ברשה בישפטים Parashat Mishpatim

Shemot / Exodus 21:1-24:18, Jeremiah 34:8-22, 33:25-26 S.uke 7:1-8:3

Socialism and the Bible

The opening verses from this week's Torah portion begin stating the following in Shemot / Exodus 21:1-10 saying, 21:1 (אַלַה הַמּשׁפַּטִים אַשַּׁר תַּשִּׁים לפְנֵיהַם: These are the rules that you shall set before them: בי תָקְנֵה עֲבֶד עָבְרִי שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים יַעֲבָד וּבַּשִׁבְעָת יֵצֵא לַחָפְשִׁי חָנֶם: 21:2 When you acquire a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years; in the seventh year he shall go free, without payment. אם־בּגפּוּ 21:3 בַא בּגַפּו יַצֵא אַם־בַעל אַשׁה הוא ויַצאָה אַשׁתּו עמו: If he came single, he shall leave single; if he had a wife, his wife shall leave with him. אָם־אֵדֹנִיוֹ יָתַּן־לָוֹ אִשֶּׁה וְיַלְדָה־לָוֹ בָּנֵים אָוֹ בָנֵוֹת הָאִשֶּה וְיִלְדָה־לָוֹ בָנֵים אָוֹ בָנֵוֹת הָאִשֶּה וְיִלְדָה־לָוֹ אָשֶּׁה וְיַלְדָה־לָוֹ בָנֵים אָוֹ 21:4 אדניה והוא יצא בגפו: If his master gave him a wife, and she has borne him children, the wife and her children shall belong to the master, and he shall leave alone. וָאָם־אָמֶר יאׁמֵל הָעֶבֶד אָהַבְתָּי 21:5 אַת־אַשָּׁתִּי וָאַת־בָּנֵי לְאׁ אָצֵא חַפְשֵׁי: But if the slave declares, "I love my master, and my wife and children: I do not wish to go free," וָהָגִישׁוֹ אַל־הַדּׁלָת אוֹ אַל־הַדּּלָת אוֹ אַל־הַבּּלָת אוֹ אַל־הַבּלּת אוֹ אַל־הַבּלּת אוֹ אַל־הַבּלּת אוֹ אַל־הַבּלּת אוֹ אַל־הַבּער אַנּער אַנּער אַנּער אַנּער אַנּער אַנּער אַנּער אַנער אָנער אַנער אָנער אַנער אָנער אַנער אָנער אָנער אָנער אַנער אָנער אַנער אַנער אָנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אָנער אָנער אָנער אַנער אָנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אָנער אָנער אָנער אָנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אַנער אָנער אָנער אָנער אַנער אָנער אַנער 21:6 (o) אַדניו אַת־אַזנוֹ בַּמַרצַע וַעַבְדוֹ לעלָם: his master shall take him before God. He shall be brought to the door or the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall then remain his slave for life. 21:7 וְכֵי־יָמְכָּר אֱישׁ אֶת־בָּתִּוֹ לְאָמָה לְא תֶצֵא כְּצֵאת הָעֲבָדֵים: When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not be freed as male slaves are. אָם־רַעָּה בָּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנֵיהָ אֲשֶׁר־לא [לְוֹ] יִעָדָהּ 21:8 הַבְּגִדוֹ־בָהּ: לאַכְיָרָה לַמְכָּרָהּ בָּבְגִדוֹ־בָהּ: If she proves to be displeasing to her master, who designated her for himself, he must let her be redeemed; he shall not have the right to sell her to outsiders, since he broke faith with her. 21:9 אם־לבנו יֵיעדנה כמשפט הַבּנוֹת יַעשה־לָה: And if he designated her for his son, he shall deal with her as is the practice with free maidens. אם־אַחַרָת 21:10 :שַאַרָהּ כְּסוּתָהּ וְעֹנֶתָהּ לְאׁ יִגְרֵע: If he marries another, he must not withhold from this one her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. (Sefaria) One of the things we think about regarding slavery is how Israel had just been delivered from brutal enslavement from Egypt, and the first mitzvot (commands) we read about are related to laws of servatude. The opening verses say כֵּי תָקְנֵהْ עֶבֶד "when you acquire a servant." This is astounding, when Israel had spent the last few hundred years as slaves that there is the command to take Hebrew slaves. One would have thought the idea of master and servant would be loathsome. Because of Israel's experience with slavery, it was reprehensible, unhealthy, and even inhumane, the Lord God commanded that six vears of service is to be done and no more. A servant can never be humiliated or degraded, and the Jewish rules of servitude are commanded to be humane, the Talmud states that "Whoever owns a servant has acquired a master. If there is only one pillow in the home, the master must give it to his servant." The reason slavery continued to exist was because of the imperfections of this world, people owe money, they must work to pay off debt, etc.

In addition to this, the Torah does not recommend socialism as a form of lifting one out of debt. One must work for their keep, to earn money and get out of debt. History bears out how men who have a lust for power have afflicted many people due to their godless philosophies of communism, socialism, and fascism. These ideologies have led to the deaths of more people in the last 100 years than in all the religious conflicts in the history of the world combined. The 20th century was the bloodiest in human history, with over 260 million people murdered by political movements. These ideologies also suppress the truth of the Scriptures, and regard people as nothing but animals to be exploited. Some people have even made the claim that the early Christian community described in Acts 2-5 when it states "all things in common" was a description of socialism. Socialism is a system under which the government owns the means of production and through coercive taxation and wealth redistribution allocates resources and makes decisions over property, prices, and production. The economic system of socialism abolishes the right to private property and gives to individuals based on their need. The Scripture that is laid claim to these things is in Acts 2:44-45 which states, "all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as any might have need." The text goes on to say in Acts 4:32-35, "not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them ... For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each as any had need." These Scriptures sound like some of the language of socialism is here, but this is only a superficial reading until we think a little more about the context of the verses. Something to note, the early believers did not sell "all" of their possessions! The phrases of "selling their property" and "all things were common property" have different meanings. Note how the believers continued to meet in their own homes, so they did not sell their homes, or all of their property. The text also says "from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them and brought the money from the sales" (Acts 4:34) Notice how this is a voluntary thing. Under socialism system of redistribution, one would be obligated and not voluntary. Another example is taken from Barnabus (Acts 4) as a positive example and the negative example of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). In Barnabus' case, this was not the giving of "all" his possessions. and it was not controlled by the state. Barnabus saw the need, and he was led by the spirit to give. In Ananias and Sapphira's case, they lied in order to give the perception of giving a lot of money, and pretended to give more than they actually did. Peter explicitly says that "when it was unsold it was your own" and after it was sold, it was "under your control" (Acts 5:4). The problem, as Peter points out, was that Ananias had "lied to the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:3). He had "lied to God" and not "to men" (Acts 5:5). The descriptions given in Acts 2-5 are drastically different than socialism.

The idea of freedoms and liberty enter into the picture when discussion of socialism and communism occurs. People want freedom of speech, a constitutional right, but do not want the responsibly of speaking truthfully. This is illustrated by the false news narratives that are occurring today across the internet, and in the news media on television. The Torah however states that we are accountable for every word we speak and no license is given to harm someone by the words we say (abuse of others by our words, Matthew 12:36-37) Bamidbar / Numbers 30:2 states, "If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not break his word (לא יַחֵל דְּבְרוֹ), but he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth." We are told here how important our words are, we are not permitted to break the sanctity of our words. The word יְחֵל is from the word אח meaning to regard something as common, insignificant, or profane. The phrase "Dibbur emet" (דְּבָּרוּ אֲמֶת) is the Torah's way of saying that we have a duty to speak the truth as the people of God. Only truthful words are powerful and significant and have real meaning and strength. Untrue words may be consigned to hell. Our

modern culture devalues the significance of our words, and use language as a power political, social, and societal tool for control in order to manipulate appearances. True speech is holy (kadosh) and sacred, which draws us back to holiness in thought, and action. Take for example from the Torah on the creation account from the Targum Onkelos.

Targum Onkelos Bereshit / Genesis 2:7

ז וּבְרָא יִי אֱלָהִים יַת אָדָם עַפְּרָא מִן אַדְמְתָא וּנְפַּח בְּאַפּוֹהִי נִשְׁמְתָא דְחַיֵי וַהָּוַת בְּאָדָם לְרוּחַ מְמַלְלָא And the Lord God created Adam from dust of the ground, and breathed upon his face the breath of lives, and it became in Adam a Discoursing Spirit.

Notice how God gave Adam the ability to think, to speak, and to reason according to Targum Onkelos. The way this is written, the breath of life that has been given by God is directly linked to our speech. Considering Lashon Hara (לָשׁוֹן הַרָה) this tarnishes the image of God in which we were created. The reason being, one who uses Lashon Hara uses his word to hurt others. This is why metzorah (the affliction of Tzaraat) was regarded as one who has this affliction is considered as dead, and there is a need for a direct miracle of God to restore one to life (rebirth, and resurrection). The words we say affect both the physical and spiritual realm. When we consider our words, they are derived from the thoughts or our heart, and lead to the course of life (lead us in the direction we choose to go). All of these things are related back to the Torah portion on slavery. The commands given in the Torah are to be kind and respectful to a man who had the need to cause himself to enter into slavery in order to pay off his debt. Socialism was not the way out. There is always the need to work hard and to do so as if we were doing so for the Lord God in heaven. It is very sobering to realize these truths come directly out of the Torah to illustrate how our attitude is to be, to work, to take care of family, to have forgiveness and mercy towards others no matter where they are in life! These are powerful spiritual truths, and we need to be mindful of the power and sanctity of not just our words, but of our actions, and even of our giving to help others, because our lives are meant for the building up and helping one another! (Ephesians 4:29) May the Lord God of Israel help us take every thought "captive" to the obedience of the Messiah, thereby enabling us to always behold and express the truth of God's unfailing love.