

LET HIM WHO IS WITHOUT GUILT NOT THROW THE LAST STONE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #945 – How Much Is Too Much? Good Shabbos!

The Sforno Argues "Let Him Who Is Without Guilt NOT Throw The Last Stone"

The *pasuk* in Parshas Behar teaches "If the hand of an alien and a resident with you will achieve, and your brother becomes impoverished with him, and he is sold to an alien, resident with you, or to an idol of an alien's family" [Vayikra 25:47]. The Torah is talking about a person who is so poor that he eventually needs to sell himself to a non-Jewish resident of *Eretz Yisrael* (a *Ger Toshav* whose relatives are idol worshippers) or to an "*Eker Mishpachas Ger*" which Rashi interprets as one who is sold to an idol itself, to be a servant for it. Rashi clarifies that the Jewish "servant of the idol" does not engage in actual worship of the idol, but he is its servant "who chops wood and draws water." In other words, he might be the gardener or the maintenance man for the church, rather than taking part in its rituals – but he needed to sell himself to the church, nevertheless.

The next *pasuk* continues: "After he has been sold, he shall have redemption; one of his brothers shall redeem him." [Vayikra 25:48]. The Torah says that we should try to redeem such a fellow. This means that if he owed X amount of dollars, so his only recourse was to sell himself to be a janitor in this church another Jew should bail him out – pay off the debt and redeem him so that he can start his life all over.

What type of person are we talking about over here? The Sforno writes on this last quoted *pasuk* – a person should not say, "I will throw a stone after the one who has fallen down already." Rashi [on Vayikra 26:1] explains that we are talking about a person who was so money hungry that he did not keep the laws of *Shmitah* [the Sabbatical year requiring farmers to let their land lie fallow]. As a punishment, he suffers financial setbacks such that he needs to sell his movable property. If he does not recognize the warning sign and repent, he eventually needs to sell his land. Finally – if he does not repent – he fall so far down financially that he needs to sell himself.

Therefore, we are talking about someone whose belief in the Almighty was weak. He did not keep the laws of *Shmitah*; he did not act properly; and that is why he wound up in this situation. We might say he deserved what happened to him. Let him remain as the janitor of the church. He deserves it!

To counteract this train of thought, the Sforno emphasizes, "No, do not say he deserves it. I will put the last nail in his coffin. Bail him out!"

This is an important lesson to us all: No matter how far a person may have drifted, we always need to try to rescue him. There is no person that is beyond redemption. A person with proper Torah values will not look down on someone in an unfortunate situation and say, "This person did it to himself".

In Brisk, a young fellow went "off the *derech*". He became an anarchist and burned an effigy of the czar. This was not twenty-first century America. This was Czarist Russia where there was no such thing as "Freedom of Expression". This *bochur* from Brisk was certainly not an upstanding member of the Jewish community. He was an anarchist. The Czarist government arrested him and they were planning to execute him.

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik told his community, "The boy is Jewish. We need to raise funds for *Pidyon Shevuyim* [redemption of captives]. We need to bail him out." People began to murmur against Rav Chaim. "This person did it do himself. What kind of idiot burns the czar in effigy?" This fellow certainly did not learn in the Brisker Kollel by Rav Chaim!

However, Rav Chaim was insistent. It was the eve of Yom Kippur and everyone came to shul for *Kol Nidre*. Rav Chaim did not come to shul. They went to his house and told him they could not start *Kol Nidre* without their Rabbi. Rav Chaim said, "I am not coming to shul to start Yom Kippur until everyone goes home and brings money to redeem this Jewish captive." So it was. The community needed to go around ON YOM KIPPUR to raise money and redeem this anarchist.

Everyone had the attitude of "It's his own fault. He deserves it. Let us throw the final stone onto his coffin." However, this is not the Torah's outlook. The *Hashkafas HaTorah* is "After he was sold, he shall be redeemed; one of his brothers must redeem him." Even though he did it to himself and even though he did it to himself not only through his own mistakes, but also through his own religious laxity – still the Jewish attitude is – redeem him, anyhow.

In our time, when unfortunately many of our fellow brethren in Israel find themselves in unfortunate situations of their own doing, precisely because they were not honest and they did not faithfully fulfill Torah standards in their own behavior, the attitude cannot be "Listen, the person deserves it. He did it to himself. Let him sit and rot." "After he is sold, he shall be redeemed; one of his brothers should redeem him."

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