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Shabbat Shoftim

August 22, 2009

2 Ellul 5769

News

We received some news from Pastor Alexander Bolotnikov who leads the Jewish work in North America with Pastor Ralph Ringer.

SHALOM LEARNING CENTER

Since 2003 Shalom Learning Center opened its doors in Hollywood, FL as the unique educational/outreach institution sponsored by the North American division and the Quiet Hour. Since 2006 the Center started its journey 'on the road' with three distinct goals.

- Train the churches and lay members to reach Jewish Communities in their areas.
- Conduct and spearhead special outreach programs designed to bring the Good News to the Jewish people together with the lay people that participate in the training.
- Maintain presence in the Adventist colleges by conducting special events, courses and colloquia for the future pastors in order to create a pool of ministers that will be able to support lay members in their Jewish outreach.

Each year Shalom Learning Center takes a group of five or six lay members for a yearly course of training during which theoretical information is combined with the practical evangelistic activity on the site. The Summer time is a period of graduation for these students.

SHALOM LEARNING CENTER GRADUATION

On August 14-16 the Shalom Learning Center has graduated six more students. People from The groups of Chicago and Washington State started their training last year in Florida and completed the course this month.

Dr. Paula Lewis, the treasurer of the Beth Shalom Adventist Congregation provided the facility at her Brooklyn office for the students to stay.

We celebrated the Kabbalat Shabbat in Brooklyn. This event was a wonderful opportunity to invite some Jewish friends and neighbors that lived in this coop building.

Dr. Lewis succeeded to a retired Jewish orthodox doctor and many Jewish patients continue to come to this office to be treated. Three Jewish neighbors came and joined us for the ONEG and listened to the Torah study. There are many elderly Jewish people in New York who are lonely and are opened for the Message.

On Sabbath Morning Richard Marker, president of the Greater New York Conference pronounced a prayer of dedication for the students. Elder and Mrs. Marker came with an old Jewish neighbor and friend, Mrs. Davida who told us that she enjoyed the service and felt like at home. Mrs. Davida attended Reform Temple for her entire life as a honored guest she was called to read the Torah.

SHANA TOVA

This Shabbat is the 2nd of Ellul, It is the Jewish month of Teshuva (repentance) and coming back to the Almighty. Jews start to prepare themselves for the feasts and celebrations of Rosh Hashana (Feast of the Trumpett) known also has the Jewish new year, celebration of Yom Kippur (day of Atonement) and known as the great day of Judgment, and then celebration of Sukkot which is the joyful feast of the Tabernacles. It is a great time to approach your Jewish friends and to give them your best wishes for the feasts and for the coming year 5770. The first best wish is Shana Tova, which means "Happy New Year".

OVERVIEW

SHOFTIM

DEUTERONOMY 16:18-21:9

Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael to appoint judges and officers in their cities. A bribe of even an insignificant sum is forbidden.

Trees are not to be planted near Hashem's altar, as was the way of idolaters.

Blemishes in animals designated for offerings and other points of disqualification are listed.

The Great Sanhedrin is to make binding decisions on new situations according to Torah criteria to prevent the fragmentation of the Torah.

A very learned scholar who refuses to accept the Halachic decisions of the Sanhedrin incurs the death penalty.

A Jewish king may only have possessions and symbols of power commensurate with the honor of his office, but not for self-aggrandizement. He is to write for himself two sifrei Torah, one to be kept with him wherever he goes, so that he doesn't become haughty.

Neither the kohanim (priests) nor the levi'im (levites) are to inherit land in Eretz Israel, rather they are to be supported by the community by a system of tithes.

All divination is prohibited.

Hashem promises the Jewish People that He will send them a special prophet like him (many understand that this prophet is the Mashiach) to guide them, and Moshe explains how a genuine prophet may be distinguished from a false one.

Cities of refuge are to be provided an accidental killer to escape the blood-avenger from the deceased's family. However, someone who kills with malice is to be handed over to the blood-avenger.

Moshe cautions Bnei Yisrael not to move boundary markers to increase their property.

Two witnesses who conspire to "frame" a third party are to be punished with the very same punishment that they conspired to bring upon the innocent party.

A kohen is to be anointed specifically for when Israel goes to war, to instill trust in Hashem.

Among those disqualified from going to war is anyone who has built a new house but not lived in it yet, or anyone who is fearful or fainthearted.

An enemy must be given the chance to make peace, but if they refuse, all the males are to be killed.

Fruit trees are to be preserved and not cut down during the siege.

If a corpse is found between cities, the elders of the nearest city must take a heifer, slaughter it, and wash their hands over it, saying that they are not guilty of the death.

APPOINTING JUDGES

This week's Parasha, Shoftim, begins with the mitzvah of appointing judges and officers to ensure a just and rightful judicial system. The Parasha begins, "**You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people. . . . Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue.**" (Deut 16:18, 20). Our rabbis explain that the Torah commands to appoint judges "**in all your gates**" in order to ensure that the judicial system remains uncluttered, thus enabling the judges to pass just and correct judgment. As our sages in the Mishna tell us, "judges must take their time and not pass judgment hastily."

"**Judges and officers you shall appoint for you,**" according to our sages, also has another message. It implies that before a person judges others, they must judge themselves first.

This applies to an individual judging others or a judge passing judgment upon others. They must remember to judge themselves by the same standard they would use while judging another person. Then, and only then, can they "**judge the people with righteous judgment.**"

This is also in accordance with the following directives of our Talmudic sages, "First a person should correct his own faults before correcting others." For only then will they be able to properly influence the behavior of others. Similarly, "Do not judge others until you have put yourself in their place."

THE POWER OF BRIBING

This week's Parasha Shoftim continues saying: "**You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a**

bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” (Deut 16:19-20) What does the Torah mean by the phrase, “perverts the words of the righteous”? How could a judge who accepts a bribe be called “righteous”?

Rabbi Avraham Heshel, explains this with a personal experience. Two merchants once came before him to judge a case in which there was a dispute over a large sum of money. After listening to their arguments, the rabbi had an intuitive feeling that one of the litigants was trying to cheat the other.

The man realized that things were not going in his favor. In desperation, he decided to bribe the rabbi. Knowing that the righteous rabbi would never accept a bribe, he thought of an idea. He excused himself for a few minutes and went into the other room where the rabbi’s coat was hanging. He placed a sum of money into the rabbi’s coat pocket and returned to the courtroom.

A few minutes later, Rabbi Heshel realized that he was beginning to reverse his verdict. Although it seemed to him like a very clear case before, he now was beginning to think otherwise.

This disturbed the rabbi very much so he decided to take a recess to rethink the situation. He put on his coat and walked outside. As he was strolling, he placed his hands in the coat pocket and found the money. It didn’t take the rabbi long to figure out who placed it there. Immediately, he went back to the courtroom and exclaimed, “How great is the power of bribery to pervert the truth. Although I had no idea that I was bribed, the bribery had its effect!”

“Now,” exclaimed Avraham Heshel, “I understand the words of the Torah that bribery “perverts the words of the righteous.” For even when the judge is righteous and has no idea that he is being bribed, the bribery will have the effect of twisting and distorting the truth.”

BE CONNECTED

G-d prohibits the Jewish people from cutting down fruit-bearing trees when besieging a city in time of war. The Torah declares the following reason for this prohibition, “for man is like the tree of the field” (Deut. 20:19). There are important comparisons between mankind and the tree. Rabbi Zalmen Marozov says that in order to become a healthy fruit-bearing tree, one must carefully attend to

the tree when it is still very young. The most crucial time is when the tree is young and susceptible to all kinds of dangers.

The same is with people. To assure that our children grow up spiritually and morally strong, we must take extra care to give them the proper education and spiritual nourishment when they are still young. Just like a small mark on a young tree will turn into a larger scar as the tree grows, so too, even what may seem a minor negative impression on a young child can have long lasting negative effect. One’s commitment to Judaism must start at a very young age.

Another lesson from the tree is the importance of being constantly “connected,” which is most visible in a tree. A tree must always be connected to its roots and through them to its source of nourishment. As soon as it is cut away from its source, it dies.

RESPONSIBILITIES

TOWARD EACH OTHER

At the end of this week’s Parasha, Shoftim, the Torah teaches us about the responsibility we have for each other. The Torah states, “If, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess, a body is found lying in open country, and it is not known who struck the person down, then your elders and your judges shall come out to measure the distances to the towns that are near the body.” (Deut 21:1-2). “All the elders of that town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the wadi, and they shall declare: “Our hands did not shed this blood, nor were we witnesses to it.” (Deut 21-6-7.) They would then ask for G-d’s forgiveness for the people of Israel.

Our sages ask, “Would anyone think that the elders of the city have committed this crime? Why do they have to say ‘Our hands have not shed this blood and ask for forgiveness?’”

This, explain the sages, is an instruction for each and every believer. It teaches us that every believer is responsible for the acts of every other believer.

This responsibility lies foremost upon the elders of the community. Thus, even the most righteous people are in some way responsible for the act of the murderer.

This lesson is especially important during this month of Elul, which began on August 21. For during this time we should reflect about our responsibilities toward each other.

BE HAPPY

One day a farmer's donkey fell down into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally, he decided the animal was old, and the well needed to be covered up anyway; it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey. He invited all his neighbors to come over and help him. They all grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well. At first, the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement he quieted down. A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well. He was astonished at what he saw. With each shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey was doing something amazing. He would shake it off and take a step up. As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he would shake it off and take a step up. Pretty soon, everyone was amazed as the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and happily trotted off!

Life is going to shovel dirt on you, all kinds of dirt. The trick to getting out of the well is to shake it off and take a step up. Each of our troubles is a stepping stone. We can get out of the deepest wells just by not stopping, never giving up! Shake it off and take a step up.

Remember the five simple rules to be happy:

1. Free your heart from hatred - Forgive.
2. Free your mind from worries - Most never happens.
3. Live simply and appreciate what you have.
4. Give more.
5. Expect less from people but more from G-d.

YOUR CHARACTER WILL BECOME YOUR DESTINY

Several years ago, a preacher from out-of-state accepted a call to a congregation in Houston, Texas. Some weeks after he arrived, he had an occasion to ride the bus from

his home to the downtown area. When he sat down, he discovered that the driver had accidentally given him a quarter too much change. As he considered what to do, he thought to himself, 'You'd better give the quarter back. It would be wrong to keep it.'

Then he thought, 'Oh, forget it, it's only a quarter. Who would worry about this little amount? Anyway, the bus company gets too much fare; they will never miss it.

Accept it as a 'gift from G-d' and keep quiet.'

When his stop came, he paused momentarily at the door, and then he handed the quarter to the driver and said, 'Here, you gave me too much change.'

The driver, with a smile, replied, 'Aren't you the new preacher in town? I have been thinking a lot lately about going somewhere to worship. I just wanted to see what you would do if I gave you too much change. I'll see you on Shabbat.'

When the preacher stepped off of the bus, he literally grabbed the nearest light pole, held on, and said, oh G-d; I almost sold your Son for a quarter.'

Our lives are the only Bible some people will ever read. This is a really scary example of how much people watch us as believers and will put us to the test!

Always be on guard—and remember—You carry the name of Mashiaich on your shoulders when you call yourself 'Believers', or 'Messianic', or 'Christian.'

Watch your thoughts; they become words.

Watch your words; they become actions.

Watch your actions; they become habits.

Watch your habits; they become character.

Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.

EDITOR

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HAFTARA

Isaiah 51:12-52:12

This Shabbat is the fourth Shabbat after Tisha B'Av. We are in a period called Shiva D'nechemta—"Seven weeks of comfort." The seven Haftarot of the weeks between Tish'a B'av and Rosh Hashana are prophesies of comfort and hope for Israel and God's people at large.

HAFTARA: G-d himself continues to comfort Israel. "I, I am he who comforts you" (Is. 51:12). Isaiah shows us that the L-rd is aware of the situation of his people "You have forgotten the LORD, your Maker" (13). However the L-rd continues to love his people and reminds them of what he has done for them in the past "For I am the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name. I have put my words in your mouth, and hidden you in the shadow of my hand, stretching out the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth, and saying to Zion, "You are my people."" (15-16). G-d calls Israel to rise, to come back to him and to fulfill her mission "Rouse yourself, rouse yourself! Stand up, O Jerusalem," (17). God gives another wonderful promise to Israel saying, he is the intercessor, he will plead her cause. "Thus says your Sovereign, the LORD, your God who pleads the cause of his people: See, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; you shall drink no more from the bowl of my wrath." (22).

If God is the intercessor, who will be against G-d's people? Shaul says, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Rom. 8:35-37).

Jerusalem is still a holy city and will no longer be threatened by the nations. "Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for the uncircumcised and the unclean shall enter you no more." (Is. 52:1). Jerusalem will be joyous for G-d's protection. "Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem" (9). G-d reaffirms his protection for his people, "for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard." (12).

BESORAT YESHUA

Mark 7:9-23

In our Parasha we have a long list of rules and laws that Moshe gives as a reminder to Israel at the border of the Promised Land.

BESORAH: In our text of the Besorah, Yeshua shows his people how easy it is to deviate from G-d's law even though we think that we are in a good condition. "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions" (Mark 7:9). They don't reject the law of G-d, but in their way of achieving perfection, they add many traditions to the law of God, and the danger is that these traditions, after a few generations, are not seen only as traditions but as laws and they finish by replacing the commandments of G-d.

It is not only a Jewish tendency; each religion has built their own customs, rules, and traditions. We have to be careful that these traditions don't replace or become more important than G-d's commandments.

Yeshua gives an example of this trap. "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother" (Mark 7:10-12). We notice here in this example that the motivation is a religious one. Religious leaders never deliberately say, "Let's change the law of God." Most of the time they have good intentions, but the result is not good because they come to impose their own rules and traditions above G-d's law.

Yeshua states what is most important in our lives, because religion is not only spirituality but much more our everyday actions. "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'" (Mark 7:21-23). How many people give the appearance of spirituality and religiosity, but in fact in their hearts they are worse than murderers.

