

KOL MEVASSER

Rabbi's Message A Good Question from a Congregant



Last week, one of our members asked me: “Rabbi, why does Parashat Mishpatim start with commandments allowing us to enslave our own people? Only 3 months after leaving slavery in Egypt, isn’t it strange that God would introduce His Torah with laws about keeping Jews in bondage?!” This was such an interesting question that I decided to write about it in the Kol Mevasser.

To approach an answer, we must examine the situations that would lead one Jew to become a slave to another in the first place. In his commentary to Ex. 21:2, Rashi explains that this could happen either because someone was caught stealing and couldn’t pay it back, or because he was in dire financial need and had no other way to earn an income.

In both cases, we see that Biblical slavery is closer to the model of “indentured servitude,” and quite different from the “chattel slavery” that was practiced in Egypt. In an ancient world where slavery was as normal as it was cruel, the Torah made a revolution by framing slavery more like a regulated financial transaction than a free-for-all of hopeless bondage. Effectively, it functioned as a social safety net,

sparing the most desperate people from incarceration or worse.

By way of comparison, chattel slavery was completely legal in pre-Civil War America, while the poor could be snatched off the street by bailiffs and thrown into “debtors’ prison” at any time. A famous example of this is James Wilson, who was imprisoned for debt twice during the 1790s despite the fact that he was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a currently serving justice of the Supreme Court!

Hence we see that Jewish slavery was imagined by the Torah as an early form of social justice, preventing the vulnerable from sinking below a baseline quality of life. Perusing the laws of slave ownership bears out this assessment, for the master must feed and clothe his slaves with dignity, protect the women and children after the ancient fashion, and even free his slave after six years of service. This is a far cry from the self-conscious exploitation and cruelty of Egyptian slavery – they are both figuratively and literally in a different parashah.

With this background, we now have a deeper appreciation of the classical rabbinic answer to the original question, which appears in the Midrash Aggada: **“If you buy a Hebrew slave” – God began teaching the rules of the Torah with the case of the Hebrew slave. Why? Because the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt**

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Parashat Mishpatim

Torah: Ex. 21:1–24:18, 118 Pesukim
Hertz 306–322; Stone 416–443
Haftarah: Jer. 34:8–22; 33:25-26
Hertz 323–324, Stone 1156–1157
Tefillot: Mashib Haruah, Hakhrizat
Adar I (Tu-We)

KJ Schedule

Ereb Shabbat

Friday, February 5th

Shaharit 6:25 am
Minha..... 5:00 pm
Shabbat Candle Lighting 5:08 pm
Arbit / Kabbalat Shabbat.... 5:30 pm

Yom Shabbat

Saturday, February 6th

Shaharit / Morning Prayer.. 8:30 am
Keri'at HaTorah 10:15 am
Musaf 11:30 am
Minhah..... 4:30 pm
Se'udah Shelisheet..... 5:15 pm
Arbit 6:00 pm
Habdalah 6:13 pm

Weekdays / Sunday, February 7th

Shaharit..... 7:30 am
Talmud Torah.....10:00 am

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and the Holy One, Blessed is He, granted them freedom. Because of this, His first commandment to us was to abstain from enslaving our brothers with cruelty; and also not to work them forever, but rather to set them free in the seventh year.”

In other words, we learn about slavery first so that we can turn our worst injustices into something socially valuable and compassionate. Thankfully, the host countries of world Jewry have now outlawed slavery entirely, an even more intense manifestation of these principles which were first laid out in the Torah of the Jews. This kind of modern, progressive step was only made possible through the thinking that God expresses from the very outset: if you allow yourselves to become callous agents of cruelty, then you will not get very much out of what you are about to read.

Keep the questions coming – it is my pleasure to connect with you through give-and-take over the Torah! Shabbat Shalom

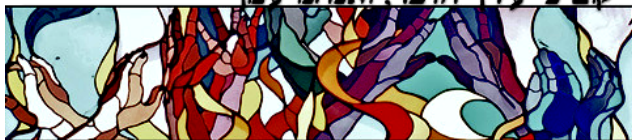
Events at KJ

Purim Baking Sunday, March 13
Join the fun & bake traditional Iraqi sweets for KJ's Community Gift Baskets.

Purim Carnival Sunday, March 20
KJ's annual celebration with carnival booths, amazing games, fun rides & BBQ

Mimouna Sunday, May 1st
Traditional celebration & community gathering after Passover with delicious treats

קום כי עליך הדבר ואנחנו עמוך



Arise, for this is your task, and we are with you

Kahal Joseph Congregation

JOYOUSLY INVITES YOU
TO CELEBRATE WITH US AT
THE INSTALLATION OF

Rabbi Raif S. Melhado

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: RABBI ASHER LOPATIN
PRESIDENT, YESHIVAT CHOVEVEI TORAH

SUNDAY, MARCH 6 - 26 ADAR I
INSTALLATION AT 5:30PM
CELEBRATORY DINNER TO FOLLOW

10505 SANTA MONICA BLVD, LOS ANGELES, CA



RSVP BY SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28
KAHALJOSEPH.ORG/INSTALLATION | 310.474.0559

KJ Schedule (continued)

Weekdays / Mon, Feb 8, Thurs-Fri, Feb 11-12
Shaharit 6:25 am

Rosh Hodesh Adar I / Tue & Wed, Feb 9-10
Shaharit 6:15 am

Ereb Shabbat / Friday, February 5th
Shaharit 6:25 am
Minha 5:00 pm
Shabbat Candle Lighting 5:15 pm
Arbit / Kabbalat Shabbat..... 5:30 pm

In Memoriam

We remember yahrzeit anniversaries from February 6 to 13, 2016. It is customary to light a memorial candle, donate tzedaka & attend Shabbat services.

27 Shebat / Shabbat, February 6th

Ezra Avrahamy *Ezra ben Yosef*
Nathan Bass *Nathan ben Yisrael*

28 Shebat / Sunday, February 7th

Hilda Jacob *Haviva bat Masooda*
Nassim Shamash *Nassim ben Sarah Khatoon*

29 Shebat / Monday, February 8th

Rama Duke *Rahma bat Salha Khatoun*
Georgia Jiji
Mordechai Sassoon *Mordechai Hayim ben Moshe*

30 Shebat / Tuesday, February 9th

Nagi Avraham *Nagi ben Murad*
Shaul Cohen *Shaul ben David*
Haim Elazar *Haim ben Yisrael*
Catherine Moses *Khatoon Matana bat Masouda*

1 Adar I / Wednesday, February 10th

Yosef Soffer *Yosef ben Eliyahu*

2 Adar I / Thursday, February 11th

Abraham Aslan *Avraham ben Meneshe*
Aaron J. Moses *Aharon ben Yosef*
Joseph Moses *Yoseph Faraj ben Yoseph Haim*

3 Adar I / Friday, February 12th

Yoseph Avrahamy *Yoseph ben Avraham*
Farang Jahanbani
Herschel Tzvi Sarne

Abraham Shalom *Avraham ben Shaul*

4 Adar I / Shabbat, February 13th

Simy Bensabat *Simy bat Mesody*
Baacker Jalali *Baacker ben Avraham*

Refuah Shelemah

Abe Abraham • Moselle Amron • Esther Duke
Mordechai Cohen • Sylvia Cohen • Tilda Levy
Miriam bat Yetta • Sassoon Ezra • Sally Amron
Maurice Ovadia • Florice Newberry