, and protect you like the apple of the eye" (*Shabbat Hymn, composed by the medieval Dunash ben Labrat*). This week's *haftorah* opens with the word- דרור (*dror*) which means "freedom." "The word that came to Yirmeyahu from Hashem, after King Tzidkiyahu had made a covenant with all the people who were in Yerushalayim, to proclaim freedom to them" (*Yirmeyahu 34:8*). *Sefat Emet* comments, that the person who is involved in Torah is called a דרור – צפור – a bird of freedom. After having received the Torah on Mount Sinai in last week's Torah portion, we are now ready to fly like a bird of freedom, basking in Hashem's Divine Presence as experienced through the holiness of His Torah. Actually the word דרור (*dror*) has the same numerical value as the Hebrew word for holy – קדוש (*kadosh*). (*Bat*

Ayin, Drush l'parashat parah). The *Shem M'Shemuel* explains that the *mishpatim* (laws between people) follow the giving of the Torah, in order to guard the Jewish people from impure spiritual forces (*Sitra Achra*) – the other side.

The Torah, which was given in the morning, is called the Torah of *chesed* (loving/kindness). When Israel is involved in Torah, we arouse the character-trait of *chesed* in the world. The *mishpatim*, were given in the evening – the time of *gevurah* (restraint) – to give us proper boundaries. Keeping these laws will ensure that the forces of evil do not spread beyond their set boundaries in the world.

Avoiding Enslaving our Fellow Jew Guards Against the Forces of Impurity

It is difficult to understand why *Parashat Mishpatim* begins with the laws of the Hebrew slave and maidservant, and also why its *haftorah* emphasizes the importance of keeping these laws. A Jew becomes a slave by either selling himself or being sold by the Jewish court into slavery in order to repay what he has stolen. According to the *Shem M'Shemuel*, this situation very seldom happened, if ever. Therefore, we would have expected that the Torah portion dealing with laws between people would begin with laws more commonly practiced. The reason why the Torah emphasizes the boundary of how much a Jew may enslave his fellow, is that when by keeping this boundary, we guard against impure forces, and ensure that they don't extend beyond their boundary. This explains the verse from our *haftorah* "You have not listened to Me to proclaim freedom, every one to his brother and every one to his neighbor; behold I proclaim freedom to you, says Hashem, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine..." (*Yirmeyahu* 34: 17). When Israel took back their Hebrew slaves after the six years, instead of proclaiming freedom for them, they went beyond the boundary of the law, thereby empowering the forces of evil to also go beyond their boundary. Therefore, the *haftorah* states "I proclaim freedom...to the sword..." rather than "I bring....", because Hashem never brings anything negative upon us. It is the lack of our own self-restraint against exploiting others, which empowers the negative forces to freely subjugate us, G-d forbid.

A Stain Remover for the Soul

"If you keep the *mishpat* in this world, I will save you from the *Mishpat of Gehinum*" (the judgment in Hell) (*Pesikta* 17). Why does keeping the *mishpatim* (laws between people) save us from *Gehinum* more than any other laws of the Torah? In order to answer this question, we have to explain the nature of *Gehinum*. This is the place where the souls are cleansed from the stain of sin. When we do laundry, not every stain comes off equally from the washing. Some stains are only at the surface of the garment and come off through a short washing machine cycle. However, there are also stubborn stains which were absorbed by the inner fiber of the garment. For these stains, we need to use stain remover repeatedly, and sometimes even bleach, until we are able to remove them. The same is the case with spiritual stains. *Gehinum* is like a washing machine for the soul. The more the sin has penetrated into the depths of the soul, G-d forbid, the stronger the washing needed in order to cleanse the soul. This is the judgment (*mishpat*) of *Gehinum*. Since the souls of Israel are essentially pure, and the sin is only accidental and exterior, by keeping the boundaries of the *mishpatim*, and not enslaving or taking advantage of others, then measure for measure, the evil forces will never be allowed to enslave us by penetrating beyond their boundary into the essence of our soul (*Shem M'Shemuel, Parashat Mishpatim, year, 5673*).