

39 – Shoftim - Outline

Shoftim Summary:

- “Shoftim” = “Judges”
 - “You shall appoint judges and enforcers in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment” (Deuteronomy 16:18)
 - 3 uses of root “shaphat” in this verse
 - the center parsha of Devarim
 - the center of God’s plan has a focus on servant leadership, like the shamash of the menorah does, as Dr. Hollisa Alewine points out in her Creation Gospel teachings: (<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYBu7T6N-D2KLez80KJ3V8lg1P6gOEviZ>)
- Two related broad topics in Shoftim:
 - Israel’s various types of leaders and
 - some of the major issues they must deal with and teach the people about
- Topics:
 - commandments regarding appointing **judges** and **enforcers** and upholding justice generally
 - commandments to not plant trees or set up stones associated with worship and how to judge an idolater
 - the establishment of a Levitical high court at Jerusalem to handle the most difficult cases
 - the biblical source for the creation of the **Sanhedrin**
 - laws regarding establishing kings and other laws for kings
 - the establishment of the Israeli **monarchy**
 - provisions for the **priests** and Levites from the tithes and sacrifices
 - prohibitions on child sacrifice, divination, fortune telling, and sorcery
 - the prophecy that a **Prophet** will come like Moses
 - a repetition about false **prophets** and the testing of prophets
 - the command to establish cities of refuge
 - for one proven to be a murderer, “Your eye shall not pity him.”
 - the command to not move boundary stones
 - laws about witnesses and especially discerning and purging from the nation a false witness
 - “Your eye shall not pity.”
 - laws for going to war
 - distant cities are offered terms of surrender, but Canaanite cities within the Promised Land are to be utterly wiped out
 - the case of the body found in the field with no witnesses as to how he died

The Month of Elul

- 6th month, started Wed. night

- an especially beautiful puzzle - a picture that both affirms the wisdom and teachings of Israel but incomplete without knowledge of Yeshua
- “Elul” = “Harvest” (Akkadian)
 - we have come to the real harvest time for this first 7-month journey, especially in terms of the part WE are given to play in working out our salvation
 - the work that begins now continues for 40 days to Yom Kippur
 - at that point, our work is done and we are told to wait upon the Lord, to wait upon the finishing work of the Messiah
 - the good news for today: we begin that final stretch now in Elul; we have time to take action to be ready
- climate and agriculture connections
 - heat starting to break, grape harvest fully underway, grain farmers may even begin preparing the ground to receive the rain
 - a change is beginning
 - in Israel, rains have been absent – a physical reflection of a kind of separation of heaven and earth, the Groom and the Bride
 - R’Slifkin: the expectancy for the return of the rains begins to grow
 - the wife PREPARES to relate again to the husband
 - the Bride hears now: “Return, O maiden of Israel”
 - the language of Jeremiah 31 before the statement of the New Covenant
 - the bride begins to sense the impending new life that approaches, the gracious New Covenant in Yeshua’s blood presented on Yom Kippur
- arousal from above and arousal from below
 - there are some months in which God is the Initiator and some months where He give us the chance to respond
 - top-down = arousal from above
 - bottom-up = arousal from below
 - Nissan (1), Sivan (3), Av (5) – arousal from above
 - Iyar (2), Tammuz (4), Elul (6) – arousal from below
 - the work we do now should arouse a response of compassion from God in the next month, the seventh month
 - onus on us reflected in the “chush” (bodily ability) of the month: “action”
 - action: the empowerment to gather up what we have seen and heard and take action for change, for growth, the taking of the spiritual and giving it a physical form
 - Shimona Tzukernik: the energy of last month, Av, is more of a masculine energy, whereas the energy of Elul is more feminine
 (https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/2266210/jewish/The-Month-of-Elul.htm 0m)
 - “Av” = “father,” masculine
 - “Elul” = “harvest,” – feminine position of receiving the seed
- mazal: Virgo, the Virgin
 - feminine + innocent

- God is helping in this month to provide the energy the engaged Bride needs to take action regarding guilt and innocence
- but we are not innocent; the whole point of the 3 Weeks and the destruction of the 9th of Av was to help us feel our sin and separation from God; what's the point of having the month of the Virgin now?
- how do we account for: 1) the goal harvest for the first half of the year, 2) arousal from below, 3) the month of action, 4) the month of innocence when we have just experienced so clearly our guilt?
 - answer that ties it all together: teshuvah (repentance, return)
 - Elul is known firstly as the month of repentance
 - repentance is:
 - the ultimate harvest for the first journey in the year
 - what we do when we've become personally responsible to the Torah then suffered a break in relationship because of our unfaithfulness
 - what we do now as He puts the ball in our court and gives us the energy to act from our own free will
 - what we do when we see that we are guilty and we want to return to a place of innocence
 - what the Jewish sages have been telling us is the root of Elul
 - such a picture!
- more to come next week on Elul and teshuvah, but for now:
 - assignment: begin to think about the areas of our lives that we want to weigh carefully now- life categories
 - R' Raskin suggests incorporating into our self-examination the 3 Garments of the Soul: thought, speech, and action.
 - we should consider the 3 Garments as we think now about our relationships, our use of time and finances, etc.
 - understand: repentance is not about feeling guilty for a while, then moving on as before, thinking our job is done; it's about taking small course-correcting actions
 - not necessarily aiming for the sky, just for the next steps that are within our reach to walk the path before us more faithfully
 - do this examination and course correcting NOW, in the month of Elul, the month of action. We want to come to Rosh Hashanah with hearts and minds at rest in the knowledge that we are ready for God's outpouring of mercy through His Son.
 - of course Believers know that our actions will never be enough to earn our ultimate salvation; Yom Kippur exists because we can never do enough

- this time of teshuvah is not about earning salvation but about demonstrating our wholehearted devotion to God

A Few Giving Stories

- we are told that one of the practical things we can do in Elul is to increase in our tzedakah this month
- when we give selflessly, God does powerful things, little miracles that can actually be very big in people's lives.
- Stories:
 - Just Driving Through: (<https://www.rd.com/article/kindness-strangers/>)
 - How Did She Know?: (<https://www.rd.com/article/kindness-strangers/>)
 - Little Ego, Big Haircut: (<https://www.marcandangel.com/2016/12/26/12-stories-of-kindness-and-generosity-that-will-change-the-way-you-live/>)

Placing Shoftim

- Sometimes Re'eh brings in the month of Elul and sometimes Shoftim does; both speak directly to the move toward teshuvah in the month:
 - Re'eh: "look through your journey and see now the two paths that stretch out in front of you"
 - Shoftim: "judge yourself and take action – shoftim and shoterim (enforcers)
- Moses' shift to the topic of authority here seems logical
 - foundation pieces of Re'eh: the need to choose God, the proper way to worship Him, the testing of a prophet, the food laws, tithes, and the appointed times, the mo'edim
 - next Moses addresses the authorities: the judges, enforcers, priests, kings, and prophets
 - it's a priority to establish and instruct the authorities
 - they represent God to the people and must be clean, holy vessels
 - Yeshua in John 14:9-11 (from the Brit Chadashah reading for Shoftim): "Can't you see, Philip, that I represent the Father to you because I am in Him and He is in Me, and everything I say to you comes directly from the Father?"
 - they must be above bribery and every lowly motive because they help to teach the people and enforce Torah boundaries
- Shoftim's placement in the Torah and in the calendar leads us to do the work of judging ourselves now so that there is less need for God to judge us harshly at the time appointed for judgment
 - our defense attorney can stand up and say, "He's sorry, and he's going to change," or he can say "My client has searched his soul and has already begun making real changes."

Yeshua: Harsh Justice, Mercy for the Community, and God's Ultimate Community Design

- justice for the individual is mercy for the community

- in both the case of the one who murders and the malicious witness, the language is, “your eye shall not pity”
 - what the malicious witness did is to be done to him; he is to be purged from the nation, and the nation will hear and fear and never again will such evil be done among them
 - the community must be protected in these cases; sin is infectious. Likewise, fear of just punishment is infectious.
- in our modern world, we’re seeing much harm inflicted upon the society because of a misguided compassion for the individual
 - the problem: failure to recognize how interconnected we are and how greatly our individual decision affect the whole society
 - picture it that all of us live in a shallow pond, and every move we make causes waves that affect the entire pond
 - what happens in the privacy of one’s home affects everyone because the consequences of those choices can’t be kept in that bubble
 - REAL social justice requires REAL consequences for sin, period – anything less weakens society
- America’s spirit of independence can be used in wonderful ways (such as innovation) but is now being harnessed to make the case that we can atomize ourselves, existing entirely independently
 - to the point that truth is relative, “MY truth”
 - the Word of God is the only definition of truth; everything else is a lie; we need to care about that because all of us are making ripples with each word, action, and even thought
 - American Believers dropped the ball when so many said, “What they’re doing is wrong, but I don’t see much harm in letting them do their own thing and having a few legal protections to do so.”
 - we simply CAN’T live separately because our kids go to the same schools, we shop at the same stores, etc.
 - we need to do everything within our power legally to fight for THE truth
 - every time a government passes laws that sanction anti-Torah behavior, everyone will suffer for that decision, period
 - morality is inherent in every law; the question is, whose morality does a given law reflect?
- there does come a time when the best we can do is withdraw
 - but we can’t, really; we are finding that we can’t shelter our children enough against this powerfully deluding spirit that has been let loose in the world
 - over and over again children are turning “woke” and abandoning their parents

- we stay immersed in truth, but many of these parents did all the right things to immerse their kids in truth
 - the ultimate answer, of course, is the return of the Messiah
- how a community is supposed to work
 - the world WILL be healed one day
 - in the community for which we are designed:
 - everyone is submitted to the Father, Who is One
 - from Him, we receive THROUGH THE SON one Spirit
 - Brit Chadashah for Shoftim: “If you love Me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:15-17)
 - the Spirit comes from the Father, but the Son has to ask for It; It comes THROUGH the Son
 - the Spirit that moves inside us and flows between us brings unity of mind and heart
 - in Messiah, we also receive one BODY
 - by receiving various differing gifts, again from the Father and THROUGH the Son: “There is one body and one Spirit...But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Messiah’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:4-8)
 - with one God and one Spirit and one Lord through Whom comes both the Spirit and the diverse Body gifts, we truly become one, the Body of the Messiah
 - this is the plan that WILL happen in the end
 - as the days grow darker, we in the Believing community are being cleansed and also knitted together more
 - increasing life in the body of Messiah is an aspect of our times as the dark gets darker and the light lighter
 - the two paths have never stood in starker contrast, and this is part of the hope for the younger generations; the way of life is clear, and the way of death is clear; we pray that they will open their eyes and see

39 – Shoftim – Transcript (not exact)

Hello and welcome to Beth Tikkun and the Spiritual Seasons series, where we are looking at the weekly Torah portions in the light of the overall calendar and God’s pattern of spiritual development that we see play out in the year and beyond. This week we are in parsha Shoftim, from near the end of Deuteronomy chapter 16 through the first 9 verses of chapter 21.

“Shoftim” means “judges.” Listen for the idea of “judgment” three times in the first verse of the portion: “You shall appoint judges and enforcers in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment” (Deuteronomy 16:18). The root of “judge” here is “shaphat,” which is also the root of the word “mishpat,” which we have near the end of the verse. Parsha Shoftim takes us right through the middle of the book of Devarim, so we can assume that it has a special significance to the whole book. In fact, we usually find this idea of servant leadership right at the center of God’s designs, as Dr. Hollisa Alewine points out in her Creation Gospel teachings (<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYBu7T6N-D2KLez80KJ3V8lg1P6gOEJZ>). The center of the menorah is the shamash, the servant leader candle.

Shoftim’s diverse topics continue Moses’ review of the commandments from Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, but Moses also adds in here some new commandments that will come into play once they get into the Land. In my mind, all of the topics here fit into two related ideas: 1) Israel’s various types of leaders and 2) some of the major issues they must deal with and teach the people about. I’m going to list out the topics now, and try to listen for these two ideas. Once again, the portion is comprised of Israel’s various types of authorities and the most important topics for them to deal with in the course of their duties. In the portion, we find:

- commandments regarding appointing **judges** and upholding justice generally
- commandments to not plant trees or set up stones associated with worship and how to judge an idolater
- the establishment of a Levitical high court at Jerusalem to handle the most difficult cases; this is the biblical **source for the creation of the Sanhedrin**
- laws regarding establishing kings and other laws for kings – **the establishment of the Israeli monarchy**
- provisions for the **priests** and Levites from the tithes and sacrifices
- prohibitions on child sacrifice, divination, fortune telling, and sorcery
- the prophecy that a **Prophet** will come like Moses
- a repetition about false prophets and the testing of prophets
- the command to establish cities of refuge; here it says that if someone is found to be a murderer, the elders of his city are to personally take hold of him and hand him over to the avenger of blood; it says, “Your eye shall not pity him.”
- the command to not move boundary stones
- laws about witnesses and especially discerning and purging from the nation a false witness; the malicious witness is to be put to death so that the nation will hear and fear and never do this evil; again here, as with the murderer who had fled to a City of Refuge, the text says that when dealing with a malicious witness, “Your eye shall not pity.” And it goes on, “It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Deuteronomy 19:21).
- next comes a whole chapter about laws for going to war: distant cities are offered terms of surrender, but Canaanite cities within the Promised Land are to be utterly wiped out.

When they go to war, the priests first address them and tell them to not fear because God is fighting with them, then the enforcers, or officers, are to address them and weed out those who have great unfinished business and have not yet tasted of the fruit of their endeavors, along with weeding out those who are fearful, lest their fear affect the rest of the fighting men

- lastly, there is the case of how the town leaders are to absolve themselves of blood guilt when a body is found in a field with no witnesses as to how the person died; a cow is killed, and its blood is used as a means of expressing the town's innocence

The Month of Elul

After that summary of the portion, let's pause now before we go deeper in the text to talk about the new month that has just begun, the month of Elul, which is the 6th month in the year. In planning out these thoughts for today, it struck me more than ever what a beautiful puzzle God has given us with this month. Each clue to the nature of the month, by itself, has its own kind of shine, but when they all come together within the framework of salvation, the resulting picture is just breathtaking. It's a picture that both affirms the wisdom and teachings of the priestly nation of Israel but also one that isn't complete without knowledge of Yeshua.

Let's start with the meaning of "Elul." The Babylonian Akkadian word "elul" means "harvest." The journey so far starting in the first month of Nissan has been leading to this month, this harvest, when our own contribution to the journey of salvation begins to crescendo for this half of the yearly journey. The highest spiritual harvest now begins in Elul and will continue for 40 days through the first 10 days of Tishrei, the 7th month, bringing us to Yom Kippur, when our work of seeing and learning and shaping is done; at that point, we are told to do little more than wait upon the Lord, to wait upon the finishing and fulfilling work of the Messiah. That's looking ahead to the 7th month. The good news for us today is that as we begin this season now in Elul, we have time to take action to be ready for that momentous day of Yom Kippur. We have time now to prepare.

In terms of the climate and agriculture, the heat is starting to break and the grape harvest is now fully underway. The grain farmers in Israel may even begin looking to prepare the ground for the next grain crop, breaking it up to ready the ground to receive the rains. A change is beginning, and around the earth we begin to feel it now. Here in Ohio, the daisies are in bloom and are receiving frequent visits from a profusion of butterflies. The tent caterpillars have spun their hazy nests in the trees. The leaves are starting to look a bit tired and eaten through here and there. Fruit trees bend under the weight of swollen pears and apples. Some trees are already starting to drop their first leaves.

In Israel, the rains have been absent for some time now, which is a physical reflection of a kind of separation of heaven and earth, a separation of husband and wife such that the wife has not received what she needs for fertility. A kind of rift has opened between the two. R'Slifkin says that in Israel now, the EXPECTANCY for the return of the rains begins to grow. The wife PREPARES to relate again to the husband. "Prepare" is the word of the moment. If she listens closely, the Bride can hear in the air the whispered invitation, "Return, O maiden of Israel!" This

call to the wayward bride to return is the language of Jeremiah 31; it is this chapter that is in the air, the calling to the bride that precedes the outpouring of the New Covenant in the second half of Jeremiah 31. We can say that what the bride is beginning to sense now is the impending new life that now approaches, and that new life is the gracious New Covenant in Yeshua's blood presented on Yom Kippur.

As we dig into Elul a bit deeper, let's understand that there are some months in which God is the Prime Mover, the Initiator, and there are some months where He sits back a bit to give us the chance to respond. He gives the seed, then steps back to give us the time to nurture the seed and bring forth its life, its potential, and our response evokes a further response from Him. In other words, there are months when the ball is in our court, so to speak. We go back and forth like this with God as the months go by. It begins in Nissan with God shining a great light from above, and light is seed. We respond in the second month during the counting of the Omer by doing some early work on ourselves. In the third month, God's great light from above happens at Shavuot, the giving of the Torah. Our response is what we will do with the Torah in the fourth month of Tammuz. The fifth month of "Av" is again top-down, "Av" being the Father, Who is pictured in the month as the powerful Lion that takes a flame and sets it to the timbers in His own house, burning it to the ground on Tisha B'Av. The sixth month of Elul brings it back to our response once again. The Jewish sources call this idea of the ball being in our court "arousal from below." (R' Raskin on Elul as arousal from below (https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/3784586/jewish/The-Zodiac-of-Elul.htm 1m), and God's top-down action as "arousal from above." The work we do now should arouse a response of compassion from God in the next month, the seventh month.

The fact that the onus is on us to some degree this month is reflected in the "chush" of the month, the bodily ability associated with the month: for Elul, the "chush" is simply called "action." It is a month in which we are specially empowered to gather up what we have seen in the month of seeing and heard in the month of hearing and weigh all of that, and TAKE ACTION, action for change, action for growth.

To put slightly different language on it, Shimona Tzukernik says that the energy of last month, Av, is more of a masculine energy, whereas the energy of Elul is more feminine (https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/2266210/jewish/The-Month-of-Elul.htm from beginning). We don't need to look any farther than the names of the months to see this, with "Av" meaning "father," the masculine, and "Elul" meaning "harvest," which is the feminine position of receiving, receiving the seed. So, again, this is a month to work with the light and seed and truth and revelation that God has given, to incubate it and begin bringing forth new life.

All of this feminine language associated with Elul is giving expression to the mazal of the month, which is the Virgin, Virgo. The idea of the Virgin is certainly feminine, but this image brings more with it; it's not just a woman but an INNOCENT woman. Virgo is indicating that this is a month in which God is helping to provide the energy the engaged Bride needs to take action regarding guilt and innocence. And so the picture comes a bit clearer.

But what can we do regarding guilt and innocence? Isn't it the case that the whole point of the 3 Weeks and the destruction of the 9th of Av was to reveal our guilt? We've just been shown that we are far from the virgin. I mean, what's the point of having the month of the Virgin after we have fallen so badly in the previous months? The Temple went up in flames, and we saw that our guilt has caused the Groom to turn His back on us. Shouldn't it be up to Him to turn back? We can't undo our guilt.

How do we account for all of the following energies working together: 1) the goal harvest for the first half of the year, 2) arousal from below, 3) the month of action, 4) the month of innocence when we have just experienced so clearly our guilt?

The answer that ties everything together, the answer to the riddle of Elul is one word: teshuvah, repentance. Elul is known first and foremost as the month of repentance, the month of returning to our Groom, the month of returning to our Source. Repentance begins now and is emphasized for 40 days, all the way through the 10 Days of Awe in the 7th month, culminating in Yom Kippur. REPENTANCE IS THE HARVEST the first half of the yearly journey has been preparing us for. Repentance is what we do when we've become personally responsible to the Torah then suffered a break in relationship because of our unfaithfulness. Repentance is what we do now as He puts the ball in our court and gives us the ability to act, to act from our own volition and free will. Repentance is what we do when we see that we are guilty and we want to return to a place of innocence. And repentance is what the Jewish sages have for centuries been telling us is what lays at the root of Elul. The journey has led us to THIS.

Again, it's just wonderful to see the seemingly disconnected pieces all taking up their place to speak in unison such a clear message. Yes, He is a God Who hides Himself. But He hides Himself in such a way that He can be found if we have the eyes to see. And in these latter days of world history, He is opening our eyes to see. And praise Him for it. One way He is doing that is by making available to us so much teaching at our fingertips. We have instant access to the breadth of the Grand Conversation.

There's a lot more to say about Elul that we don't have time for now if we want to get to our text in Shoftim, so we'll come back to the topics of Elul and teshuvah next week. For now, let me suggest that our practical assignment for the week is to come up with the areas of our lives that we want to weigh carefully now. Let's make a list of the categories in our lives that we want to probe and consider to see how we're doing. R' Raskin suggests incorporating into our self-examination the Three Garments of the Soul: thought, speech, and action. We can apply each of these three realms to the more specific categories we want to examine, like our relationships to spouse and family and spiritual community and neighbors. In your relationship to your spouse, how are you doing in thought? How are you doing in speech? How are you doing in action? We can apply the three garments to how we're doing with using our time efficiently, how we're doing with what enters our eyes and ears and mouths, how we're doing with the use of the finances God has given us and in each area of our life. Teshuvah begins with this kind of deep introspection.

There's much to say here, but understand this important point: repentance is not about feeling guilty for a while, then moving on as before, thinking our job is done. The goal is not a primarily an emotional one, seeing and feeling your guilt. Repentance is much less about feeling guilty and much more about taking action, small actions to correct our course, the course He has us on. We're not necessarily aiming for the sky, just for the next steps that are within our reach to walk the path before us more faithfully.

And we want to do this examination and course correcting NOW, in the month of Elul, the month of action. We want to come to Rosh Hashanah with hearts and minds at rest in the knowledge that we are ready for God's outpouring of mercy through His Son. We want to be JOYOUS on Yom Kippur. Even though we are fasting on that day, we come to the fast knowing that, in a way, the fast is our last task in a chain of actions stretching back into the month of Elul, a chain that we have engaged with fully. THE TIME TO REPENT IS NOW.

Of course Believers know that our actions are not enough and will never be enough to get us to the goal, but this understanding that our ultimate salvation does not depend on us is inherent in Yom Kippur; Yom Kippur exists because we can never do enough to earn our salvation. So this time of teshuvah is not about us earning salvation. It's about being wholehearted in our walk with God. It's about giving our best and trusting God with the rest. And so if we prepare now by doing teshuvah now, as we receive atonement on Yom Kippur through the blood of Yeshua, we come to that day knowing that we have expressed a wholehearted devotion to God.

A Few Giving Stories

But before we leave the topic of Elul today, I want to share a few quick giving stories, little snapshots, really. We are told that one of the practical things we can do in Elul is to increase in our tzedakah this month. So, let these little snippets of generosity be an encouragement for us in doing that. Giving is very near to God's heart, and when we give selflessly, God does powerful things. When we give, He does little miracles that can actually be very big in people's lives. God uses our giving to change peoples' hearts, and that's monumental.

Just Driving Through

The first two stories come from Reader's Digest. This first comes from Cindy Earls from Ada, Oklahoma. "When my friend and I were injured in a car accident, a family from out of state stopped to help. Seeing we were hurt, they drove us to the hospital and stayed there until we were released. They then took us home, got us food, and made sure we were settled in. Amazingly, they interrupted their vacation to help us." <https://www.rd.com/article/kindness-strangers/>

I think these kind strangers understood that they were made to witness this car accident for a reason. It wasn't coincidence. And so much of our giving of time and service, especially, depends on us recognizing that God has a plan for this moment in front of us that's different from the careful plan we had laid out for ourselves. They had planned out their vacation. But God said, "Take a day from your vacation and show kindness to these people." And in obedience, they said, "Let's put our plan aside. God has another path for us for today."

How Did She Know?

The second was sent to Reader's Digest by Nadine Chandler, from Winthrop, Massachusetts. "I was driving cross-country to start a new job. What began as a fun adventure turned into a nightmare when I realized I had run through most of my money and still had a ways to go. I pulled over and let the tears flow. That's when I noticed the unopened farewell card my neighbor had shoved in my hand as I left. I pulled the card out of the envelope, and \$100 dropped out—just enough to get me through the remainder of my trip. Later, I asked my neighbor why she had enclosed the money. She said, "I had a feeling it would help."

<https://www.rd.com/true-stories/inspiring/kindness-strangers/>

Imagine your frustration and fear when you find that you are a thousand miles away from everyone you know, and you don't have enough money to get to the end of the journey! It's a desperate moment like that that makes a small act of generosity into a life-changing experience.

Little Ego, Big Haircut

The last little story today comes from a number of giving stories collected and shared by Marc Chernoff. Someone wrote the following to him. "Times haven't been easy lately, but people have been kind. We live in a lower-middle-class neighborhood. My wife was just diagnosed with breast cancer last week, so my 14-year-old son decided that he wanted to raise money to help pay for some of her medical expenses. His idea was to go door to door around the neighborhood with hair clippers and let people shave a part of his head for a small donation of their choosing. He asked me whether a \$100 goal would be too much. I told him not to get his hopes up. He came back home ten minutes ago with a bald head and \$1,225. Three people gave him \$100 bills."

<https://www.marcandangel.com/2016/12/26/12-stories-of-kindness-and-generosity-that-will-change-the-way-you-live/>

Well, I don't know what you were like at age 14, but I certainly would have dreaded suddenly showing up at school bald. But here was a young man who didn't let the vanity of youth get in the way of his good deed for his mom.

Placing Shoftim

Well, with that background now, let's turn our attentions to placing Shoftim in the progression of Torah portions and in the calendar. First of all, let's notice that sometimes last week's portion of Re'eh brings in the month of Elul and sometimes Shoftim does. And both of these speak directly to the move toward teshuvah in the month: "Re'eh, look backward through your journey and see forward now the two paths that stretch out in front of you," and "Shoftim, judge yourself, Israel." We see and we judge and we take action. And speaking of the ACTION related to judgment, Shoftim begins not only with "judge" but "enforce," "Shoftim and shoterim you are to place in all your gates." It's quite amazing, really. God's brevity here with just a few key words built into the calendar that convey the breadth of this complex moment in the journey is just the height of poetry: "Repent, Israel, by SEEING the blessing and the curse and place at your gates JUDGES and ENFORCERS to make manifest that judgment." And, on top of what we can hear in these words now, they also spoke to a particular people at a particular

time on a surface level, the practical instructions for a generation 3,335 years ago. That's the first meaning, and it applies to us also in the same practical ways. But as we go deeper, God has structured these words to speak to us quite personally on this very day, today, three millennia and three centuries down the line. It's mind boggling, really. How can you lose with a God like this?

Moses' shift in this portion to authority seems logical here. He began his detailed recitation of the Torah in Re'eh with foundation pieces. Listen again to the foundation pieces Moses chooses, as these are good to review: in Re'eh, Moses addresses the need to choose God, the proper way to worship Him, the testing of a prophet, the food laws, tithes, and the appointed times, the mo'edim. These are foundation stones. What he decides to cover next is authority – the judges, enforcers, priests, kings, and prophets. These authority figures, in a way, represent God to the people, and it's a priority to establish them and instruct them, so they're coming relatively early here in this review of the Torah. Speaking of this representing of God to the people, Yeshua talks about this in the Brit Chadashah reading for Shoftim in John 14 when He says to Philip, "Can't you see, Philip, that I represent the Father to you because I am in Him and He is in Me, and everything I say to you comes directly from the Father?" (John 14:9-11). And so, if the authorities God gives us represent Him to us, they must be clean and holy vessels. They must be above bribery and every lowly motive. They are the human connections between God and the people. They speak His word to us. They help to teach the people how to walk with God, and they enforce the boundaries of the Torah. They must be beyond reproach.

One idea we shouldn't miss in the placement of Shoftim here in the Torah and in the calendar is that if we do the work of judging ourselves now, there is less need for God to judge us harshly at the time appointed for judgment, which we are told is the period of Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur. The defense attorney can stand up there on our behalf and say, "He's sorry, and he's going to change," but how much weightier is it when he can stand up there and say, "My client has tripped up a bit, but he's already shown his remorse by searching his soul and making some real changes."

Yeshua: Harsh Justice, Mercy for the Community, and God's Ultimate Design

Well, moving on now, we have time here to dip into one element of the portion that God impressed upon me this week. In the end, we'll connect this subject to Yeshua. It's not a topic that I dip into very often, but if there's a place for it, it's here in Shoftim. We might summarize the idea by saying justice for the individual is mercy for the community.

I mentioned in the summary that there are a couple of cases here where people misstep so egregiously that Moses says, "Show them no pity." These are the cases of the murderer and the malicious witness, the witness who lies to the court in order to ruin someone. The same language is used in both cases: "Your eye shall not pity." In the case of the murderer, the elders of his town are to retrieve him personally from the City of Refuge to which he has fled, and they are to hand him over to the Avenger of Blood, so that the guilt for shedding innocent blood will be purged from the nation. And in the second case, Moses says that what the malicious witness

wanted to do to his neighbor is to be done to him instead. He is to be purged from the nation, and the nation will hear and fear and never again will such evil be done among them.

The community must be protected in these cases. Sin is infectious. Likewise, fear of just punishment is infectious. It is not compassion to spare the individual and inflict great harm on the whole nation. In these cases, the death sentence strengthens the community against the kinds of sin that tear a nation apart.

In our modern world, which is increasingly one culture, we are often seeing harm inflicted upon the society because of a misguided compassion for the individual. The real problem here is that we fail to recognize how interconnected we are and how very greatly our individual decisions and lifestyles affect the whole body. It might be helpful to picture ourselves this way: imagine that we are all living in a shallow pond, and every move we make causes waves. Every choice we make creates ripples that are felt to some degree across the entire pond. People say, "What do you care what happens in the privacy of this other person's home? What business is it of yours?" Well, if you could keep the effects of your choices contained within your home, you might be right. But you can no more keep the effects of your private choices contained within your bedroom than you can stop the waves from racing outward after dropping a stone in a quiet pond. REAL social justice requires REAL consequences for sin, period. Anything less is going to weaken the whole body.

It's not a surprise that a lot of this false compassion for the individual is originating here in America because we have a very strong pull in us toward individuality and independence; we could even call it a "spirit" of independence. This is a gift when it is channeled properly, and it is a curse when it is not. Many of our founding fathers and mothers would not settle for being controlled religiously, so they left their homelands and came here, and they carried inside them the seed of independent thinking, which they used for the good. Our great ability to innovate here in America is an outgrowth of this spirit of independence. But what we're seeing now is that same independent spirit being turned to the lie that we can atomize ourselves, that we can somehow exist completely independent like separate atoms, separate little worlds spinning on our own. We are being naively told that we can even choose our own morality. We hear things like, "It's MY truth." Well, there's no such thing as MY truth or YOUR truth. There's truth, period, and everything else falls short of truth, so to the degree your truth or my truth is different from THE truth, it's a lie, and it will result in death, and not just death for me or you – it's death for everyone. The definition of truth is the Word of God. If "your truth" or mine doesn't match up to THE definition of truth, then it ain't true. And I need to care about that because you and me both are making ripples with every word, every action, even every thought we have.

And Believers in America dropped the ball when so many said, "What that person is doing is wrong, but I guess that's his life and his choice, and I can't really do anything about it, and it's not really a big deal if he has legal protections for his lifestyle choices. Fine, take the protections and leave us alone. You do you, and I'll do me. Let's live peacefully in our separate realities." Well, it doesn't work that way because our children are going to the same schools and they

have to be taught something. Whose version of truth are they going to be taught? It doesn't work that way because we shop at the same stores. It doesn't work that way because we see the same advertisements.

The fact of the matter is that those of us who accept and honor THE truth need to do everything we can do legally to insist that others live according to THE truth. Every compromise on that front will result in death for everyone. Understand clearly that every time a government passes laws that sanction anti-Torah behavior, everyone will suffer for that decision, period. There is no such thing as legalized sin that doesn't bring the consequences of sin upon everyone who lives under such a law, and the wages of sin is death. Legislatures WILL legislate morality, no matter what. Morality is inherent in the creation of laws. Every law reflects SOMEONE'S understanding of right and wrong. There's no escaping that. Every law reflects a moral code that is the source of that law.

In the end, there does come a time when the best you can do is withdraw, withdraw as much as possible from the parts with the deadly infection. And even then, the unfortunate truth that so many are finding out is that we can't really shelter the children from the madness out there. The delusion is so, so very powerful in our times. Truly a spirit has been let loose to wreak havoc in the world, and it's supernatural. And the children are growing up within this environment that is so saturated by this evil. And the children will make many important decisions before they have much knowledge and life experience. Parent after parent is being rejected by grown children under the woke delusion. The battlefield is bloody and getting bloodier all the time. We must be immersed in truth, and that's part of our protection. But there are parents who spent years immersing their children in truth, doing everything right, only to have their kids turn on them in a moment, in the blink of an eye, leaving the parents who sacrificed so much for them standing there heartbroken.

I don't have the answer here. But I know that the ultimate answer is the return of the Messiah. And so we say, "Come quickly, Lord Yeshua."

With such a heavy topic, let's spend a little time looking toward the truth of the healing of the world that is also coming, the deeper magic, so to speak. The way this world is supposed to work, and the way it will work, is that everyone is fully submitted to the Father, Who is One. And from Him, we receive THROUGH THE SON one Spirit. And we read about this in the Brit Chadashah reading for Shoftim. Listen to the following spoken by Yeshua and recorded in John 14: "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:15-17). Yeshua must ask the Father to send the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit comes FROM the Father but THROUGH the Son, through the Son's asking for the Father to send the Spirit. And again in the next chapter of John, Yeshua says that HE will send the Spirit of Truth, Who proceeds from the Father (John 15:26). Now, here's the main point, the Spirit flowing within us and among us is the SAME Spirit, so the Spirit brings us into accord with one another, giving us one mind and one heart.

Having one mind and one heart is good, but it doesn't stop there. We need one body, too, to be fully one. And Scripture tells us that in the same way that we receive one Spirit, we also receive diverse gifts so that we can become one body. These gifts also come FROM the Father and THROUGH the Son so that we can contribute as unique parts of a body, which is called the Body of Messiah. Listen to the following from Ephesians 4: "There is one body and one Spirit...But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Messiah's gift. Therefore it says, 'When He ascended on high He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men'" (Ephesians 4:4-8). In other words, the Messiah gives us all gifts of certain forms, the measured amount of the Messiah's gift to each of us.

And so with one God and one Spirit and one Lord through Whom comes both the Spirit and the diverse Body gifts, we truly become one, the Body of the Messiah. That is the plan. And make no mistake, God will have His way in the end. It will happen. And that is what is happening now to some degree in the Body of Believers. We're not fully there yet, obviously, but we're on the way, and as the days grow darker and the persecution increases, the greater Body of Messiah will be purged and knitted ever more together. This increasing life in the body of Messiah is also a part of our times along with the tribulations that are tearing our culture apart. So be encouraged today that as the dark gets darker, the light gets lighter.

And this is part of the hope for especially the younger people who have fallen into the woke trap. The two paths have never stood in starker contrast to each other. You need look no further than the suicide statistics to see which way is death and which way is life. And so we pray now that the eyes of the younger generations would be opened now to see the two paths, the way that leads to darkness and death and the way that leads to light and life.

Well, that's all for today. Thank you for listening. I have put a link to an outline of this teaching below the video. May God bless us today to be a people who take seriously the call to repentance when the opportunity is being extended to us. May we be a people who are willing to have our plans interrupted when God sends us on a little mission. May we be a people who understand that every precious person's sin affects all of us, a people who fights for truth in our world today. And may we rise up to be the people He has made us to be. Shalom.