Twitter Thread by Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg



Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg
@TheRaDR



Thinking about how, in Judaism, redeeming captives is considered a "great mitzvah," something that takes precedence over even supporting the poor, and the cash bail system.

1/x thread

Maimonides writes that ignoring the need to redeem captives goes against “Do not harden your heart or shut your hand against your needy fellow” (Deut 15:7) and “Do not stand idly by your neighbor’s blood” (Lev 19:16), among other Torah commandments.

The Shulchan Aruch (a significant Jewish law code) writes: “Every moment that one delays in freeing captives, in cases where it is possible to expedite their freedom, is considered to be tantamount to murder.”

If a community is in the middle of building a synagogue and the need to redeem captives comes up, they're ordered to dismantle the synagogue and sell the bricks and wood and use that money to redeem captives.

In the US, in many places, they use cash bail when someone is arrested ostensibly as a way to force a defendant--one who has not been convicted of any crime--to return for the trial.

But in a lot of ways, it's simply the criminalization of poverty. If someone can't afford to post bail, they stay in jail. Needless to say, this is tied to some of the ways that structural racism functions in the criminal justice system.

3/5 of the people in US jails have not been convicted of any crime. Nearly half a million people.

People have not been convicted of any crime.

Enduring the horrors of the prison system because they don't have the money not to.

https://t.co/2P1SYe4eLg

And it impacts people's chances of freedom. Those held pretrial are 4x more likely to be sentenced to prison than ppl released prior to trial. Pretrial detainees are also likely to make hurried decisions to plead guilty to a lower charge rather than waiting for a trial.

While this might not have been what the Talmud and later Jews meant when they talked of redeeming captives, I don't think they could have envisioned this system. And it's not so far off.

Someone is captured by law enforcement--often for being Black or brown--and if they can't afford to pay their way out, they're in. Innocent until proven guilty. Legally innocent. Captured.

There are great orgs (like @ChiBondFund) in every city doing the work of redeeming captives, and there are more places where people are working to outlaw the practice of cash bail.

If you're in Illinois, PLEASE call (don't just tweet! Call!) @GovPritzker and tell him to sign HB 3653. Numbers to call in second tweet here.

https://t.co/EdyX1xXgvV

> Hey Illinois:
>
> Please pick up the phone and CALL @JBPritzker and tell him to sign HB 3653, which eliminates cash bail in most cases and removes qualified immunity for police.
>
> Numbers to call in next tweet. https://t.co/20251SDgph
>
> — Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg (@TheRaDR) February 3, 2021