

CHEVRAH TORAH...5777

With HEART in MIND

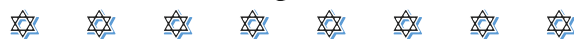
MUSSAR Teaching to Transform the Text & Our Lives

Mishpatim—Exodus 22:20-23...23:9

SAME'ACH B'CHELKO—Happiness with your Lot

...Key KOSHI...

MAHARAL: WHY must a past of bondage motivate us to have a kind & generous heart?
HOW does the just treatment of the stranger reflect our sacred self/life-perspective?



P'SHAT...Studying Torah—Encountering The Word—The Will—The ONE

The truly wise individual is not one who has achieved wisdom but a *talmid chacham*—a wise student...one who is constantly learning—including by observing and reflecting on what can be learned from other people.

<p>22:20] You shall not wrong nor oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.</p> <p>21] You [communal leaders] shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan.</p> <p>22] If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me,</p> <p>23] and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans.</p> <p>23:9] You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.</p>	<p>כָּל־אֲלֻמְנָה וַיְתוֹם לֹא תַעֲנוּן :²⁰</p> <p>אִם־עֲנָה תַעֲנֶנָּה אֲתוֹ כִּי אִם־צָעֵק²¹</p> <p>וַצָּעֵק אֵלַי שָׁמַע אֲשַׁמַּע צָעֲקוֹתוֹ :</p> <p>וְחָרָה אַפִּי וְהִרְגֹתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּחָרֶב²²</p> <p>וְהָיוּ נְשִׁיכֶם אֲלֻמְנוֹת וּבְנֵיכֶם</p> <p>יְתָמִים :²³ אִם־כָּסַף תִּלְוֶנָה אֶת־עַמִּי</p> <p>אֶת־הָעַנִּי עַמְּךָ לֹא־תִהְיֶה לוֹ כְּנִשָּׂה</p> <p>לֹא־תִשְׂיָמוּן עָלָיו נָשֶׁךְ :</p> <p>וְגַר לֹא תִלְחָץ וְאַתָּם יִדְעוּתֶם אֶת־^{23:9}</p> <p>נַפְשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי־גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ</p> <p>מִצְרָיִם :</p>
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בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוֵּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

REMEZ...Acquiring Torah...When Torah penetrates our entire being, not just our *seichel/intellect*, this is the acquisition of Torah. —R' Avi Fertig

22:20 *You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt*
RASHI... “for you were strangers...” If you taunt him, he, too, can taunt you back, and say in return: “You also started out as a stranger.” Pot, do not call the kettle black!...Any use of the term “Ger” in Torah means a person not born in the country he presently resides; simply put, he came from another place.
RASHBAM... “Do not oppress him”---to do your work, since he has no champion, as we remember it written: “I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppressed them.” (Exod 3:9) And since “you know the feelings of the stranger, seeing you were strangers...” (Exod 23:9) the severity of punishment will match the intensity of his misery.
NECHAMA... “Lo Til’CHaTZeyNu”...The verb *LaCHaTZ* does not recur from its earlier appearance till we reach this text. The prohibition of oppressing the stranger is thus linked by verbal association with the oppression suffered by Israel as strangers in Egypt. We are bidden to put ourselves in his place, for it was our place.
IBN EZRA...The term “Ger” is from the berry “Gar-Ger”...implying one severed from the branch.
RAMBAN...In my opinion, the correct explanation of the verse “*You shall neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him*” implies that you should not think that the stranger has no one to deliver him from your hands. On the contrary, you know that when you were strangers in Egypt...God brought vengeance upon the Egyptians...In like manner, do not afflict the widow and orphan, nor the stranger...for God shall hearken to their cry.

23:9 *You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of a stranger, as you were strangers in the land of Egypt*

ALTER... “No sojourner shall you oppress, for you know the sojourner’s heart, since you were sojourners...”

The Hebrew is “*nefesh—life*” ... “inner nature; essential being; breath.”

NECHAMA...Why does RASHI understand the prohibition as a threat? ...Because a history of alienation and slavery is by itself no guarantee that you will not oppress the stranger once you’ve gained independence...Do past memories influence the newly liberated to adopt an attitude of tolerance and love?...Do we not often find the opposite to be the case? The hate, persecution and shame the individual or community experiences in the past do not always act as a deterrent, preventing them from adopting the same attitude to those entrusted to their power....The fact that “*You were strangers in the Land of Egypt...*” is certainly no adequate motivation. On the contrary, how often do we find that the slave or exile who gains power...finds compensation for his former sufferings by giving free rein to his tyrannical instincts?...For this reason, the double motivation. Some will be sufficiently moved by the memory of their experience of oppression to put themselves in the stranger’s shoes. Others will, at least, be influenced by the argument “*If you wrong him, he will wrong you back.*”

ALSHIKH...A Jew should not say: If idolatry is so repugnant what is so terrible if I hold it against a *Ger*—one who converts. That is why, immediately following 22:19, forbidding idolatry, it is stated: “*You shall not afflict a Ger...*” For you, too, lived once in Egypt where you worshipped idols, and God does not look down upon you!...So it teaches in 23:9 “*You know the soul of the stranger...*” That is, you know the soul of the *Ger*---the convert, like a newborn child in our faith, for you were “*gerim*” from Egypt...

SABAH of SLOBODKA ... “for you know the soul of the stranger...” Do not interpret these words in the *P’shat*, that its forbidden us to oppress the stranger since we were strangers and oppressed, and because we know the taste of oppression. Rather because it is the obligation of every human being to feel for his fellow—both the simcha and the sadness, as if it touched his very soul. “*And you shall love your neighbor as yourself*”—really, as yourself! Our connection to one another is not complete without our ability to feel as if we and our fellow human being are in the same situation, with no distinction.

Throughout history, Jews were the archetypal strangers. Abraham says to the Hittites, “I am a stranger and a sojourner among you.” The Israelites were strangers in Egypt. Moses said, upon the birth of his first-born son, “I am a stranger in a strange land.” They were strangers to teach us that God loves the stranger. They were different, yet God set on them great Love to teach us the dignity of difference.

Two ideas have sounded like siren calls through the ages, leading men to shed the blood of other men. The first is that God is on the side of the strong, the established, the powerful. That is why God chose a people who were weak, few, and homeless. The second is that somewhere there is a truth so universal that it is to be imposed on all humankind....But God chose the powerless to teach that He is not to be found in power; a people who neither shared the faith of others nor imposed their faith on others to teach that there is not one way alone to God’s Presence, but many...A civilization that does not tolerate difference fails the basic moral requirement of humanity. A world that cannot live with strangers is a world not yet redeemed. [A Letter in the Scroll, Sacks, pgs 92-95]

ELIE WIESEL...

...Man, by definition, is born a stranger: coming from “nowhere” he is thrust into an alien world—one which existed before him. A world which did not need him, and which will survive him. A stranger, he goes through life meeting other strangers...and, estranged from both himself and his world, his very existence lies in doubt...

On the sociological level, the stranger is someone who suggests the unknown...

The stranger represents what you are not, what you cannot be, simply because you are not he.

For the Jew, the problem is particularly pertinent and poignant...Since our beginnings, we have been considered as strangers par excellence. We have come to exemplify—by our very existence—other peoples’ prejudices toward their own strangers...To most all of humankind, the stranger is the other.

He is not bound by your memories, by your laws...He is an emissary of evil and violence. Or of death. Surely he is from the other side. Thus, in many traditions, he was rejected, isolated, condemned....

The stranger was sent away or somehow disposed of

To us too, the stranger represents the unknown; but the attraction he holds is one of fascination—never hate. Rather than absorb the stranger, we encourage him to remain true to his essential self...We want the stranger to offer us not what we already have...but that which he has and we do not....

...For the Jew, the stranger suggests a world to be lived in, to be saved.

One awaits the stranger, one welcomes him...In our tradition, the stranger may well be someone very important: a prophet in disguise, a hidden Tsaddik...or even the Messiah. Thus, with every stranger encountered we hope to receive a fragment of his secret...a spark of his flame.

To live without strangers would result in an impoverished existence.

[“The Stranger in the Bible,” Address at HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, 1981]

...PRACTICE...

Looking out and looking in:

SHARE experiences with a chaver about encountering/being the 'Stranger'...
HOW does your life-approach celebrate "the stranger" ...?

CONSIDER:

HOW does your knowing the soul of the stranger transform him/her
and compel your compassionate response?

RESPOND:

"You shall love the stranger as yourself"
WHAT will you do to fulfill this Covenantal command?