

Parashah #48

(Updated 8.14.10)

Shof'tim ~ שופטים ~ Judges

Torah: D'varim/Deuteronomy 16:18~21:9

Haftarah: Yesha'yahu/Isaiah 51:12~53:12

**B'rit Hadashah: Mattityahu/Matthew 5:38-42; 18:15-20; Acts 3:13-26; 7:35-53;
1st Corinthians 5:9-13; 1st Timothy 5:17-22; Ivrit/Hebrews 10:28-32**

First, I want to apologize for not announcing last Shabbat was our last Sabbath in the Hebrew month of Av. Of course, we don't exactly when the new moon will appear but it looks like Thursday, August 12th 2010, will be the 1st of Elul 5770. On HaShem's calendar this is the last month of the agricultural or civil year. This is a crucial period of preparation, as we look forward to a new year.

There are a few special customs our observant Hebrew brothers and sisters, as well as Torah pursuant believers perform during the month of (eh-lool) **Elul**, which means **search**. (How appropriate!!)

- One is the daily reading of **Psalm 27**, "One thing I ask . . . is to dwell in the house of the L~rd all the days of my life." A relationship with HaShem supersedes all else because He is the source of everything!

No "if's"

No "and's"

No "but's"!!!

I want to encourage you the read Psalm 27, right now!!!

- Another special custom for the month of Elul is to blow the Shofar every morning. The Shofar sound is literally an alarm clock designed to "awaken" us from our spiritual slumber and brings to us clarity, alertness and focus. This is a time to reflect on areas where we have fallen short in the past and how we expect to change in the future. I pray this will be a meaningful time of growth for all of us. More about Elul, later!! (If you don't have a shofar, pretend!!!)

CHAPTER 16

Let's get on to our Parashah for this week, which begins with "You are to appoint judges and officers for all your gates." (**Verse 18**) Obviously, if you are going to have (show-tehr-**reem**) **shoterim/officers** and (showf-**teem**) **shof'tim/judges**, you will need, in Hebrew, a (bay-eat **dehn**) **beit din/court**.

In the Stone Edition of the Artscroll Chumash, the Sages comment, the appointment of a person to staff the courts was not sufficient. They must be qualified and righteous so they will judge honestly and correctly. If the community has a hand in appointing unqualified judges, HaShem holds the community responsible for any perversion of justice which might result from such an appointment.

I might add, I believe this nation has elected an unqualified candidate and HaShem will hold this nation responsible for the perversion of justice resulting from this appointment.

As I reread **verse 18** in the Complete Jewish Bible, the word “gates” rang loud in my ears! Don’t ask me why, but HaShem speaks to me in some weird ways and it’s okay with me! Anyway as I was reading, a song some of us sang as children, came to mind. “Be careful little eyes what you see, be careful little eyes what you see, for the Father up above is looking down in love, so be careful little eyes what you see.” As I recall, this song covered several areas:

- Be careful little mind what you think
- Be careful little ears what you hear
- Be careful little hands what you do
- Be careful little feet where you go

Anyway, HaShem impressed upon me those are all “gates” or openings to our being and we should set a guard, or officers, over these “gates” in order to help us walk in righteousness and justice.

Verse 19 specifically mentions three things a judge shall **NOT** do:

- Do not distort justice
- Do not show favoritism
- Do not accept a bribe

Concerning the latter, Torah gives specific reasons for not accepting a bribe:

- A gift blinds the eyes of the wise . . .
- And twists the words of even the upright

The Complete Jewish Bible uses the words “justice, only justice you must pursue” where as the Chumash uses the words, “righteousness, righteousness shall you pursue” in **verse 20**. When I checked the Hebrew used in this verse, I found tzadek, tzadek (צדק צדק) was used, which means “righteousness, righteousness”. So what is the difference between justice and righteousness? To me, justice is a right relationship between two people while righteousness is an individual being in right relationship with Adonai. Another way of looking at it is . . .

- righteousness is being like our Abba Father
- while justice is doing what He would do.

One commentator said it is not enough to only seek righteousness; it must be done through honest means. And my thoughts are . . . you could seek righteousness through dishonest means? I don't think so!

All of this justice and righteousness is immediately followed by **verse 21** which has to do with an idolatrous tree or sacred pole used in pagan worship. It was the custom of the idolaters to landscape their temples in order to attract worshippers. Torah places its emphasis on what takes place **inside** the courts and synagogues, not on the beauty of their exteriors. Hmmm!!!! Never mind, we won't even go there!

The Sages make an interesting commentary here, regarding the placement of these two verses (**20 & 21**). They derive "one who appoints an unqualified judge is tantamount to one who plants an idolatrous tree." Another Hmmm!!! Moving right along

Here we go again!!! The Complete Jewish Bible renders **verses 21 & 22** as "You are not to plant any sort of tree . . . beside the altar of Adonai your G~d that you will make for yourselves . . . ; Adonai your G~d hates such things" So much for placing Christmas trees on the altar or anywhere else for that matter! The prophet Jeremiah spoke clearly concerning this matter in **Yirme'yahu/Jeremiah 10:2-5**. Check it out . . . it's there!!!

CHAPTER 17

Immediately following the instructions concerning improper means of exterior decoration of the Temple and of invalid altars, we have instructions concerning defective sacrifices and disqualifications of animals for Temple service. (**Verse 1**)

Verses 2-7 address the proper procedure for the persecution of idolaters. No matter how serious the charge, the court may not act against the transgressor/idolater until an **exact and thorough investigation** has been made. Here we find the instruction of having testimony from two or three witnesses. I bet some of you thought this was just found in the *B'rit Hadashah/Renewed Covenant*. Here again, we see Yeshua and *Sha'ul/Paul* teaching Torah! Torah done away with??? Hmmm again!!!!

- Mattityahu/Matthew 18:16
- 2nd Corinthians 13:1
- 1st Timothy 5:10
- Ivrim/Hebrews 10:28

Originally HaShem gave it to Moshe to give to *B'nei Yisra'el/Children of Israel*, in **verse 6** and then again in **Chapter 19:15**. Incidentally, the book of *D'varim/Deuteronomy* is quoted more by the writers of the *B'rit Hadashah/Renewed Covenant* than any other book in the Bible.

Verses 8-13 provide information concerning cases too difficult for the local authorities. They are to go to the Sanhedrin, the High Court of 71 *judges/shof'tim*, which would convene in “the place which the L~rd your G~d chooses” (**verse 8**). Once again, these instructions are being given on the east side of the *Yarden/Jordan* River before they enter the Promised Land. In the Promised Land, we know HaShem chose for His name to be upon (Yeh-roo-sha-lah-yeem) *Yerushalayim/Jerusalem*. Getting back to the Sanhedrin, once their verdict has been rendered, it is to be followed to the letter, without exception.

According to **verses 14-17**, Israel was to set a king over themselves, once they entered and settled in *Eretz Yisra'el/the Land of Israel*. As I understand, it was to be a king whom . . .

- HaShem would choose . . .
- One of their own
- who would lead them
- inspire them
- set an example of selflessness and
- wholeheartedly serve Him (Sounds like Yeshua to me!)

However, when the time came, the request of “I want to have a king . . .” referred to a king like the other nations had. This displeased HaShem (and that’s how they wound up with King *Sha’ul/Saul*).

There are three things a king was **NOT** to acquire:

- Too many horses
- Too many wives
- Too much gold & silver

As I read this, I thought, “Ah ha! This sounds like a prime example of King Solomon.” We know he was brought up in the admonition of the L~rd. After all, his daddy was a man after G~d’s own heart. So I quickly did a search to see what kind of information was available concerning these particular directives.

It was essential for this king’s values and conduct be Hebraic and not an imitation of the nations around them. As we all know, position and power can go to ones head regardless of the era in which one lives. Such was typical of the monarchs of then (as well as now). They showed their greatness by:

- the number of their horses
- the size of their harems and . . .
- the hordes of their treasuries.

This was NOT to be true of a Hebraic king. This king's glory was the glory of the nation. He was required to . . .

- maintain the dignity of his office
- curb his lusts
- be an example of moderation
- be an example of obedience to Torah.

(Again, this sounds like Yeshua to me!) In fact, the Apostles regarded Yeshua as “the One who has been appointed by G~d as Judge of the living and the dead.” (Acts 10:42) And *Sha'ul/Paul* taught that HaShem “has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed.” (Acts 17:31)

- *Sha'ul/Paul* refers to Yeshua as the “Righteous Judge” (2nd Timothy 4:8)
- G~d will judge the secrets of men through the Messiah Yeshua. (Romans 2:16)
- We must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah, so each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” (2nd Corinthians 5:10)

The Sages indicate King Solomon was one of the greatest of all Jews and the wisest of all men. Yet he violated these limitations on the king's prerogatives, confident his superior wisdom would protect him from the pitfalls specified by these verses. But he erred.

- His large stables **did** take the people back to Egypt
- His many wives **did** affect him and . . .
- His large treasury **was** a corrupting influence.

Verses 18-19 say the king is to write two copies of the Torah. According to some, one copy was to remain in the treasury for safe keeping and the other was to be kept with him and referred to daily. There are others who believe if the king inherited a copy of the Torah from his father (kingship was often passed down from father to son), he only had to write one copy, the one which would remain with him. He was to consult the Torah for guidance “all the days of his life”. Bottom line, although the king is the temporal leader, he must be under the ultimate authority of the Torah and its Giver.

One commentary concerning this matter said this provision is meant to insure the king, himself, was to submit to the rule of the law and not become a despot without accountability or boundary. Specifically, the passage says he shall write a copy of the Torah so “his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen.” (Verse 20) In other words, the king is subject to the laws of Torah just like everybody else in the kingdom. He has no royal exception or special immunity. By writing a copy of the Torah for himself, the king is reminded he is not above G~d's law. This basic ethic of Torah is called the Rule of Law.

I think this would be a good thing for our public officials in this day and age . . . from local government to the Federal government!

CHAPTER 18

Verses 1-8 concern the *Kohanim/Priests*, the *L'vi'im/Levites*, who are teachers of Torah in addition to their Temple duties. They receive their support from offerings, from first fruits, as well as spoils of war.

One commentary addressed **verse 3**, about the portion of the kosher slaughter which should be given to the Kohanim. The Chumash uses the words . . .

- “foreleg,
- the jaw, and
- the maw”.

Thank heavens for other translations!!!! The Complete Jewish Bible renders these words as:

- “shoulder,
- the jowl and
- the stomach”.

Okay, back to the commentary . . . the Kohanim are to receive these specified parts from every kosher domesticated animal that is slaughtered as these parts symbolize the service that is offered in the Temple.

- For using their right arms to slaughter the offerings, the Kohanim received the right foreleg;
- In return for their blessing the people, they received the jowl/jaw which included the animal’s tongue;
- In return for examining the animal’s innards (for possible disqualifications), they received the maw/stomach.

I thought this was an interesting correlation.

Additionally, the cohen was to receive the first fruits of the grain, new wine, olive oil and the “first of the fleece of your sheep” (**verse 4**).

In **verses 9-14**, the Torah goes into the admonition not to follow the abominable practices of the pagan nations. It is human nature to want to know what the future holds. HaShem wants us to have faith He will give us whatever knowledge we need. We should not yield ourselves to the ways of the world through. . . .

(Verses 1-7) Upon the expansion of their territory, *B'nei Yisra'el/Children of Israel* were told to add three more cities of refuge. (Verses 8-10)

Here we go again . . . how many times have I read this and not seen it???? Oh well . . . verses 11 & 12 are verses concerning extradition. “However, if someone hates his fellow member of the community, lies in wait for him, attacks him, strikes him a death blow, and then flees into one of these cities; then the leaders of his own town are to send and bring him back from there and hand him over to the next-of-kin avenger, to be put to death. You are not to pity him. Rather, you must put an end to the shedding of innocent blood in Isra’el. Then things will go well with you.” Gosh, our judicial system certainly has taken a lot of guidance from the Torah! AND, it would be good if they followed through with what they started. I don’t believe, for one minute we are supposed to house and feed law breakers at the expense of the people. As a matter of fact, given the way facilities are run now-a-days, prisoners should be in nursing homes and our elderly should be in prisons, where they would have a better lifestyle and healthcare!

Verse 14 is very clear about not moving boundary markers!! While I made a commitment to pray for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (in 2005) because the Word says we are to pray for those in authority, I personally believe he would have done well to have read and heeded this verse. I also believe President Barak Obama would do well to heed the Word of the L~rd instead of Hillary Clinton. We should not grow weary in interceding for Eretz Israel, as the current Prime Minister, Benyamin Netanyahu is being pressured, relentlessly, to release the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) and half of Jerusalem to the Palestinians. G~d forbid!!!!

Again, in verse 15 we are compelled to receive “**the testimony of two or three witnesses**” in any case before convicting a person of any offense or sin.

Then in verses 16-20 we have instructions concerning (eh-deem zoe-mehm-meem) *edim zomemmim/false testimony*. As I understand verses 17-19, both men (parties) involved in the controversy are to stand before Adonai, before the *cohanim/priests* (Rabbi) and the judges (Elders) in office at the time. They (Rabbi and Elders) are to investigate carefully. If they find that the witness is lying and has given false testimony, they are to do to him what he intended to do to his brother. (Ya know, sometimes it’s hard not to preach when one is aware of clergy who transgress these instructions and assume their “spiritual authority” transcends Torah!)

As I read these instructions, concerning the one who bore false witness, whatever was to happen to the defendant would happen to the false witness, I thought of Haman and Mordecai. If you are unfamiliar with it, we will be studying it during The Feast of Purim in the middle of Nissan, just before *Pesach/Passover*, so stay tuned!!

And finally, verse 21, repeats instructions from Sh’mot/Exodus 21:24 and Vayikra/Leviticus 24:20, which will be repeated again in the B’rit Hadashah in Mattityahu/Matthew 5:38 about an

“eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot”. One commentary mentioned in all cases where the Torah speaks of punishment in these terms, it refers to monetary compensation. A Jewish court would never inflict physical injury in revenge or retribution. The only physical punishments imposed are the death penalty and lashes as prescribed by the Torah.

So why were these verses written in such a manner they could be taken so literally? “Rambam and other commentators explain in the Heavenly scales, the perpetrator **deserves** to lose his eye and for this reason cannot find atonement for his sin merely by making the required monetary payments; he must also beg his victim’s forgiveness but the human courts have no authority to do more than require the responsible party to make monetary restitution.”

CHAPTER 20

Again, more encouragement concerning the battles to be fought when overtaking *HaAretz/The Land* which Adonai is giving *B’nei Yisra’el/Children of Israel* to possess. Furthermore, Adonai is **going with them** to **fight on their behalf**. However, in **verses 5-8**, every person who wanted an excuse to be relieved from their obligation to secure *HaAretz/The Land* was given one. Those excuses included:

- a new house which hadn’t been dedicated yet
- having a new vineyard
- being engaged or recently married
- flat being afraid and fainthearted!

Such a deal!!!

Verses 10-15 address the “Peace Treaty” to be offered to towns Isra’el is planning to attack. However, as I understand this and other verses, this did not apply to the Canaanite nations. The word of the L~rd is very clear. The Canaanites were not to live in The Land under any circumstances. Personally, I believe this “peace treaty” refers to optional wars against enemies other than the seven “ite” nations!!!

Notice the difference in **verses 16-18** when the land of inheritance is being addressed. Nothing, absolutely nothing is to be left breathing!!! Why? “So they won’t teach you to follow their abominable practices, which they do for their gods, causing you to sin against Adonai your G~d.”

And **verses 19-20** indicate our G~d is a G~d concerned with both ecology and the welfare of man. During a siege of the land, no trees were to be cut down with an axe. The primary concern had to do with fruit trees. If there were trees which bore no fruit they were fair game and could be used to build siege works.

CHAPTER 21

Our Torah portion concludes with the case of the “unsolved murder” (dum de dum dum)!!! The specifics are given concerning the (ehg-**lah** ah-rue-**fah**) *eglah arufah/axed heifer*, which served as an atonement for the peoples of the neighboring cities since they didn’t prevent the murder.

(Verses 1-9)

According to the Sages, if the corpse of an unwitnessed murder was found lying in the open, the Torah required the elders of the closest town to perform a public ritual in which they declare they were not guilty and they pray for forgiveness for the Hebrew people.

Shof'tim ~ שפטים ~ Judges

Haftarah: Yesha'yahu/Isaiah 51:12 ~ 53:12

This Haftarah opens with a rebuke to *B'nei Yisra'el/Children of Israel* about forsaking HaShem. It is followed by words of comfort and encouragement and ends with the Holy One speaking about His continued presence in *Yerushalayim/Jerusalem* as her Defender and Protector. In the process, Israel is redeemed from exile and begins to declare HaShem’s salvation to the nations.

It is somewhat difficult to see the connection between this Haftarah and the Torah portion. However, Rabbi Hertz comments, “. . . the haftarah sets out a program of religion – to plant heaven and establish the earth for the children of men. The Sidra, in one of its luminous commands – “justice, justice, shalt thou follow” – gives the fundamental prerequisite for all humans living on earth.”

Shof'tim ~ שפטים ~ Judges

B'rit Hadashah: Mattityahu/Matthew 5:38-42; 18:15-20; Acts 3:13-26; 7:35-53;
1st Corinthians 5:9-13; 1st Timothy 5:17-22; Ivrit/Hebrews 10:28-32

Mattityahu/Matthew 5:38-42 There have been many erroneous teachings from these verses. First, with regard to an “eye for eye and tooth for tooth” phrase, which is quoted directly from **D'varim/Deuteronomy 19:21**, HaShem was not condoning revenge but was controlling and limiting it. According to the Mishna, “if someone wounds his “brother”, he becomes liable to compensate the injured party for five different aspects of the injury:

1. Damage
2. Pain
3. Healing

4. Loss of time from work and
5. Insult.

In the case of damage, here is an example of how restitution is determined. Suppose someone blinded someone else, cut off his hand or broke his leg. They value the injured person as if he were a slave for sale in the market and they appraise his value before the injury and now. The Mishna (Oral Torah before being written down) goes into great detail on how the five different areas are to be compensated.

Secondly, “if someone hits you on the right cheek, let him hit you on the left cheek”. This is a Hebrew idiom referring to an insult. In other words, Yeshua wasn’t condoning physical abuse but was encouraging His brothers to disregard **verbal** insults and not give them validity by responding to them. In **NO** way did He believe or teach one should allow oneself to be physically abused.

Mattityahu/Matthew 18:15-20 “. . . every accusation can be supported by the testimony of two or three witnesses . . .” is a direct quote from **D’varim/Deuteronomy 19:15** and is the way Yeshua says we are to handle a matter if a brother commits a sin against us and won’t listen when spoken to privately.

Acts 3:13-26 **D’varim/Deuteronomy 18:15-19**, specifically, is quoted in **verses 22-23**. “For Moshe himself said, ‘Adonai will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers. You are to listen to everything he tells you. Everyone who fails to listen to that prophet will be removed from the people and destroyed.’”

Acts 7:35-53 Again, **D’varim/Deuteronomy 18:15-18** (see above) is quoted in **verse 37**.

1st Corinthians 5:9-13 **Verse 13** is the connection to our Torah portion. Eight times in the book of **D’varim/Deuteronomy**, alone, we are told to “expel the evildoer from among yourselves”. Those words are found in . . .

- D’varim/Deuteronomy 13:6(5)
- D’varim/Deuteronomy 17:7
- D’varim/Deuteronomy 17:12
- D’varim/Deuteronomy 19:19
- D’varim/Deuteronomy 21:21
- D’varim/Deuteronomy 22:21
- D’varim/Deuteronomy 22:24
- D’varim/Deuteronomy 24:7

1st Timothy 5:17-22 **Verse 19** is one of my favorite passages. “Never listen to any accusation against a leader unless it is supported by **two or three witnesses**.” Of course, we

recognize “two or three witnesses” is a direct quote from **D’varim/Deuteronomy 17:6** as well as **D’varim/Deuteronomy 19:15**.

Ivrit/Hebrews 10:28-32 A very strong admonition comes from *Sha’ul/Paul* concerning “someone who disregards the Torah of Moshe is put to death without mercy ‘**on the word of two or three witnesses**’. Think how much worse will be the punishment deserved by someone who has trampled underfoot the Son of HaShem . . .” Again we see **D’varim/Deuteronomy 17:16** and **19:15** quoted verbatim. As we are told and taught *D’varim/Deuteronomy* is quoted more than any other book of Torah in the *B’rit Hadashah/Renewed Covenant*. I don’t know how people can begin to think the Original Covenant has been “done away with” when Yeshua, as well as His followers quoted it SO much!!!! Think about it. If, as we are told, Paul says the Torah was “done away with”, why was he (Paul) still quoting it more than thirty years after Yeshua’s death? Could it possibly be mistranslation or misinterpretation?

Our corresponding Psalm for this Torah portion is: Psalm 17

Next Week’s Lesson: Parashah #49

Ki Tetze ~ כִּי תֵצֵא ~ When you go out

Torah: D’varim/Deuteronomy 21:10 ~ 25:19

Haftarah: Yesha’yahu/Isaiah 54:1-10

(Messianic adaptation: 52:13 ~ 54:10)

B’rit Hadashah: Mattityahu/Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-12; 22:23-32;

Mark 10:2-12; 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-38; 1st Corinthian 9:4-18;

Galatians 3:9-14; 1st Timothy 5:17-18

Corresponding Psalm: Psalm 32

Who fills his mind with Torah clears it of fear and folly.

Rabbi Chanina Sgan HaKohanim

Shavuah tov (have a good week)!!!