



## DIVREI MENACHEM

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# Redemption Through Justice

Sometimes, we need to state the obvious, but not is the obvious always easy to state, nor is it that simple to locate as logic would dictate.

Our Parsha, Mishpatim, provides an example of such in its opening lines that discuss the treatment of Jewish bondsmen. So why, of all the topics introducing civil and tort law – sandwiched between the Aseret Hadibrot and the establishment of the Mishkan – would the lowly servant have been chosen?

With the help of Artscroll's commentary, we can provide several insights:

Even the most degraded man and woman are created in the image of God.

The laws of bondsmen represent an extension of the Tenth Commandment, "You shall not covet" (Ramban). And to know what one must not covet, one must be familiar with the rights and property of

others – a theme elaborated throughout the Parsha (Sforno).

Our religious behavior is not confined to rituals and the synagogue. On the contrary, Chazal taught that there is no distinction between what is commonly called 'church and state.' All areas of life are intertwined. Thus, Kedushah derives from halachically correct business arrangements (including that of Jewish servants) no less than ritual matters.

Seemingly mundane laws are as much an expression of Hashem's supernal Will as Shabbat and Kashrut; hence, the treatment of bondsmen is spelled out in much detail.

Pointedly, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik posits that Mishpatim, emphasizing damages, is more than a mere description of laws; it is a moral code. Civil laws carry religious significance. Thus, mistreatment of bondpeople, destruction of property, and trespassing are, additionally, moral transgressions.

For the Rav, the care taken in the observance of civil law by Hashem's Chosen People is the gateway to prophesy and the "apocalyptic revelation" meant for the Jewish people alone. Through our deep care for other people's rights, we open the way for the Shechinah to dwell upon us.

Perhaps the Rav had in mind the uplifting message of the prophet Isaiah that, "Tzion will be redeemed through justice and its captives through righteousness" (Isaiah 1:27). ■ *Menachem Persoff*

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