

# Law Makes You Free

**BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE**

The Israelites, having been slaves, are freed only to then receive God's law. At first glance, this might seem to encumber them yet again. But slaves are subject not to law, but to will. The more law, the freer. Listen to R.W. Southern in his classic *The Making of the Middle Ages* discuss the development of law:

The higher one rose toward liberty, the more area of action was covered by law, the less it was subject to will. The knight did not obey fewer laws than the ordinary freeman, but very many more; the freeman was not less restricted than the serf, but he was restricted in a different, more rational way. Law was not the enemy of freedom...The most highly privileged communities were those with the most laws.

We tend to think of law as a fetter, restricting our freedom. But we only have freedom because of law. Without traffic regulations we are not free to safely drive, without property laws our homes are unprotected. Internal life can be liberated by law as well. Jewish law seeks to regulate us in order to elevate us. Practiced with wisdom and compassion, *halacha* — Jewish law — gives the chance for one's spirit to be free.