

CSH Shabbat Service Schedule

February 12 | Tetzaveh
February 26 | Vayakhel

Friday, January 28, 2011 Candle Lighting 4:44 pm

This week's Torah reading: Mishpatim

Annual: Ex. 21:1 – 24:18 (Etz Hayim, p. 456)

Triennial: Ex. 21:1 – 22:3 (Etz Hayim, p. 456)

Haftarah: Jeremiah 34:8 – 22; 33:25 – 26 (Etz Hayim, p. 482)



Musings on Mishpatim -- When you acquire a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years; in the seventh year he shall go free, without payment. (*Exodus 21:2*)

The Hebrew word for "go free" is *yatsah*, which has the same root as the verb "to bring out," found in the first commandment: *I the Lord am your God who brought you out (hotseiticha) of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage*. It is the same root as in the term "Exodus (*yetsiat*) from Egypt." This "going free" is the desired state for the individual; it is what God strove to do for us. Indentured servitude is an affront to God.

<http://www.kolel.org/blog/2008/01/parashat-mishpatim-exodus-211-2418.html>



The first law enumerated in this parsha deals with the treatment of Hebrew slaves, presupposing that slavery will exist among the Israelites. How could a people newly freed from slavery, fully aware of its horrors, contemplate creating a society in which they would enslave each other? How could God, proclaimed at Mount Sinai as the one "who brought you out of the Land of Egypt, the house of bondage" (*Exodus 20:2*), condone slavery? Have the Israelites learned nothing from their experience in Egypt?

This law is one of many illustrating the compromises required when transforming a people's mentality and lifestyle. The Torah could have set guidelines for a utopian society, but the Israelites could never have realized them. The Torah recognizes human limitations and sets goals accordingly. Becoming a holy people is a gradual process. Unreasonable demands lead to great disappointments.

The Torah admits that Israelite society will be imperfect. All Israelites will serve God, but some will serve humans as well. At the same time, slavery will be restricted; the degradation experienced in Egypt will be avoided. In Egypt, enslavement was lifelong. Now, it would be restricted to six years. In Egypt, children were torn from their parents. Now, family bonds would be recognized and honored. In Egypt, slaves were given no respite. Now, slaves and masters together would rest on Shabbat.

We are partners with God in repairing the world. Often, the challenges facing us seem insurmountable. We are overwhelmed by the suffering around us. We doubt our ability to effect change. The Torah reminds us that we cannot transform the world overnight; even God cannot work such a transformation. We must be content with gradual change, with improving the world step by step. These small steps are achievable, and each one, however small, brings us closer to our goal.

http://www.clal.org/update_torah_archive.html (Dvora Weisberg)

~~~~~

Among the regulations, we find that slaves are to serve for six years and be freed in the seventh. At the end of that time, the slave may choose not to go free but instead remain a slave until the jubilee. After six years of service, could a slave really say "I love my master and do not want my freedom?" That pronouncement was required for the slave to remain in servitude.

The explanation of the laws of slavery in the Mechilta, one of the oldest works of the Midrash, makes it possible for us to understand how a slave might choose to remain with a master rather than go free. For example, the Mechilta tells us, "A Hebrew slave must not wash the feet of his master, nor put his shoes on him, nor carry his things before him when going to the bathhouse." (Tractate Nezikin) It goes on to say that even those things a student or a son might do for the master should not be done by the slave. Slaves were to be used for economic purposes, not for creature comfort.

Then the Mechilta tells us, "Just as a hired man cannot be forced to do anything other than his trade, so also a slave cannot be forced to do anything other than his trade." If the slave came into service as a barber, tailor, butcher, or baker he works at that trade for his master, and the master cannot compel him to change his occupation.

The slave also had regular hours. "Just as a hired hand works only during the day and does not work during the night," so it is with the slave. In fact, the Midrash goes so far as to suggest that if the master has only one good loaf of bread or one cup of good wine, he must give it to his slave. One can see that in Jewish tradition, the rules pertaining to slaves were a big step forward in comparison to the harsh lawlessness of the Egyptians. Could it be that the experience of Egyptian slavery led to the formulation of more humane laws of servitude?

<http://www.bajcvermont.org/torah/5770-mishpatim.pdf>

~~~~~

My God

Give us the patience to remember
to judge less and heal more
ourselves and others
and to love the divine spark
which resides in each and every person
that our congregation might be an authentic conveyor of Torah

We are all fragile.

Give us the strength to chase after tzedek (justice)
the vision to know what it means
the humility to know when we can do more
the fortitude to disallow the seemingly mundane tasks from
obscuring the vision
the love that allows us to love.

Amen

<http://www.tbe.org/site/sog/050204.htm>



Condolences – To Sandy Mehl on the passing of her beloved brother.

Donations -- The next time you are looking for a meaningful way to celebrate a simcha, a birthday, a promotion, remember a loved one, or comfort a mourner, please consider making a donation to The Conservative Synagogue of the Hamptons.

End Quote --

Our mission has been the protection of the wage-worker, now; to increase his wages; to cut hours off the long workday, which was killing him; to improve the safety and the sanitary conditions of the workshop; to free him from the tyrannies, petty or otherwise, which served to make his existence a slavery. -- Samuel Gompers

As long as the mind is enslaved, the body can never be free. Psychological freedom, a firm sense of self-esteem, is the most powerful weapon against the long night of physical slavery. -- Martin Luther King, Jr

Shabbat shalom.

Stacy

Stacy Menzer
President
The Conservative Synagogue
Of the Hamptons
PO Box 1800
East Hampton, NY 11937
631 725 8188
www.synagoguehamptons.org