



Shabbat Shkalim
25 Shevat 5778 / February 9, 2018

Dear Shir Tikvah,

How many times do we have to hear it until we know it is true?

וְגַר לֹא-תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ כִּי-גֵרִים
הֵייתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: ...
אִם-עָנָה תִעֲנֶה אֹתוֹ כִּי אִם-צָעַק
יִצְעַק אֵלַי שְׁמַע אֲשַׁמַּע צַעֲקָתוֹ:
שמות כב:כ, כב

*You shall not wrong a stranger or
oppress him, for you were strangers in
the land of Egypt...If you do mistreat
them, I will heed their outcry as soon
as they cry out to Me.*

Exodus 22:20 and 22

We read these lines this Shabbat, as part of a litany of rules that get elaborated after the giving of the Ten Commandments. The Israelites, so recently escaped from Egypt, are reminded of their moral obligation to those most vulnerable in society.

Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, 11th century Spanish commentator wrote about these lines:

Once the stranger accepts [the rules of your society], you cannot oppress them in your country/land, because you are more powerful than them. And remember! You were strangers like them...whoever sees a person oppressing...and does not help...is considered as an oppressor...If a person oppresses an immigrant and there is no helper, the punishment comes to everyone.

Let's pay attention to the plight of migrants. As tens of thousands asylum seekers in Israel resist the threat of deportation, as undocumented students protest in Washington, DC and long-time residents of the United States are deported to countries that they haven't seen in decades, let us remember our sacred duty to interrupt systems of oppression, in solidarity with those most impacted.

This work is imperative and life-giving and, apparently, each generation needs to be reminded: our comfort, our safety does not belong to us. It is our obligation to act up when we see people - or structures of power - oppressing those made marginal from the bounty of collective living: the immigrant, the widow, the orphan, the uninsured, the homebound elder, the young transperson of color targeted by the police.

Let's keep praying, let's keep working, let's keep raising our voices and moving our bodies for justice. Let's renew Torah through our insistence that its call makes real claim on our lives.

Grateful to be moving into Shabbat with you.

Rabbi Arielle Rosenberg