

The Mitzvah on Selling Yourself into Slavery and why all men (Jew and non-Jew) need Yeshua the Messiah.

This weeks reading is from [Parashat Mishpatim](#) (*Shemot / Exodus 21:1-24:18*), the Torah portion opens with the Lord providing us with “*judgments*” (הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים) ordinances. He begins by telling us how to treat a Hebrew slave (21:2), if a man is forced to sell his daughter because of debt, what is he to do (21:7-9), if a man has a wife he is not allowed to reduce her food, clothing, or conjugal rights (21:10-11). These ordinances on slavery are some of the most significant and important Scriptures found in all of the Bible when we consider the opinions of the rabbis.

In addition, we are given stipulations on murder regarding premeditated or accidental (21:12-16) murder. We are told how to decide what happens when two men are fighting and one is injured, how one’s loss of work is to be compensated. We are also given a ruling that is related to abortion, when two men are fighting and strike a woman and she miscarriages, the offending person is to pay compensation for the loss (21:22), and any other injury, the ruling is to be fair and described as eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth (21:24). Note how the unborn child is described in the Hebrew text as “*child*,” which suggests the unborn baby as having a soul, a person, and not a thing or piece of tissue that may be discarded at the will of the mother. The Torah Portion goes on to discuss a man’s property, cattle, and fields (22:3-14). Sorcerers and Witches are not permitted to live (22:18), bestiality is forbidden (22:19), and one is not to sacrifice to any other gods (22:20). Be good to the stranger (22:21), and do not oppress the widow or orphan (22:24). No interest is to be charged on loans made to a brother (22:25). The law of the first born is given (22:29-30). The seventh year rest for harvesting (23:10-11) and the seventh day rest from working (23:12). The command to celebrate three yearly festivals is given, (i) the Feast of Unleavened Bread (23:14), (ii) the Feast of Harvest of First Fruits (23:16), and (iii) the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year (23:16).

This week’s study contain many ordinances and rulings which are designed to be fair and just. The most interesting aspect of this week’s reading is related to what it means to be a Hebrew slave and the importance of

selling ourselves into slavery today. Is selling ourselves into slavery an important part of your life today? How is this related to the justice, mercy, and the righteousness of God?

ספר שמות פרק כא Shemot / Exodus 21:1-6

א ואלה המשפטים אשר תשים לפניהם: ב כי תקנה עבד ושבעת יצא לחפשי חנם: ג אם-בגפו יבא בגפו יצא אם-בעל אשה הוא וינצאה אשתו עמו: ד אם-אדניו יתן-לו אשה וילדה-לו בנים או בנות האשה וילדיה תהיה לאדניה והוא יצא בגפו: ה ואם-אמר יאמר העבד אהבתי את-אדני את-אשתי ואת-בני לא יצא חפשי: ו והגישו אדניו אל-האלהים והגישו אל-הדלת או אל-המזוזה ורצע אדניו את-אזנו במרצע ועבדו לעלם:

21:1 'Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them: 21:2 'If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. 21:3 'If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. 21:4 'If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone. 21:5 'But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,' 21:6 then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently. (NASB)

Based upon the Torah, a person could end up a slave as a result of poverty, debt, or maybe even as a result of a crime. In the mitzvah of selling yourself into slavery, Moshe states in *Shemot / Exodus 21:3*, ג אם-בגפו יבא בגפו יצא אם-בעל אשה הוא וינצאה אשתו עמו: 21:3 'If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. (NASB) The English translation says "if he comes alone" using the Hebrew word בגפו. When thinking of what it means to be alone, how that would be translated from the Hebrew bible, one would generally think of the Hebrew word לבד meaning "alone, by himself, unaccompanied" or the word יחידי meaning "single, individual, alone." These words describe being alone, however, Moshe writes בגפו taken from the root word גוף

meaning “*body*.” The Torah concept here is that the man who becomes a slave, comes with nothing but himself (his body). When one enters into debt, the only way to overcome debt is by selling yourself into servitude. This is a very important concept, because the selling of ourselves because of debt may come in many forms today. Take for example the selling of yourself to the momentary pleasure of sin. When this happens, such a person is willing to place his or herself into slavery to serve the desires of the flesh or the body (בגוף). The Apostle Paul said in *Romans 6:16* “*Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?*” (NASB) Solomon wrote in *Mishley / Proverbs 5:22* “*His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his sin*” (NASB). The Torah describes the mitzvah on slavery in Israel as a voluntarily sale of yourself to the slave master. Paul parallels this in *Romans 7:14* saying “*For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.*” The point is that in the case of the Torah, the one who sells himself must be purchased back by the mitzvah of redemption. And in parallel fashion, when the debt is to be collected, we discover that all we truly have purchased is death itself when we sow the seeds of sin, “*For the wages of sin is death*” (*Romans 6:26*).

Let’s look at what the rabbis have to say concerning the selling of one’s self into servitude (bond-servant). Akeidat Yitzchak has the following comments concerning *Shemot / Exodus 21:1-6*.

Akeidat Yitzchak 67:124

The whole paragraph dealing with the Jewish servant can be understood allegorically as reflecting man’s experience in this world. He enters alone, leaves alone, leaves his acquisitions behind, and when he expresses the desire to attach himself to a human master, he is brought to elohim, to be forcefully reminded of his error. In the seventh decade of his life, his vitality ebbs, and as he approaches his death, i.e. the time he returns to the grave, he does so chinam, chofshi, without any encumbrance. This is either due to physical decline or because of lack of energy to go on living. The wheel has turned, as a wheel is always apt

to do. What had once been thought to be a continuous upward curve, has peaked and become a downward movement. (compare Exodus 21:2-6)

It is very interesting how Akeidat Yitzchak describes the one who sells himself into slavery. He comments on the one who enters alone and leaves alone, and that when he needs to attach himself to a human master, he is brought before God to be reminded of his error. Notice how this description of *Shemot / Exodus 21:1-6* seems to parallel our lives, we enter into this world alone, and leave alone, and when we sin, are we sell ourselves to the momentary pleasures of life (*pride and immorality; note how these two things covers all sins, e.g. the pride of life is connected to hate, murder, and all sorts of evils, etc.*)? Due to our sins, one day we will be brought before the Lord and have to rely upon His mercy, and our faith in Him and the Messiah Yeshua for the payment of the debt according to the Law of Redemption. The reason being, there is no man on this earth who is able to redeem one because of his sins.

The Mekhilta is Aramaic (מכילתא) and is a halakhic midrash to the Book of Exodus. The name “*Mekhilta*,” corresponds to the Hebrew “*middah*” (“*measure*,” “*rule*”), and is used to denote a compilation of Scriptural exegesis (“*middot*,” *Talmudical Hermeneutics*). Let’s see what the Mekhilta has to say concerning these verses from the Torah.

Mekhilta 21:3, Part 1:

(Exodus 21:3) “If alone (i.e., without a wife) he came, alone shall he go out.” What is the intent of this? It is written (9) “If his master gives him a woman” (a Canaanite bondswoman). (“If” here is) optional (and not mandatory). You say “optional,” but perhaps it is mandatory. It is, therefore, written “If alone he come, alone shall he go out” — It is optional and not mandatory. These are the words of R. Yishmael. R. Akiva says: “If alone (i.e., intact) he came, alone shall he go out” — If he came with his organ prominences (intact), he goes out with them intact (i.e., the master must indemnify him for any organ prominence loss that he caused him). R. Yishmael says: Our verse is not needed for this. For it is written (Ibid. 7) “And

if a man sells his daughter as a maidservant, she shall not go out as the (Canaanite) bondsmen go out” — by (loss of) organ prominences, as the Canaanite bondsmen do go out. You say (it means) this; but perhaps (it means that) she should not go out with (six) years (of service) or with Jubilee years, as the (Hebrew) bondsmen do go out. It is, therefore, written (Devarim 15:12) “If your Hebrew brother or sister is sold to you, etc.” — whereby we are apprised that she does go out with (six) years (of service). Whence do we derive (the same for) the Jubilee? From (Leviticus 25:42) “For they (i.e., all Hebrews are My servants.” In any event, (it has been shown that) it is not the second conclusion (i.e., that she does not go out with years of service and with Jubilee), which is correct, but the first (i.e., that she does not go out with loss of organ prominences). This tells me only of a Hebrew maidservant. Whence do we derive (the same for) a Hebrew bondsman? It is, therefore, written (Devarim 15:12) “the Hebrew man or the Hebrew woman.” The first is likened to one second. Just as the Hebrew woman does not go out with (loss of) organ prominences, so, the Hebrew man (But why is a verse needed for this?) Can it not be deduced a fortiori? viz.: If a Hebrew maidservant, who goes out with (the appearance of pubertal) signs, does not go out with (loss of) organ prominences, then a Hebrew bondsman, who does not go out with signs, how much more so should he not go out with (loss of) organ prominences! __ No, this (that she does not go out) may be true of a Hebrew maidservant, who was not sold for thieving — wherefore she does not go out with (loss of) organ prominences — as opposed to a Hebrew bondsman, who was sold for thieving — wherefore he does go out with (loss of) organ prominences. It must, therefore, be written “the Hebrew man or the Hebrew woman” — to liken the first to the second, viz.: Just as she does not go out with organ prominences, so, he.

This whole commentary is based upon what Rabbi Akkiva states, רבי עקי”

regarding “*organ prominences*” (אברים נכנס). Note אברים means “*organs, limbs, wings, pinion, or part*” and נכנס means “*entering, ingoing.*” The Mekhilta comments on what happens while one is a slave, if he goes in or comes out of his commitment as a slave (7 years) with a missing body part, then he goes out of the commitment as he came in. But if he was injured in the service to his human master, then the master is to compensate him when he leaves (after 7 years). The point is that if one sells himself to sin, the master of the man is his sin, and sin will cause one to be injured, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Sin does not compensate a person, there is no compensation for the one who indulges in the fleeting pleasures of sin, there is only guilt before God and one’s reliance upon His mercy. When one turns from his sin, he enters into something new, to the covenant of God, drawing near, and walking in His ways.

For the one who sold himself into slavery, if he chooses to remain with his master, the Scriptures say, וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֶדְנָיו אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֶל-הַדָּלֶת אוּ : 21:6 *then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently. (NASB)* The point is the one who chooses his master, he must go before the Lord. What about those who choose sin as their master? Daat Zkenim says the following concerning this verse from the Torah.

Daat Zkenim on Exodus 21:6, part 1

וְרָצַע אֶדְנָיו אֶת-אָזְנוֹ בַּמְרָצֶע, “*his master must pierce his ear with an awl;*” *why did the Torah choose the awl as the tool with which to pierce this servant’s ear? The numerical value of the letters in the word מְרָצֶע equals 400. It is to remind that servant that seeing that G’d had redeemed the Jewish people from 400 years of slavery, it is unbelievable that he should choose being enslaved to a human master voluntarily. G’d had stated categorically in Leviticus 25:55 כִּי לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִים, “for the Children of Israel are meant to be bound by a master- servant relationship only with their G’d,” not with any human being. If this man chooses to become indentured to a human master he deserves to*

be punished physically. (Talmud, tractate Kiddushin, folio 22, and Tossaphot on that folio. (ורצע אדוניו. ולמה מרצע) לפי שמרצע“ע בגימ’ ארבע מאות אמר הקב“ה אני הוצאתי אתכם משעבוד ארבע מאות שנה ואמרתי כי לי בני ישראל עבדים והלך (וקנה אדון לעצמו לפיכך ילקה במרצע:

The blood letting of the ear against the Mezuzah (הַמְזוּזָה), which contains a piece of the Torah scroll, draws the context of the covenant relationship, and Shomer Mitzvah (שמר מצווה), and obedience to God’s Word, and being obedient to the master. What about those who choose sin as their master? Daat Zkenim states, *“for the Children of Israel are meant to be bound by a master- servant relationship only with their G’d,”* the one who chooses sin as his master is without hope.

The commentary *Shney Luchot HaBrit, V’Zot HaBerachah, Derech Chaim Tochachot Musar 156* has the following to say concerning *Shemot / Exodus 21:6*.

Shney Luchot HaBrit, V’Zot HaBerachah, Derech Chaim Tochachot Musar 156

Let us select from the group of judgments an example for which it is not possible to find a rational explanation and which therefore compels us to resort to the parallel with the Creation. In the law of the insolvent thief who may be sold into slavery for six years (Exodus 21,6) the penalty may be applied only if the value of the article that was stolen and has to be replaced is the equivalent of or greater than the value of six years of the thief’s work. If his work for six years is reckoned as being more valuable than the stolen articles, the court cannot allow him to be sold into slavery. The obvious question arises why in each case the thief is not sold into slavery for the exact time during which his work would equal in value the stolen articles. This would enable him to restore their value to the owner as soon as possible. The answer suggested by Rabbenu Bachya ben Asher refers to the seven days of Creation as a parallel. In his commentary on the Pentateuch, he points out that the

reason why the Torah chose the laws of the Jewish slave as the first of the judgments is its connection both with the Creation and with the Exodus from Egypt. The Commandment aims at admonishing those who have received their freedom from the Hand of G'd to conduct their lives in a manner that would preclude their transformation into slaves once again. Furthermore, this Commandment applied a principle that had been introduced at the Creation, namely that the number seven is associated with rest from toil. This number is of fundamental importance. It is used not only for days, as in the case of the Sabbath, but also for years, as in the case of the Sabbatical year in the Holy Land. The fact that it also used for the year in which the Jewish slave is to be released from his enforced labor means that the man from whom the goods have been stolen is forced to wait until the thief has sufficient money to repay him the either large or small sum that has not yet been repaid. He has to withdraw his just claim if its implementation conflicts with the principle of Creation. The message is clear. As we are, in the first instance, products of Creation, we have to live according to its principles.

The rabbis compare the difference between selling one's self into slavery due to two types of debt. One is due to poverty, the other is due to a crime (theft). The going in and come out of the commitment for the one in poverty, is limited to 6 years, the 7th year he is free, whereas the one who is committed due to theft, the penalty of slavery may extend much longer than 6 years. The rabbis say, *"the reason why the Torah chose the laws of the Jewish slave as the first of the judgments is its connection both with the Creation and with the Exodus from Egypt. The Commandment aims at admonishing those who have received their freedom from the Hand of G'd to conduct their lives in a manner that would preclude their transformation into slaves once again."* Can you see how significant this statement is regarding being a slave to sin? The Apostle Paul made these very same statements in *Romans 6:16* *Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience,*

which leads to righteousness? (NIV) Obedience to what? The rabbinic connection to the creation and slavery, is that we are set free from sin in the Messiah Yeshua. If you are a slave to the master, Yeshua the Messiah, you are given rest from your toil. The conclusion of the rabbis is *“The message is clear. As we are, in the first instance, products of Creation, we have to live according to its principles.”* Note how the Apostle Paul uses the language of *“new creation”* in the Messiah Yeshua throughout his letters in the Apostolic Writings. If you are a *“new creation”* in the Messiah, then we are called to live according to His principles. The question then is *“what are the Messiah’s principles?”* Yeshua said that He and the Father are one in agreement, thus his principles are the principles that are found in the Torah. We are called to live our lives according to God’s Ways, according to the Torah.

The Jewish commentator Sforno has the following to say concerning these verses from the Torah regarding selling one’s self into slavery.

Sforno on Numbers 6:13:1:

יביא אותו, our sages in B'rachot 8 have already explained this to mean that the Nazirite is to bring himself, as it were. Normally, when someone is being prepared for a higher status than that he had attained in the past, such a person is being “brought” to his new assignment by someone superior to himself. This is why the person afflicted with tzoraat is brought to the Temple. Here, the Nazir presents himself in the Temple instead of being brought, i.e. presented by someone superior. Compare Leviticus 14,2 concerning the צרוע, and concerning the Sotah where the Torah had also written in Numbers 5,15 that the husband was to bring his wife to the priest. Similarly, a Jewish servant, asking to extend his term of service beyond the original 6 years, is brought to the door post to have his ear pierced by his master. (Exodus 21,6). Contrary to all this, the Nazirite at the end of his term who will once more begin to shave the hairs of his face and head, thus becoming “a new man,” brings himself. The reason is simple. There is no one on a higher spiritual niveau who could act as the one “bringing” him, i.e. presenting him.

Sforno compares the one who commits himself to slavery for 6 years to the Nazirite, and to the Sotah. The idea is that the ultimate goal is to be free from servitude to an earthly master. The Nazirite voluntarily places himself under an oath before God to not do something, for a certain period of time of whose length is of his own choosing. The Sotah is in regard to sin and marital infidelity. The Nazirite is Torah observant, he is obedient to God's Word, whereas in the Sotah, one has been unfaithful to the covenant. These two things draw a contrast between being faithful and being unfaithful, to righteousness and sin in relation to the mitzvah concerning selling one's self into slavery. This suggests the rabbis understand the two sided nature of selling one's self into slavery, as being due to (i) financial debt, and (ii) sin. The one who sells himself to the Lord, making the Lord God in heaven his master, and lives his life obedient to the Mitzvot (God's Word), like the Nazirite, the rabbis say, *"the Nazirite at the end of his term who will once more begin to shave the hairs of his face and head, thus becoming "a new man," brings himself."* Notice the parallels to the one who places his faith in Yeshua the Messiah, makes a vow to serve him (*selling one's self as a bond-servant, as in the Torah command*), lives his life for him, and is obedient to God's Word, Paul said that such a person becomes a new man. Note how the authors of the Apostolic Writings describe themselves, *Romans 1:1 "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus..."*, *Philippians 1:1 "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus..."*, *Colossians 1:7 "...Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant,"* *Colossians 4:7 "...Tychicus, {our} beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord,"* *James 1:1 "James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,"* *2 Peter 1:1 "Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ..."*, and *Jude 1:1 "Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ..."* They all proclaimed themselves to be *"bond-servants,"* willingly committing themselves to serve their Master Yeshua for life. The two sided nature of the bond-servant denotes the significance of why all men, both Jew and non-Jew need Yeshua the Messiah. The Law of redemption is necessary for all men due to the debt of sin. The Lord calls us to repentance, and to walk in His ways, and to seek the one who is able to redeem us from our sins, to buy us out of servitude to sin. After these things, the Lord will enter into our lives and empower us to have success in our lives for His glory. I have heard some people believe the Jewish

people are already in a covenant with God and do not need Yeshua, only the Gentiles need Yeshua. However, based upon this analysis of the Torah and the comments of the rabbis, both Jew and Gentile need to seek the one who is able to redeem them from sin, Yeshua the Messiah!

This week's Torah portion speaks to us about the mitzvah of the bond-servant and its relevance for our lives today on both a physical (obedience) and a spiritual (faith) level. We are called to commit our lives to the Lord in heaven, and to Yeshua the Messiah our redeemer. There is great freedom and peace as a bond-servant of our Father in heaven, and Yeshua the Messiah. The Scriptures state in *Shemot / Exodus 21:3*, ג' :
21:3 אִם-בְּגִפּוֹ יָבֵא בְּגִפּוֹ יֵצֵא אִם-בְּעַל אִשָּׁה הוּא וְיִצְאָהּ אִשְׁתּוֹ עִמּוֹ:
‘if he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. (NASB) The English translation states “*if he comes alone*” using the Hebrew word בְּגִפּוֹ. Generally, the Hebrew word לבד meaning “*alone, by himself, unaccompanied*” or the word יחידי “*single, individual, alone*” are used to describe one who is alone. Moshe is using this word specifically to denote the body, and the idea that the man who becomes a slave, comes with nothing but himself (his body). The way the Torah is written describes the personal responsibility of each individual before God. And if the servant decides to dedicate his life to his master, they are to go before God and to the door post using an awe to put a ring in his ear to indicate that he has dedicated his life to his master as a “*bond-servant*” for the remainder of his life. The Hebrew text states, וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֶל-הַדֶּלֶת אוֹ אֶל-הַמְּזוּזָה וְרָצַע אֶדְנִי אֶת-אָזְנוֹ וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֶדְנִי אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֶל-הַדֶּלֶת אוֹ אֶל-הַמְּזוּזָה וְרָצַע אֶדְנִי אֶת-אָזְנוֹ :
21:6 *then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently. (NASB)* Moshe writes saying וְהִגִּישׁוּ “*and he brought him near*” unto God, to “*the door*” (הַדֶּלֶת), and to “*the mezuzah*” (הַמְּזוּזָה, door post) containing a small Torah scroll. The master forces an awe into the servants ear fixing the ear against the mezuzah, against the Torah, and blood is shed. This signifies standing before God and making a covenant of faith. Can you see the parallels here to the bond-servant, the covenant relationship, and the new man, the one to whom the Lord writes his Torah upon his heart to be a testimony unto the glory of God? (*Jeremiah 31*) In addition, faith and the Torah, coupled with drawing near to the Lord, brings with it the concept

of bringing one's entire family before God to live righteously before him, and dedicating ones life to the master? The Apostle Paul wrote the following, *Romans 6:16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? 6:17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 6:18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (NASB)* This is the reason why all men need Yeshua the Messiah. According to *Romans 6:16-18*, we are all slaves to something, why not be slaves to righteousness and bond-servants of the Messiah? In doing so, we are establishing the covenant that we believe in, by faith, by the way we live our lives, and by the grace of God.

