

Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Mishpatim:*** **Exodus 21:16-34**
 Haftarah: **Jeremiah 34:10-11**
 B'rit Chadasha: **II Corinthians 6:1-2**

If/when men contend

[Exodus 21:18]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 119:9-16;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is *L'Hodot* [the Prayer of Thanksgiving]

V'gonev ish umecharo – if a man shanghaies/carries away and sells another Exodus 21:16a.

Children are children. So, it was inevitable that the little ones in the camp would get curious. One by one tots in the camp of the Redeemed began to tug on their father's tunics and ask: "*Abba, why does Moshe carry that box with him everywhere we go? Are there really bones inside of it, like everyone says?*" Oh, what an earful the inquisitive children would then receive! What - have I never told you the story of Yosef and his brothers, Beni? Many years ago, long before I was born, our father Yisrael had twelve sons. One of these sons – a very gifted young man - was named Yosef. It is his bones that are in that box. One day, long ago, he was running an errand for his father. He found himself surrounded by his brothers – who were jealous of him. They attacked him from all sides. He tried to resist, but there were too many of them. They were all strong, and they overpowered him. They pummeled him with fists and shepherd's rods. They stripped him naked and mocked him. They threw him to the ground, and bound his hands, his feet, and his neck with chains. They covered his head with a smelly hood so that he could not see anything. They threw him headlong into a deep pit from which they knew he could not escape. He cried out for help – but they just laughed. Then he heard pieces of silver being counted out. That was when he realized they had sold him like a choice cut of meat – and that he would no longer be anything but some foreigner's slave. He wept. Barring a miracle, he knew would probably never see his father - or anyone he knew – ever again. His dreams - as well as all his likes and dislikes, hopes and fears, feelings and opinions – were now of no consequence to anyone. They would never matter again. He was now just a commodity to be bought, sold, used, and abused ... however some future highest bidder might see fit. Every day of his life he would have to must bend his back and do whatever his owner, or that owner's sons - or even his mistress - might demand of him. Perhaps

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those who wound up in charge of his destiny would be gentle, kind-hearted, and fair; perhaps they would be profane, sadistic, and cruel. Either way, there was nothing he could do about it. That is how Yosef became enslaved.

Human trafficking is not unique to any one culture. Every ethnicity in the history of the earth has engaged in it in one form or another. Every race has profited – and lost – from it. Every bloodline has been affected by it. Every family has lost someone to it. It has gone on since time immemorial - and it is still going on today. Moreover, until Messiah establishes His earthly reigns from His capital city of Jerusalem, it will continue to make fortunes – and cause suffering. The Holy One did not create the concept; nor does He advocate, bless, or sanction it. But He fully understands that it is part of mankind’s reality He is fully aware of the inhumanity of man toward man. He is painfully cognizant of the darkness within men’s hearts. He knows all about humankind’s obsession with money and power – and anything that will bring either of those things. And He knows that every single one of the men, women, and children He has brought under His Chuppah of betrothal has been wounded by both the chaffing of the human trafficker’s chains and the sting of the straw boss’ whip. The pain is real. This wound is fresh. The skin is raw. The memory is painful. And it has to be dealt with – right up front.

Why Is This Human Trafficking Stuff Something We Need to Learn to Deal With Right Up Front?

Flashback a few hundred years. Rewind the scroll to the remarkable Covenant story of Yosef and his brothers, and their dealings with Yishmaeli and Midyani tradesmen, with Potifar, and with his wife.

The Holy One knows where we come from. He knows the scars we bear, and the inner rage we feel from our years in slavery, under the thumb of another ethnic group, another race and another culture. He knows why we feel the way we do. But He also knows that our anger is actually our worst enemy - a worse enemy than those who ruled over us in the flesh. He knows that we can be totally free from the flesh-chaffing bonds of human trafficking, but still cruelly enslaved by the spirit-killing chains of anger, outrage, and bitterness. All of those things, however, send the wrong message to the nations. All of them are totally inconsistent with our one new man identity. So He is renewing our minds – starting with the way we look at, think, feel, and speak about, react to, and behave toward human traffickers. He is teaching us to recognize our fatally flawed human ideas of what is ‘*good and evil*’, ‘*right and wrong*’, ‘*just and unjust*’, ‘*moral and immoral*’, and ‘*fair and unfair*’ as the childish and unproductive hindrances they are. He is training us to make Him alone our guide, His Covenant alone our strategy, and His specific directions alone our approach to fixing the problem.

In the eyes of the Holy One each human life – brimming as it is with unique components of personality, creativity, and potential to spread *love, peace, joy and hope into the world, and intricately connected to a network of family members, friends, acquaintances, and bloodlines* - is precious. That includes the victim and victim's family and the alleged perpetrator and his or her family alike. Treating any other human being as if he or she was a chattel to be used for your own purposes – or a means to any end - is inconsistent with the redemption the Holy One has wrought for us. But so is attributing guilt, or imposing sanctions, on another human being out of fleshly corruptions like 'moral outrage' and 'righteous indignation. The Holy One is not interested in establishing a 'moral compass' in us; what He wants is a Kingdom of *sh'ma*-people, who do what He says should be done - no matter what they happen to think or feel about the people involved or the situation presented.

We are no longer merely a people who believe in God. We have heard His Beautiful Voice. We have experienced His Sweet Presence. We have seen unmistakable manifestations of His Power – and yet His Amazing Capacity for kindness. We have an eternal Covenant with Him. He is now *our God*, and we are now *His people*. Amazing! The ramifications are absolutely stupefying.

There are now well-established *rights of relational possession* on both sides. We have rights to expect certain things from Him, and He has rights to expect certain things from us. There are now *protocols of intimate communion and accountability* to be worked out. And there are now – on our part - *responsibilities of becoming*. He is presently in the process of downloading to us all the software – and all the instructions - we will ever need to meet those responsibilities of becoming.

Welcome to the Kingdom of Heaven!

The Creator of the Universe is training up *a kingdom of high-level royal emissaries* to represent Him before, and declare and model His Plan of Redemption and Restoration to, the world. The Holy One sees right through bad attitudes, bad habits, bad vocabulary, and bad behaviors. He, unlike man, sees far beyond the drama of any given moment. He sees the possibility of restoration where men only see suffering and loss. He sees the seeds of healing where men only see trauma. He sees a pathway to *shalom* where men only see an obstacle course of angst and anxiety. He sees a budding harvest of deliverance where men see a weed patch of injustice and oppression. He sees cause and effect, treatment and cure, redemption and restoration. His vision is unlimited by what psychologists, sociologists – much less accusers, prosecutors, judges, juries, and opinionated occupants of the seat of the scornful - can see. He actually sees all human beings - whatever their ethnicity, culture, gender, age, or bloodline - as beautiful bundles of potential waiting to be

awakened, commissioned, and released. He knows that most of the creative and redemptive potential that He programmed into every human being's DNA before the foundation of the world is unseen by the ordinary human eye. And that is where He wants us – His chosen *Am Segulah/Mamleket Kohanim/Goy Kadosh* – to come in. He intends to teach us how to look for the potential that exists in all people and situations then identify, awaken, activate, nurture, and release that potential. The only way that can happen, however, is if we let Him teach us how to look at, think about, and relate to the people He places within our sphere of influence the way He thinks about them, and to see in and concerning them what He sees in and concerning them.

We are not judges. We are not critics. We are not vigilantes. We are not moral crusaders. We are not social engineers. We are Creation-whisperers. We are healers. We are lovers. We are servants of mankind. We are stewards of mysteries. We are models of wisdom, mercy, kindness, hope, joy and *shalom*. We have not been redeemed from bondage to point fingers or cast blame. Nor have we been called at such a time as this to argue fine points of theology, quarrel over politics, impose our ideas of morality upon society, or come up with a plan to redistribute the earthly wealth our King has entrusted to whomsoever He wills. What we are here to do is spread our King's message of goodwill, forgiveness, redemption, and restoration.

***Never Underestimate the Value of Every Human Life
in the Eyes of Its Creator***

For the sake of His Kingdom our Bridegroom-King is training us to look at every human being as potentially capable of transcending all of his or her limitations and serving a very valuable purpose. Think of Noach, Avram, Sarah, Rivkah, Ya'akov, Rachel, Yehudah, Moshe, David, Sh'lomo, Eliyahu, Sh'mon Kefa, and Shaul of Tarsus in their worst moments, and you should begin to get the picture. As the Holy One's ambassadors on earth we simply do not have the option of assuming an air of moral superiority and condescending to judge any fellow human by our perception of the behavior they engage in during their worst season of life. Neither do we have the option to love or favor one group and hate another, or to respect/honor one class and disrespecting/dishonoring another. The Holy One makes it clear we are to think of not only *subjugated and disadvantaged people* but also of *rich and powerful people* much differently than did the Egyptians, or the Babylonians, or the Kena'ani, or the descendants of either Yishmael or Esav. Rabbi Kalmon Packouz expresses it this way:

*Hear your Father, your King,
the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe, saying to you:
Love and respect all of My children.*

*Have a deep and profound sense of respect for each person you encounter.
The person to whom you are talking is created in My image.
By being respectful towards every single person created in My image,
you are respecting Me. The greater your respect for Me,
the greater your respect for those created in My image.*

*Love others as yourself.
The more you focus on the good qualities of each individual whom you
encounter, the greater will be your positive feelings towards that person.
With some of My children, doing so will be easy. Do so even when it is difficult.
Identify with other people and you will feel an increased love towards them.
Realize that you and others are all souls and have one Creator.*

*Especially when relating to someone with whom you find it difficult to interact,
hear Me telling you,
"Right now you are speaking to someone created in the image of your Father.
Speak with love and respect".²*

Our First New-Identity Upgrade – His Mishpatim

The process the Holy One is following to renew and reprogram our minds is to throw out hypothetical fact situations loaded with tough moral, emotional, value and priority issues and then tell us how He would – and therefore wants us to - handle situations involving those issues. We may or may not ever face the exact fact situation He chooses to employ as a hypothetical – but we will most certainly encounter the moral, emotional, value, and priority issues those fact situations present. With each fact situation He lays out for us He is pushing us *to* –and in most cases light years *beyond* – the limits of our natural human wisdom and compassion. That is the whole idea. He does not want us to deal with the moral, emotional, value, and priority issues out of either our human compassion or conventional wisdom. He wants us to give the world FAR MORE than what it considers ‘normal’. He wants us to be led by His *Ruach* [*i.e.* Spirit] instead of by our flesh. He wants us to He is therefore *offending our minds* in order to *reveal the twisted preconceived ideas of ‘justice’ and ‘fairness’ and ‘morality’* which we have allowed to take up residence in our hearts over the course of our years of bitter enslavement to the world’s system of looking at life and responding to the ugliest sides of fallen humanity.

Ambassadors of His Kingdom cannot represent His Heart to the world and release His Decrees – whether for redemption or for judgment - if they allow themselves to function out of things like outrage, or revulsion, or majority opinion, or sympathy for any class of people, or bias or other form of enmity against any class

² Rabbi Kalmon Packouz, of *Aish HaTorah*, in *Shabbat Shalom Weekly-Mishpatim*, year 5776.

of people, or human reasoning, or self-righteous condemnation. So let the great *renewing of the mind process* begin! With regard to every *mishpat*-scenario the Holy One uses, just be sure to look for:

1. The Operative Hebrew vocabulary He employs – *i.e.* the specific Hebrew verbs and nouns the Holy One employs to describe the situation and/or conduct He has chosen to focus on;
2. The ‘Sacred Writing Root’ Out of Which the Hypothetical Grows – *i.e.* the source of the hypothetical in the Torah or other sacred Hebrew writing;
3. The Kingdom Priority(ies) From the *Aseret HaDibrot* that the Holy One is Trying to Establish in Us through having us meditate on the hypothetical; and
4. The Procedural Safeguard the Holy One Imposes – *i.e.* the limiting factor or factors that He teaches us to employ to keep the focus on healing, redemption, and restoration instead of self-will.

Let’s get started, shall we?

The Heartbreak of Human Trafficking

V’gonev ish umecharo – *if a man shanghai and sells another ... v’nimtza v’yado* – and [the human trafficking victim] *is found in his possession ... mot yumat* – death, surely death. **Exodus 21:16a.**

What a fascinating hypothetical!

1. The Operative Hebrew Vocabulary the Holy One Employs

The first verb the Holy One employs in this hypothetical is *ganav*. This verb pictures a surreptitious, stealthy taking and carrying away. Think of Rachel’s secret theft of her father’s idols. **Genesis 31:19.** Think of Ya’akov’s secret, middle of the night departure from Laban’s house with his daughters and grandchildren. **Genesis 31:20.** And, as suggested above, think of Yosef being ‘stolen away’ from his father’s house. **Genesis 40:15.**

The second verb the Holy One employs in this hypothetical is *machar* – *mem, chet, resh*. This verb means to *sell or barter* – *i.e.* exchange for currency or transfer for consideration. Think of Ya’akov’s purchase of the birthright from Esav. **Genesis 25:31-33.** Think of his later purchase of Laban’s daughters, Leah and Rachel, from Laban for a negotiated term of years of labor. **Genesis 31:15.** And, of course, think of Yosef being sold first to the Midyani, then to the Yishmaeli, then to Potifar. **Genesis 37:27-28, 36.**

2. *The ‘Sacred Writing Root’ Out of Which the Hypothetical Grows*

The Holy One does not mention any names, of course – but does He really need to? This hypothetical is clearly designed to awaken in us the memory of the horrible sequence of events that unfolded in our own family, a few generations ago, at a place called *Dotan*, involving Yosef and his brothers. Do you remember *Yosef’s humiliation and the things he suffered*? Do you remember Ya’akov’s bereavement - and the pain that flowed from his inability to get any closure regarding the disappearance of his beloved son? Do you remember the cloud of guilt and the web of lies under which the brothers, each one a perpetrator, lived and raised their families? These things have no place in a Redeemed Community.

3. *The Kingdom Priority(ies) From the Aseret HaDibrot that the Holy One is Trying to Establish in Us*

One of the lifestyle priorities the Holy One proclaimed over us in the Aseret HaDibrot was ***Lo tignov*** – you will *not engage in deceit or stealth to deprive others of that which I have given them. Exodus 20:17*. A little later in the Download, the Holy One also declared: ***Lo-ta'aneh verei'acha eid shaker*** – you will *not invalidate the weight of your testimony by declaring things or engaging in behavior that you have not seen or heard from Me*, and ***Lo tachmod*** – you will *not pine for or desire anything that I have not given you. Exodus 20:18-19*.

We are now ambassadors of Heaven. We now represent the Author of All Life. We are now agents of healing and wholeness, here to give to our fellow man, not take from him. We are here to offer humanity hope of freedom, not increase their bondage. We are now responsible to model our King’s Beautiful Ways of goodness, gentleness, and humble self-less service to every person we encounter. We must learn, and teach others, the hard lessons of the Yosef-and-his-brothers story. We cannot repeat this kind of self-promoting and misery-inflicting behavior. *Never again*, the Holy One was saying, will Yehudah or any of his brethren sell or lay hand on a Yosef to sell him – either for *vengeance* or for *profit*. If any member of the Redeemed Community has not learned this critical lesson from the era of Egyptian bondage (all resulting from the sale of Yosef into slavery by his jealous brothers), he is a *danger to the community* and *is to be put to death* according to legal process in order to purge the community of the spiritual sickness he represents.

4. *The Procedural Safeguard the Holy One Imposes*

Notice, therefore, the *procedural safeguard* the Holy One establishes in His Wisdom. Not everyone suspected of *shanghai-ing* or is to be condemned. Not everyone accused of forcible slave trade is to be executed. Only if the human trafficking victim is found *b’yad* – *i.e.* in the perpetrator’s actual physical possession - is the court system of the Holy One’s Redeemed nation to impose

sentence. ‘Circumstantial evidence’ is not enough for a finding of guilt. Even a confession by an accused perpetrator is not enough to support such a finding. There are, you see, all kinds of reasons why persons confess to crimes that have nothing to do with guilt.

The exposure and punishment of wrongdoers, you see, is never to be the objective we promote; the goal toward which all our thoughts, words, energies, and actions are directed is maintaining a Kingdom-of-Heaven-scented society, instead of one ruled by love of money, lust for power, ethnic hatred, class envy, fleshly sensitivities and sentiments, self-expression or exaltation, negative emotions, outrage, or bloodlust.

Forget ‘righteous indignation’, ‘moral outrage’ and all the high-sounding hyperbole – those fleshly approaches just perpetuate the poisoning of humanity through the bitter fruit of the tree of the knowledge of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. Our Redeemer wants us to banish those things from our minds, and purge talk of them from our individual and collective vocabularies. The Holy One doesn’t want us – as other nations do – to hear of situations like incidents of actual or suspected human trafficking and make snap moral judgments. Much less does He want us to follow the ways of the serpent and become harsh judges, *lashon hara* spewers, and hatemongers. He wants us to resist the dark impulses of our flesh, and listen for and to HIS HEART. He wants us to view every situation we encounter – and all the real *people and elements of Creation that are* involved in that situation, even tangentially – through the lens of His Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind as a species and for the Restoration of Creation to its original, intended Edenic state of beauty, fruitfulness, and *shalom*. He wants us to see – and bring His blessing to - the real faces, names, families, and bloodlines – on all sides of every situation! See Genesis 12:3 and Exodus 19:6.

If/When a Man ‘Curses’ His Father or His Mother ...

This hypothetical engages each of us at the level of the most important relationship of our lives – our relationship with our parents.

1. The Operative Hebrew Vocabulary the Holy One Employs

Umekalel aviv ve'imo – and if/when one curses his/her father and mother ... ***mot yumat*** – death, surely death. Exodus 21:17; see also Leviticus 20:9

The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as curse is a form of the verb root *qalal*³. This verb does not mean *curse* in the modern English sense of to use foul language – *i.e.* calling your mother a bad name. The Hebrew verb *qalal* means to take any action or make any comment that tends to make someone else *of little*

³ *Qalal* is *qof, lamed, lamed*. Strong’s Hebrew word #7043, it is pronounced *kawl-awl*.

account, or bring them into dishonor or disrepute. It means to embarrass them, humiliate them, expose their sin, belittle them, mock them, or otherwise to lessen the esteem in which they are held in the eyes of others.

2. The ‘Sacred Writing Root’ Out of Which the Hypothetical Grows

In the *Aseret HaDibrot* the Holy One proclaimed over us: ***Kaved et-avicha v'et-imach*** – *i.e. bring honor and exaltation to your father and mother. Exodus 20:12a.*

In the Holy One’s eyes, human births are never *mistakes of nature*. He ordained for every human being ever born, or which will ever be born, both an *av* [father] and an *imma* [mother]. These persons – who are human beings that He created, that He loves very much, and that HE infused with the potential for both a ‘great name’ and a ‘great nation’ – may *die on us, or abandon us, or be absent from our lives* for long periods of time, but *the Holy One still recognizes them, and expects us to recognize them, as special contributors to our lives*. They may not be Ozzie and Harriet Nelson type parents⁴. They may at times *act irresponsibly*. They may at times *behave cruelly*. They may – indeed, will probably - make choices we do not like. But even if, Heaven forbid, they do absolutely nothing for us with the opportunity given to them by the Holy One to be parents to us other than physically bring us into this world, the Holy One wants us to know, *it is enough*. For us, *the daughters and sons*, I mean. The world can judge however it wants – that is what it does. We, on the other hand, are to honor those who gave us life, whose bloodline we come from and are to perpetuate, and whose DNA we bear.

As a result of mistakes made and/or abuses engaged in, our *parents* may, have serious issues to deal with when they face the Holy One. But that is their business, not ours. Our task is *to honor those who gave us life ... no matter what*. In the Holy One’s eyes the opportunity of life is *just that precious* a gift.

3. The Kingdom Priority(ies) From the Aseret HaDibrot, that the Holy One is Trying to Establish in Us

Think of *Cham* [Ham] and what he did to his father *Noach* [Noah] in connection with the vineyard incident. Think of how *Reuven* humiliated and dishonored his father *Ya'akov* [Jacob] through his affair with Dan and Naftali’s mother, Bilhah. Think of how Sh'mon and Levi made their father’s name a stench in Kena’an by deceiving, murdering, and plundering the men of Sh’chem. These examples from the era of the patriarchs scream into our ears – ***Kaved et-avich v'et imeciha!***

After all, in the Holy One’s eyes it is each individual’s contribution to his nuclear

⁴ Ozzie and Harriett Nelson, along with their real-life children, Ricky and David, were the stars of a 1950s-era family television show in America called “Ozzie and Harriett”. The form of family life portrayed on their show became the American ideal.

family – not his participation in organizations, institutions, movements, economies, ministries, or systems - that gives cross-generational longevity to His Kingdom. Each person is responsible for making *tikkun* – i.e. restoration and repair – for whatever damage was done either by or to the ones who gave him or her the precious gift of life.

4. ***The Procedural Safeguard the Holy One Imposes***

In regard to this particular *mishpat*, there is no procedural safeguard – and there are no exceptions. Therefore, even if a father – or mother – does not hug or praise the son or daughter or tell the son or daughter ‘*I love you*’ as much as the son or daughter would like [or at all], the Holy One says that the son or daughter who brings dishonor or shame him or her is still subject to a judicial order of capital punishment – just like a *murderer*. Even if the father or mother father *beats* – or *abandons* – his son or daughter, if the son or daughter curses the father or mother for this, the son or daughter is be tried by the duly appointed judges and, if found guilty, *put to death* [by the judicial system, not by the person’s parents or siblings]. As Messiah honored His Father and Mother, so are we to honor ours. In every situation, it is what Messiah would *do*. If you doubt this, please read Matthew 15:4, where Yeshua of Natzret specifically re-affirms this *mishpat* of Torah. Welcome to perfect *Wisdom* counterbalanced with perfect *compassion*.

Remembering the Lesson of Moshe and the Taskmaster

Do you remember what happened back in parsha *Sh’mot* when Moshe saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave? Moshe reacted in what he considered *righteous indignation* and killed the taskmaster. Here is what the Holy One has to say about that:

Vechi-yakei ish et-avdo o et-amato b’shevet
If a man strikes his male or female servant with a rod,

umet tachat yado nakom yinakem
Such that [the servant] dies at his hand, [the death] must be avenged.

Ach im-yom o yomayim ya'amod
However, if [the servant] is able to stand and serve again after a few days,

lo yukam ki chaspo hu
then, the matter shall not be avenged, since he is [his master's] money/property.
[Exodus 21:20-21]

As stated earlier, I suspect that the ones to whom the Holy One first gave these particular instructions *could still vividly remember the sting of the taskmaster’s whip*. The Holy One wanted them to know that He saw all their wounds, but that *it is not His way to automatically intervene just because someone is getting beaten*.

Acts of cruelty - as opposed to reasonable discipline - against any man and woman

the Holy One has entrusted to a Redeemed person as a servant are inconsistent with the Holy One's Ways. But servants, like all human beings are fallible; and they sometimes get *downright ornery*. The Holy One wants to make it clear that merely because someone in His covenant community accepts the 'sacred trust' of taking a servant into one's care does not mean the servant will be permitted to come in, take over, and take advantage. *Reasonable discipline* of servants is permitted – indeed even *encouraged* by the Holy One. Why does the Holy One not prohibit corporal punishment of unruly servants? Why is He not always on the side of the underdog? Why is He not always against the powerful person? Because He knows that in the long run, in the context of the master-servant relationship, reasonable discipline will actually inure to the benefit of the one disciplined as well as the one who does the disciplining.

Extreme cruelty, or excessive force, of course, is something altogether different. Extreme acts of cruelty and excessive force *have to be punished*. Indeed if cruelty were to go unpunished in the Holy One's community how would the Holy One's community be any better an example for the world to follow than Egypt or Babylon or pagan Kena'an? Therefore the Holy One decrees that *cruelty by the master brings about an early termination of the trust agreement*. Indeed, Torah makes it clear that if a master does anything which disfigures a servant for life - such as putting out an eye, or even knocking out a tooth – in His view the master has forfeited the right to the servant's labor for the rest of the contracted six-year term, and must send him out with full provisions to enable him to become a self-sufficient member of society. **Exodus 21:26-27**.

Other Subjects Covered by the Holy One In This Aliyah

Bond-servanthood issues were very 'real' to the newly redeemed people at Sinai. But the Holy One knew there were other issues that would touch the hearts of subsequent generations. I suspect He's about to hit on one of those. One of the other subjects that the Holy One addresses in today's aliyah as covenant principles, you see, is *what we are to do with persons who act disrespectfully toward their parents*. **Exodus 21:17**. It looks like the Holy One really does intend to 'meddle' in the way we raise our children, folks – *and in the way our children respond to us*. The Holy One apparently believes parents and children *both* have responsibilities to make the relationship work. Imagine that. How *totally foreign* that is to our 21st Century worldview!

In the Holy One's view *not everything that goes wrong is automatically a parent's fault*. The Holy One does not let His covenant people 'cop out' by blaming their parents – or their peers, or their circumstances, for that matter - for everything that goes wrong in their lives. *Hmmmmn*. Has He managed to offend your mind yet?

The Holy One knows – and wants us to know - that even in the community of His Redeemed there will be difficulties in the parent-child relationship. He knows – and wants us to know - that sometimes even our homes will become dysfunctional. The Holy One did not promise a *utopia* where everything would be perfect. He prepared us instead to deal with *reality* – and to OVERCOME. In our personal Covenant walk, therefore, assigning fault to others is never an issue we are supposed to deal with. The issue from the Holy One’s perspective is always how we will respond in real time to – and transcend - unpleasant situations. That includes everything from mild irritation to horrific trauma, from embarrassment to abandonment, from deception to betrayal, from criticism to abuse, from lost property or revenue opportunities to complete financial collapse, and from separation to bereavement. Assigning fault and blame are what governments and legal systems do for societal purposes. That is not our job. For us, assigning fault or blame is always a dangerous distraction from our mission. Fault and blame, you see, are focused upon the past - which of course can never be changed. The Covenant lifestyle is future-oriented, not past obsessed. Our job is to move on, to press forward, and to transcend - and to assist others to do the same.

The Holy One expects us to be a community of *overcomers* - not a bunch of whiny, self-righteous blame-placers and dysfunctional doomsayers who choose to look at themselves only as victims of imperfect environments. Keep in mind however that the Holy One’s *focus* in announcing these *mishpatim* was not on empowering parents to stone disrespectful children – but was instead on *encouraging and showing the necessity of respect for parents*. Hence before the Holy One engaged in this discussion with Moshe He spoke in the hearing of all His Redeemed the ‘***Honor your Father and your Mother ... so that you may live long ...***’⁵ prophetic empowerment which would enable all who *sh’ma*-ed to enjoy life to the fullest.

Also addressed is the subject of how the Community is to respond when *men get into fights*, when *domesticated animals get out and wreak havoc*, or when someone *creates a dangerous condition on land* causing someone else to get injured [Exodus 21:18-19, 22-25, 28-34]. Just as the Holy One wanted us to know His community of Redeemed persons would have some dysfunctional homes, He also wanted us to know His community would experience some internal strife, that even His chosen people would sometimes suffer accidental injuries, and that the physical possessions He placed into our hands would sometimes be damaged or destroyed before we were through enjoying them.

An ‘Eye for an Eye’? What Does That Really Mean?

The most controversial aspect of today’s aliyah is probably the oft quoted “*an eye*

⁵ Exodus 20:12.

for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” pronouncement. This is not a ‘command’. Neither is it a ‘law’. It is *mishpat* – *i.e.* a poetic idiom designed to shock and reprogram our brains. It is just the Holy One’s way of refocusing the attention of an unpleasant situation on reasonable compensation for the victim commensurate with the degree and nature of actual damage done by the perpetrator, instead of ‘payback’ or ‘vigilante justice’.

Ayin tachat ayin shen tachat shen

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth

yad tachat yad regel tachat regel

a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot.

Kviyah tachat kviyah peitza tachat patza

A burn for a burn, a cut for a cut,

chaburah tachat chaburah

A wound for a wound.

[Exodus 21:24-25]

This *mishpat* of the Holy One is one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted instructions our Covenant Partner in Heaven has ever uttered. Let’s try to get a handle on it, shall we? First of all let us look at *the context* in which the words are used. Verses 22 through 25 all deal with a single, quite specific situation - where a pregnant woman miscarries because she has been struck in the course of a fight between men. *In such a situation* is when the principle of “*eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, and bruise for bruise*” applies. To the Hebraic mindset, however, the Holy One’s ‘*eye for an eye*’ instruction does not mean anything close to what Westerners think. It is just like Yeshua’s injunction that we should *pluck out our right eye* or *cut off our right hand* if either offends. All the Divine Voice is saying is that the members of our bodies which engage in breaches of covenant are acting against our new identity, contrary to our mission, and as saboteurs of our destiny, and need to be brought back under control. The sages of Israel always interpreted this correctly as a matter of ‘measure for measure’ – *i.e.* that *fair and commensurate compensation must be paid for the loss of an eye, a tooth, a hand or a foot.*” No Hebrew ever had his eye punched out, his tooth punched out, or his hand or foot cut off, by the *shoftim* [judges]. The words used are merely a Hebrew *idiom*. All they mean is that, in the context of the legal system’s operation [not as part of a vigilante campaign of vengeance], fair and reasonable compensation is to be paid to an injured person *in proportion to the damage caused*. The workers’ compensation systems in America incorporate this concept, indicating specific sums of money payable as compensation for “scheduled injuries” - with a greater sum payable for more serious and disabling injuries than for less serious, less disabling injuries.

Vengeance, Retribution, Punishment, and ‘Payback’ Are Never for Individuals to Dish Out – They Are HIS Jurisdiction Alone!

In the Holy One’s Redeemed Community the taking of *personal vengeance* for wrongs done – even to a person’s loved ones - is not to occur. Men are not to be *brawlers* who fight at the drop of a hat, nor are they to be *crusading vigilantes* like Zorro or Robin Hood. There is to be a *legitimate system of justice*. Hence Torah tells us that the husband who inflicts his vengeance on those who hurt his wife in the midst of their fight is not exempt - he must fairly compensate (in money or property) the persons who caused his wife’s injury and the death of his child in proportion to the injury he causes them in his anger. **Exodus 21:22-23.**

In the Holy One’s community, you see, irresponsible, selfishly motivated actions which endanger others, as well as actions taken in the heat of passion which result in injury, are to be dealt with according to two factors - the *Holy One’s wisdom* and *His compassion*. Whatever the Holy One’s wisdom and compassion agree is right under the circumstances equals His *mishpatim*. All activities and endeavors a man (or woman, or child) of the Holy One’s Community pursues are to be guided by these two over-riding factors. This is because in the Holy One’s community we are supposed to understand that *man’s efforts are not what will determine our success* – but the Holy One’s favor and blessing. We work and we sweat, of course; but however hard we may work we must always understand that *we do not live by the sweat of our brow*. We live, and eat, and prosper, by the Words of the Holy One’s mouth. All we have we receive from that Source. There are no ‘*self-made men*’ who ‘*did it my way*’ in the Holy One’s kingdom.

The good news is that for this reason we have no need to participate in the “rat race”, or “dog-eat-dog” world of the society around us. We are to run from such things. We are to model another, better way – a way that reflects the essential goodness of our Creator and Redeemer, the Holy One.

Whence Cometh Fighting Among You?

The third major subject of today’s aliyah is *quarreling/fighting* among men. Brace yourself, guys. The Holy One is about to get *really personal*. Here is the Holy One’s teaching on quarrelling and fighting:

If men quarrel, and one strikes the other with a stone, or with his fist, and he doesn't die, but is confined to bed; if he rises again and walks around with his staff, then he who struck him is to be cleared: he is only to pay for the loss of his time, and provide for his healing, until he is thoroughly healed.

[Exodus 21:18-19]

The Holy One *created man*, and knows full well that He instilled in the male of the

human species an *aggressive*, competitive, and *combative* nature. He did not do this so that we would make good football players or so we would become adept at killing and injuring each other. He did it so we would be capable of *subduing and ruling over creation* – including some pretty imposing critters (lions, tigers, bears, crocodiles, and sharks, to name a few). But some of us have tendencies toward “misplaced aggression” - aggression toward our fellow man. *Fights* break out. *Scuffles take place*. We *wrestle*. We *lash out at each other*. We exchange words, then shoves, then blows. The Holy One does not say *mot yumat* [death and more death; death and dying multiplied] in regard to such misplaced aggression. But He does not say “boys will be boys” either!

If personal honor or pride is all that is at stake turning the other cheek is Torah at its finest. But if, as, when, and to the extent the Kingdom of Heaven’s agenda is at stake turning the other cheek is unforgivable cowardice. In some situations therefore we must realize that it would be a gross misinterpretation of Yeshua’s teaching to ‘turn the other cheek’ and let the wrongdoers kill, steal and destroy the weak and defenseless. We are never to go *looking for a fight*. We are never to *romanticize the fight*. We are never to become known – or seek to be known - as fighters. Fighting is not to be our first inclination when a difficult situation arises. It is not supposed to be something we ever do in response to anger or fear or malice. We are not to be *brawlers*. We are not to be *bullies*. We are not to try to get our way through threats or intimidation. We are never to use more force than absolutely necessary to protect vital life interests. If we fight, we are to fight as we live – in *sh’ma* response to the Holy One’s Voice. It is all a matter of seeing what the Father is doing, and *sh’ma*-ing His Voice.

There is, of course, *a time for war* as well as *a time for peace*. It is, like everything else in the kingdom, *a matter of times and seasons*. Some things are quite frankly *worth fighting for*. That is why the Holy One Himself is called a “Man of War”. **Exodus 15:3**. That is why He took our side against the Egyptians and the Amaleki. That is why Yeshua ran the moneychangers out of the Temple, and why He challenged the Scribes and Pharisees in ways they would understand – even calling them a ‘*generation of vipers*’. And that is why we can be 100% sure that when the time comes, and things look like there is no way we can survive, He will rise up like a mighty Warrior once again, take our side, and fight with all His strength against the Anti-Messiah and his minions – even if He has to tread the winepress alone.

Questions For Today’s Study

1. The first subject of today’s aliyah is *forced slavery*. In a nation where the Holy One is King for any man to force a man, woman, or child into involuntary slavery is intolerable. The Holy One’s people, who have entered into *eyrusin* with Him,

must begin to think like He thinks about the value of human life. While Torah is clear that a person – Hebrew or *goy* [gentile] - may *voluntarily* sell himself into indentured servitude, and a Hebrew may purchase such a “slave”, and employ the bondservant, and while a *goy* whose nation fights against Israel in a war may surrender himself into indentured servitude instead of being killed, the Holy One makes it very clear, right up front at *Har Sineh*, that His people are not to deal in forced slave trade in any of its levels. We are not to engage in capturing/shanghaiing people. We are not to buy and sell at slave markets. What is more, the mere possession of a man, woman, or child who has been forced into slavery is so abhorrent to the Holy One that the guilty party “shall surely be put to death”.

[A] Which provision(s) of the *Aseret HaDibrot* [the so-called ‘10 Commandments’] do you think form the basis for this *mishpat*?

[B] What attitude would a person have to have about a fellow human being to force him or her to work for him or her against their will?

[C] Why do you think the Holy One feels that the death of all slave traders and slave owners is the appropriate way to deal with the issue of forced slavery?

2. The second subject of today’s aliyah is the relationship between children and parents. In yesterday’s aliyah the Holy One declared: "*Anyone who attacks* [Hebrew *nakah*, Strong’s #5221] *his father or his mother shall be surely put to death.* **Exodus 21:15.** The second verse of today’s aliyah extends this theme: *Anyone who curses* [Hebrew *qalal*] *his father or his mother ... death, surely death.* **Exodus 21:17.**

[A] In Strong’s and Gesenius look up the Hebrew verbs translated as “attacks” [KJV “smiteth”] in verse 15 and as “curses” [KJV “curseth”]. Write these two verbs in Hebrew consonants, with vowel sounds, and in their transliterated forms. Look for the first two or three usages in Torah of each of these words, and see what the words meant in those passages. Then, describe the Hebraic word picture you see developing around each word.

[B] Which provision(s) of the *Aseret HaDibrot* [the 10 prophetic identity and mission announcements of Genesis 20] do you think form the basis for this *mishpat*?

[C] Why do you think the Holy One feels that death is the appropriate way to deal with a person who either *nakahs* or *qalals* his or her mother or father?

[D] Note the specific words the Holy One uses in reference to death: *mot yumat* [literally, *death and more death*, or *death and dying*]. Remember what the Holy One told Adam and Chava would happen if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? How does the *mot yumat* declaration compare to that proclamation?

3. The third subject of today’s aliyah is *quarreling/fighting* among men.

[A] Suppose two men fight and no one gets physically injured. What involvement should the Redeemed Community have?

[B] Does it matter, according to the Holy One’s teaching, who *started* the

fight?

[C] What seems to be the Holy One's main priority in regard to men's misplaced aggression?

[D] What does Exodus 21:22-25 teach us about how the Holy One views an unborn child?

[E] Which provision(s) of the *Aseret HaDibrot* [10 Commandments] do you think form the basis for this *mishpat*?

4. The next subject of today's aliyah has to do with the discipline of indentured (voluntary) servants [remember, forced slavery is prohibited on penalty of death]. If a person sells himself or herself to a Hebrew (for money or food or anything else of value), he or she submits himself or herself to discipline – “for he/she is the *property* [of the master]” **Exodus 21:21**. The same is true of an employee in the workforce. *To take a job with someone is to submit to that person's discipline.*

The Holy One does not require or expect an employer to “put up” with insubordination, sabotage, theft, or laziness. An employer is entitled to loyalty, obedience, and productivity. With the right of discipline however comes the *responsibility* to administer discipline in a way that does not compromise the servant's ability to make a living and provide for a family after the agreed period of servitude [or employment] is over. The Holy One teaches:

If a man strikes his servant or his maid with a rod, and he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished. Notwithstanding, if he gets up to serve after a day or two, he shall not be punished, for he is his money.

[Exodus 21:20-21]

If a man strikes his servant's eye, or his maid's eye, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for his eye's sake.

If he strikes out his man-servant's tooth, or his maid-servant's tooth, he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake.

[Exodus 21:26-27]

[A] What kind of conduct does the Holy One say employers/masters should refrain from in disciplining servants/employees?

[B] What if an employer gets angry and *yells* at an employee. Does this violate Torah?

[C] What limits does the Holy One say should be placed on discipline of employees/servants? Where is the permissible “boundary”?

[D] Which provision(s) of the *Aseret HaDibrot* [10 Commandments] do you think form the basis for this *mishpat*?

5. Another subject of today's aliyah is causing injury to another – or his property - by *negligence*. The Holy One *cares about people's health*. He *cares about people's ability to earn a living*. He cares about their property (such as livestock, for example). And so, He expects **us** to care about such things, as well, and to act

responsibly in relation to them. If the Holy One, Who owns everything, entrusts to us something that is capable of producing injury (a car, a gun, a bull, a chain saw, etc., etc.), the Holy One wants us to be good and responsible stewards of those things. He therefore says:

*If a bull gores a man or a woman to death,
the bull must surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten;
but the owner of the bull is not to be held responsible.
But if the bull had a habit of goring in the past, and it has been testified to its owner,
and he has not kept it in, but it has killed a man or a woman,
the bull must be stoned, and its owner must also be put to death.*

*If a ransom is laid on him,
then he will give for the redemption of his life whatever is laid on him.
Whether it has gored a son or has gored a daughter,
according to this judgment it shall be done to him.
If the bull gores a manservant or a maidservant,
thirty shekels of silver are to be given to their master, and the ox shall be stoned.*

[Exodus 21:28-32]

If in His wisdom Our Covenant Partner in Heaven gives us the means to do business – from digging ditches or wells (the specific activity mentioned) to practicing law or accounting or medicine, to running a store or corporation – He expects us to *be responsible in the way we conduct that business*. He gives this example: *If/when a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and doesn't cover it, and a bull or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit shall make it good. He is to give money to its owner, and the dead animal shall be his.* Exodus 21:33-34.

[A] What is the key factor that determines if a person is to be held responsible for injury done by his ox (or, for that matter, by his car or back-hoe)?

[B] When a member of the Redeemed Community of the Holy One undertakes a project – digging a well or trench, cutting down a tree, building a house or fence, building a fire, mowing the grass, or starting a business, for instance – what should he or she be concerned about besides just the success of the project?

[C] Which provision(s) of the *Aseret HaDibrot* do you think form the basis for these *mishpatim*?

6. In today's haftarah *Yirmayahu* [Jeremiah] is continuing his narrative account of what happened in connection with a Jubilee-declaration made by King *Tzedakah-yah* [Zedekiah] of *Y'hudah* [Judah] shortly before the Babylonian invasion. This emancipation proclamation was a great idea – but it went horribly “wrong”.

*All the princes and all the people sh'ma-ed, who had entered into the covenant,
that everyone should let his manservant, and everyone his maidservant, go free,
that none should make bondservants of them anymore;
they sh'ma-ed, and let them go: but afterwards they turned*

*and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return,
and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids.*

[Jeremiah 34:10-11]

[A] What provisions of Torah did those in Y'hudah who covenanted with Tzedakah-yah to release their indentured servants violate?

[B] Why do you think these people brought their servants and handmaids back into slavery?

7. In today's Brit Chadasha reading Shaul quotes a passage of the TaNaKh – from *HaNavi Yeshayahu* [Isaiah], chapter 49 - to the Redeemed Community in the Greek city of Corinth. He also makes reference to a well-known Psalm – Psalm 69.

*Working together, we entreat also that you not receive the grace of the Holy One in vain,
for he says "At an acceptable time I sh'ma-ed you; in a day of salvation [i.e. Yeshua]
I helped you." Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation.*

[2 Corinthians 6:1-2]

[A] What verse from Isaiah 49 does Shaul quote?

[B] What verse from Psalm 69 does Shaul reference?

[C] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the Hebrew words our English Bibles translate as "grace". Considering the context of our Brit Chadasha reading for today, what Hebrew word do you think would describe what "grace" Shaul was talking about in verse 1?

[D] Describe the Hebraic word picture you saw developing as you searched out the Hebrew word for "grace".

[E] Read Isaiah 49 and Psalm 69 – from beginning to end. What do you think "salvation" means?

[F] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the Hebrew word that is translated "salvation" in Isaiah 49 and Psalm 69. Write the Hebrew word in its verb root form, with Hebrew consonants and vowel markings. Then describe the Hebraic word picture.

*May His wisdom and His compassion be your guide
in all your relations with men, in all your education, and in all your activities, forever.
Like the pillar of fire and cloud, may these be your constant companions.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 119:9-16

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.

With my whole heart, I have sought you.

*Don't let me wander from your **mitzvot**.*

*I have hidden your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.*

*Blessed are you, O Holy One. Teach me Your **chukot**.*

*With my lips, I have declared all the **mishpatim** of your mouth.
I have rejoiced in the way of your **edut**, as much as in all riches.*

*I will meditate on your **pikud'im**, and consider your ways.
I will delight myself in your **chukot**. I will not forget your word.*