

## **And in the seventh, he shall go free, for no charge. (21:2)**

Overcome with economical woe, a Jew ignores the degradation that he will bring upon himself and resorts to theft to elevate himself from his sorrowful economic state. He is caught, and found lacking in funds with which to make restitution. As a result, he is sold into slavery. In the event that the value of the theft equals or exceeds the estimated value of his six years of work, he is sold as a bondsman. Jewish slavery is unlike any other form of restriction of personal freedom. The Jewish bondsman is treated quite well. Nonetheless, he is still a slave, and, as such, he has limited freedom.

The Torah refers to the bondsman as an *eved Ivri*, Hebrew slave, rather than *Yehudi*, the more exalted designation that continues to serve as our identity as a nation. Furthermore, the idea of fixing his service to just six years, and granting the seventh year the power of catalyzing his freedom, seems to be more symbolic than rational. While in most aspects of this period of slavery the bondsman is treated with dignity, in one instance this man is meant to feel denigrated. This is the law that permits the master to give him a heathen slave-girl as a “wife” for the duration of his servitude, after which the wife and whatever children she bears remain with the master. Apparently, this man’s plunge into spiritual ignominy must be expunged through a self-awareness of the degree of his descent. Losing *Yehudi* status and being allowed to liaison with a non-Jewish woman drives home the notion that he is as distant from Judaism as his wife, and his national affiliation plunges to that of the period preceding the Giving of the Torah. What about the “six” years of servitude, followed by the “seventh” year, generates his freedom? How does this fit into the equation?

In almost parallel expositions, the *Nesivos Shalom* and *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, examine the *eved Ivri* from a perspective which instructs us concerning our personal *avodah*, service, to the Almighty. The *eved Ivri* symbolizes the Jew who has fallen from his spiritual level and is now in dire need of *tikkun*, spiritual repair. No Jew is forgotten. No Jew is left to wallow alone in spiritual defilement. Every Jew has an opportunity to return and find a remedy for his spiritual estrangement.

The fall to sin of the *Eved Ivri* is alluded to by the six years of servitude, as six is the number (six work days) which symbolizes the purely material, physical world. In order to achieve restitution of that which was lost by his sinful activity, he must subordinate his “six” to work himself up to “seven,” the symbol of *Shabbos*. During the precious *Shabbos*, his soul can regain its original brilliance. The light of *Shabbos* penetrates into the darkest and coldest hearts and resuscitates them, elevating the Jew from the nadir of depravity and returning him to the apex of spiritual luster. Even the Jew who has submerged and lost himself in the “deep six” can, through the *kedushas* *Shabbos*, the holiness of *Shabbos*, rise to his designated pinnacle. Once the slave leaves his master, he will leave with a reminder of caution: Beware of the “six” of materialism and physicality to which you have been enslaved, and focus on the “seven” of *kedushah* to which you were created to live.

I have taken the liberty of melding together the ideas which *Rav Hirsch* and the *Nesivos Shalom* expounded in order to convey the message that “*Shabbos* saves.” How does this phenomenon occur? How do we bring back every Jew who has alienated himself from the Torah-way, just by living, experiencing and observing *Shabbos*? I turn to the *Nesivos Shalom*. *Shabbos* comes to us in a variety of ways. For some, it comes weekly, while, for the saintly few, the entire week is focused on *Shabbos*. Sadly, some individuals experience that awakening after seven long years, and others who never (never say never) have to wait for *Yovel*, the Jubilee year – once in a lifetime – to have the opportunity to find a remedy for their spiritual angst. Everyone, however, is afforded that chance to return.

How does it work? The full complement of *Shabbos kedushah* and its therapeutic effect is achieved through *ahavah*, love. We serve Hashem on *Shabbos* with the attribute of love – complete, total, unabashed, unrestricted love of Hashem. As long as one cannot sever his love for the earthly, and materialistic, so that he gives to Hashem only the leftovers, the light of *Shabbos* will not illuminate him. Hashem wants us to repair our breach and return it to Him. *Shabbos* can be that vehicle, if we are prepared to submerge ourselves totally in its holiness.