

א ב י ס כ ל ת ו ר א !

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כ"ו שבט תשפ"ו • משפטים

Slavery after **?!יציאת מצרים**?

By Ahava Askarinam '29

This week's פרשה, משפטים, takes place after בני ישראל leave ישראל. In מצרים the Jews were slaves who were constantly suffering. Shockingly, the תורה immediately begins with the rules of when a Jewish person dedicates themselves to being the slave of another Jewish person. This person is called an עבד עברי.

An עבד עברי is only yours for a certain amount of time: "כי תקנה עבד עברי שש שנים יעבד ובשבעת יצא" "לחפשי חנם" "If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall work for six years and in the seventh he shall go free, for nothing" (שמות כא:ב). During the six years, the owner is required to protect the slave's family unity. After the six years, the Jewish owner is required to let him go free as he has done his work, unless he wants to stay. From all of these various rules, we can see that an עבד עברי is treated very well, as any human should be. However, there is still one question. Why would this topic of an עבד עברי be brought up right after the horrible slavery that took place in מצרים?

The juxtaposition of this type of slavery right after מצרים shows that after the Jewish people have suffered, they can now be strong—even as slaves. There is a very big difference between what the Jewish people went through in מצרים compared to what an עבד עברי is. The Jewish people should now see that they can endure another type of slavery that does

not have to be as horrible. The תורה says that you are required to treat your עבד עברי with dignity. The גמרא (קידושין ב.) famously states that anyone who acquires an עבד עברי, it is as if he bought a master for himself. עבד explains that if there is any needed resource that the master only has one of, he must give it to the עבד עברי. For example, if there is only one pillow in the house, the master must give it to the עבד עברי. In the ancient world, slaves were property; however, the תורה portrays them as someone the owner is responsible for.

We give such extreme sensitivity to the concept of slavery for many reasons. We were once slaves, and this experience can create a memory that the Jewish people connect to. Secondly, and most importantly, this is a spiritual test of how much compassion we have. The עבד עברי is depending on us, and we must figure out how to treat him correctly. Lastly, the תורה constantly emphasizes, any time financial matters come up, that even when a Jew has fallen into poverty, they are still a Jew.

The message of this juxtaposition is that true greatness is how you treat others, especially those who have less power than you. After בני ישראל's incredibly difficult slavery in מצרים, they built a society that treats slaves well. Now that the Jewish people are free, they must still have responsibility, because freedom without responsibility can turn into oppression. In our day-to-day lives, we can apply this to how we treat others. As individuals, we are only

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capable of controlling how we treat others, and the best we can do is hope that they will treat us well. The way an owner treats an עבד עברי is how, in every situation, we should treat anyone who has a little bit less power than us. Being kind and inclusive is one of the most powerful things we can do in life for ourselves and for those around us.

An Eye for an Eye!?

By Gavriel Szalat '29

This week's פרשה, משפטים, is a big deal. It's all about creating a just and fair society. It's got laws about property, damages, and social responsibility, in other words, how to treat others with respect and dignity. One thing that stands out is the idea of "an eye for an eye". As the פסוק says עֵיִן תַּחַת עֵיִן שֵׁן תַּחַת שֵׁן יָד תַּחַת יָד רֶגֶל תַּחַת רֶגֶל "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (שמות בא:כד). The literal meaning of this פסוק is that if someone knocks out your eye, hand or foot, you should knock out theirs. However Jewish tradition and commentators like אבן עזר and רש"י explain this concept differently. They say that what it really means is that if you cause damage, you are accountable for your actions, and you need to pay for the losses you caused. This is a totally different reading. The תורה is not encouraging us to physically take the loss. If someone hurts you, you should not hurt them back. In fact, the תורה is teaching us the opposite: If you hurt somebody, it's your job to help them get better. Fairness shouldn't have to be achieved through physically taking the loss of someone.

This law is actually a big deal because it shows how serious it is to hurt someone. It's not just about the physical harm, it's about the impact on the person and their community. It's also about being mindful of how our actions affect others. If you're doing something that could potentially hurt someone, you need to take responsibility for it. It's like, if you're driving recklessly and you hit someone's car, you can't just drive away, you need to own up to it and make it right.

According to our tradition, "an eye for an eye" does not actually mean that the attacker's eye gets destroyed as a punishment for destroying someone else's eye. However, ספורנו points out that there is a very important lesson we can learn from here. If you cut off someone's hand, you deserve to get your hand cut off. This is what the תורה says. *Technically*, we don't do this. The attacker just pays the value of the damage he caused, because it's hard to cause exactly the same amount of damage. However, from the wording of the תורה we see just how terribly physically hurting someone else is.

Overall the law of an eye for an eye is teaching us to be thoughtful, empathetic, and just. The lesson we can all take away from this is that we should all treat each other fairly and that our relationship with each other is extremely important.



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