



Matir Asurim ["The One Who Frees Captives"] connects Jewish spiritual, cultural, and communal resources and people experiencing incarceration or re-entry.

Divrei Matir Asurim

Matir Asurim Words/Matters -- Feb 2024/Adar-1 5784

Matir Asurim Organizational News

Organizers' Meeting

Matir Asurim held an organizers' meeting on January 28. One major decision was to shift to quarterly general meetings, with working groups meeting more often as needed.

One member agreed to investigate possibilities for hiring paid, possibly temporary, staff and to prepare a proposal for the group to consider. Another member agreed to investigate issues around food service and kosher meals and to propose an advocacy strategy for group consideration.

NEXT MEETING: March 17.

Food Service/Kashrut Feedback

Matir Asurim is gathering information about existing conditions and laws around kosher food service. We are a small number of volunteers, spread out across the U.S. and Canada, and we know we cannot address every need. But we do want to hear from Jews inside, and from visitors who use commissary and vending machines:

Do you have access to kosher food?

Is it comparable to meals provided to those not on religious diet?

Are special foods for Shabbat and holidays available?

Will you have access to customary sweets for the festival of Purim (March 23-24 this year)?

Are accommodations made for the days of Passover (April 22-30)?

Will you have access to ritual foods for seder?

Anything else you'd like to share with us about your experience with kosher and ritual foods?

Inside readers, please send responses to news shared here, additional thoughts on MA operations, or Torah Explorations:

- through outside MA pen pal, if you have one;
- through postal mail: Matir Asurim, PO Box 18858. Philadelphia, PA 19119;
- by emailing matirasurimnetwork@gmail.com;
- or contact Divrei Matir Asurim's editor at ethreporter@gmail.com.

--- Memorial, Healing and Special Concern, Celebration ---

Submit items for future editions (use contacts above, page 1). Categories include:

- shares concerns for healing of all kinds,
- recalls teachers and loved ones whom death has taken from us, and
- marks milestones and celebrations.

Recent Execution Loss:

January 25: Kenneth Eugene Smith, Alabama

Executions Scheduled:

February 28: Ivan Cantu, Texas.

February 28: Thomas Creech, Idaho

Memorial:

February 21 **El-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz** (Malcolm X, 1925-1965): Muslim leader, activist for Black empowerment, anti-racism, human rights

March 3 **Danny Kaye** (1911-1987): comedian, actor/dancer, UNICEF Ambassador

March 7 **Gordon Parks** (1912-2006): photographer, film director, composer, author

March 10 **Harriet Tubman** (1822-1913): abolitionist, women's suffrage organizer, social activist

Healing:

All suffering community and state violence in US, Canada, and around the world.
All seeking healing of spirit, repair of personal conflicts, and healing of body.

Other:

Adar 9 (Feb 18) is "**Jewish Day of Constructive Conflict**" (see below, p.4)

Schedule of Exodus Torah Reading

Hebrew title [English]. Chapters: verse

Civic & Hebrew calendar dates
for Shabbat the portion is read.

Shemot [Names]. Ex 1:1-6:1.

Jan 6. 25 Tevet

Vaera [I appeared]. Ex 6:2-9:35.

Jan 13. 3 Shevat

Bo [Come]. Ex 10:1-13:16.

Jan 20. 10 Shevat

Beshalach [When he let go]. Ex 13:17-17:16.

Jan 27. 17 Shevat

Yitro [Jethro]. Ex 18:1-20:23.

Feb 3. 24 Shevat

Mishpatim [Laws]. Ex 21:1-24:18.

Feb 10. 1 Adar I

Terumah [Donation]. Ex 25:1-27:19.

Feb 17. 8 Adar I

Tetzevah [You shall command]. Ex 27:2-30:10.

Feb 24. 15 Adar I

Ki Tisa [When you elevate]. Ex 30:11-34:35.

Mar 2. 22 Adar I

Vayakhel [He assembled]. Ex 35:1-38:20.

March 9. 29 Adar I.

Pekudei ["Accounts of"]. Ex 38:21-40:38

March 16. 6 Adar II

NOTE: Torah Explorations follow themes of recent and upcoming weekly readings, but they do not match exactly to the reading calendar.
Some Torah Explorations relate to holiday readings.

TORAH EXPLORATIONS: *Exodus in the Wilderness*

Last month's Torah Explorations brought us up to the Sea of Reeds and into the wilderness beyond. We learned:

- "The people" escaping together are not an ethnic group or all alike in other ways.
- The people take along the bones of their ancestor Joseph, representing a long, complicated past.
- The people witness the destruction of Pharaoh's army; then God alters the route they will travel, to avoid a "change of heart" for fear of war (Exod 13:17-18).

The Sea parts, so the diverse people can walk through, away from *Mitzrayim*, the "Narrow Place" of biblical Egypt (Exod 14). This is a moment to celebrate -- and the people do offer the "Song of the Sea" in response (Exod 15). But the story is far from over...

- The Song finishes, and one verse later the people complain about lack of water.*
- Chapter 16 starts with the people complaining about lack of food.
- Chapter 17 starts with another complaint about lack of water.
- Chapter 17, and the Torah portion *Beshalach*, ends with a battle and declaration of an eternal enemy.**

...We -- along with that people out in the wilderness -- get the message that this is going to be a long, hard trip.

At the end of chapter 15, God instructs Moses to purify the bitter water of Marah so it is drinkable.* In Chapter 16, God begins supplying daily *manna*, special bread that is just enough to nourish each person for a single day, throughout the journey. In Chapter 17, God instructs Moses to strike a rock with his staff, causing water to flow. At the close of Chapter 17, God orders a remembrance of the enemy whose name will be wiped out.**

* By the early centuries of the Common Era, Torah was read in public three times a week: on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays/Shabbat. The Babylonian discusses this, asking: "When did this start?"

The answer: Right here, in Exodus 15:22-23!

"...they traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water. And they came to Marah and could not drink the water from Marah, for it was bitter" – Exod 15:22-23, JPS trans.

Water symbolizes Torah. Being without this for three days made the people weary and caused trouble – bitterness – among them. So, the Talmud explains: this story teaches that we should never go three days without Torah. – from B. Baba Kama 82a

At this point in Exodus, the people have not experienced Revelation at Sinai and there is no "Torah" in the simple sense. But the Talmud is emphasizing the importance of Torah, in a wider sense:

It's the reason for this whole Exodus trip. It's essential for Jews living in every age. It helps communities manage bitter times.

(cont. p. 5)

** "Amalek," as a group of people, first appears in the bible at Exod 17:8. We don't know anything about them or read about any provocation or disagreement before the battle. Amalek just "came and fought with *Am-Yisrael* [Israelite Nation] at Rephidim."

People living in/near, Rephidim might have been provoked by *Am-Yisrael* simply showing up and marching through. The bible doesn't say this, though. And teachers over the centuries have struggled with why this people attacked.

(cont. p. 5)

TORAH EXPLORATIONS: Exodus in the Wilderness (cont)

*** Torah=Water note, cont. from p.4**

The Talmud passage quotes from Isaiah –

“Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come for water” (Isaiah 55:1).

In this section, the prophet Isaiah is speaking in God’s name, fretting that the people of that time (8th Century BCE) are drifting out of relationship with what matters most: “Why do you spend money for what is not bread? Your earnings for what does not satisfy?”

When things are toughest, for us personally and for our communities, it can be helpful to pause and ask: What really nourishes us? What quenches our true thirst? How can we help one another access what really supports us?

**** Amalek note, cont. from p.4**

Some suggest that Amalek is a sort of anonymous, symbolic enemy.

This same battle is retold in *Devarim* 25. There we read that Amalek appeared suddenly and attacked those who were weakest and most weary after the recent escape from Mitzrayim. Some say that Amalek represents our willingness to leave the most vulnerable behind – and **that** is our eternal enemy.

Some teachers insist that Amalek, as a human enemy, is long gone and tell us to guard against identifying any living group as “Amalek.”

Others continue to label living people, including Palestinians, as “Amalek” with violent results. One example: an Israeli-American murdered 24 Muslim Palestinians praying together in Hebron, West Bank on Purim (Feb 25) 1994. “Amalek” also appears in recent speeches from Israeli leaders. This is way beyond the scope of these pages, but we should be aware of the many ways text is used. ...And Jewish teachers have always struggled with the strange, contradictory command to remember to blot out and not to forget.

The Shabbat before Purim -- March 23 this year -- is called "Shabbat *Zachor* [Remembrance]." An extra Torah reading for this day retells the Amalek story from Exodus 17 with added details:

Remember what Amalek did to you
by the way, as you came forth out of *Mitzrayim*;
how he met you by the way, and struck the stragglers,
all that were weak and weary in the rear; and he did not fear God.
Therefore, when YHVH your God gives you rest from all your enemies round about,
in the land which the YHVH your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess,
you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; do not forget
-- *Devarim* [Deuteronomy] 25:17-19

In her teaching, "Breaking the Amalek Cycle," Dr. Julie Lieber writes about Chapter 9 of the Book of Esther. In it, Esther and Mordecai set up the holiday of Purim as a remembrance of their story. They demand that "future generations of Jews on this day should **not** occupy themselves with destroying Amalek," Dr. Lieber writes. Instead, the holiday includes "gift-giving, breaking bread, and merry-making" -- which strengthens community and helps provide for the poor. So, Dr. Lieber concludes: The Purim story can be read as a "courageous tale" about people who "dare to disrupt entrenched patterns centered on violence," replacing them with "new 'rememberings' and 'doings' of kindness and connection."

-- "Breaking the Amalek Cycle" appears on bible-study website "929" and on the text platform Sefaria.

TORAH EXPLORATIONS: *Exodus in the Wilderness (cont)*

The next two Torah portions are Yitro (Exod 18:1 - 20:23) and Mishpatim (Exod 21:1 - 24:18). They include interesting and important stories and central teachings of Judaism.

Yitro (Jethro)

Yitro includes *Aseret Ha-Dibrot*, The Ten Statements (Chapter 20). These are usually called "The Ten Commandments" in English. But they begin with a declaration, not a command:

- 1) *Anochi HaShem Elohekha...*
"I am YHVH, your God..."
- 2) You shall not have other gods before me.
- 3) Don't take the name of YHVH in vain.
- 4) *Zachor et yom haShabbat L'Kadesho*
Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.
- 5) *Kaved et avikha v'et imekha*
Honor your father and mother.
- 6) *Lo tirtzach*. Do not murder.
- 7) *Lo tinaf*. Do not commit adultery.
- 8) *Lo tignov*. Do not steal.
- 9) Do not give false testimony.
- 10) Don't covet your neighbor's possessions.

The portion is named for Jethro), the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses. He arrives, along with his daughter, Zipporah -- who disappears for many chapters, after the strange tale in Exod 4:24-26 -- and their children.

Jethro helps Moses with some community organizing and the two men engage in a public ritual of welcome. Many teachers note that the warm cross-community relationship in Chapter 18 is a strong contrast to the Amalek incident at the end of Chapter 17.

This brief mention, at Exod 18:2, is the last time Zipporah's name appears in the Torah. Some teachers believe she is "the Cushite wife" mentioned in Numbers 12; some believe not. But her name is not used there, and we never hear another word about Zipporah.

Mishpatim (Laws)

Mishpatim includes more details about how the people and Moses and God interacted at Sinai.

Moses performs a ritual and reads "the record of the covenant." The people respond: "*Na'aseh v'nishmah*" -- which can mean "we will do and listen" or "we will do and obey." (Exod 24:7).

After this, Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders go up the mountain where they "beheld God and ate and drank" (Exod 24:9-11). Then, a cloud covers the mountain for seven days, until God calls out to Moses. The presence of God appeared to the people like a "consuming fire." But Moses climbs up into the cloud, where he spends forty days and nights. He comes down again in Exodus 32. (See note on *Ki Tisa* below.)

The portion includes many statements of law. Some demand care for a borrower when lending money. Some focus on fairness in courts. Others limit, but do not abolish, slavery. Several treat women as property. All these have been interpreted over the centuries to form Jewish practice.

Some examples:

Exod 22:1-2 limits bodily harm to a thief when protecting one's home.

Exod 22:20-21 says:

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of *Mitzrayim*. You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan."

Exod 23:1 bans false rumors.

Exod 23:4-5 says that we must help an enemy's donkey, if it's lost or trapped.

Exod 23:9 says:

"You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of *Mitzrayim*."

TORAH EXPLORATIONS: Adar-1 and Purim Preparation

Jewish leap years, like this one (5784), have 13 months, instead of 12. So, we have an extra month of Adar this year:

Adar 1 begins on February 8-10.

Adar 2 begins on March 9-11.

Purim begins after Shabbat on March 23.

The Talmud says: "when the month of Adar enters, increase in joy." Tradition asks us to look for ways to add joy -- for ourselves and others -- even in the most difficult times. In a leap year, we have two months for this increase of joy. And the holiday of Purim suggests some strategies.

The Book of Esther is read on Purim.

The story is associated with fun, like dressing up for the reading and making noise when Haman's name is read. But the tale itself is quite violent. Here's a summary:

In the kingdom of Persia, where Jews are a minority, a Jew named Mordecai is raising his younger cousin Esther. Her Jewish identity is hidden. King Ahasuerus throws a big party. When Queen Vashti refuses to appear, she is dethroned. Both Esther and Mordecai are brought into the palace: Esther is one of a group of women meant to serve the king. Mordecai uncovers a plot to kill the king and is rewarded for reporting it.

Haman becomes a powerful official.

Mordecai won't bow before Haman, so

Haman seeks to destroy all Jews in revenge.

Following Haman's advice, the king issues a decree that all Jews will be killed.

Mordecai appeals to Esther to save her people. She did not have permission to visit the king but approaches him anyway. She invites the king and Haman to a banquet, pleads for her people, and exposes Haman's plot. The king grants Esther's request and condemns Haman to die on the gallows that he built for the Jews. The king's decree cannot be undone, but Jews are given permission to defend themselves. The holiday of Purim is established. Mordecai replaces Haman in the king's favor.

Purim Themes:

Esther's identity is hidden for most of the book. Haman's evil intentions are hidden at first. God's name is never mentioned in the whole book, so God, too, is hidden. The story also includes many flips -- people who were down are suddenly on top, and vice versa. The biggest flip, which saves the Jewish people from destruction, comes when Esther reveals herself.

Solar – Lunar – Lunisolar Calendars

Solar. Some calendars are based on the sun (solar). The Gregorian (Christian) year is 365 days, to match the earth's trip around the sun; months have 28-31 days; and every four years, one day is added to keep the year in synch with the sun. In this calendar, Easter is always in the spring and Christmas is always near the winter solstice.

Lunar: Some calendars are based on the moon (lunar). The Islamic year is 354-5 days, matching twelve moon cycles; months are 28-29 days. Holidays have no specific season, instead shifting by 10-11 Gregorian days every year. So, the holy month of Ramadan fell in summer (August) in 2010, for example, but comes in early spring (March) this year.

Lunisolar: Some calendars are based on both moon and sun (lunisolar). The Jewish year is 365 days with months of 28-29 days; a month is added every few years -- seven times every 19 years, to be exact -- to keep months in the same season. From year to year, holidays shift up to three weeks within the Gregorian calendar. But leap years ensure that Passover is always in the spring, and Sukkot is always in the fall.

TORAH EXPLORATIONS: Adar-1 and Purim Preparation (cont)

Hiding, changing appearances, and turning things upside down are all part of the Purim holiday:

Purim is a holiday where everything as we know it gets turned on its head. It is a moment in Jewish time in which we give ourselves permission to dress up as a way to reflect the realities we wish to see in the world. Or perhaps, we might see it as an invitation to take off the masks we each wear throughout the year, reveal our authentic, joyous, celebrated selves to each other. It is a moment when binaries collapse and we allow ourselves to shift perspectives and to consider that things are not necessarily what they seem. On Purim we celebrate the miracle of our survival by offering gifts to our friends, our neighbours and to those with less than us. We celebrate our survival through connection and a joy so deep, it is itself a revolution.

-- Matir Asurim Resource Team, Purim 5782

This introduction to the holiday is part of the Purim Resources available at MatirAsurim.org.

An outside contact can download the material for sharing in print or copying into emails

-- or use the contacts on page 1 to request a copy.

With the extra month to prepare for Purim, we have more time to consider these holiday suggestions:

Show "the realities we wish to see in the world."

Take off masks of the regular year and "reveal our authentic, joyous, celebrated selves to each other."

Collapse binaries -- yes/no, this/that -- "to consider that things are not necessarily what they seem."

Celebrate "survival through connection and a joy so deep, it is itself a revolution."

More on Adar

The Hidden Month

A mystical tradition links each month of the regular year to one of the twelve biblical tribes. So, what about the 13th month? Adar-1 is missing from the calendar more often than it appears. So, Rav Kohenet Jill Hammer dedicates Adar-1 to Dinah, the child of Jacob most often overlooked. Building on this idea, *For Times Such As These* suggests:

An extra month of the year, especially in the season of joyfulness, is an invitation to find new forms of joy, celebrate unsung ancestors, and revel in the creativity of our tradition. -- p.175

This "*Radical's Guide to the Jewish Year*" is a new resource from Rabbi Ariana Katz and Rabbi Jessica Rosenberg, one of Matir Asurim's core organizers. It also includes some notes about *Zayin Adar*, the seventh day of the month of Adar.

Birth and Death of Moses

The seventh of Adar is observed as both the birthday and the death day of Moses. It has become a day of special importance for burial societies, "*chevra kadishah*."

When Moshe died, we are taught, the Holy One prepared him for burial. It is on this night, then, that the sacred workers of the chevra kadisha can take a night off to reflect and be together outside of the focused and solemn work of preparing bodies for burial....

This practice of inversion of what is common and regular for the chevra kadisha resonates with the month of Adar, in which we turn things on their heads. On the seventh of Adar, we blend the care of death work with the joys of communal life. What new traditions do you feel called to create at that intersection?

-- *For Times Such As These*, p.177-8

TORAH EXPLORATIONS: More on Adar (cont)

9 Adar and Constructive Conflict

Model teachers?

Hillel and Shammai are two of the earliest, most famous teachers of early Judaism. Hillel the Elder was born in Babylon around 110 BCE and died around 10 CE in Jerusalem. The much younger Shammai lived in Jerusalem, from roughly 50 BCE to 30 CE.

The two teachers are often discussed together in the Talmud, with hundreds of debates between them recorded. One famous debate ends, finally, when a voice from heaven declares: "These and these are the words of the living God. But the practice is according to Hillel" (B. Eruvin 13b). These famous words are often quoted to show that Judaism values differing points of view. And the two schools are held up as great examples of civil disagreement or "arguing for the sake of Heaven."

But things were not always so civil. At one point, Hillel and Shammai got into an argument over the purity of grape juice and olive oil. Things got so heated that the day was "as *kasheh* as the day the Calf was made" (B. Shabbat 17a).

Kasheh means "hard" or "difficult" or "severe."

The "Calf" is the one the people created out of gold, while Moses was still on Sinai -- the central story of the Torah portion *Ki Tisa*. The Golden Calf incident ended with the deaths of 3000 people (Exod 32:28).

As bad as the Golden Calf?

Does Shabbat 17a mean that 3000 students were killed in a fight between the school of Hillel and the school of Shammai? Or is something more symbolic meant?

Either way: it was a terrible fight with severe consequences. And it happened on 9 Adar.

The "9 Adar Project" started at the Pardes Center for Judaism and Conflict Resolution over ten years ago. It was originally one day focusing on conflict and how to resolve it. Then it expanded to a full week on "Constructive Conflict."

The 9Adar Project provides related learning materials for all ages. Many were prepared by Rabbi Daniel Roth, then director of the Pardes Center for Judaism and Conflict Resolution. (He now directs a related, independent program called Mosaica.) What follows is based on in part on Rabbi Roth's teaching for the Torah portion Mishpatim:

"'Go according to the majority' –
But first know the 49 vs 49."

Bending to the majority

In one Talmudic story, Moses asks God about the calendar, wanting to know exactly what to do: "What is the practice?"

Instead of giving a set ruling, God responds:

"acharei rabim l'hatot

[bend after the majority]" -- J Sanhedrin 4:2

Whatever decision wins the majority vote, that is the practice.

According to this story, it's important for people in every age to work things

out together. Practices can change when circumstances change. If Moses had been given all the decisions, already set, change would not be possible. "Bend after the majority" is more flexible.

But flexibility is also more complicated and full of conflict. And one lesson of this passage is that handling conflict requires effort.

"Arguing for the sake of Heaven" is considered a necessary part of understanding. This is one reason Jews study in pairs, so we can challenge each other's ideas, help each other consider as many sides of an issue as possible. Bending after the majority means bending away from positions that lost the vote. But the Talmud includes those positions, too, along with "the winner." (cont. p.9)

These words, "*acharei rabim lahatot*," are found in Exod 23:2, in the Torah portion Mishpatim. (More on the "bending" of these words below.)

TORAH EXPLORATIONS

9 Adar -- Bending to the majority (cont from p.8)

In fact, the Sanhedrin passage goes on to say that decisions should be based on "49 vs 49 reasons" -- understanding 49 reasons in favor of an idea and 49 reasons against it.

(There are 50 gates of wisdom, but "the absolute truth," 50, is divine. Humans can only know 49.)

The Talmud considers "49 vs 49" training for handling conflict -- in good times and bad. And we know the bad times will come.

After all, the schools of Hillel and Shammai were well-known for disagreeing in a respectful, helpful way, "arguing for the sake of Heaven." On that one 9 Adar, though, they ended up in violent conflict. This is a remind to us all that conflict can go seriously wrong, very quickly. Practice can help us prepare for when conflict goes off track.

Practicing conflict

Looking at different sides can be very challenging, especially if the subject affects us personally, Rabbi Roth says. But practice can help us develop useful traits:

First is *mudaut atzmit* (self-awareness) of our own 49 reasons that brought us to our particular understanding of truth. What various experiences and people contributed to our interpretations of the truth as such?

Second is a deep sense of *anavah* (humility) that our truth is at best a partial truth based upon only 49 reasons and never reaches the absolute truth of 50.

Once we have acquired awareness of the bias of our own 49, we need to acknowledge the 49 experiences, stories, concerns, and values that make up our opponents' understanding of truth.

In order to fully enter into this opposing position, we must cultivate a genuine sense of *kavod* (respect) for our opponents.

We also need *sakranut* (curiosity) about the 49 reasons and experiences that bring them to their understanding of the truth; this requires deep listening and a degree of empathy.

Exploring 49 reasons for/against every issue is a bit much. We don't have to exhaust ourselves with "other hands." But practicing on issues that matter to us less can be good training for handling more sensitive issues.

Teaching ourselves to consider other perspectives can strengthen the values Rabbi Roth describes:

- self-awareness,
- humility,
- recognition of bias,
- respect for opponents, and
- curiosity.

And strengthening those values can help us expand the possibilities we see in any situation.



The 9Adar Project
Jewish Week of Constructive Conflict
WWW.9ADAR.ORG

?? "Bend to the Majority"??

The phrase, "*acharei rabim l'hatot*" (used in the Talmud story above) appears in the portion Mishpatim:

You shall not follow after *rabim* to do wrong;

you shall not testify in a dispute so as to *acharei rabim l'hatot*. -- Exodus 23:2

rabim = "big, many; powerful, mighty" *acharei* = "after." *l'hatot* = "to lean, to incline, to bend."

Some usual translations of the whole verse: "Do **not** follow the powerful to do wrong; Do **not** twist dispute testimony to incline toward the powerful." OR "Do **not** go after a crowd (many) to do wrong; Do **not** twist dispute testimony to bend toward a crowd." This verse is the heart of important (cont. p.10)

"Bend to the Majority" (cont. from p.9)

teachings about power and evil: Do not be pressured into doing wrong because the crowd is doing so. Do not let a powerful person or a majority stop you from doing what you think is right. Don't let a person's status in the world stop you from telling the truth. All warnings about what **not** to do.

In the Talmud story quoted in the 9 Adar discussion, and in several others, the last three words of Exod 23:2 are separated from the rest of the verse. The three words -- "*acharei rabim l'hatot*" -- are taken as a positive statement: "Bend to the majority" or "follow after the majority." In the story above, they are used (by God) to give authority to the people in every generation to make decisions as a group. In another Talmud story, they are used to talk back to God, saying: You should not interfere in our decision-making because "You already wrote in the Torah, 'follow after the majority'" (B. Baba Metzia 59b).

In these Talmud stories, the three words are used in way that seems opposite to the verse in Mishpatim. But they're still teaching about power and the role of words.

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Who We Are

We are a collection of Chaplains, Rabbis, Cantors, Kohanot/Hebrew Priestesses, advocates, activists, volunteers, loved ones of incarcerated people, and people with direct experience of incarceration. We are an all volunteer group who began meeting in 2021. We live and work across Turtle Island, in territories, cities, and rural settings of the US and Canada.

Vision

We are striving toward a world free from oppression, where aspects of social identity like race, class, and gender no longer limit our safety, opportunities, and agency to live into the fullness of our sacred potential.

We are striving toward a world where individuals are mutually accountable to one another and where wrongdoing is addressed through reparative and transformative justice, guaranteeing the human dignity of all parties.

We are striving toward a world where all people are provided with the conditions for healing trauma and for *teshuvah* (repentance/restoration), surrounded by resources, guidance, and social support networks.

We are striving toward a world where nobody is isolated and everyone has opportunities to connect to something larger than ourselves—whether to community, culture, or spirituality. Within that world, we envision a Judaism that is radically welcoming and accessible to all seekers.

Divrei Matir Asurim is a publication to promote religious education and solidarity among members and all interested.

If not otherwise noted, content is provided by V. Spatz, an outside member of Matir Asurim. Please consider sharing your own and providing your feedback.