**[Soul on Fire – Parshat Mishpatim](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/soul-on-fire-parshat-mishpatim)**

A disciple of Rabbi Moshe of Kobrin awoke one morning overcome with worry, so instead of going to work, he went straight to the rebbe’s house. The rebbe was just sitting down to eat breakfast, and pronounced the *brakha*over his bowl of porridge:

 שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בִּדְבָרוֹ – *She’hakol nihyeh bidvaro – By whose Word all things exist!*

The rebbe did not greet him, but just went ahead and ate his breakfast, while the man waited. Finally, the rebbe said, “Zalman, I thought you were like your father, but I see you are not like him. Your father once came to me with a huge load of problems. Just as he entered, he heard me say, *‘she’hakol nihyeh bidvaro – by whose Word all things exist,’*just as you did. When I finished, I saw he was preparing to leave.

“‘Abramele,’ I called to him, ‘didn’t you have something on your mind?’

“‘No,’ he said, and left.

“Do you understand? When a person hears that all things exist only because of God’s Word, what more is there to talk about? This is the answer to all questions and worries.”

Rabbi Moshe gave his hand to Zalman, who held it in silence for some time, then he bade his master farewell and left.

The root of all angst of the soul stems from what the Torah calls the עֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע *eitz hada’at tov vara – the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad.* That is, our ability to project our imagination into the future or the past and envision different possibilities. What shall we choose? What if this or that happens? What if things had gone a different way? Or, it could also be our resistance the present moment, our saying “no” to what is actually present.

This ability to envision and judge is not a problem in itself; that is what allows us to be creative and to make choices. But the problem comes when our ability to judge knocks us out of alignment with the present moment, which really means that we get knocked out of alignment with ourselves. We think we are worried about something “out there,” but really, we have created a split within ourselves.

 שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בִּדְבָרוֹ – *She’hakol nihyeh bidvaro – By whose Word all things exist!*

The truth of a spiritual teaching is not in its factuality, but in its ability to cut to the core of the one single problem: *non-alignment with this moment*. The true teaching at once sheds light on the root of the problem and simultaneously burns away all impediments, bringing one back to unity.

There is a hint in the *parshah:*

כִּֽי־תֵצֵ֨א אֵ֜שׁ וּמָצְאָ֤ה קֹצִים֙ וְנֶאֱכַ֣ל גָּדִ֔ישׁ א֥וֹ הַקָּמָ֖ה א֣וֹ הַשָּׂדֶ֑ה שַׁלֵּ֣ם יְשַׁלֵּ֔ם הַמַּבְעִ֖ר אֶת־הַבְּעֵרָֽה׃
*When a fire goes out and finds thorns, and it consumes stacked or standing (grain), or a field, the igniter of the fire shall make restitution…*

* Exodus 22:5

*Parshat Mishpatim* contains mostly civil laws for a maintaining a just society; the word*mishpatim* means just “judgements” or “laws.” The above law addresses the scenario of one who accidentally starts of fire, and the fire destroys their neighbor’s property.

But on a deeper level, the *kotzim –* “thorns” – are resistance to the present moment; the true teachings, the *mishpatim,* are like a fire that “goes out” and burns up resistance. It then consumes the “stacked” and the “standing.” The “stacked” is the way we frame reality, the way we “stack” our thoughts and words together to describe what we think is going on. The “standing” means the grain that is growing from the ground, which represents our thoughts and feelings that spontaneously arise, before we “stack” them into bundles of words and judgements.

Finally, the “field” is awareness itself, within which everything else arises. The true teaching, the *mishpat emet* is one that will ignite all these levels and return us to our state of radiance, the inner light of consciousness in which true Wholeness is found:

הַשָּׂדֶ֑ה שַׁלֵּ֣ם יְשַׁלֵּ֔ם הַמַּבְעִ֖ר אֶת־הַבְּעֵרָֽה
*…the field, Wholeness shall make Whole, (through) the igniter of the flame…*

The phrase for “making restitution” is *shalem yishalem –* literally, “Whole shall make Whole” – hinting at the quality of Wholeness inherent within the *sadeh –* the “field” of awareness itself, which becomes revealed through *hamav’ir et hab’erah –* the “igniter of the flame” – that is, the true teaching. This *Shalem,* the Wholeness of the consciousness that receives this moment as it is, is the key to returning to *Shalom,* peace and freedom from worry…

***More on Parshat Mishpatim...***

[**The Center is the Vast Open – Parshat Mishpatim**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-center-is-the-vast-open-parshat-mispatim)

There’s a story of Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak of Peshischa, that he didn’t have the happiest of marriages. His wife would frequently grow extremely angry at him and scold him at length. Normally, he would say nothing, and simply endure her words in silence, unaffected. But one time, he snapped back at her. Taken aback, she stopped her abuse and left the room.

A disciple witnessed the whole thing asked the rebbe: “Master, you always endure her anger in silence. Why did you snap back this time? Did you lose your balance and become angry?”

“Not at all,” the Rebbe replied, “I could see that she was growing more and more angry that I wasn’t reacting, so I pretended to get angry to help her feel better.”

There are two common images that are often used to describe the state of equanimity – of freedom from one’s own negative emotions, or reactivity.

The first is the image of dwelling in the center of your being. When you are at the center, reactivity may arise – anger, fear, jealousy, anxiety, and so on, but you’re are not caught in any of that because the emotions are simply bubbling up around you, while you remain in the “eye of the hurricane” so to speak. In this image, the chaos is external, and you are the calm center that sees the chaos, unaffected by it.

The second is the image of being a vast space within which the reactivity arises. In this image, the chaos is within you, but you are so much more vast and spacious than whatever feelings are bubbling up, that they are insignificant.

Both of these images actually point to two different practices for realizing freedom: being present with your body, on one hand, and knowing yourself as the vast space of awareness both within and infinitely beyond your body, on the other.
These two practices are actually two different stages of the same practice, hinted at in this week’s reading: The Israelites all stand together in rapt awe at Sinai, while the mountain smokes and quakes, engulfed in cloud and fire:

 וַיֹּ֣אמְר֔וּ כֹּ֛ל אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּ֥ר יְהוָ֖ה נַעֲשֶׂ֥ה וְנִשְׁמָֽע
And the people said, “Everything that the Divine speaks, ***na’aseh v’nishmah,*** we will do and we will hear.” (Exodus, 24:7)

The ordering of the words in this verse, na’aseh v’nishma, is strange. You would think that the words should be the opposite – first you would hear, then you would do. But the fact that the words are reversed – “we will do” and then “we will hear,” teaches a key insight:

If you want the freedom of knowing the vastness of your own being as the  borderless space of awareness within which experience arises (v’nishma) – you must first bring your awareness deep into your own body (na’aseh). In connecting with your body, with your heart and with your breathing, your consciousness is drawn out from its ordinary activity of incessant thinking, and into its own nature as open space.

There’s another hint of this unity between the center of your being and the vastness of your being earlier in the parshah, where it discusses how an indentured servent must be set free in the seventh year:
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וּבַ֨שְּׁבִעִ֔ת יֵצֵ֥א לַֽחָפְשִׁ֖י חִנָּֽם
And in the seventh (year), he shall go out free, without charge.

וּבַ֨שְּׁבִעִ֔ת – And in the seventh: In the image of the Star of David, the six rays of the star represent the six directions in space and the six days of the week, while seven is represented by the center of the star. This is Shabbat – the “eye of the hurricane” in time. Seven, then, is the inner sanctum, the holy center – the drawing of awareness into the temple of the body.

יֵצֵ֥א לַֽחָפְשִׁ֖י – he shall go out free: And yet, through connecting with the center, yeitzei – there is a “going out” to freedom. This is the realization that the awareness that dwells within your body is not confined to your body. Rather, it is a vast field that knows everything you perceive; the air around you as well as the stars in the sky are all equally arising within the vast field that you are.

חִנָּֽם – gratis, free of charge, an act of grace – this freedom is not something you have to work for or somehow create; it’s what you already are. Pay close attention to your actual experience in this moment and see – you are the freedom of awareness, right now...

[**Cutting Through to the Essential Core – Parshat Mishpatim**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/cutting-through-to-the-essential-core-parshat-mishpatim)

**Exodus 23:6**

​כִּ֣י תִפְגַּ֞ע שׁ֧וֹר אֹֽיִבְךָ֛ א֥וֹ חֲמֹר֖וֹ תֹּעֶ֑ה הָשֵׁ֥ב תְּשִׁיבֶ֖נּוּ לֽוֹ׃
When you encounter your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering, you must take it back to him.
כִּֽי־תִרְאֶ֞ה חֲמ֣וֹר שֹׂנַאֲךָ֗ רֹבֵץ֙ תַּ֣חַת מַשָּׂא֔וֹ וְחָדַלְתָּ֖ מֵעֲזֹ֣ב ל֑וֹ עָזֹ֥ב תַּעֲזֹ֖ב עִמּֽוֹ׃
When you see the donkey of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless raise it with him.

לֹ֥א תַטֶּ֛ה מִשְׁפַּ֥ט אֶבְיֹנְךָ֖ בְּרִיבֽוֹ׃
You shall not subvert the rights of your needy in their disputes...

It is told about Reb Mordechai of Neskhizh that before he became known as a rebbe, he was a businessman. All year long he would put aside some money from his daily earnings so that he would be able to purchase the finest etrog for the holiday of Sukkot. (An etrog is a citron fruit used in a special Sukkot ritual).

One year, as Sukkot approached, he traveled to the city with all his savings to find the finest etrog. On the way, he encountered a distraught water seller whose horse had collapsed on the road, and the water seller stood in confusion and despair. Reb Mordechai immediately stopped and gave all his money to the him so that he might buy a new horse.

"What does it matter?" Reb Mordechai said to himself, "While everyone else says their blessing on an etrog, I'll say mine on this horse!"

There is a great richness to tradition and ritual, but the danger of such richness and complexity is that we can become lost in their agendas and lose touch with essential simplicity of true spirituality: transcendence of ego, knowing the Oneness and expressing this realization in kindness toward all beings we encounter. Hassidic tales such as these cut through the sometimes dense forrest of religion to the core of the spirit...

[**Before- Parshat Mishpatim**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/before-parshat-mishpatim)

“V’eleh hamishpatim asher tasim lifneihem-"And these are the judgments you will place ***before*** them.”

In order to understand the distinction between your thinking mind and your awareness, it’s helpful to notice that while your thinking mind can’t function without your awareness in the background, your awareness isn’t at all dependent on the movement of your mind.

A nice metaphor for understanding this distinction is the ocean and the waves. The waves are completely dependent on the ocean, because the waves are nothing but the surface movement of the ocean. No more ocean, no more waves. But if the waves cease to be, the vast ocean with its great depths remain. In the same way, your awareness is actually the vast ocean of consciousness within which the waves of your thoughts rise and fall.
​
Now if you’re living mostly on the level of the waves, that’s the ego- the “me” with its problems, concerns, successes and failures. Of course that’s part of who you are on the surface of your consciousness, but the question is, is that where you want to live? Or, do you want to live in the vast depths of your consciousness, in the fullness of who you are, beneath those little waves of your mind-based identity.

This week’s Torah reading is Parshat Mishpatim. Mishpatim means, judgments. It begins with God saying to Moses: “V’eleh hamishpatim asher tasim lifneihem- And these are the judgments you will place before them.”

It then goes on to talk about various various civil laws that Moses is to teach the Israelites. But in the first sentence there’s a special hint about how to connect with the vast ocean of consciousness that you are, rather than be trapped by the waves on the surface. It says that the mishpatim, the judgments, should be lifneihem- before them. In other words, don’t get unconsciously absorbed into the judgements of your mind, but rather see your judgments as if they’re “before” you.

That means, don’t try to stop your judgments or get rid of them, simply notice them and let them be. The more your practice noticing your judgments, without judging your judgments, the more you’ll begin to feel yourself as the noticing, rather than the judging. And that simple noticing is the vast ocean of consciousness beneath the waves of thinking. But in order to really keep your judgments lifanekha, before you, so that you don’t get trapped by them, you have to be willing to stay with the truth of whatever you’re perceiving, without imposing your own interpretation.

The Hassidic rebbe, the Seer of Lublin once said, “I prefer sinners who know that they are sinners, rather than righteous people who know they are righteous people.”

Now why would he say that? Because if you know that you’re a sinner, you’re probably seeing yourself truthfully- after all, most of us make at least a few mistakes once in a while. But if you see yourself as perfectly righteous, you’re probably interpreting things in a skewed way to satisfy a certain self-image. And self-image, otherwise known as ego, is on the level of the waves. Of course nowadays, there can be just as much ego in putting yourself down as in puffing yourself up, but the point is to let go of self-image, let go of needing things to be a certain way, and stay with your actual experience, because the part of you that knows your actual experience is that inner vast ocean of consciousness.

So in this week of Shabbat Mishpatim, the Sabbath of Judgment, let’s practice seeing whatever judgments arise in the mind, allowing them to come and go in the space of this moment, through the practice of Presence and meditation.

Good Shabbiissss!
love
​brian yosef

[**The Girlfriends- Parshat Mishpatim**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-girlfriends-parshat-mishpatim)

If you awaken to spiritual freedom, does that mean that you’ll remain free all the time? Is spiritual freedom a permanent state?

This question reminds me of before I was married, when I had different girlfriends. On one hand, they were committed relationships. On the other hand, we always had the choice to spend time together or not. At the end of the day, I was always free to go home to my own house if I wanted to. So, although there was a kind of commitment, it was nothing like being married.

Does that mean “marriage” is a permanent state in which the relationship is constant and perfect?

Of course not!

Like all living things, it’s in motion. It needs attention and nurturance. And yet, there is something that changes completely when two people commit to having one life together, to be one family.

Spiritual awakening is just like that.

At first, you may have a spiritual experience. That experience tells you something about reality; it changes your whole outlook. However, like all experiences, it’s temporary. When it fades and another experience happens, you might forget all about what you’ve learned. You’re not having the spiritual experience anymore, so you don’t have access to its truth.

You may long for that experience, you may seek it out in different ways, you may even find it. You may find it in sports, in music, in dance, whatever. But ultimately, it’s a place you visit, not the place you live. It is your girl/boyfriend, not your life partner.

This week’s reading, Parshat Mishpatim, begins with laws regarding a male Hebrew indentured servant. It says that he can work for six years but must be set free in the seventh year (Ex. 21:2):

“Sheish shamim ya’avod-
       “Six years he shall work…”

The word for indentured servant is the same as the word for slave- eved. The master of the slave is called an adon- “lord”.

But these two words, eved and adon, also have a completely different connotation: God is sometimes called Adon, and a holy person is called an Eved Hashem- a Servant of God.

Seen metaphorically, then, the Hebrew eved that goes free is like someone who has a spiritual experience, but when the experience is over, s/he goes free from it. It’s only temporary.

But then the text says that if the eved doesn’t want to go free, he is brought to a doorpost, declares that he loves his adon and his new wife and children and that he wants remain an eved. His ear is then pierced against the doorpost and becomes a slave forever (Ex. 21:6):

“Va’avado l’olam-
       “And he shall serve him forever…”

Metaphorically, this is one who becomes an Eved Hashem- a Servant of the Divine. It’s getting “married” to God.

But if spiritual awakening is about freedom, what does that have to do with being a servant or a spouse? Why the contradictory metaphors?

Rashi points out another contradiction in the text that will shed light on this first contradiction: In the above verse, it says:

“He shall serve him forever.”

But this contradicts another verse, which states that all Hebrew slaves are set free on the Jubilee Year, the last year in a fifty-year cycle, no matter what (Lev. 25:10):

“V’ish el mishpakhto t’shuvo-
       “And you shall return each person to his family…”

To resolve this contradiction, he says that the word olam-  “forever” or “eternal”- is actually another word for the Jubilee Year, because after the Jubilee Year, the status of everything completely changes. The original state of reality is gone, so everything up to the Jubilee Year, the year of freedom, is called “forever.”

So, being a “slave forever” gets you to “freedom!”

Meaning- the point of committing yourself to a life of spiritual practice is to shift out of the time-bound, thought-created sense of self, into connection with That which is Eternal- the present moment, always existing as the space of your own awareness, beyond thought.

How does that work?

Back to our text-

When it says the slave is taken to the doorpost, the word for doorpost is mezuzah- the same as the ritual scroll traditionally fastened to the doorposts of Jewish homes.

And what is the first word of the text written on the mezuzah? “Sh’ma”- “Hear”!

Hearing, unlike seeing and tasting, is the sense that we can't shut down; our ears are always open. We can't shut our ears to escape the sounds around us.

Similarly, we can't escape Reality. There's nothing but Reality, everywhere!

And yet, we create this inner resistance to Reality, and that resistance is the basis of ego- that contracted sense of self which imprisons the spirit.

To relax that resistance means to return to openness- to be an open ear, wholly with what is.

That’s the point- and the mechanism- of spiritual practice: to leave your identification with your inner resistance (ego) and awaken into your true and free nature as awareness, by "hearing" the truth of the present moment.

At some point, when you’re ready, it’s time to “get married”- to let go of your attachment to mind created reality and commit to Actual Reality. Then, this moment becomes your Lord, your Master, your God. Reality becomes your “family”- your home base- the place you live, not the place you merely visit.

Does that mean then the relationship is perfect?

Of course not! There’s risk- failure is possible. But you’ve stepped into commitment with Beloved.

And, just as relationships sometimes need coaches and therapists, so too the spiritual life is helped by spiritual teachers:

Reb Yaakov Yitzhak, the Seer of Lublin, once said to his disciple, Reb Zvi of Zhidochov:

“So long as I am alive, I’m not afraid that you’ll slip from your commitment to the Divine. But afterwards- who knows?”

Said Reb Zvi: “I don’t want to live longer than you, rebbe.”

“How can you say such a thing?” protested the Seer. “You are still a young man, and I am old!”

“Rebbe,” replied Reb Zvi, “I will pray that you live forever.”

“But does mortal man live forever?” asked the Seer.

“I meant, rebbe, that you should live one hundred and twenty years, as Moshe Rabeinu (Moses Our Teacher) did,” explained Reb Zvi.

“Come now, Reb Zvi,” said the Seer, “Just a moment ago you said ‘forever,’ and now you’re saying ‘one hundred and twenty years.’ A hundred and twenty years is not forever.”

Replied Reb Zvi: “I came across the idea in some book I read that Moshe Rabeinu lived one hundred twenty years, corresponding to the number of Jubilee Years within our present six thousand year cycle.  For in the Talmud it is written-

‘Shita alfei shanei havah alma-
       ‘Six thousand years the world will be…’

“And, in six thousand years, there are a hundred and twenty Jubilee Years.

“In the Torah, furthermore, the Jubilee is sometimes called olam- meaning, ‘forever,’ as in the passage where the Hebrew slave pierces his ear-

‘Va’avado l’olam-
       “And he shall serve him forever…’

Meaning, the slave serves until the Jubilee year, which is called ‘forever.’

“The point is, I will pray that your hundred and twenty years on this earth should inspire me commit forever. Like that Hebrew slave, I should make the Eternal Beloved my Lord and my family…”

“And in what book did you see that idea?” the Seer asked.

“Well, actually,” replied Reb Zvi, “It could have been mine…”

On this Shabbat Mishpatim, the Sabbath of Judgments, may we open to the one judgment now before us: Commit. Hear. Awaken. May we too write the “books” of our lives, each pointing toward this awakening, and may we support each other on our unique paths. And, may every personal transformation lead us speedily toward the evolution of humanity, to a time of true peace and mutuality.

Good Shabbos!
​-b yosef