

TORAH THOUGHTS – JEFFREY EPSTEIN’S SEX SCANDAL

Multi-millionaire Jeffrey Epstein pleaded not guilty Monday after he was indicted on charges that he operated a sex trafficking ring in which he sexually abused dozens of underage girls in the years 2002-2005. He could serve up to forty-five years in prison.

Considering the scandal, I thought of a peculiar narrative in Genesis: The Bible relates that divine beings cohabited with human women. “The divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them.” (6:2) In the next passage, we read that in part due to this situation, God lamented and brought the Great Flood.

The Rabbis of our tradition understood the ‘divine beings’ to be princes, and not gods. Interpreted this way, men in power did whatever pleased them, taking the women they wanted, with or without their consent. Similarly, Mr. Epstein lured girls into his homes, and abused them for his own pleasure.

We are the descendants of Abraham, who stood against injustice. We should speak out in support of those being exploited.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said, “Few are guilty, all are responsible.” According to news reports, Mr. Epstein avoided serious charges in 2007. As a result, some suggest that influential and wealthy individuals receive more favorable treatment by our law enforcement agencies. Do you agree? What other cases might validate this claim?
2. Consider these biblical verses and what they teach about exploitation.
 - a. “You shall not subvert the rights of your needy in their disputes ... Do not take bribes, for bribes blind the clear-sighted and upset the pleas of those who are in the right. You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 23:6, 8-9)
 - b. “Justice, Justice shall you pursue ...” (Deuteronomy 16:20)
 - c. “Thus, says the Lord: Execute justice and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor; and do no wrong, do no violence, to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.” (Jeremiah 22:3)
 - d. The Lord will judge the elders and the princes of His people saying, 'You have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses; Why do you crush My people, and grind the face of the poor?'” (Isaiah 3:14-15)
 - e. “God stands in the congregation of God; amid the judges He judges: How long will you judge unjustly, and respect the persons of the wicked? Judge the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and destitute. Rescue the poor and needy; deliver them out of the hand of the wicked.” (Psalm 82:1-4)

3. Sex abuse is a major challenge today.
 - a. There are over 40 million slaves worldwide in 2017;
 - b. 37.5% of them are in forced marriages, and;
 - c. 12.5% are in forced prostitution sex slavery.
 - d. Learn more at <https://www.freetheslaves.net/about-slavery/slavery-today/>

4. I support Project S.A.R.A.H. (Stop Abusive Relationships at Home). To learn more, go to www.projectsarah.org.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Pont