

B'nei mitzvah

11 Elul 5767 August 25, 2007

Devarim 24: 10-14

Beth Chayim Chadashim

drash by Eliana bat Avraham v Sarah, Linda Moakes

They say “you had to be there.” As Jewish people, approaching a new year, we are asked to “be there”, to remember and prepare ourselves to enter the “promised land” during the High Holy Days. When I began studying my portion of Ki Tsetsi, I felt compassion for Moses and Adonai. After 40 years of wandering in the desert with all of us; suffering, schvitzing, and kvetching, I really understood. They had listened and they thought of many things that had been overlooked in the original Ten Commandments. Actually, after 40 years, they thought of 603 more. That was one level of being there. On a more literal level, Devarim 24:10-14 is a more nuanced discourse on “Thou shall not steal” which, initially, must have seemed rather straightforward, but it was not. We are told:

Devarim 24:10 When you make a loan of any sort to your countryman, you must not enter his house to seize his pledge (security).

24:11 You must remain outside, while the man to whom you made the loan brings the pledge out to you.

24:12 If he is a needy/poor man, you shall not go to sleep in his pledge (people often gave blankets as security Assuming the pledge was something to keep the man warm, the pledge had to be returned so the man could use it to keep warm overnight. 2)

24:13 you must return the pledge to him at sundown, that he may sleep in his cloth and bless you; and it will be to your merit before the Lord your God. **I**

We are asked to look at the relationship of creditors and debtors. Literally, as a creditor, we are commanded to maintain the dignity of debtors. And we are told that we have a right to dignity as a person in debt.

It is not acceptable to go into homes and demand payment or to take things in place of a loan. No matter what we are “owed” we are not allowed to take away another person’s comfort and ultimately, their sleep.

The principle of taking a pledge is acceptable, but we are commanded to receive it with mercy. The idea of taking collateral for a loan is valid, because it encourages personal responsibility in the one receiving the loan.

On a deeper and more personal level we are looking at our intrapersonal relationship. Apropos of Elul and teschuva: How are we in debt to ourselves? Where have we fallen short or behind in our expectations and demands on ourselves? Did we promise to be more patient, learn to swim or macramé, stop gambling, join a reading club, leave a bad situation, go on a diet, or build a mikvah and then didn’t do it? Do we fall short in our vows and bargains with ourselves in such a way that we are “in debt” to ourselves?

This section reminds us that when we do not fulfill a personal vow it is not acceptable to go “inside” to our psyches, self-esteem, worth, pride, or shame and extract some “security” that causes anxiety, fear, dread, sorrow, or sleeplessness. We are commanded to return the “pledge” or “judgment” before

we go to sleep each night. We are expected to be merciful to ourselves on a daily basis. To be there for ourselves. I suggest that we think about how we fulfill the promise and expectation/demand of the Torah, "kiddoshim tihiyu" -- you shall be holy. I believe that how we treat ourselves is a key element of teshuva, of being merciful and preparing the "core of our souls, our neshama for the experience of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur." 3

I know that my soul has been blessed with love and mercy by studying with Gavriella, Donna, Cecilia and our teachers, Rabbi Lisa, Daniel, and Fran. Thank you for this blessing. May we all be written in the Book of Life.

Shalom

#### References

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