

# Shabbat Shoftim

## August 14, 2010

### 4 Ellul 5770

Parasha

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Newsletter n° 386

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## News

### ASI CONVENTION

Those who have read our last week newsletter remember that the main news came from Orlando, Florida where was held the NAD Jewish Advisory. In fact if the NADJA is held at this period of the year, it is because this committee wants to be connected to the ASI National convention, where booths and advertisements for the Jewish ministry is done.

I would like to say that the ASI convention is every year my favorite gathering because of its high spirituality and personal edification. I always get out from this convention, moved and spiritually uplifted.

This year was not an exception. Very high quality messages were delivered to the delegates. I would like just to mark here the outstanding sermons we heard. First on Friday evening by a young pastor, Jeffrey Rosario "The REBELution" (written in this way in the program) where Jeffrey exhorted us to give to the young adult (13 and over) all their place in the church. For Jeffrey we become young adult at the age of 13, age of the Bar Mitsva in the Jewish tradition. And the Second one on Sabbath morning, preached by pastor Mark Finley "Crossing Jordan" inviting us to pass by a spiritual revival in order to receive the last rain of the Holy Spirit and to be ready for the Second coming of Jesus.

This year the Jewish Adventist presence was remarkable. In fact everyone who was walking in the exhibit hall would remark that there was at least three booth advertising for Jewish ministries. That means this work is more and more visible in our church and I am sure that this presence will help our church to grow in her understanding of the necessity to work for Israel and Jews all over the world.

We are still meeting people who have a very narrow view of our mission and the role of Israel in

the last proclamation of three angels' message just before the coming of our Messiah. Let me remind to everyone that we have received clear instruction from our pioneers about this topic. Ellen G. White for example says in 1905: *"There are Jews everywhere, and to them the light of present truth is to be brought, that they may have an opportunity to accept it. There are among the Jews many who will come to the light, and who will proclaim the immutability of the law of God with wonderful power."*

it was a pleasure to see three booth advertising for this ministry, I took picture of each one of them.



Above, John Lascu at a booth for a new lifestyle center in Israel.

Here is a picture of Richard Elofer, at his booth for the World Jewish Adventist Friendship Center of the Office of Adventist Mission.



And below, we recognize Ralph Ringer, coordinator of the Jewish Ministry for the NAD.





# OVERVIEW

## SHOFTIM - שְׁפֹטִים

### DEUTERONOMY 16:18-21:9

**M**oshe tells the children of Israel 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 (Torah scrolls), 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 the Land of 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 prophets 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 Israel 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.

## WALKING WITH G-D

**T**he Torah states, "love the Lord, your God, and to walk in His ways all the days..." (Deut. 19:9) What does it mean to "walk in His ways"? Why does the Torah stress "all the days"?

The Sages explain that walking in God's ways means that we must emulate Him by bestowing kindness and being compassionate. Some people mistakenly think that if they do someone a favor, especially a major one, that they have fulfilled their obligation to do chesed (kindness) for the next few weeks. Therefore, says Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, the Torah stresses that the obligation of chesed is all the days. Every single day of our lives we must go out of our way to do someone a favor. This is how we can be like the Almighty!

It is a matter of focus and thinking ahead. Make it your policy to hold the door for someone. Let a car wanting to enter from a side street the opportunity to enter in front of you. Before you leave your home in the morning, put a coin for tzedakah in a pushka (a charity box). It is so easy, if you plan in advance.

## WHAT IS A BRIBE?

**T**he beginning of Parshat Shoftim cautions the judges of the Jewish people, "Do not take a bribe (shochad)" (Deut. 16:19). The Talmud (Ketuvot 105b) asks, "What is shochad? It means SHE'HU CHAD (that he is alone)."

The commentator Gan Raveh explains this cryptic remark in light of another Talmudic passage (Shabbat 10a) that states, "Any judge who issues a true verdict is considered to be a partner with God in Creation." In other words, a judge who accepts a bribe cannot issue a true verdict, since the bribe

will have swayed his perception of truth. Since his ruling will not be just, he can no longer be called God's partner in Creation. Therefore, the bribe (shochad) has led him to a state where he is alone (she'hu chad).

## VALUE OF TREES

**T**he Torah states, “When you besiege a city for an extended period, to make war against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them; for you may eat from them, and you shall not cut them down; for is the tree of the field a man (or, for man is like the tree of the field), that you should besiege it? Only the trees which you know are not trees for food may you destroy and cut down, in order to build bulwarks against the city that makes war with you, until it falls.” (Deut 20:19-20). The fruit trees must be spared, as they provide sustenance; other trees can be cut down for purposes of the war, and used in battle.

Jewish commentaries have different opinion on the commandment about trees. The Targum Yonatan, who understands the statement as a rhetorical use of language—and reads the verse as, “Don’t hurt the tree—is the tree a person that would feel pain?”

Rashi’s reading of this statement is of a similar vein, as he also understands the verse in a rhetorical sense: “What good would result from punishing the tree?”

The Ibn Ezra, on the other hand, understands the text in a more literal, straightforward sense: “Man’s destiny is intertwined with the larger ecological reality. If man destroys a tree, in a sense he is destroying himself.” Thus, the verse is interpreted as an equation of man with the fruit-bearing tree.

The Ramban agrees in general with the approach of the Ibn Ezra, and then links the interpretation with a broader Rabbinic tradition, which is a nuanced approach: “a tree, even a fruit-bearing tree, may be destroyed when necessary.”

Rav said: “A palm tree producing even one kab of fruit may not be cut down. An objection was raised: What quantity should be on an olive tree so that it should not be permitted to cut it down? A quarter of a kab.—Olives are different as they are more important. ... Ravina, however, said: If its

value [for other purposes] exceeds that of its fruit, it is permissible [to cut it down]. (Talmud Bavli Bava Kamma 91b)

The Talmud deals with pragmatic considerations; the tree has value, though rather than innate, unqualified value (as is the value of human life), the value of the life of a tree is utilitarian. If the cost of care for the tree surpasses the value of the fruit produced by the tree, it would be foolhardy to keep this tree, and hence cutting down such a tree is permitted. This being said, the Talmud reports a tradition that weighs in for the sanctity of the life of a tree, and the spiritual price to be paid for cutting down a tree. This tradition is “up close and personal,” and a bit frightening.

R. Hanina said: “My son Shivhat did not pass away except for having cut down a fig tree before its time.” (Talmud Bavli Bava Kamma 91b)

## MONTH OF ELLUL

**W**e have just started the month of Ellul, which is the last month of the Jewish year. Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year) will be on September 9. Ellul is a month of revival and repentance for the Jewish people. Why not to use this month in our congregations to lead our members and Jewish friends to a real revival of their spirituality with God. The new year is always a good time for important decisions and resolutions, but if we want these decisions to last we must prepare them.

The name of the month of Elul comprises an acrostic in Hebrew— Alef, Lamed, Vav, Lamed, “ani ledodi vedodi li”, “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine.” The romance between God and his people is the very backbone of this month. Knowing our human need for the “feeling” experience, in these days of mercy, God follows the practice he initiated with the giving of the second set of Tablets and brings the Torah down to our level. He brings the language of the soul down to the level of feeling so that we can find it palatable.

All we have to do is to take the first little step. We must appoint the proper judge to guide our affairs, the proper officer to keep us in line. We must confirm the appointment of the Yetzer Tov (good inclination) as our judge even if we are unable to make him the sole judge. God will do the rest.”

## LIVING LINKS


**T**he Torah States, “And you will come to the priests, the Leviim, and the judge who will be in those days.” (Deut 17:9)

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was extremely sensitive to the smell of garlic and could not tolerate its odor. Once, he was teaching a group of students. He paused, the smell of garlic reaching his nose... “Would the student who ate garlic kindly leave the room?” he asked. Not just one, but many students left. One of them was Rabbi Chiya.

The next day Rabbi Shimon (Rabbi Yehuda’s son) chided Rabbi Chiya for his lack of consideration in eating garlic before attending the lecture. Rabbi Chiya replied “I didn’t eat any garlic. The reason I left was that so the offender should not have to be embarrassed by revealing himself.”

Where did Rabbi Chiya learn the need for this sensitivity to the feelings of others? The Talmud teaches us that Rabbi Chiya learned this behavior from seeing Rabbi Meir conduct himself in a similar way. And from whom did Rabbi Meir learn it? From Shmuel HaKatan. And Shmuel? From Schania in the Book of Ezra. And Schania learned it from Yehoshua, who learned from Moshe Rabbeinu.

Why didn’t the Talmud skip all those generations and just get to the point? Why didn’t it just say, “Rabbi Chiya learned his sensitivity and noble behavior from Moshe Rabbeinu?”

 We stand at the end of an unbroken chain of generations. A chain of generations that stretches back ultimately to Moshe Rabbeinu and a moment of supreme contact with G-d on Sinai. But our contact with that moment is with the great Torah Sages of our own generation. There are no “missing links” in the chain of the Torah. For every rabbi is a student of his rabbi.

When we seek wisdom and direction, we need look no further than our own living links to the past. (Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz)

## GROWING LIKE A TREE

**T**he great Talmudic sage Rabbi Yehoshua gave his mother the credit for his brilliant scholarly achievements. For when he was still an infant, she would bring his crib to the yeshiva so that he would grow and develop in the atmosphere of Torah.

## POSITIVE QUALITIES OF OUR LEADERS

**T**wo friends were sitting together at the funeral of a prominent community member. A long procession of distinguished personages and family members delivered warm eulogies, bringing tears to many eyes. After the funeral, the two friends walked home in a contemplative mood. “You know something,” one of them commented. “He was a very fine fellow. I am going to miss him.”

“I know you are not supposed to speak ill of the dead, but you could not stand the guy. You always had something nasty to say about him.”

“Yeah. But let’s be honest. Whenever he was honored, I always wished I was receiving those honors. But now that he’s passed on, I can think about him more objectively. And you know what? He really was a fine fellow!”

In our own lives, regrettably, we all too often see the tendency to denigrate our leaders as a means of self-aggrandizement. Sometimes, we are even guilty ourselves. But if we can condition ourselves to recognize these criticisms for what they are, we will find it easier to focus on the many positive qualities of our devoted community leaders, pastors and rabbis. Not only will we then be able to give them their due respect, we will also discover greater inner satisfaction and a higher sense of self-worth for ourselves.

## EDITOR

A newsletter published by the  
World Jewish Adventist Friendship Center  
Under the umbrella of the  
General Conference —Global Mission Office

Richard-Amram Elofer  
4, Abraham Lincoln  
94186 Jerusalem  
Israel

Tel. +972 504 535 121  
Fax +972 2625 1319  
email: richard@elofer.com  
web: jewishadventist.org



## HAFTARA

### Isaiah 51:12-52:12

**T**his 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

**I**n 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.

