

# *Shiur L'Yom Chamishi<sup>1</sup>*

*[Thursday's Study]*

**READINGS:**    *Torah Massei:*                      **Numbers 35:9-34**  
                  *Haftarah:*                                        **Jeremiah 3:1-25**  
                  *B'rit Chadasha:*                                **James 4:9-10**

*“Bloodshed pollutes the land . . . .*  
*[Numbers 35:33]*

**Today's Meditation is Job 36:13-14;**

**This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #18, *Tzuri v'Goeli* [My Rock and My Redeemer]**

Yesterday we read the Holy One's instructions that 48 cities in Eretz Yisrael should be set aside as Levitical Cities. Today we will read that of the 48 Israeli cities designated as places where Levi'im were to maintain their homes and live regular lives alongside members of the other twelve tribes, the Holy One decreed that six of those cities [i.e. 1/8<sup>th</sup> of the total number] are to be very, very special. These six very special Levitical cities are to be set up and governed in such a way as to function as *arei miqlat* [cities of refuge]<sup>2</sup>. That is a concept wholly unique to the Torah.

## *Arei Miqlat – Cities of Refuge*

The idea of cities of refuge was first raised by the Holy One back at Sinai, where as part of the *Mish'patim Discourse* of Torah the Divine Bridegroom told Moshe:

***Makeh ish vamet***

*If one person is struck by another and dies,*

***mot yumat***

*death causes death.*

***V'asher lo tzadah***

*If he did not lie in wait for him [or lay waste to him]*

***v'ha-elohim inah l'yado***

*and the judges/authorities approach for his hand*

***v'samti lecha makom asher yanus shamah***

*I will provide a place where he may flee.*

**[Exodus 21:12-13]**

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<sup>2</sup> The six cities of refuge were Kedesh, Shechem, Hebron, Bezer, Ramot-Gilead, and Golan.

Note the concluding phrase – *makom asher yanus shamah*, i.e. a place where he may flee.

If a person must flee, that must mean someone is after him.

What to do, where to go?

***My Shield and the Horn of my Salvation,  
My Stronghold and my Refuge<sup>3</sup>***

In this world *stuff happens*. Some of it is really bad.

How we react when stuff happens – and how we treat people who are in the middle of the stuff that happens - is supposed to be one of the major things that distinguishes real servants of the Most High from the other people of the world. When stuff happens the Holy One does not call His People to be critics, accusers, or blame-placers. He does not call His People to go around judging the human beings – or nations or ethnic groups - involved in the ‘stuff’. He does not call His People to be activists or protesters or vigilantes or crusaders for ‘*truth, justice, and the American [or European, or Asian, or African, or Jewish] Way*’.

He calls His People to provide *refuge* – *a place where the one in trouble may flee*.

Let’s talk about that novel idea a little, shall we?

The Hebrew phrase our English Bibles translate as *refuge*’ in the text of our Torah reading for today is *miqlat*<sup>4</sup>. This is a noun derived from the Hebrew verb root *qalat* [*qot, lamed, tav*], which means to contract/draw closer together, as in to *huddle* or *draw into an enclosure*. Picture what happens in Israel today when the missile sirens go off, and people have to stop whatever they are doing and run for the nearest appointed shelter, and you get a pretty good picture of what this Hebrew verb depicts. Turning this verb into a noun by adding the *mem* as a prefix, changes the focus from the action of contracting/drawing closer as the sirens sound to *the place to which the people run*.

A *miqlat*, then, is a secure enclosure to which people run in times of trouble. It is a place of protection, where one can huddle with others in safety until a danger passes.

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<sup>3</sup> II Samuel 22:3, from the Song of David.

<sup>4</sup> *Miqlat* is spelled *mem, quf, lamed, tet*. Strong’s Hebrew word #4733, it is pronounced *mik-lawt’*,

### **The Issue Is the Pollution of the Land By the Spilling On It of Innocent Blood**

Before Kayin [Cain] went out to lay in wait in a field for his brother *Hevel* [Abel] [see Genesis 4:8] the Holy One spoke to Kayin, to warn him against letting his offense take control of his soul. After Kayin disregarded the warning and committed the worst deed possible the Holy One visited Kayin again. This time the Holy One said:

**“What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from under the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”**

Kayin complained that his penalty was too severe - that “whoever” found him would kill him. Who would find him? Seth was not yet born. The only people on the earth were Adam and *Chava* [Eve] and Kayin himself. The only people who could possibly “find” him and kill him would be Adam or Chava, his mother and father - the next of kin of Hevel, who was slain. Kayin recognized that his own father and/or mother - or eventually someone else born from their union - would be the ones to avenge [Hebrew *goel*, which means to redeem, to vindicate, or to avenge] the death of Hevel. This was “too much” for Kayin to bear.

In an act foreshadowing His unfathomable grace toward human beings the Holy One continued to reach out to Kayin, giving him a “mark” to clearly warn anyone who wanted to kill him that judgment would be upon them and would be severe. But He did lift the curse on Kayin’s *relationship with the land*. It was the Holy One’s will that a *Goel* [the Redeemer/Vindicator/Avenger, Messiah Y’shua] must come forth in the fullness of time to redeem the land, by spilling acceptable blood (i.e. blood which would be accepted by the Holy One as a substitute for the blood of all murderers).

Likewise, as the Holy One now prepares the Redeemed Remnant to enter the Land of Israel He warns them that the shedding of innocent blood will pollute the land, and will cause it to “cry out” for redemption, vindication, and avenging. This cry will stir the heart of the next-of-kin of the victim. The Holy One however wished for His People to be different from other peoples - for them to create cities of refuge<sup>5</sup> to which one who innocently (in his own eyes, at least) killed another could run, to escape the *goel*.

This did not mean the killer would go free. A Torah-consistent trial would be held, and after that consequences - possibly even execution, for certain types of killings -

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<sup>5</sup> For further information on the refuge/city of refuge concept see Exodus 21:12-13, Deuteronomy 19:1-13, and Joshua 20:1-9.

would ensue. But the possibility of grace was extended. That is the Holy One's way. Blessed be His Name.

### *The Carrying Forth of the Biblical Thread*

After the Flood the Holy One told Noach and his sons:

***Shofech dam ha-adam***

*He who spills human blood*

***b'adam damo yishafech***

*by man his blood is to be spilled,*

***ki b'tzelem Elohim asah et-ha-adam.***

*for in the image of God was man made.*

[Genesis 9:6]

Generations later, at Sinai, the Holy One's Voice affirmed this aspect of the covenant He had made with Noach and his sons, thundering from Heaven the following unmistakable message:

***Lo tirtzach***

*"You will not/are not violently break into pieces."*

[Exodus 20:13]

The Hebrew verb which is the subject of this prohibition is ***ratzach***<sup>6</sup>. It means to *violently break into pieces*. The most commonly understood form of doing this involves *bringing about a death by violent assault*. But it really means simply the shedding of innocent blood. It can be literal, in the sense of causing a physical wound from which blood issues forth<sup>7</sup>, or as Y'shua taught in the Sermon on the Mount<sup>8</sup> it can be symbolic, in the sense of causing an emotional scar with angry looks, words, labels, and accusations.

Though the Holy One condemns the shedding of human blood in the harshest terms, He still has love for the person who shed the blood, and therefore demands that such person not be executed without having the opportunity to receive a fair trial. The accused person was to be protected until he could be tried fairly and objectively by the society. One very strong evidence of this is the Holy One's provision, in the very Torah which establishes the death penalty as the proper punishment for the shedding of human blood, for 'Cities of Refuge' to which anyone accused of manslaughter, guilty or not, can run for safe haven.

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<sup>6</sup> ***Ratzach*** is spelled *resh, tzade, chet*. Strong's Hebrew word #7523, it is pronounced *raw-tzawkh'*

<sup>7</sup> A Biblical picture of the kind of conduct that constitutes literal ***ratzach*** is found in Judges 19-20, the sordid story of the wanton infliction of the fatal abuse by perverse men from the city of Gibeah [in the tribal allotment of Benjamin] upon a visiting Levite's 'concubine'.

<sup>8</sup> See especially Matthew 5:21-22.

## *Vengeance – or Justice? Outrage – or Wisdom?*

The subject of actual cities of refuge spread throughout a nation – i.e. *arei miqlat* - is a fascinating subject. The idea is completely unique to the Torah. No other nation has ever had such a thing – or ever will.

This is something the Holy One of Israel designed for the people He loves. It cannot be matched by any idea or benevolence conceived by man.

The Cities of Refuge are irrefutable proof – to us and to the world - that the Holy One is a God not only of *power* and *justice* - but of *wisdom, compassion, patience, mercy and forgiveness*.

In the Holy One's Persona and Kingdom, *might does not make right* - and *neither does a sense of outrage arising from a cause or offense*.

Mankind was created in the Holy One's 'image', and thus were made to reflect all His Divine Attribute. As a result of the Fall, however, human beings have lost their connection to the Holy One's wisdom, compassion, patience, mercy and forgiveness attributes. Unfortunately, now the only aspects of His 'image' with which fallen men are able to connect are His abstract thought, speech, purposing, and power attributes. Having the latter without the former is a recipe for calamitous disaster. It makes man become a very dangerous kind of voracious, highly emotional, and extremely devious animal – instead of the light-bringer and blessing-dispenser he was created, designed, and is still destined to be.

The result of having a connection to the Holy One's attributes of abstract thought, speech, purposing, and power without any connection to His offsetting attributes of wisdom, compassion, patience, mercy and forgiveness, you see, is that whenever a person or a member of his family, nation or ethnic group, suffers damage, injury, insult, or offense at the hands of another human being, what fallen men lust for is *quick vengeance*. They use their gifts of abstract thought and speech to falsely label this as '*justice*'.

If you want to see what this looks like, just watch the public reaction – usually fueled by inflammatory news reports – the next time a child is thought to have been abused, injured or killed, or left in a hot vehicle in the summer time. Or how people rush to judge a celebrity or sports figure, minister, or politician who is accused of a crime or what the culture of the day regards a moral indiscretion. Watch how people who do not even know the persons involved start focusing time and passion upon, and expressing moral outrage over, and issue calls for 'justice' concerning, situations which have nothing whatever to do with them, and over

which they have incomplete and inadequate knowledge.

But man's idea of vengeance never solved a problem – and it never will. Man's idea of vengeance just makes things worse. It just causes tensions to escalate. It just insures retaliation by those who associate with the one[s] against whom vengeance was taken.

Man's idea of vengeance turns an earthquake into a tsunami.

The Holy One – the Creator of both the offended and the offender in every situation and controversy – says '*not so fast!*' He wants to inject His attributes of wisdom, compassion, patience, mercy and forgiveness into the situation to slow down the rushing river of emotion that boils over every time someone's physical or symbolic blood is spilt.

The Holy One defines *justice* as something far, far different than *vengeance*. He does not think in terms of 'right and wrong', 'moral and immoral', 'fair and unfair', or 'good and evil' – He thinks in terms of wisdom. He always wants cooler, calmer heads - and softer, more compassionate hearts - to prevail. He wants *real solutions* – not vengeance.

That is why the Holy One called for His Redeemed People to do things differently than any other nation of the world ever had or ever would. That is why He called for the establishment of easily accessible *arei miqlat* on both sides of the Jordan River. The Holy One wanted to make sure safe cities – where wisdom and compassion ruled - to be conveniently located throughout the land of His Dominion. He wanted to assure that in His land of dominion no person – whether a Hebrew or a foreigner/sojourner within the land - would have to suffer man's idea of 'vengeance' or even have to travel an unreasonable distance to reach and receive the protection of a city of refuge. These 6 cities – and the refuge they were established to provide - were to be open and freely accessible to everyone, of any nation, tribe, or tongue.

***How Are You Doing on Making Your Presence, Your Home,  
Your Neighborhood, and Your Community  
a 'City of Refuge' In Your World?***

All cities of refuge were also Levitical cities. Having Levites and priests there was a big part of making justice available instead of vengeance. The Holy One intends for those who know Him best and whose lives are committed to serve Him faithfully should be able to *calm other people down* and *focus them on long term solutions and wisdom* rather than immediate bloodlust and vengeance. They,

above all people on the earth, should be the ones who sprinkle living water on emotionally charged people and situations instead of adding fuel to their raging fire.

How about you, Dear Reader? Do you understand what the calling of true people of the Holy One is in relation to the emotionally charged situations and controversies that arise from time to time? Such situations and controversies are springing up everywhere in today's world. If they are not arising right in front of you in your house or neighborhood or community, just turn on the news.

But did you know that we are not to get caught up in other people's 'drama, trauma and offense'. We are called to be a place of refuge from such things. We are called to inject wisdom, compassion, patience, kindness, and forgiveness into every situation and controversy – not throw gasoline on the fire like the rest of the world does.

We are to keep focused on long-term solutions, not keeping score between the parties, declaring what is 'fair and unfair', 'right and wrong', 'moral and immoral', or 'good and evil'.

Do not let yourself get swept up in the emotion, the self-righteous talk trash, or the outrage. Do not let yourself get swept up in rhetoric, the ideology, or the accusation. The world does not need to hear another emotionally-charged or judgmental opinion – it needs someone who will remain calm, pray, seek wisdom from Heaven, and then, if the situation falls within the person's Divinely ordained sphere of influence, patiently work with all parties involved in the controversy to achieve real, meaningful, lasting solutions to the underlying problems and ultimate sources of controversy.

You see, Dear Reader, the truth is that you and your household are called to become the ultimate city of refuge. People should not just come to you and your household for comfort, or sympathy, or your opinion, advice, or pity. They should come to you for wisdom, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness. And what you should offer is not an attitude, a sense of outrage, the expression of moral judgment, or the placing of blame – what you should offer is a pathway to resolution inspired by none other than the ***Ruach*** – i.e. Empowering Breath - of the Holy One of Israel.

We are here to fix the world for posterity, not contribute to the havoc of the present in the name of 'righting wrongs'.

We are to never let ourselves get caught up in either outrage or a rush to judgment.

We are to never let our tongue or our influence be hijacked by the adversary and used as an instrument of incitement or condemnation.

We are most definitely not called to form opinions or express our judgments about people or situations [a] about which we have insufficient knowledge through personal observation [hearsay most definitely does not count] and [b] which are outside our Divinely established and currently operative sphere of influence.

Nations go to war - that is just a part of life. Criminal prosecutions occur and investigations and lawsuits proceed – that is the world’s governmental system at work. People complain and hate or use everything from the gift of speech to physicality inappropriately - that is just the expected result of the Fall. Unless we are called to physically engage in combat on behalf of our nation, or to sit on the bench as judge or in the chair as an eyewitness or as a juror, as for us and our houses, for Heaven’s sake we are to remain above the fray - as faithful agents of shalom and ambassadors of reconciliation and restoration.

People should not just come to us and our households primarily for comfort, or sympathy - much less our opinions, advice, pity or financial assistance. They should come to us for wisdom, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness. And what we should offer them is not a self-righteous attitude, a sense of outrage, an expression of moral judgment, or the placing of blame. What we should offer them is a pathway to resolution inspired by none other than the Ruach – i.e. Empowering Breath - of the Holy One of Israel.

So leave leaping to conclusions to the pagans of this world, Dear Reader. Let all who love the Holy One and wish to serve and represent Him honestly in this world put away our vigilante daggers and lynch ropes. Let us stow our crusader capes, hoods, cliché-slogans, eye rolls and stare downs. Let us stash our self-righteous frowns and activist rhetoric - and all the inflammatory social media posts and video clips that go with them - in the trash bin where they belong.

A refuge is a safe place - a place of hope. And that is what we are called to be.

The only thing that people – even those who have been involved in horrible stuff - should see in your eyes, glean from your facial expressions and body language, and hear in your voice is something like the following:

*“You are safe here.*



*I will not judge you.  
I will not take either your side or that of your adversary/accuser.  
What you can trust me to do is recognize your humanity,  
pray for you, and seek – and share with you as and when I receive –  
whatever counsel Our Mutual Creator wishes to give me for you.  
I will not think myself better than you,  
or pretend to be more holy or righteous than you.  
I will not moralize or preach to you.  
I will not berate or condemn you. I will form no opinions about you.  
I will be happy to let the legal system sort out whatever has happened thus far  
and what should happen next. I will not try to influence that in any way.  
In the meantime, you are innocent until proven guilty here,  
and the only issue you will need to address with me is  
'how can we take practical steps to fix whatever led up to whatever happened  
so that it never happens – to you at least – ever again?'*

Think of Y'shua's response to the woman caught in adultery – and the angry men who wanted to accuse, humiliate, and stone her. He was not the appointed forum for her prosecution or judgment. And He did not pretend to be. Meditate upon the calmness and peace He demonstrated to both the woman and the self-righteous crowd of haters her accusers, and the words He spoke to both. Meditate upon these things long and hard. Note how His calmness, wisdom, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness changed the atmosphere and moved the situation from near riot toward a meaningful solution.

Then go, and be like the Master – in every Divinely ordained sphere of influence in your life.

### ***What Exactly Distinguishes a City of Refuge From Any Other City?***

Regarding the 6 specific Levitical cities the Holy One decreed should be cities of refuge, the sages tell us the following special rules were historically applied<sup>9</sup> to maximize their accessibility:

*The [ruling council] is obligated to straighten the roads to the cities of refuge, to repair them and broaden them. They must remove all impediments and obstacles ... bridges should be built [over all natural barriers] so as not to delay one who is fleeing to [the city of refuge]. The width of a road to a city of refuge should not be less than thirty-two cubits.*

**"Refuge", "Refuge",** was written at all crossroads so that those accused of killing another should recognize the way and turn there.

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<sup>9</sup> See the article 'From Our Sages', Parsha Matot-Massei, available on line at <http://www.chabad.org/parshah/indepth/default.asp?AID=52613>.

Notice as we examine what our *aliyah ha-yom* has to say on the subject that the first thing we are told is that the ***arei miqlat*** concept originated *with the Holy One*, not with Moshe, with the tribal leaders, with the *kohanim* [priests], or with the people.

Here is what the Holy One has to say to us about the ***arei miqlat***:

*When you pass over the Yarden into the land of Kana`an,  
establish cities to be ***arei miqlat*** [cities of refuge] for you,  
that the manslayer who kills any person unwittingly may flee there.*

*The cities shall be to you for refuge from the avenger,  
that the manslayer not die, until he stands  
before the congregation for judgment.*

*The cities which you designate are to be for you six cities of refuge.  
Designate three cities beyond the Yarden,  
and three cities shall you give in the land of Kana`an;  
they shall be cities of refuge.*

*For the children of Yisra'el,  
and for the stranger and for the foreigner living among them,  
shall these six cities be for refuge;  
that everyone who kills any person unwittingly may flee there.*

[Numbers 35:9-15]

Most of the ***arei miqlat*** were built on mountaintops. Since cities in that part of the world during the time frame of Torah were built with white limestone this meant that the cities of refuge would *gleam magnificently* in the sunshine or in the light of the moon. The reflection of either the sun's direct or indirect light off of the white limestone would act like the beacon of a lighthouse - easily visible from many miles away.

Perhaps something like this is what the Master was talking about when He said to those who followed Him:

*You are the light of the world—  
like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden.*

[Matthew 5:14]

The world has more than enough darkness. In the faces and words and houses and cities of the people YHVH, let there be light!

### ***Questions for Today's Study***

1. Here are some questions about the ***arei miqrat*** [cities of refuge].

- [A] Who was to have the right to flee to the cities of refuge? Was any person – Hebrew or pagan, guilty or innocent – denied this right under any circumstance?
- [B] From whom were such people fleeing?
- [C] What was the purpose of having cities of refuge?
- [D] How many cities of refuge did the Holy One say there should be?
- [E] Draw a map on a separate sheet of paper showing the locations of all the cities of refuge.
- [F] What was the responsibility of the “*avenger of blood*”?
- [G] Look up the word “avenger” in Strong’s Concordance and in Gesenius. Write the Hebrew word and describe the Hebraic word picture it presents.

2. The next thing the Holy One discusses after calling for cities of refuge is the circumstances under which the taking of a human life will necessitate the death penalty *once due process of law is applied to the accused and the situation/controversy through the legitimate operation of the nation’s impartial criminal justice system.*

- [A] List the aggravating factors which, if present, had to be found to be present before one who killed another was to be subjected by the legal system to capital punishment [i.e. a death sentence].
- [B] Why, under such circumstances, did the Holy One say the killer was to himself be put to death by the nation?
- [C] How did the Holy One direct that the execution of one who had killed another person under such aggravating circumstances to be carried out?
- [D] Who did the Holy One say was to determine whether these aggravating factors did or did not exist under the evidence and circumstances in question?
- [E] In Strong’s concordance look up the Hebrew word for the person(s) who were to determine whether the aggravating factors did or did not exist. Write the Hebrew word and its root, and the definitions of both the verb root and the noun derived from it.
- [F] Once someone fled to a city of refuge how long did that person have to stay there to be guaranteed safety?
- [G] How long did the Holy One say these practices and standards should continue?

3. In verses 30-32 of the 35<sup>th</sup> chapter of Numbers the Holy One sets forth three ordinances concerning the trial and treatment of those accused of killing another.

- [A] How many witnesses did the Holy One say were absolutely required before one could be found guilty?
- [B] In Strong’s Concordance and Gesenius’ Hebrew-English Lexicon look up the word which verses 31-32 translate as “ransom”. Write the Hebrew word and a description of what you think is its meaning.

[C] In what two circumstances was the taking of “ransom” [i.e. penance] from or on behalf of someone accused of a breach of Torah forbidden?

[D] Since in only two circumstance is the taking/making of penance in lieu of punishment prohibited, what do you think that means the Holy One means for us to do in regards to every other situation – i.e. any situation in which the taking/making of penance by or on behalf of one who breaches a Torah instruction in lieu of punishing him/her is not specifically prohibited.

4. In Numbers 35:33 the Holy One says: ***“you are not to pollute/defile the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.”***

[A] Why do you think the Holy One was so adamant that the land upon which He was preparing to download His Kingdom and from which He was about to launch His invasion and campaign to re-conquer earth was not to be “polluted”/defiled?

[B] Look up in Strong’s Concordance and in Gesenius’ Lexicon the word our English Bibles translate as *pollute or defile*. Write the Hebrew word in Hebrew consonants and vowel markings, and in English, then describe the Hebraic word picture it presents.

[C] Look up in Strong’s Concordance and in Gesenius the word our English Bibles translate as *atonement*. Write the Hebrew word in Hebrew consonants and vowel markings, and describe in a few short words what you think the word means.

5. In the verses assigned for today from this week’s Haftarah, Yirmayahu expresses a hope for not only the future reconciliation of Israel and B’nei Yisrael, but the eventual fulfillment of the Holy One’s purpose and destiny for Ya’akov’s seed.

[A] What is the first key to these things, according to Jeremiah 3:4?

[B] What does the Holy One seek from B’nei Yisrael, instead of ‘vengeance’ or even ‘justice’? List the specific things He calls for in Jeremiah 3:12-14.

[C] If B’nei Yisrael responds to the Holy One’s overtures as requested in Jeremiah 3:12-14, what does He promise to do? List the specific things He promises to do in Jeremiah 3:13(c) – 18.

6. In today’s suggested reading from the apostolic Scriptures *Ya’akov*, the half-brother of Y’shua, discusses a similar theme as we saw in Jeremiah 3:12-14. He says, on behalf of the Holy One:

*Lament, mourn, and weep.*

*Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to gloom.  
Humble yourselves in the sight of the Holy One, and he will exalt you..*

[James 4:9-10]

[A] In verses 9-10 what instructions does Ya'akov give to persons seeking to approach the Holy One? List them in the order given.

[B] Write a letter to the Holy One, in which you go through each of these instructions one at a time.

[C] What will happen if you *humble yourself in the sight of the Holy One*? What do you think that would that look like in your present situation, and in regard to any controversies or struggles you are currently facing?

*May you experience personally –  
and reflect throughout every sphere of influence the Holy One has given you –  
all of the wisdom, compassion, patience, mercy and kindness Attributes  
of the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and of Ya'akov.*

***The Rabbi's son***

### ***Meditation for Today***

**Job 35:13-14** [The wise counsel of *Elihu*]

***Surely God will not listen to empty talk,  
Nor will the Almighty regard it.  
Although you say you do not see Him,  
Yet justice is before Him, and you must wait for Him***