

4 Elul, 5774 (30/8/14) **Dealing With Issues: Staying In Shape Spiritually** J. M. Terrett

Shoftim

Judges

Torah:

Deut. 16:18-21:9

Haftarah:

Is. 51:12-52:12

Brit Chadashah:

Matt. 3:1-17

Sherri p. 139) **Ps. 17**

Jewish Hero: Aaron and Dawn

Summary: Judgement not only means finding out the truth and punishing evil, it also means dealing with and resolving issues and this week's Torah portion deals with the people's need to establish judges and let them deal with such things as: idolatry, murder, and witchcraft. As well there is a mention of the rights and obligations of the future monarchy, the promise of the future prophet like Moses (Yeshua), the cities of refuge, cases of fraud, exceptions from military service, the conduct of war and how to handle unsolved crimes, Unless you know how to deal with the messy, negative aspects of living, you cannot prevent this infection from weakening and destroying spiritual health and life.

The Haftarah portion deals with the promise of the return from captivity, but also fast forwards to the arrival of our Messiah and the eventual establishment of His eternal kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. This is always our double hope as Jews and Gentiles – not only will He continually deliver us and guide through the valleys of our lives, but He wants us to keep our eyes fixed on our permanent home and the eventual arrival of all that He has promised concerning His glorious kingdom. The passage ends with an exhortation to avoid impurity (defilement) and not to act in haste or panic, because the L-RD will direct us, generation by generation, until all is fulfilled.

The Brit Chadashah portion deals with the ministry of John the baptist and the baptism (immersion) of our L-RD. John calls for sincere, authentic repentance which brings forth fruit (takes action), because the L-RD is gathering His wheat (those who take action) and scattering the chaff (those who do not take action).

Our L-rd was baptized in preparation for His eventual sacrifice as the perfect Lamb of G-d who came to die for sinners and to set us free to bear good fruit.

The lesson from all three passages is that our lives are eventually more impacted by the decisions we make than by the events which happen to us, be they ever so good or ever so evil. So it is never as important to consider what is happening to us, as much as it is important to consider how we should respond to our lives, both from an eternal perspective and one which is based on righteousness (positive repentance).

Obedience and sincere repentance are the sign of a good tree and it is the only way to stay in shape spiritually as we deal with the issues we face in the ups and downs of our lives.

I have selected several verses which I would like to read to you and comment upon as we consider the positive impact of judgment and repentance on our lives. There is so much more that could be said and if in your reading of the weekly passages, you encounter things you would like to discuss or that you wish to clarify because you do not understand them, come to Yeshiva Bible Study and we will dig in at greater depth together.

Deut. 16:20: *Justice and only justice shall you pursue (you shall punctually follow justice), so that you may live and occupy the land that the L-RD your G-d is giving you.*

Doing that we know is right from His Word quickly and solely is the key to a happy, long life in the L-RD. It does not matter what is going on around us among the nations and fashions of the world, because we are called out of the world to walk in His light. We need to avoid being part-time light dwellers because there is no room for any darkness to linger in our lives.

Deut. 17:19: *He shall have it (a copy of the Law) with him and read from it every day so that he may learn to fear the L-RD His G-d and observe and put into practice all the words of the law and all its ordinances.* Modern orthodox Jews require that every adult Jewish male write himself a copy of the Torah and use it for personal study as part of what it means to own the Word of G-d. If any of you wish to do this, more power to you, but the point of this requirement is two fold. First that the leader (king) of the people study and act according to the Word and also that he own the Word as his true mandate for ruling.

How is your study doing, royal priesthood? How well is His Word integrated into your life (how well is your life integrated into His word)? His Word is our link to His righteousness and to His promises – how strong is your link? Do you perform regular, daily maintenance. Do you see the situations of your life as opportunities to practice righteousness and obedience, for this is the royal way, and the only way to be happy and fulfilled in Him (to the Jew first and also to the Gentile).

Deut. 18:13: *You must remain completely loyal to the L-RD your G-d (and not seek out soothsayers and diviners, or magicians, mediums, augurs [sign seekers] or those that pass their children through the fire).* People in today's secular world want to cover all their bases and many forms of spiritual help and guidance are available which promise protection and success to give you an edge over the competition and to help you succeed far above your natural abilities. This kind of spiritual opportunism is forbidden to the disciples of the L-RD.

He has not come to give us a better ride, or an advantage for us over others which will help us become part of a spiritual elite. We are delivered from darkness to walk in the light and we are told to have nothing further to do with spiritual gimmicks that claim to give us spiritual power over the events of our lives – because the point of life is to be completely loyal to our King and to the stipulations of His Word and not to try and find ways of cheating and taking short cuts to fame and fortune.

Deut. 19:10: *In order that innocent blood is not spilled forth in the midst of the country that the L-RD your G-d gives you as an inheritance and so that you would not be guilty of murder.*

The cities of refuge were there to protect innocent people and to make sure that justice was done so that both the rights of the deceased and the rights of the living were protected. Accidents can happen and should not be punished. Sometimes people pretend that an accident has happened in order to avoid suffering the consequences of intentional actions. These cities gave people the opportunity to have their case heard and judged and not just suffer a vendetta – where people punish others because of their pain and their anger and not because of any sense of righteousness and fair play. How about you? Do you resolve or allow your pain and anger determine how you respond?

Isaiah 51:13: *And would you forget the L-RD who made you and who stretched forth the heavens and founded the earth! And would you tremble before the oppressor because he seeks to destroy you! But where is the fury of the oppressor?* We live in a world where things frequently spin out of control and horrible things happen to innocent people and it could be easy to look at the power of evil, corrupt people who are misbehaving around the globe and forget that in spite of everything the L-rd is always in final control. And as long as we live under this final control we and our children will live to see the oppressors disappear as the glory of our Creator fills the earth. What are you looking at- the L-RD or the unruly bullies who are temporarily in charge and whose works will not endure?

Isaiah 52:12: *For you shall not go out in haste and you shall not go in flight, for the L-RD will go before and the G-d of Israel shall be your rear guard.* Even in the midst of great distress we should never give in to spiritual panic where we grasp at any straw and do anything we can to survive. When we realize that even through the most dire situations, the L-rd goes before us and is our rear guard, then we will maintain our spiritual perspective and overcome all and any darkness which comes against us. This is the enduring testimony of the House of Israel through the centuries and it is our calling to live lives free of spiritual panic and desperation, because even if they feed us into the ovens of Auschwitz, we are still on the winning team. They can take us captive to Babylon, but they can never remove us from the care and protection of the L-RD of hosts.

Matt. 3:8 *Produce therefore fruit worthy of repentance.* Most people want favour with G-d and want to make some kind of peace with the universe, but there is a price they are hesitant to pay. They will learn all kinds of techniques and perform all kinds of rituals, but there is only one key to peace with G-d – repentance based on a sincere faith in His Word. He wants to give us the power to change and to break free from all and any forms of spiritual captivity – whether it is of our own making or not. We cannot produce these on our, but we can repent (let go) and learn what His Word says, so that both our perspective and our lifestyle reflect His priorities and our confidence in them.

Judgment can set us free from folly and darkness as we learn to deal with the issues of our lives and see all that happens to us in our lives as opportunities for obedience based on our confidence in Him through His Word. As we come to celebrate a milestone in a couple's life, may we determine to use the circumstances of our lives as milestones to His faithful care and provision for those who walk according to his Word.