

| PORTION | DATE | HEB DATE | TORAH | NEVIIM | RENEWED |
|---------|--------------|-------------|------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Shoftim | 7 Sept. 2019 | 7 Elul 5779 | Deut. 16:18-21:9 | Isa. 51:12-52:12 | John 14:9-20 |

We studied *Shoftim* last year on a *pashat* (literal) level. This year, we will go in a little deeper to understand how the month of Elul is connected with *shoftim* (judges). It is written, “Appoint judges and officers within all your gates, which YHWH your Elohim is giving you, according to your tribes. And they shall judge the people with righteous right-ruling. Do not distort right-ruling. Do not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.” (Devarim 16:18-19)

In this week’s haftarah, it begins with “*A-no-chi a-no-chi hu, me-na-chem-chem*” (אֲנֹכִי אֲנֹכִי הוּא, מְנַחֵם־כֶּם; I, I will comfort you) in Yishayhu 51:12. A parable: A king was angry with his queen and he divorced her. Several days later, he was remorseful and asked her to return. She said that she will return when he pays her double of her *ketuvah* (marriage contract). “This is exactly what happened between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*. At Sinai, I said to you, ‘I (*anochi*) am Hashem, your Elohim.’ In the future, when we will be in Yerushalayim once again, I will say ‘I, only I, am He Who comforts you,’ repeating the word “*anochi*” twice.”¹

The Midrash² says that the redemptions from Mitzrayim came about through man, it was not eternal redemption as it was followed by further enslavement. The final redemption will be brought about through Hashem Himself and it won’t be followed by any more enslavement. It means when it came to the redemption from Mitzrayim, Hashem’s promise to Avraham at the *brit bein habetarim* (ברית בין הבתרים, The Covenant of Parts; Beresheet 15:10-17) came true during the plague of the firstborn: “But the nation whom they serve I am going to judge” (Beresheet 15:14). At this time, Hashem Himself passed through Mitzrayim and struck down the firstborn (Shemot 12:12).

Yet while the redemption was carried out by Hashem Himself, the majority of that redemption was carried out by Moshe and Aharon. Only a small part of it was done directly by the hand of Hashem. In the future, however, the redemption of *Klal Yisrael* will be done completely by Hashem. This is why the verse says, “*anochi, anochi*” when discussing the subject of future redemption, hinting that this time it will be done completely through the hand of Hashem.

One of the explanations of three animals represent Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov. Avraham served his guests calf (Beresheet 18:7), Yitzchak was almost sacrificed upon an altar but then exchanged for a ram (Beresheet 22:13), and Ya’akov wore goat’s hair (Beresheet 27:9) to disguise himself and receive blessing from Yitzchak. As for a turtle dove and a pigeon (Beresheet 15:9), it symbolizes *Yisrael* will be trampled on and beaten by the nations of the world throughout their time in exile. However, *Yisrael* will be one despite their perils as Avraham left the birds whole, meaning the *Yisrael* will always remain united (Beresheet 15:10) until the end of days.

Other commentators explain the birds in a different way. They say the birds of prey represent King David, swooping down to defeat all the enemies of *Yisrael*. However, Avraham’s chasing away of the birds (Beresheet 15:11) demonstrate that this will not be fully accomplished until the arrival of the Messiah.

¹ Yalkut Shimoni, Yeshayahu, Remez 474

² *ibid*, 577

This is one of the reasons we read from Tehillim chapter 27 which says “*YHWH is my light*” – He enlightens me with the knowledge of what is good and what is not good. “*And my deliverance*” – He saves me from my evil inclination, which seeks to entice me to defy what I know is right. “*Whom should I fear? YHWH is the refuge of my life. Whom should I dread?*” – Those who put their trust in physical defenses, such as a fortress, can never feel safe and secure. But the one whose fortress is Hashem Himself fears nobody.

Returning to Yishayahu, the Midrash explains that the first “*anochi*” means Hashem married you in Sinai (Shemot 20) by giving you the *matan* Torah (Giving of the Torah). Now, you are given a divorce because you did not heed to My voice. The second “*anochi*”, Hashem will remarry you and never again be divorced, meaning you will be His for eternity when the Messiah returns.

We have seven “gates” in our body: two ears, two eyes, two nostrils, and a mouth. These are the gates rather ‘judges.’ The judges do not only apply to the legal systems of the world. Rather, these ‘gates’ are ‘judges’ that determine what you should do. You also have to judge using the “gates” in your body. Should I see this or not? Should I listen to this or not? Should I say this or not?

In verse 19, the Torah says, “Don’t take a bribe.” This refers to a situation when a person is about to sin. A good judge (*yetzer tov*, *Good Inclination*) will say, “Don’t do it because it is prohibited by the Torah.” But, the bad judge (*yetzer hara*, *Evil Inclination*) will say, “Do it. After all, it is only one time. What is the big deal?” So, the *yetzer hara* is trying to convince you that it is okay since no one sees you. This is the meaning of bribery.

Shimon HaTzaddik explain that the world stands on three things: Torah, *avodah* (service, prayer), and *chessidim* (acts of kindness). A question: when it comes to ‘acts of kindness’, why does it say in plural? It should have said *chesid* (חֶסֶד, act of kindness). Torah means learning the Torah and doing the *mitzvot* (deeds). *Avodah* means performing the service in the Temple. Since we no longer have the Temple, it is through prayer that we perform services.

A chair needs four legs. If it stands on three legs, it is unstable. *Chesed* has two-legs: we can act with the body, and second is with money. Let’s elaborate: If I see a blind person attempting to cross the street, I run to that person and assist him to cross the street by stopping the cars. Second scenario: A person knocks on my door and ask for money for good deeds, then I give that person money for him to do good deeds through my money. So, there are two ways of doing kindness, one is with the body and the other is with the money. These are the examples of *chessidim*.

Shimon ben Gamaliel says that the world exists on three things: *din* (דִּין, judge), *emet* (אֱמֶת, truth), and *shalom* (שְׁלוֹם, peace). He said that Shimon HaTzaddik’s reference is to the Heavens. That is why there are many acts of kindness in order for the Heavens to sit firmly on the earth. Gamaliel is referring to this physical, lower world. So, three legs which symbolizes stool, it is enough for this world as it is written, “Thus said YHWH, “The heavens are My throne, and the earth is My footstool.” (Yishayahu 66:1)

The judgment is not only judging others but myself as well in a righteous manner as it is written, “Hypocrite! First remove the plant from your own eye, and then you shall see clearly to remove the splinter out of your brother’s eye.” (Mattithyahu 7:5) It is so easy to see the wrongdoing of others, but not of my own. We are very critical of pointing out the wrongdoings and judge him harshly. But when it comes to us, we seek for mercy, kindness. Thus, Yehushua said, “Hypocrite!” The *yetzer hara* is very corrupt. It will say, “You have

done few good things today. So, it is okay to do one sin. Hashem still loves you.” That is why we need a good judge.

Next is *emet* (אמת, truth). The world cannot exist without truth. If we remove ‘aleph’ from ‘emet’, we are left with ‘mem’ and ‘tav’ which, together means ‘death’.

Hashem created the world with peace. The peace is not just a peace between the countries nor is it between husband and wife. But it is also a peace within myself. Most people do not have peace within themselves. That is why there is so much conflict, not just within myself but with others. If I claim to be a follower of Yehushua, then there has to be a peace as He said, “Peace I leave with you – My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (Yochanan 14:27) This is the meaning of *shalom* (peace).

However, the *yetzer hara* comes and pull us away with sweet words so we can’t make clear diagnosis of our self by distorting the reality and by bringing turmoil using emotions. To put it all together, during the month of Elul, when we do *teshuvah* (repentance), we first had to judge (*din*) ourselves to see the truth (*emet*), so that we can be at peace (*shalom*).