

MORDEKAI'S DRASH – SHOF' TUM



Torah: *Shof'tim* (Judges), *D'varim* (Deuteronomy) 16.18-21.9
Haftorah: *Yesha'yahu* (Isaiah) 51.12-52.12
Suggested Messianic Writings: *Mattityahu* (Mathew) 3.1-17

Shalom,

Moshe continues in this parashah with more instructions for Israel to carry out after they enter the land that HaShem is giving to them. Back in *Sh'mot* (Exodus) 18, Moshe's father-in-law *Yitro* (Jethro) encouraged Moshe to discontinue being the only judge for Israel, as he would wear himself out, but rather to appoint various leaders to help with all the judgments for the people. Moshe heeded this advice, and Israel's first judicial system was set up. Now Moshe is giving the commandment that there shall be judges established in every city in Israel after he is gone and Israel has crossed over into the land.

HaShem set a high standard for the judges of the land – they shall judge the people with *righteous judgment*, קִדְּוָה טוֹפְשִׁימ, *mish'paht tseh-dehk*. The definition of קִדְּוָה *tseh-dehk*, *righteous*, is “accurate, fair, just”. The protocol was that the communities were to be responsible for appointing their judges; the sages understood this to mean that if the community had a hand in appointing unrighteous judges, then the community was to be held responsible if justice was perverted.

“You are not to distort justice....” The KJV says, “Thou shalt not *wrest* judgment....” *Wrest* is an older English word; the Hebrew is נָחַת *nah-tey*, which means “to stretch or spread out; by implication to bend away (including moral deflection)”. *The Message Bible* translates the line as, “Don't twist the law.” Following that instruction, leaders are told “do not show partiality or favoritism, and do not accept a bribe”. *Bribe* in Hebrew is שֹׁחַד, *sho-khad*, meaning simply, “a gift presented to one in return for a favor”. Whatever the purpose of the “gift,” a leader is not to take such when dispensing justice, “for a gift blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of even the upright,” or put another way, “a bribe... undermines the intentions of the best of people.”

“יִדְּוָה קִדְּוָה קִדְּוָה, *tseh-dehk tseh-dehk teer-doph*, Justice, only justice, you must pursue;” or as another translation states, “Righteousness, righteousness shall you pursue”. One reason that the word is repeated in the Hebrew is to emphasize two different aspects of the word. Some of the ancient commentators said that in the current context, it means that to pursue righteousness in general, one must pursue a righteous court. Another opinion given, one a little more personal, is that we are to: 1) pursue righteousness through our own deeds, and 2) pursue righteousness as a gift from HaShem. For example, in *D'varim* (Deuteronomy) 10.16, HaShem commands Israel to “circumcise the foreskin of your heart,” in other words, they were told to cultivate a right attitude which would then *produce* righteous behavior. Later, in *D'varim* 30.6, HaShem promises that He Himself will “circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your children, so that you will love Adonai your God with all your heart and all your being”. HaShem will *provide* the gift of righteousness.

Righteousness is spoken of often in the Tanakh. *Yesha'yahu* (Isaiah), writing of the suffering of the coming Messiah, says in 53.11, “After this ordeal, he will see satisfaction. By his knowing [pain and sacrifice], my righteous servant makes many righteous; it is for their sins that he suffers.” Much of what *Yesha'yahu* wrote can apply to both Israel and Yeshua, but not this verse. Only the Messiah makes many righteous after suffering for their sins. If we acknowledge that *Mashiakh* (Messiah) Yeshua makes righteous those who accept Him as Lord and Master, we have received the gift of righteousness; on the other hand, we cannot accept such a gift and do nothing with it, for this is a gift that we must pursue constantly by what we do, by how we live. In other words, we *receive* the gift of righteousness through faith, by trusting our Creator God, while at the same time we *pursue* righteousness in all that we do. We dare not abuse either way of obtaining righteousness.

Note that the commandment says to “pursue” righteousness – in fact, “you *must* pursue righteousness”. The Hebrew word for *pursue* is רָדַף, *rah-dahf*, which means “to run after”. Rabbi Hertz' commentary (Rabbi Hertz was Chief Rabbi of the British Empire pre-WWII), regarding the entire phrase, states, “These passionate words may be taken as the keynote of the humane legislation of the Torah, and of the demand for social righteousness by Israel's Prophets, Psalmists and Sages.” Shoes that perfectly fit both feet – if the justice system pursues justice/righteousness, then justice will be applied to the land. If the community that

appoints the judges pursues righteousness, then the judge will be just, and the land will live in righteousness. A nation goes the way of its leaders. This is from Torah, if anyone thinks this is being bound up under Law, what are the options? Unrighteousness, injustice, oppression, unfairness, dictatorship! Choose this day whom you will serve. The G-d that *Avraham, Yitz'khak v'Ya'akov* (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) served is the same G-d that *Kefa, Yochanan v'Sha'ul* (Peter, John & Paul) served.

The prophet *Mikhah*, (*Mee-kha*, Micah) wrote of justice (6.8): “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does ADONAI require of you but to *do justice*, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” The apostle *Sha'ul* (Saul/Paul) put it another way, in the letter to the Philippians (4.8), “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, *whatever is just*, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, *think about these things*.” *Think about (or on)* in Greek is *logizomai*, (*log-id'-zom-ahee*), which means, “to take an inventory, to consider”. If one “thinks” long enough about something, one “acts” on those thoughts.

What is the purpose of this pursuit of righteousness, righteousness/justice, justice? The answer is given in the rest of verse 20: “*So that you may חיה, kha-yah, live (def: come to life, give life, be healed, keep alive, stay alive) and ירש, yah-resh, possess (def: to take possession of, inherit, dispossess; to occupy (by driving out previous tenants, and possessing in their place)) the land Adonai your God is giving you.*” The pursuit of righteousness/justice will bring a righteous/just reward.

Hertz' commentary notes that, “Justice is not the only ethical quality in God or man, nor is it the highest quality; but it is the basis for all the others. ‘Righteousness and justice are the foundations of Thy throne,’ says the Psalmist [89.14]. The whole idea of the Divine rests on them.”

Only when we – from the individual to the community to the government – follow the advice, nay, the commandment of our Creator, will all go well. Where does the pursuit of righteousness, righteousness/justice, justice rank in your life? *Sha'ul* wrote similarly of this dual pursuit, that of chasing after what we have received (a Biblical paradox), in 1 Timothy 6.12, “Fight the good fight of the faith, *take hold* of the eternal life to which you were called when you testified so well to your faith before many witnesses”. *Take hold* literally means, “to seize”. You see the double paradoxical pursuit? We have been called, we have received a high calling, but to retain it, we must pursue it, we must *seize* it! How do we *seize* eternal life? *Sha'ul* actually gave the answer in the preceding verse (6.11): “*Pursue* righteousness, godliness, faithfulness, love, steadfastness, and gentleness.”

Someone once said that life can be so “daily”. I believe that a great way to take the daily-ness out of daily life is to be in hot pursuit of the righteousness offered by the Creator, which is the gift of eternal life that is given freely, yet with such a high price, by the Messiah *Yeshua*. He is coming to separate the wheat from the chaff (Matt 3.12). He is coming to set up an eternal kingdom that will continually pursue “righteousness, righteousness/justice, justice”. Author Jerry Bridges wrote a book on the subject, entitled, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, wherein he states, “Scripture speaks of both a holiness we have in [Messiah] before God, and a holiness we are to strive after. We can ignore *neither* [Messiah's] role *nor* our own if we are to successfully pursue holiness. It is as simple as refusing to smudge the truth on a tax return or as complicated as forgiving the person who has most viciously hurt us. [We need to] take holiness out of the realm of the impossible and bring it into the real world of our daily lives and decisions.”

Israel (I speak of Jewish people globally in this thought) desperately needs to pick up that pursuit that their forefathers began in the days of Moshe. A true pursuit of righteousness (far beyond any good that humanity can do on its own) can only do one thing – reveal the King of Righteousness for who He is, *Yeshua HaMashiakh*, *Yeshua* the Messiah, the true Judge who will judge justly. “Awake! Awake, Tziyon [Zion]! Shake off the dust! Arise! Break out into joy! Sing together, you ruins of Yerushalayim [Jerusalem]! For Adonai has comforted his people, he has redeemed Yerushalayim! Adonai has bared his holy arm in the sight of every nation, and all the ends of the earth will see *the salvation (yeshua) of our God, Yeshuat Eloheynu*, יְשׁוּעַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ” (from this week's Haftorah). The pursuit is on; got your running shoes ready?

יְרוּשָׁלַם שְׁלֹמֹ – *Sha'alu shalom Yerushalayim* – Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

B' rakhot v' todah rabbah
(Blessings & thank you very much)
Mordekhi (Marc)

This Yeshua, who has been taken away from you into heaven, will come back to you in just the same way as you saw him go into heaven.
(Acts 1.11 CJB)