

פרשת
שמיני של פסח
Parashat Shemini shel Pesach

*Devarim / Deuteronomy 14:22-16:17, Isaiah 10:32-12:6
John 20:15-20*

The Mitzvah of Pikuach Nefesh (פיקוח נפש, Rescuing a Life) and Servant hood

The reading for this week is from *Devarim / Deuteronomy 14:22-16:17* and speaks about being freed from slavery, being set free from debt, not charging interest, the Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. What these Scriptures are speaking to us is concerning servant hood, and committing our lives to the Lord. When we do this, He will provide everything that we need, clothing, food, drink, and will remove the anxiety and restlessness of life that is always pressing hard against us. This week's reading reminds us when we commit to serving the Lord, we gain all that we need along with countless blessings. This is what the Torah is alluding to in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 15:13-18*:

Devarim / Deuteronomy 15:13-18

15:13 'When you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. 15:14 'You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. 15:15 'You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command

you this today. 15:16 'It shall come about if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he fares well with you; 15:17 then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also you shall do likewise to your maidservant. 15:18 'It shall not seem hard to you when you set him free, for he has given you six years with double the service of a hired man; so the Lord your God will bless you in whatever you do. (NASB)

This text suggests that in order to receive a blessing from God we are to be a blessing to others. This is analogous to what Yeshua had done for us. He did not just set us free. He also gave us gifts. This is an important point, as *Sforno on Devarim / Deuteronomy 15:18 Part I* writes saying, “לא יקשה בעיניך, *to furnish him with some of your wealth upon his departure, seeing that he has served you faithfully and you will not become poor by doing so.*” The idea is when we place our faith in Yeshua the Messiah, we do not do so as to become poor. When we share our wealth giving to the poor the Lord will bless us. The Lord makes us rich in many ways, most importantly in our relationship with Him. The Talmud describes these commandments (mitzvot) in the following way:

Talmud Bavli Kiddushin 38b:1

כל מצוה שנצטוו ישראל קודם כניסתן לארץ נוהגת
בין בארץ בין בחוצה לארץ לאחר כניסתן לארץ אינה
נוהגת אלא בארץ חוץ מן השמטת כספים ושילוח עבדים
שאע“פ שנצטוו עליהם לאחר כניסתן לארץ נוהגת בין
בארץ בין בחוצה לארץ...

Any mitzva that the Jewish people were commanded to perform before entering Eretz Yisrael, i.e., it was not linked to entry into the land, applies both in Eretz Yisrael and outside of Eretz Yisrael. Conversely, any mitzva that they were commanded to perform after they entered Eretz Yisrael applies only in Eretz Yisrael, except

for the abrogation of monetary debts in the Sabbatical Year (see Deuteronomy 15:1–2), and the emancipation of slaves in the Jubilee Year (see Leviticus 25:39–41). Even though the Jews were commanded with regard to these mitzvot that they were to perform them only after their entry into Eretz Yisrael, these mitzvot apply both in Eretz Yisrael and outside of Eretz Yisrael.

The idea here is related to the mitzvot which apply only inside of the land of Israel, and those that are universal (inside and outside of the land). Those rules regarding the Shmittah year applies both inside and outside. The commands regarding taking care of the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the stranger, applies both inside and outside of the land. In fact, the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the stranger, to care for them, this is what these Scriptures speak about. (*Chizkuni on Devarim / Deuteronomy 15:1 Part 1*) This is about having compassion and love for one another, these are the basic principles that were being taught by Yeshua in the Apostolic Writings. The Torah states the following:

Devarim / Deuteronomy 15:18

לֹא־יִקְשֶׁה בְּעֵינָיִךָ בְּשִׁלְחֶיךָ אֹתוֹ חֲפָזִי מֵעֲמֹךָ כִּי מִשְׁנֵה שָׂכָר
 שְׂכִיר עֲבָדֶיךָ יֵשֶׁשׁ שָׁנִים וּבְרִכָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר
 תַּעֲשֶׂה: (פ)

15:18 When you do set him free, do not feel aggrieved; for in the six years he has given you double the service of a hired man. Moreover, the LORD your God will bless you in all you do.

The person made himself a bondservant, had made so much money for his master, that the master may feel grieved that he would loose this servant. Consider why Yeshua chose money (or possessions) as the alternative master to which most of us are drawn. *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Matthew 6:24)* He understood that man’s desire is to

seek to acquire and hold on to things that make life more comfortable. It seems to make little difference whether one starts from a position of relative poverty or relative wealth; we all want more. To get more, we have to commit our time and energy to gaining more, this makes it impossible to simultaneously be a servant of God. Divided loyalty is a serious problem, and Moshe describes this as not feeling grieved for turning his servant loose in the shmittah year, do not be afraid, the Lord your God will bless you in all you do! This describes how the servant of God must be all in. This is expounded upon in the rabbinic commentaries such as what we find here written by Daat Zkenim.

Daat Zkenim on Devarim / Deuteronomy 15:18 Part 1

כי משנה שכר שכיר עבדך, “for he has worked for you twice as long as the wages that he received,” a hired hand usually hires himself out for a period of three years. We know this from Isaiah 16,14: בשלש שנים כשני שכיר ונקלה כבוד מואב, “in three years, fixed like the years of a hired labourer, the glory of Moav shall shrink;” it follows that someone who has served his master for six years has actually served twice the length of a hired hand. The reason they hired such laborers for a period of three years was that if they had hired such a person for a term of a year or two years, sometimes the years are longer and sometimes they are shorter, depending it had more than one month of Adar. By making the term three years there could not be a dispute about how many days of labour this included.

Here Daat Zkenim comments on the one who hires himself as a laborer and he does so for three years. This is connected to the Shmittah in that the person is released on the seventh year and having worked twice as long indicating that his pay was half of what he had spent laboring. (Note how there is an interesting parallel to the life of Jacob.) This is the command given according to *Vayikra / Leviticus 25:39* *If a countryman among you becomes destitute and sells himself to you, you must not force him into slave labor. 25:40 Let him stay with you*

as a hired worker or temporary resident; he is to work for you until the Year of Jubilee. 25:41 Then he and his children are to be released, and he may return to his clan and to the property of his fathers. (BSB) Hired servants were engaged by the day and paid at the close of the day. A servant hired by the priest was not regarded as one of the family, and was not allowed to eat of the holy things, whereas the slaves were considered a part of the family (*Vayikra / Leviticus 19:13, 22:10, Devarim / Deuteronomy 15:18, 24:14, Job 14:6, Malachi 3:5*). There is a change of status here in the difference between a slave and a hired servant. This is contrasted in the New Testament with the Shepherd who owned the sheep (*Matthew 20:1-8 workers in vineyard, Luke 15:17-19 prodigal son, John 10:12-13 good shepherd and sheep*). The servant who functions as a worker just as in the parable of the workers in the vineyard (*Matthew 20*) Yeshua likens to “*the kingdom of heaven.*”

The verses we are looking at for this week are from *Devarim / Deuteronomy 15:1-18*:

Devarim / Deuteronomy 15:1-18

15:1 'At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts. 15:2 'This is the manner of remission: every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because the Lord's remission has been proclaimed. 15:3 'From a foreigner you may exact it, but your hand shall release whatever of yours is with your brother. 15:4 'However, there will be no poor among you, since the Lord will surely bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, 15:5 if only you listen obediently to the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today. 15:6 'For the Lord your God will bless you as He has promised you, and you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; and you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you. 15:7 'If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your

towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; 15:8 but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks. 15:9 'Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,' and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the Lord against you, and it will be a sin in you. 15:10 'You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings. 15:11 'For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.' 15:12 'If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free. 15:13 'When you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. 15:14 'You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. 15:15 'You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today. 15:16 'It shall come about if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he fares well with you; 15:17 then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also you shall do likewise to your maid-servant. 15:18 'It shall not seem hard to you when you set him free, for he has given you six years with double the service of a hired man; so the Lord your God will bless you in whatever you do. (NASB)

א מקץ שבע-שנים תעשה שמטה: ב וזה דבר השׁ-
 מטה שמוט כל-בעל משה ידו אשר ישה ברעהו לא-יגש
 את-רעהו ואת-אחיו פי-קרא שמטה ליהנה: ג את-הנכרי
 תגש ואשר יהיה לה את-אחיה תשמט ידה: ד אפס פי
 לא יהיה-בה אביון פי-ברה יברכה יהוה בארץ אשר יהוה
 אלהיה נתן-לה נחלה לרשתה: ה רק אם-שמוע תשמע
 בקול יהוה אלהיה לשמר לעשות את-כל-המצוה הזאת
 אשר אנכי מצוה היום: ו פי-יהוה אלהיה ברכה באשר
 דבר-לה והעבטת גוים רבים ואתה לא תעבט ומשלת בגוים
 רבים ובה לא ימשלו: ז פי-יהיה בה אביון מאחד
 אחיה באחד שעריה בארצה אשר-יהוה אלהיה נתן לה
 לא תאמץ את-לבבה ולא תקפיץ את-ידה מאחיה האביון:
 ח פי-פתח תפתח את-ידה לו והעבט תעביטנו די מחס-
 רו אשר יחסר לו: ט השמר לה פן-יהיה דבר עם-לבבה
 בליעל לאמר קרבה שנת-השבע שנת השמטה ורעה עינה
 באחיה האביון ולא תתן לו וקרא עליה אל-יהוה והיה בה
 חטא: י נתון תתן לו ולא-ירע לבבה בתתה לו פי בגלל
 | הדבר הזה יברכה יהוה אלהיה בכל-מעשה ובכל משלח
 ידה: יא פי לא-יחדל אביון מקרב הארץ על-פן אנכי
 מצוה לאמר פתח תפתח את-ידה לאחיה לענינה ולאבניה
 בארצה: ס יב פי-ימכר לה אחיה העברי או העבריה
 ועבדה שש שנים ובשנה השביעית תשלתנו חפשי מעמה: יג
 וכי-תשלתנו חפשי מעמה לא תשלתנו ריקם: יד העניק
 תעניק לו מצאנה ומגונה ומיקבה אשר ברכה יהוה אלהיה
 תתן-לו: טו וזכרת פי עבד היית בארץ מצרים ויפדה יהוה
 אלהיה על-פן אנכי מצוה את-הדבר הזה היום: טז והיה
 פי-יאמר אליה לא אצא מעמה פי אהבה ואת-ביתה פי-טוב
 לו עמה: יז ולקחת את-המרצע ונתתה באזנו ובדלת והיה
 לה עבד עולם ואף לאמתה תעשה-פן: יח לא-יקשה בעינה
 בשלחה אתו חפשי מעמה פי משנה שכר שכיר עבדה שש
 שנים וברכה יהוה אלהיה בכל אשר תעשה:

The Torah in the Tanach is often spoken of as the loving instruction and gift of God to his people as a guide for life, something to be cherished and enjoyed, as well as something to be obeyed under penalty of the punishment for disobedience. The wise person is said to live according to God's ways which are intended for life. This is the context of what we are finding here in the reading from *Devarim / Deuteronomy 15:1-18*. When we walk in God's ways, we are ordering our lives in accordance with God's word and so we know God because we walk in His ways. The commands on the servant being freed from slavery, being set free from debt, not charging interest, the Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot all speak of these things. The rabbis in the Talmud speak about turning the servant away empty in the following way:

Talmud Bavli Kiddushin 17a:7

The Gemara asks: What is the reasoning of Rabbi Meir? The Gemara explains: He derives a verbal analogy from "empty" stated with regard to the severance gift: "You shall not send him away empty" (Deuteronomy 15:13), and "empty" stated with regard to a firstborn: "All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem; and none shall appear before Me empty" (Exodus 34:20). Just as there, in the case of the firstborn, one must give five sela, so too here, in the case of severance gifts, one must give five sela.

Talmud Bavli Kiddushin 17a:8

The Gemara asks: But one can say that he is obligated to give only five sela in total from all of the three types listed in the verse. The Gemara answers: If "empty" were written at the end of the verse, i.e., Deuteronomy 15:14, the halakha would be as you said. But now that "empty" is written before the verse, i.e., at the end of Deuteronomy 15:13, apply the phrase "Do not send him away empty" to "flock," and apply "empty" to "threshing floor," and likewise apply "empty" to "winepress." Consequently, there must be five sela

for each type.

The Gemara explains not letting a servant go away empty by comparing to the redemption of the first born son. (*Kiddushin 17a:7*) The Gemara also places limits on the amount of payment given to the servant who leaves. (*Kiddushin 17a:8*) What does God through Moses want us to see in these passages from *Devarim / Deuteronomy 15*? Our serving God should be as one who is redeemed, and the Lord God does not limit His blessing upon our lives. This is the message of the Passover, the Lord God through His mercy redeemed Israel and delivered her from the bondage of slavery to the land of sin (Egypt). The Lord God blesses us and empowers us so we can be a blessing to others. It is in this we are to be like the One whose image and likeness we bear, who uses His resources and power for others. We are to do likewise.

The haftarah reading for the Torah portion is from *Isaiah 11*.

Isaiah 11:1-9

11:1 Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. 11:2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. 11:3 And He will delight in the fear of the Lord, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; 11:4 But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. 11:5 Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist. 11:6 And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. 11:7 Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. 11:8

*The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's
den. 11:9 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy
mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of
the Lord As the waters cover the sea. (NASB)*

The haftarah reading in the Rabbinic literature does not discuss the origin of the practice of reading publicly from the Prophets in a formal cycle. Traditions developed however on reading a particular passage from the prophets with each weekly Torah portion. The Babylonian Talmud (*Megillah 29b*) suggests that a haftarah should “resemble” the Torah reading of the day. This suggests that the haftarah may be linked to a theme or genre from the Torah reading. Because of this, we look to the haftarah reading for some clue about its intended function. It is interesting to try and understand what the Torah portion is about in the minds of the rabbis by their citing from *Isaiah 11*. Here we have *Isaiah 11* which speaks of the one who will come from the tribe of Jesse, who will be raised up by God in the spirit of wisdom and understanding. He will fear the Lord, and delight in that fear, he will not judge by sight or by his ears but will judge in righteousness. He will be fair, and he will strike the earth with the words of his mouth. It also states that righteousness and faithfulness will be bound around him. He will be faithful, and then Isaiah speaks a prophetic message that there will be peace between enemies (wolf and lamb, child and cobra, etc) and peace will reign because the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. These things are connected to the servant in the description here in the Torah. The Apostle Paul wrote that Yeshua took upon him the form of a servant (*Philippians 2:7*). The Servant of God exercises his function as a servant by humbling himself. *Isaiah 42:1* states, “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.” (NASB) Yeshua is called the servant of God in *Acts 3:26* “For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.” Notice how Yeshua functioned in his role as HaMoshiach (the anointed one) to lead and guide the people in God’s ways, to turn men from their wicked ways. Part of His service was the lead us in the way we should go,

walking according to God's word such that each of us would turn from our wicked ways. (i.e. the message of repentance) *Matthew 20:28* states, "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (NASB) This idea of giving his life as a servant is related to the preservation of human life takes precedence over all the other commandments in Judaism. This same principle can be found in the command Moshe gave us in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 15:18* When you do set him free, do not feel aggrieved; for in the six years he has given you double the service of a hired man. Moreover, the LORD your God will bless you in all you do. (NASB) Treating a brother as a hired servant as opposed to as a slave is analogous to saving a life, treating him as having value and worth. This builds self esteem which is very important. Both our words and our actions can destroy a persons self esteem which is analogous to the death of the soul. The Talmud emphasizes this principle of saving a life by citing the verse from *Vayikra / Leviticus 18:5* "You shall therefore keep my statutes...which if a man do, he shall live by them." The rabbis add "That he shall live by them, and not that he shall die by them." (*Talmud Bavli Yoma 85b*) This is where it is derived that when a life is involved, all the Sabbath laws may be suspended to safeguard the health of the individual. This is the principle of being pikuach nefesh (פיקוח נפש) doche Shabbat (rescuing a life in danger takes precedence over the Sabbath). Whenever two mitzvot come into conflict with each other, one is given precedence over the other. For example, this is understood in the case of brit milah on Shabbat, or any עשה דוחה לא תעשה (positive commandment that "pushes away" a negative one). In the Talmud when there is a discussion over two opposing commands, they usually discuss whether it is "הותרא/hutra" or "דחויא/dichuya," whether the mitzvah that gave way effectively ceases to exist (הותרא), or if it's still there, but we are allowed to override it anyway (דחויא). This is the context of the *Talmud Bavli Yoma 85a-b*, and other sources, discuss when someone's life is in danger on the Shabbat, and the Shabbat laws have to be violated in order to save his life. The idea is we not only may but must violate Shabbat in order to save a life. The *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 328:2* states "It is a religious precept to desecrate the Sabbath for any person af-

flicted with an illness that may prove dangerous; he who is zealous is praiseworthy while he who asks questions sheds blood.” Note also how this safeguarding the health of a person is emphasized in the fast on Yom Kippur *“A sick person is obliged to break the fast. Neither the patient nor those attending him need atone when performing such acts that are forbidden under normal circumstances.”* This mitzvah of pikuach nefesh (פיקוח נפש) is what Yeshua did on our behalf. He gave his life for our behalf. This principle of saving a life is as one who serves, who gives his life on behalf of another. This overrides the negative command. I have heard some argue that Yeshua did not function as per the Torah requirement to make atonement and so his sacrifice upon the cross was not sufficient. This principle of servant hood, and giving one’s life for another is founded upon the mitzvah of saving a life. Yeshua obeyed a primary commandment from the Torah, a positive command of saving a life for each and every one of us. Within this context, it is acceptable to say that this overrides the negative command, and hanging there upon the cross, he bore our sins just as the Scriptures say. The Lord God of Israel our Father in heaven accepted this atoning sacrifice and validated it by raising Yeshua from the grave three days later. Yeshua presented to us true servant hood giving his life for those he loves. We are to do likewise. First and foremost, giving our lives to the Lord by accepting what Yeshua has done and then obeying God’s Word. These things describe how the Torah and the Gospel Message go hand in hand.