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Gematria on the Parshah: Arbaah Nezikin: Repairing the Soul

By: Moshe Herskovits



In Parshat Mishpatim, the Torah outlines four categories of damages: HaShor, HaBor, HaMaveh, and HaHever — the ox, the pit, an animal eating another's field, and fire. The Baal Shem Tov teaches that these are not only legal categories but also the main ways we harm ourselves spiritually in Avodat Hashem.

Noam Elimelech adds that these four categories correspond to the letters of Shem Hashem and to the Avot and David HaMelech. He says when all four areas are spiritually repaired, Hashem's Name and Presence fully shines upon us.

What are the four main ways we damage ourselves spiritually? How can the Avot guide us in repairing them?

HaBor: Being Empty of Torah

The first category of damage is habor, the pit. The Baal Shem Tov explains that this refers to a person who is like an empty pit, someone who travels without focusing on Torah.

When Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn came to America, his very first campaign was to encourage chassidim to recite Mishnayot while traveling around New York. He explained that Torah is like smoke. Just as smoke spreads and affects the people around it, words of Torah spoken release Divine energy into the world.

Another aspect of the pit is moving through life without purpose. In every encounter, we should ask what mitzvah can emerge from this moment? Eruvin 64a teaches that Rabbi Abba and Rabbi Menashia never parted without a Dvar Halachah, making sure holiness came from every meeting. Avraham Avinu corresponds to the bor. The Torah says Avraham was ba bayamim, came with his days. Every moment he focused on promoting Hashem's wisdom and kindness into the world.

HaShor: Guarding Our Eyes

The second category is hashor, the ox. The Baal Shem Tov teaches that the ox represents guarding our eyes. The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that every time we overcome our animal instincts, it is as if we have brought a korban in the Beit HaMikdash. The gematria of ביטול (nullifying the self) is 57, the same as מזבח (Altar). Just as the mizbeach drew Divine blessing into the

world, so too every act of self-restraint draws blessing.

Additionally, the word לא shares the same letters as ל-א, Hashem's Name of kindness, reminding us that saying no to the yetzer hara draws Hashem's kindness into the world.

Yitzchak Avinu corresponds to the shor. The Torah tells us that he went blind due to the incense Esav's wives offered to idols. From this we can learn to develop a natural disgust for immorality, by recognizing that overcoming it brings blessing into the world.

HaMaveh: Eating Like an Animal

The third category is hamaveh, an animal eating another's field. The Baal Shem Tov explains that this represents eating without awareness of Hashem.

Noam Elimelech teaches that when we eat, we should be mindful of Hashem's love and kindness in every bite. The Biblical word for food is מאכל which equals 91, the same as ה' י-י, and also אהבה וחסד (love & kindness). Brachot are not only said before the meal; holy eating requires mindful gratitude in every bite.

Yaakov Avinu corresponds to hamaveh. He spent 22 years labouring in Lavan's house and remained spiritually connected through his constant tefillot.

HaHever: Fire of Anger

The final category is hahever, fire. The Baal Shem Tov teaches that fire represents anger, which spreads destruction like flames. David HaMelech corresponds to this category. Despite immense suffering, including being pursued by Shaul, David never took revenge. Instead, he transformed his pain into praise and tefillah. The gematria of שאול is 337, the same as מזמור לדוד, teaching that David turned Shaul's persecution into praise. In moments of anger and frustration, we too can redirect that emotional fire into gratitude and tefillah.

Megillah 12b asks why Mordechai is called Yehudi and not Yemini, since he came from the tribe of Binyamin. One answer is that Mordechai existed in the merit of David HaMelech. When David fled Yerushalayim because of Avshalom's rebellion, Shimi ben Geira, an ancestor of Mordechai, hurled curses and stones at him. David's soldiers wanted to kill Shimi, but David said, "It is not Shimi who is cursing me; it is Hashem. If Hashem wants me to return to power, that is what is for the best, and if not, that too is for the best." Through restraining his anger and accepting Hashem's will, Mordechai

HaYehudi was born generations later.

A Practical Challenge

This week focus on one small intentional act in each category:

HaBor – During travel or transition time, re-view Torah or recite a Dvar Torah to yourself so no moment is empty.

HaShor – Choose one moment to guard your eyes or restrain an impulse, remembering that this draws Hashem's kindness into the world.

HaMaveh – During one meal, eat slowly and mindfully, feeling Hashem's love and kindness in every bite.

HaHever – When anger or frustration arises, pause and transform that energy into tefillah or praise.

Through repairing these four areas, may the four letters of Shem Hashem shine fully within us, bringing blessing to ourselves and to the entire world.

The Courage to Lose Yourself

By: Adam Klasner



There is a kind of insanity that destroys a person. And there is a kind of insanity that saves them.

Parshas Trumah introduces a strange detail. The Mishkan, the dwelling place for God, is built almost entirely from one material. Shittim wood. The Torah repeats it again and again.

Shittim.

The word itself is unsettling. It comes from the same root as shtus meaning folly, deviation, insanity. And later in the Torah, Shittim appears again, as a place of moral collapse, temptation, and spiritual downfall.

Which raises the obvious question. Why would God choose to build His home out of the very substance associated with chaos and loss of self?

The answer cuts deep.

The sages teach that no one sins unless a spirit of shtus overtakes them. Not madness in the clinical sense. But disconnection. A veering away from one's inner truth. A temporary forgetting of who you are and what you stand for.

That is the destructive insanity. The kind that pulls you out of your life, your values, your body, your soul.

But the Mishkan is not built to suppress that

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energy. It is built to transform it.

Because there is another kind of shtus. A holy one.

King David embodied it.

When the Ark was finally brought home, David did not act like a king protecting his image. He danced. He whirled. He lost himself completely in joy before God. No self consciousness. No calculation. No concern for how it looked.

And his wife Michal was horrified.

From her perspective, dignity meant restraint. Holiness meant composure. Leadership meant control. David, to her, looked unhinged.

But David saw something deeper. He understood that there are moments where holding onto your identity is the greatest obstacle to truth. That sometimes the most honest spiritual act is letting yourself dissolve.

He told her plainly. I am willing to become even smaller in my own eyes. Because real greatness is not self possession. It is surrender.

This is the holy insanity.

Not the kind that numbs you or pulls you away from yourself. But the kind that breaks the grip of ego. The kind that lets you stop performing and start being. The kind that allows life, love, joy, and God to move through you without obstruction.

This is why the Mishkan is built from Shittim wood. Because God does not dwell where everything is polished and controlled. He dwells where a person is willing to let go.

The tragedy is not intensity. The tragedy is disconnection.

We spend so much energy trying to be normal, composed, impressive, spiritual enough, stable enough. But often what we call normal is just a prison. A quiet way of staying guarded.

Healing does not always come from tightening your grip. Sometimes it comes from loosening it.

From allowing yourself to feel without managing. To trust without understanding. To show up without armor.

That is the shtus that builds a home for God.

Overcoming Slavery

By: Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski



At first glance, Parshas Mishpatim opens with an odd Mitzvah: "If you acquire a male Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh year he shall go free, without payment" (Shmos 21:2).

The Chumash then proceeds to lay out an entire legal framework governing slaves, slavery and servitude.

I once heard a heretical attack on the

veracity of the **תורה שבכתב**, G-d protect us, from these verses. They asked something along the lines of: How can the Torah include laws of slavery immediately after the experienced persecution of the Jewish people under Egypt? How can a document claim to be the foundational text of morality legislate an institution that denies human freedom?

The Ramban explains the following: "If you buy a Hebrew slave: The first ordinance begins with the Hebrew slave because the release of the slave in the seventh year is a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt, which was mentioned in the First Commandment..." (Ramban on Shmos 21:2).

The Netziv similarly explains: "If you acquire [a Hebrew servant] etc: It begins with the law of servants to clarify that, according to what was stated at the beginning of the Ten Statements, "Who brought you out of the house of bondage [slavery]..." (HaEmek Davar on Shmos 21:2. See the Ramban who answers similarly).

According to this, the Torah is not awkwardly transitioning from freedom to slavery. On the contrary, it is doing precisely the opposite: it is embedding the memory of Jewish freedom into the very fabric of civil law. The Hebrew slave is never allowed to forget - nor may his master - that slavery is conditional and morally constrained, because Jewish history itself testifies to the ultimate rejection of these aspects of this institution.

I'd like to suggest another approach to why Mishpatim starts with the Mitzvos of slavery.

The Jewish people left Egypt only days earlier. They may have been physically free, but the slave mentality had not yet dissipated. Slavery was not an abstract concept to them - but a lens through which they perceived the world, colored the reality of their worldview.

And precisely for that reason, this is where the Torah begins.

If the Torah is meant to shape a people, it must first address them where they are. By starting here, the Torah acts purposefully: it takes the most personal, most sensitive, and most morally charged institution in the Jewish psyche - and boldly applies jurisprudence to it: servitude is limited, abuse is forbidden, dignity remains intact. In other words, the Torah does not accept slavery - it transforms it, and in doing so, begins the long process of uprooting the slave mind, still trapping many Jews. And this, perhaps, makes it the most fitting place to begin.

Master Your Inputs and Outputs

By: Rabbi Avrohom Jacks



Every time you pick up your smartphone, you stand at a gateway of infinite choice. But the device you hold in the palm of your hand is not neutral; it possesses the potential to harm or to heal. It amplifies your ability to shape the world just as it deepens your capacity to be influenced by it.

This dual dynamic (to project influence outward and to absorb it inward) is not unique to the digital age. In fact, it mirrors a specific legal framework found in this week's Parsha regarding how we interact with public spaces. The Torah explores the consequences of creating hazards in the public domain, identifying two specific obstructions that could injure a passerby: the sunken pit and the protruding obstacle. These are more than just legal categories. They are metaphors for the two engines of our souls. The pit represents our capacity to receive, while the protrusion represents our ability to give.

Just as an open, unguarded pit creates a danger in the physical world, an unguarded mind creates a hazard in the digital one. Because you are constantly receiving input, you must be strictly intentional about what you consume. You can use your phone to saturate your consciousness with the noise of the world, or you can fill it with timeless Torah wisdom. You can consume fear-inducing headlines or absorb edifying material that inspires calm and certainty. Ultimately, you decide whether you will receive something empowering or diminishing. You can dig a dangerous pit, or carve out a receptacle ready to be filled with blessings.

But your responsibility does not end with what you absorb; it extends to what you project. This brings us to the protrusion (the metaphor for your ability to impact the wider world). Like the pit, a jutting object could be either a hazard or a benefit. The content you put out into the world can cut others down, or it can build them up. You therefore have an obligation to take ownership of your creative energy and use your influence as a force for good.

Our mission is to transform the world into a home for G-d. You achieve this by mastering your inputs and your outputs. You curate a life of beauty by absorbing only what inspires you. You build a legacy of kindness by radiating only that which heals the world. So, the next time you pick up your phone, pause and think of the pit and the protrusion. Then, decide to transform the public domain into a dwelling place for the Divine.



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