

Introduction to Parsha #48: *Shoftim*¹

READINGS: ***Torah Shoftim:*** Deuteronomy 16:18 - 21:9
 ***Haftarah*²:** Isaiah 51:12 – 52:12
 B'rit Chadasha: John 1:19-27



Set/Establish Shoftim v'shotrim for yourselves in all your gates.
[Deuteronomy 16:18(b)]

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the *Second Petition, T'shuvah* [The Prayer of Repentance]

Shoftim v'shotrim titen-lecha Set/establish magistrates and scribes for yourselves ...
b'chol-she'areicha – in all your gates Deuteronomy 16:18a.

It is time for the second installment of Moshe's '*Diverging Pathways*' Discourse. Last week in *Re'eh* Moshe taught us that 'blessings' and 'curses' are not the result of fate, of sorcery, of manipulation by either elites or demons, or judgment from on High, but are instead the inevitable natural result of *lifestyle choices* made by individuals, couples, families, bloodlines, and communities. Moshe kicked off the 'pathways diverging' discourse by warning us that slacking off in regard to Torah always results in defaulting to the seduction-vacuum of self-will, idolatry, ethnocentricity, dallying with the traditions and halakah of other cultures; and becoming less and less sensitive to the needs of the widows, the fatherless children, the foreigners, the poor people, and the Levites that live in our communities. That is because this world operates under the law of sowing and reaping – and whatever a person, a couple, a family, a bloodline, or a community

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² In Hebrew tradition the reading of the weekly parsha is followed by the reading of a shorter, thematically linked passage from one of the prophets. This second text is called *haftarah*. The word *haftarah* comes from the addition of both the prefix *hey* [h sound at beginning] and the suffix *hey* [h sound at end] to the verb root *fey-tet-resch*. The verb root means to *burst forth*; e.g. for a flower to burst forth in bloom from a bud.

reaps is always going to be in direct proportion to what that person, couple, family, bloodline or community has chosen to sow. Sow *tzedakah*, and you will reap *tzedakah*; sow *shalom* and you will reap *shalom*. But on the other hand, if you choose to sow selfishness you will reap a bumper crop of selfishness; sow seeds of hate and you will reap a harvest of hate; sow negativity and you will surely reap negativity; sow profanity and you will find yourselves awash in a sea of profanity; sow vanity and you will reap vanity; sow the wind, and you will inevitably reap the whirlwind. Blessings will always flow from blessings; curses always flow from curses. The narrow path that leads to blessing is found in the King's protocols of *tzedakah*, *tikkun olam*, and *shalom asah*-ing, as laid out for us in Torah; the broad path that leads to frustration, dissipation, despair, and destruction – *i.e.* the 'curse' – is the lot of those who reject the King's Protocols, choosing instead to continue in the ways of lawlessness, lovelessness, selfishness, ethno-centricity, obsession over sensuality, sexuality, sentimentality, pseudo-morality, pseudo-science, and pseudo-intelligence that have been wreaking havoc on human civilization since ... well, since the memory of man runneth not to the contrary.

The Infrastructure Initiative

This week the prophet's focus shifts to *Kingdom infrastructure*. The primary subject of the download this week will be *healthy vs. unhealthy community and national leadership*. Someone has to shepherd the sheep. Someone has to keep records. Someone has to help resolve controversies. Someone has to keep the focus forward-looking, the hearts inspired, and the bodies motivated. And someone has to be the glue that holds the society together.

The Holy One wants us to build – and then model to the nations and cultures of the world - a Beauty-Realm Inspired, Kingdom-of-Heaven-Scented Society. And for that to happen, we need *Kingdom-of-Heaven-Scented Leaders, Administrators, Visionaries, Counselors, and Unifiers*.

The eighth petition of the daily Amidah, called 'Mishpat', reads:

Ha-Shivah Shof'teinu

Return 'judges'/men of good judgment/wise forward-looking counsel

K'varishonah

like You gave us in the beginning/shaking out

v'yoetzeinu k'vatechilah

and counselors as You provided in our best days

v'haser mimeinu yagon v'anochah

remove from us our sighing and our sorrow

u'm'loch aleinu atah Adonai l'vadechah
reign over us; come, be our only ruler

b'chesed uv'rachamim v'tzadikeinu b'mishpat
rule us in covenant love and in compassion and rule us with 'righteous judgment'

Baruch Atah Adonai Melech ahev tzedakah u'mishpat
Blessed are You, O Holy One, King Who loves 'righteousness' and 'justice'

If we are to pray either this prayer, or the part of the one the Master taught us '***May Your Kingdom to Come, and Your Will to be Done, on earth as it is in Heaven***', we need to have at least a basic understanding of what that would look like and consist of. Moshe is finally ready to provide us that revelation. The question is, are we ready to receive it?

Tying Moshe's Revelation Download to the Times and Seasons

Make every crooked path strait! Prepare the way! Bring forth the purest of oil! Ready the shofars! Ascend to the banquet hall! This season is all about preparing for our Glorious King's coronation.

Part of this preparation is for a *coronation ball*; most of it, however, is for the beginning of a new season and higher level of responsible Kingdom administration. Bowing our knee and calling Him '*Lord, Lord*' is never going to be enough. That is just the barebones beginning. The real work of the Kingdom comes when our wills are subordinated to His in real, tangible, practical, visible ways, and our lives begin to bear the testimony that our highest priority is for His Will to be done in all things. The month of *Elul* is not just about preparing for a ceremony; it is about building and inaugurating an inspired infrastructure through which our King can bring His Wisdom, His Priorities, and His Agenda to bear on the most mundane as well as the most serious issues that adhere to humanity. In *Elul* we are not just to prepare to announce that the Kingdom of Heaven is 'nigh'; in *Elul* we are to drop everything else and start to operate in the King's ways, demonstrate His goodness with good deeds, and administer His decrees in gentleness, kindness, and *shalom*. In *Elul* we are called to prepare our hearts, our families, and spheres of influence to recognize and embrace responsible Kingdom Administration. The first mandate of this infrastructure-building season is:

Shoftim v'shotrim titen-lecha
Place for yourselves magistrates and scribes/administrators

b'chol-she'areicha asher Adonai Eloheicha noten lecha lishvateicha
In all your gates in the places the Holy One your assigns to you as dwelling places

v'shafeitu et-ha-am mishpat tzedek

and they will announce the Holy One's instructions and what is in line with His Will.

[Deuteronomy 16:18]

Who will co-labor with the Holy One to guard us? Not politicians. No demagogues. Not ideologues. Not crusaders. Neither anarchists nor Torah-terrorists need apply. No spin-masters, no blame-casters, no complainers, and no race-baiters will be considered. No pundits, no entertainers, no populist heroes, and no arrogant fools spouting political or doctrinal opinions can be allowed to set the tone or the agenda for the Holy One's Kingdom of Priests. The next phase of this Kingdom is to be introduced to the world and administered by humble men, women, and children – honest brokers who are willing to immerse themselves in Torah, walk through teshuvah, stand in prayer, and do *tzedakah*. This season is lost on the unteachable ones who think they already know it all. It is lost as well on those whose primary usage of the capacities of thought and speech is to judge, criticize, and condemn others. Elul is for those who have their ear, heart, and mind tuned to the Holy One, and long to walk with Him daily.

The vision is glorious. The blueprint is brilliant. The season for Kingdom Construction is upon us. But who will catch the Architect's vision? And from whence will come the men who know Torah, the men, women, and children who are willing to be schooled in Kingdom administration and infrastructure building?

Where Are the Infrastructure Builders?

The Kingdom-building mandate of *Shoftim* is not intended for prideful, offended, angry, judgmental, hypocritical people who like think of themselves as worthy judges. It is certainly not intended for – nor safe in the hands of - short-sighted, self-absorbed cynics and critics who operate out of the negative energy of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Who is the wisdom of this parsha intended for? The *Parsha of Responsible Kingdom Administration* follows parshot *D'varim*, *Va'etchanan*, *Ekev*, and *Re'eh* for a reason. It is intended for those who have an awareness of their special calling and their predisposition to sinfulness [*D'varim*]. It is intended for these who, in response to the knowledge of their special calling and their predisposition to sinfulness, have a fresh history of humbling themselves before the Bridegroom-King to plead for His Grace [*Va'etchanan*]. It is intended for those who have embraced the mind-renewing and identity-reshaping power of the *mitzvot*, *mishpatim* and *chukim* of Torah, and as a result have already begun to leave a Messiah-like 'footprint' wherever they go [*Ekev*]. It is intended for those who have sought and received Divinely enhanced vision regarding what it means to worship the Holy One in Spirit as well as in Truth, who have wholeheartedly embraced the Bridegroom-King's Kingdom-Building agenda, as well as the King's priorities and calendar [*Re'eh*].

In short, the Divine download of empowering wisdom that constitutes parsha *Shoftim* is intended for humble, fully surrendered lovers of the Bridegroom-King who are bearing fruit testifying of a very real and practical relationship with the Holy One. The revelation of parsha *Shoftim* is intended for people whose chief desire has become to see the Holy One's Kingdom come and His Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven – and that these things happen in the Bridegroom-King's Timing, in His Delightful, Glorious Way. The wisdom this parsha presents is for Covenant-submissive, Kingdom-Minded, King's-Agenda-focused people. The things Moshe will teach in the Parsha of Responsible Kingdom Administration are intended for those who have been found worthy by the King of carrying spiritual authority. It is, in other words, for those who have 'caught' the vision of the King, had intimate communion with Him and are engaged in an active apprenticeship under His Tutelage. It is for people who are willing to surrender all personal agendas, attitudes and opinions in exchange for the privilege of co-laboring with the Bridegroom-King in the administration of the King's Grand Cross-generational Plan of Redemption for Mankind and Creation.

This is not a time for complaining. This is not a time for assigning blame. This is not a time for 'civil disobedience' in the name of politics or theology. This is a time to tune into the heart of, heed the words of, and serve the purposes of, the King. There is no place on the Kingdom-Construction crew for any form of self-obsession - whether it be self-loathing, self-pity, or self-promotion. Our season of building Kingdom Infrastructure must be like the sweet season in which our forefathers built the Tabernacle. In this season our lives – and our thoughts, conversations, behaviors, and reactions, must not be about us - they must be about THE BRIDEGROOM-KING. We have the honor of bringing THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN to earth in real time, in real ways, and in real life. Politics, ideology, self-interest, analysis, philosophy, pharmakeia³ and religion have all had their day – and look what a horrible mess these things have made of our world! There is no other priority. Now it is time for our Bridegroom to be exalted, adored, served, and introduced to the world!

Enhanced Visual Capacities Should Be Kicking In Big Time!

Three weeks ago in his world-changing *Va'etchanan* download Moshe invited us into what I call *the realm of the Divine Spark* – i.e. the level where we both hear

³ Revelation 18:23 declares regarding the One World Order system code-named 'Mystery Babylon': "And the light of a candle will shine no more at all in you; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in you, though your merchants were the great men of the earth; for by your pharmakeia [KJV 'sorceries', but literally meaning chemical/pharmaceutical compounds/mixtures] were all nations (ethnicities, cultures) deceived."

and respond to the life-giving words of the Holy One. Last week in parsha *Re'eh* the fiery prophet exhorted us to actually take one step higher, and enter into *the realm of Divinely enhanced vision*. Moshe drew us after our Divine Bridegroom at a whole new *altitude*, and encouraged us to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by this height to 'behold' the things of this world *from a long-term Kingdom perspective*. He wants to train those who will surrender to the process - and agree not be offended - how to see, recognize, and participate in '*what the Father is doing*' on the earth. He wants us to join Him in doing exactly what He is doing at our 'such a time as this'.

***He's As Blind As He Can Be – He Just Sees What He Wants to See!*⁴**

Just as there are frequencies of sound that lie beyond the boundaries of ordinary human hearing, so are there multiple realms of activity that lie beyond the shortsighted veil of ordinary human vision. In other words, at any given moment *there are thousands more things going on than meet the eye*. There is always much, much more happening than human eyes can see. Shaul acknowledges this reality by stating explicitly that the Holy One created things that were both visible and things that were *invisible*. **Colossians 1:16**⁵.

Some realms once thought to be invisible can now be visualized through human inventions such as microscopes, telescopes, sonograms, and night-vision technology. These are not really invisible things – just very small or very distant things. Some realms of invisible creation however – *i.e.* those in the Spiritual realms – cannot be seen even with the most sophisticated technological innovations. These are things that the Holy One has designed to be so hidden from ordinary view that even angels long to look into them. See **1 Peter 1:10-12**⁶. To visualize these realms of truly invisible reality one must have the kind of *Divinely enhanced vision* that Moshe introduced to us in Torah. Religious minds are content to just see what they see on the page, in the program, through the formula, according to the doctrinal statement, as stated in the creed. These are those who *just see what they want to see*. Star-crossed lovers of God with awestruck hearts, on the other hand, always desire to gaze upon the truly invisible things of the Holy

⁴ These words are from John Lennon's 1965 philosophical composition 'Nowhere Man', which was recorded by the Beatles and made a part of the album 'Rubber Soul'.

⁵ This verse reads: "*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.*"

⁶ This passage reads: "*Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Messiah who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Messiah and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the good tidings to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels desire to look.*"

One.

Shaul of Tarsus was one of the awestruck ones. His odyssey started with a voice that was audible but *a vision no one else saw*. **Acts 9:7**. He always sought to inspire his readers to be awestruck ones as well – people whose goal is to “*not focus on the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*” **II Corinthians 4:18**. After all, as the writer of Hebrews has made clear, the currency of the Kingdom in this age is never what is seen, but it is always the ‘*evidence of things not seen*’. **Hebrews 11:1[b]**. So, much as in Genesis 22:11-13 the experience of *sh’ma*-ing the Voice of the Angel of the Holy One caused Avraham to ‘look up’ from *the procedures he thought of as worship* and see the ways of Heaven⁷, so last week the prophet of the Holy One invited us to transition from *sh’ma*-ing the words of the Holy One to ‘look up’ from the procedures we think of as worship and see the higher ways to which we are called to honor our Bridegroom-King⁸.

The Key to Life, Health, and Peace – It Has to Start With Food

Moshe did not by any means stop with introducing us to a Divinely enhanced vision of ‘worship’. He quickly turned his attention to matters far less esoteric. He called us to take a fresh look at what we do and do not see when we think of ‘food’. Building upon what the Holy One had declared at Sinai about things that are and are not to be considered ‘food’ for us and our children [See Leviticus 11:1-23] he reminded us that the only living creatures the Holy One designed to be ‘food’ for us were [a] mammals that both *part the hoof* and *chew the cud* and [b] aquatic creatures having both *fins and scales*. Multiple creatures that do meet these criteria certainly exist. Such creatures, however, are designed by the Holy One to serve other purposes in Creation than as part of the human ‘food’ chain. Most of them play critical roles in the earth’s waste recycling and/or disposal system. Moshe

⁷ In Genesis 22:5, in preparation for the *akeida*, Avraham said to his young men he had taken with him to the base of Mount Moriyah: *‘Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go to that place. We will worship [Hebrew, nishtachaveh] and then we will return to you.’*

⁸ Moshe had previously spoken to those with ears to *sh’ma* what true worship is to consist of. See Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28-29. Last week he went further and gave us something to compare the true, pure worship of the Holy One he had taught us *against*. This consisted of pulling back the prophetic curtain and showing us a glimpse of the kinds of things the Kena’ani people groups who dwell in the land we [except for Kalev and Y’hoshua] had not yet seen do in the name of ‘worshipping’ their gods. He wanted us to recognize false worship modalities when we see them. He does not want us to get confused about something as important as worshipping our Bridegroom King. So he began last week’s parsha by prophetically showing us what not to do in the name of worship. He then brought the parsha to an end by reminding us where and when and how our Divine Bridegroom has planned for His Beloved ones to gather corporately to meet with Him and rejoice in His Presence – in dramatic contradistinction to the local-community centered, random timed, human-activity focused worship pattern the Kena’ani followed.

enjoined us to recognize that the All-Wise Creator Who knows exactly why He made each creature wants us to see all those creatures and their purposes through His eyes instead of the short-sighted, appetite-crazed eyes of human flesh which tend to *just see what they want to see*.

The Marks of Beasts and Other Priorities

Moshe did not stop with calling us to employ our Divinely enhanced visual capacities to re-examine the food issue. He also had us look closely at our skin and our hair. He then opened up the realm of Divinely enhanced vision in these areas to show us some examples of things involving skin and hair disfigurement practices which the pagan cultures around us consider artistic ‘expressions of individuality’. The Holy One, however, revealed how totally inconsistent such things – and the bold statement they make about our leftover flesh enslavement priorities - are with a life totally surrendered to the call of the Holy One. Our bodies – including our skin covering and our hair - are no longer our own to do with as we please, for our pleasure and our self-expression. They belong to our Redeemer-King. They are for His use, and for His glory. They are not for our self-expression. They are not supposed to look like the popular culture’s latest trend. We began to see that for sons and daughters of the Kingdom neither the styles of pagan culture nor a self-indulgent desire for individual expression can determine how we will steward, bedeck and adorn our bodies. His instructions must do that.

The Poor You Will Always Have With You

Next Moshe taught us what being ‘poor’ really looks like in the eyes of those whose vision has been Divinely enhanced. He then introduced us to visual images that showed us how the Holy One desires for earthly subjects of the kingdom of Heaven to relate to and interact with those who are truly poor. He taught us that we are not to see or interact with the poor through the fragile, easily manipulated lens of ‘human compassion’ but through the trustworthy lens of eternal wisdom and enlightened Divine Compassion.

If I Forget You, O Jerusalem ...

And then Moshe began to cultivate in us eyes to see a Great City of a Great King. He introduced us to, and caused us to hunger for, the idea of going ‘*up to Jerusalem*’. As a result we have come to understand a little of what David meant when he wrote in Psalm 27:4-5:

*One thing have I asked of the HOLY ONE, that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the HOLY ONE all the days of my life,
to behold the graciousness of the HOLY ONE, and to visit early in His temple.*

*For He conceals me in His pavilion in the day of evil;
He hides me in the covert of His tent; He lifts me up/makes me stand upon a rock.*

This Week: Even More Areas Receive the Scrutiny of Divinely Enhanced Vision

This week the prophetic call to rethink everything we think we know about life on earth will shift to a call to ‘rebuild’ human society in very practical, strategic ways. *Shoftim* will shine the spotlight of Divinely enhanced visual capacities on even more important areas of life on earth. Moshe will begin by focusing on the kind of healthy interpersonal relations he wants us to experience in the villages, towns, cities, and *shtetl*’s in which we will live. You see, in this world we are not called to function merely as individuals. It is never ‘us against the world’. Nor are we – for any extended period of time – supposed to limit our interactions solely to the members of our families. We are not Noach. We are not called to build an ark and hide out in it in hopes we and our families can somehow miraculously weather the approaching storm. We are like the stars in the Heavens and the sands of the Sea. We are designed and strategically placed to constitute critical parts of and to play important roles in our King’s great ecosystem. We have been assigned places to go, people to meet, and downloads of Kingdom *simchah* [joy], *shalom* [peace, wellness, wholeness], *chokmah* [wisdom], *tikvah* [hope] and *chanan* [grace, mercy] to release. We are called, commissioned, and empowered to change the atmosphere every place the sole of our foot shall tread by offering a BETTER WAY – i.e. a better FRAGRANCE, a better WORLDVIEW, and a BETTER SET OF OPTIONS in every area of life. We are not here to take over the world – or even to impose our opinions, our beliefs, or our moral compass on its population. We are not here to cram anything down anyone’s throat. We are not here to engage the world in arguments over philosophy, ideology, theology or politics. We are not here to criticize people who do not think or behave the way we think they should. We are not here to condemn people for the thoughts they think, the ideologies that stir their passions, or the ideas they espouse. We are not here to pronounce judgment on either sinful individuals, misguided organizations, fossilized institutions, or nations. We are not here to express outrage. We are not here to be vigilantes. We are not here to hate – or to throw gasoline on the flames of hate coming forth from those who know no other way. What we are here to do is release the sweet fragrance of Messiah, and pour out the pure water of the King’s Words. We are here to introduce others to the pleasantness of the King’s Heart and to offer them the problem-solving wisdom of the King’s counsel. We are here to model the Kingdom Worldview and the Bridal Lifestyle to real people in real time in real life situations. Anything else we choose to do is disconnected from and counter-productive to our mission. Any other endeavor is an unhealthy romp down the dark pathway of the runaway bride.

***Getting An Understanding of –
and the Bridegroom-King’s Heart For – the Communities
In Which We Live, Work, Shop, Congregate, and Vacation***

Our covenant walk with the Holy One is designed to involve not only *vertical interactions* – i.e. wonderful seasons of intimate communion with the Divine Bridegroom. It is also designed to involve a plethora of strategic *horizontal interactions* designed to advance the Kingdom of Heaven in the ‘real world’ These horizontal interactions include encounters with *members of our own family*, with *strangers on the street*, with *casual acquaintances in the marketplace*, with the *authority figures and bureaucrats of a myriad of human institutions*, and with all the crazy characters that live in our neighborhoods.

In this connection it helps to keep in mind that each of us is called to participate – and wield Kingdom influence - in two *communities*. *First of all*, we are called to be part of and contributors to a *covenant community* – made up of all those who, like us, have been redeemed by the Holy One and are actively seeking to live the *sh’ma* lifestyle to which we are called in Torah. I call this first circle of humanity our “*Torah Community*”. By no means do I intend to limit this to those with whom you actually meet and study Torah, pray, or worship – I mean all within your city or village which hold to both the Commandments of God and the Testimony of Yeshua⁹ – whether you know them by name, or gather with them, or not.

Secondly, we are also called to participate in a much larger, much looser, and potentially more hostile community – the community of all descendants of Adam who do not hold to the Commandments of God and the Testimony of Yeshua. I call second circle of humanity our ‘*Adamic Community at-Large*’.

Fulfillment of the mission for which we have been sent to live on planet earth for our respective ‘such a time as this’ certainly requires us to know how to [a] relate intimately, lovingly and submissively to our Divine Bridegroom one-on-one [Mission Focus # 1], and to [b] teach such ways of relating to the Holy One to our children [Mission Focus # 2]. But it also requires us to learn how to *represent* and *be an ambassador for* our Divine Bridegroom in all our day-to-day dealings with all our fellow men – all our horizontal interactions with members of either our *Torah Community* or the *Adamic Community at-Large*. [Mission Focus #3]. As both Moshe and Messiah were careful to instruct us, we are not merely called to *love the Holy One our God with all our individual hearts, and minds, and strength*¹⁰ - we are

⁹ This description of the Torah Community is clearly set forth in such verses as Revelation 1:2, 1:9, 6:9, 12:17, 14:12, and 22:14.

¹⁰ Moshe taught this in Deuteronomy 6:5; Y’shua taught this in Mark 12:29-30.

also called to, at the *same time*, and with the *same degree of zeal, love our neighbors as ourselves*¹¹. Our individual hearts are always to aspire to go ‘*up to Y’rushalayim*’. But in the meantime we still have *day-to-day lives to live and properties to steward and social, governmental, and economic issues to deal with* in our respective *villages, towns, and shtetls*.

Our Divine Bridegroom deeply *loves* and passionately *desires to use us to release some level of blessing into the life of* each and every member of both our Torah Community and the Adamic Community at-Large. We are His *diplomats*. We are His *emissaries*. We are His *envoys*. We are His Kingdom’s *ambassadors*. Our calling as representatives of His Kingdom prohibits us from either *ignoring* or *acting disrespectful toward* any other human being. Our calling as His *attachés* prohibits us from either *worshipping* or *hating or fawning over* or *cowering in fear before* any other human being. The stakes are high. Our opportunity to participate in the advancement of the Kingdom of the Most High God is upon us. Hence it is time to focus our divinely enhanced vision squarely upon the mundane affairs of day-to-day life – especially the interpersonal transactions, interactions, and conflicts we all face here in our *respective periods of waiting*.

Looking With Divinely Enhanced Vision at Matters of Day-to-Day Life Within Our Personal Spheres of Influence

Moshe describes the location upon which he wants to focus our attention as ‘*b’chol she’areicha*’. That literally translates as ‘*in/at all your gates*’. So what are these ‘gates’ Moshe is talking about? Put another way, when Moshe uses the phrase ‘*in/at all [our] gates*’ the question for those who are learning to function in the *re’eh*-realm of Divinely enhanced vision becomes – *What do you see?*

The Hebrew noun in question is *sha’ar* – formed by combining the Hebrew letters *shin, ayin, and resh*. It is derived from the verb root that means to *divide, mark off, or separate into realms*. Moshe has used this noun several times before in this discourse. It started in Deuteronomy 5:14 where Moshe spoke to us of the Sabbath and told us that among the persons who were to rest from labor along with us on the seventh day is ‘the foreigner *b’sho’areicha* [*i.e. in/at/on your gates*]. Then came Deuteronomy 6:9, where Moshe told us that we were to write the words of the Torah not just on the doorposts of our houses but also *b’sho’areicha* [*i.e. in/at/on your gates*]¹². This was followed by Deuteronomy 14:28, where Moshe told us that in the third year of the tithe cycle we are to bring out the tithe of our produce of that year and store it up *b’sho’areicha* [*i.e. in/at/on your gates*]. Wherever you may see our ‘gates’ as being, they are clearly places where the foreigner, the Levite, the

¹¹ Moshe taught this in Leviticus 19:18; Y’shua taught this in Mark 12:31.

¹² This instruction was repeated in Deuteronomy 11:20.

fatherless and the widow who are *within our gates* can come to rest on Sabbath and to which they can come when hungry and eat to their fill. **Deuteronomy 14:29.**

But ... What Do You See?

What we see and do not see when we look at the written page of Torah and read on it a phrase like ‘*in/at all [our] gates*’ will depend upon the extent to which we have or have not entered into the realm of enhanced visual capacities. One basic physical-level answer to the question would be “*I see the physical gates of walled cities in Israel circa 1400 BCE.*” There is little question that is a legitimate ***p’shat*** [i.e. simple, straightforward, exegeted, face-value] interpretation¹³.

If a few physical gates of a very few walled cities in ancient Israel are all you see when you read the phrase ‘*in/at all our gates*’ there is not really much point to this passage being codified in the Scripture. There are, after all, not many walled cities with standing gates left – in Israel or in the world. So if all one sees when reading what we are to do ‘*in/at all our gates*’ is a historic anomaly applicable only in ancient cities, Moshe’s words are reduced to no real meaning whatever to us today. In that event the things Moshe says to us about what we are to do ‘*in/at all our gates*’ will be mildly of interest to us from a historical viewpoint, but will seem completely irrelevant to any real-life issue. And that will mean that what Shaul of Tarsus wrote to Timothy in II Timothy 3:16 – i.e. that *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* – is simply not true for us today. Perhaps we need to pursue this a little further. What if we looked a little deeper at what a *sha’ar* is, and prayed along with the Psalmist as we did so that the Holy One would: ‘***Open my eyes that we may see wondrous things in your Torah***’? Psalm 119:18.

Moshe – and the Divine Writer Who inspired him - could have chosen words that would have limited the application of the ‘*in/at all your gates*’ instructions to literal gates of literal cities. Moshe knew the right words to use to do so. But he chose not to¹⁴. So what else could we the phrase ‘*in/at all your gates*’ mean. Surely our gates – whatever they are - are supposed to be unlike any other nation or people’s gates. Surely our gates – whatever they are - are supposed to function as gateways to the Kingdom of Heaven. What if it is all a matter of the *points of intersection of the various spheres of influence the Holy One opens up to us for His Kingdom’s sake*. Do we not all have *personal ‘gates’* over which we are responsible for traffic into and out of? Do we not all have an *eye gate*, an *ear gate*, an *attitude gate*, a *taste gate*, a *smell gate*, a *speech gate*, an *opinion gate*, and

¹³ It should be noted however that Moshe did not mention cities at all in this passage. And nowhere in this section did he use the well-known Hebrew phrase that refers to walled cities [i.e. *irim choma'im*].

¹⁴ In this connection one might also ask what Moshe was referring to as our ‘gates’ in Deuteronomy 14:28.

so on? Do we not all also have *media gates* over which we are responsible - gates that open every time we turn on a television or radio, play music, access the internet, or speak, text or use an app on a phone. And do we all not have many other more *interpersonal gates* over which we are responsible as well, situated at every portal through which we pass to interact with the world. We pass through a point of intersection of realms [*i.e.* a *sha'ar*, or 'gate'] each time we enter or leave our home, each time we turn onto a route we have chosen to follow to get from one place to another, each time we enter or leave our work area, our entertainment area, and any marketplace area to which we go.

What Should Be Found In/At/On All Our 'Gates'?

Moshe tells us that two kinds of guardians should be established at all of our gates. The first kind of guardian-at-the-gates functions as a *shofet*. The second kind of guardian-at-the-gates functions as a *shoter*. It is through these filters all stimuli and all interactions with Creation [in human or other form] – in both of the communities with which we are called to interact - should be processed. But what exactly is the function of a *shofet*? And what specifically is the role and value of a *shoter*? Ah, Beloved, those are just a few of the issues we will be discussing in our studies this week.

A Foretaste of Kingdom Government – And a Glimpse Inside the Inner Workings of the Messianic Kingdom

At this stage in his life Moshe sees – and wants us to train us to see - things the average man does not see. Moshe's vision is not limited by linear horizons. He sees – at least through a glass darkly – the process of the development of Kingdom principles in layers and stages. He sees the risings and fallings of history across many generations, indeed across many millennia. Knowing the fits and starts the people of the Great King will endure along the way he is taking care to lay a solid foundation for us - because he knows what is going to be built upon those foundations both for good and for evil.

Y'hoshua and Kalev will build upon the foundations Moshe is laying – but so will the sons of Eli. David and Sh'lomo and Eliyahu and Elishahu will build upon the foundations Moshe is laying – but so will persons with other agendas like Jeroboam and Ahab and Jezebel. Yeshayahu and Yirmayahu and Yechezkiel and Hoshea will build upon Moshe's foundation – but so will the false prophets who speak '*peace, peace, when there is no peace.*' Yochanan the Immerser and Yeshua of Natzret will build upon the foundations of Moshe – but so will a multitude of persons with other agendas and values such as Herod and Caiaphas and the Pharisees and Sadducees. The problem will not lay in the foundation. The foundation – the Torah – is perfect. It is the Very Word of the Holy One. And this

firm foundation will *always be there* for us. Our job in every generation will merely be *to clean away the debris of false structures that self-absorbed and deceived men have built* over this foundation for their own purposes and pursuant to their own agendas. The key is to recognize what is the foundation Moshe laid, and what is a false addition or plastering over of that foundation. Here are the keystone elements of the true foundation of the Word of the Holy One through Moshe:

1. ***yirat Adonai*** [the fear of the Holy One is the beginning of wisdom (i.e. skill in practical application of Torah)];
2. ***the brit olam principle*** [our purpose and destiny on earth was established forever by the Covenant (brit) the Holy One made with our Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov and re-affirmed with the generation of the Exodus on Mount Sinai];
3. ***ahavat Adonai*** [the love of/passionate pursuit of the Holy One is the first duty of mankind, and as covenant partners of the Holy One our first responsibility is to model such love and passionate pursuit for all to see];
4. ***ahavat l'reacha*** [the love of neighbor as self is the second duty of mankind, and as covenant partners of the Holy One we are to take the lead in demonstrating that kind of love to the world]
5. the ***sh'ma Yisrael*** lifestyle [true princes of the Holy One's Kingdom must live by attuning their ears to, *sh'ma*-ing, meditating upon, and putting into practical application all His Words]; and
6. ***avodat Adonai*** [to be of service to and in the name of the Holy One, making *tikkun olam* for the sin of the Garden, is the purpose of man].

Moshe will now spend three full parshot – *Shoftim*, *Ki Tetze*, and *Ki Tavo* – laying out practical steps through which the above kingdom principles are to be established in the lives of real people. In *Shoftim* his primary focus will be to address the different types of human, flesh and blood leadership that the Holy One has in mind for His people as they work through the process of implementing Kingdom principles. There will be five primary types mentioned in all:

1. *shoftim* [usually translated as 'judges'],
2. *shotrim* [usually translated as 'officials' or 'scribes'],
3. *melachim* [usually translated as "kings"],
4. *kohanim* [usually translated as "priests"], and
5. *nevi'im* [usually translated as "prophets"].

Before *Shoftim* is over Moshe discuss in detail each of these five types of leaders which the Holy One will cause to exist and affect our daily lives in the Redeemed Community.

***Hmmmmn. Is it Possible We Have Found
the Hebraic Roots of Shaul of Tarsus 'Five-fold Ministry' Concept?***

Take note as you read this week's parsha that the Holy One has apparently

always had a “five-fold ministry” team in mind for His people. The concept was not invented by Shaul. Indeed, if we think it through we may come to question whether what Shaul was really talking as a ‘five-fold ministry’ is anything at all like what Christian theologians have taught. Most of those theologians actually teach that what Shaul was talking about was *leadership positions in ‘local church organizations’* when he said in Ephesians 4 [as translated into English]:

*He gave some to be **apostles**;
and some, **prophets**; and some, **evangelists**; and some, **shepherds** and **teachers**;
for the perfecting of the holy ones to the work of serving,
to the building up of the body of Messiah; until we all attain to the unity of the faith,
and of the knowledge of the Son of the Holy One, to a full-grown man,
to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Messiah;
that we may no longer be children, tossed back and forth
and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men,
in craftiness, after the wiles of error; but speaking truth in love,
we may grow up in all things into him who is the head, Messiah;
from whom all the body, being fitted and knit together
through that which every joint supplies,
according to the working in measure of each individual part,
makes the body increase to the building up of itself in love.*

[Ephesians 4:11-16]

But what if Shaul – a Torah-submissive Hebrew of Hebrews - was NOT talking about leadership in ‘local churches’ at all, but was instead midrashing about the leaders the Holy One had given to the nation of Israel? When Shaul wrote his letters, you see, the bulk of the Jewish people were still living in Israel under a Roman ‘protectorate’. Shaul’s letter to the called-out ones in the city of Ephesus was dated *circa* 62 CE – 8 full years prior to the destruction of the Temple by the armies of Titus. So what if in Shaul’s mind the word we translate into English as “apostles” in this passage was not meant to refer to any modern-day preacher claiming that august title, as we have been led to believe, but refers instead to pioneering covenant-keepers like Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya’akov, and Yosef, about which we read in Sefer *B’reshit*? What if in Shaul’s mind the word we translate into English as “prophets” was not meant to refer to the ‘personal prophecy’ ministers we find so often in modern charismatic congregations but was intended instead to refer to prophets like Moshe and Y’hoshua, about which we read in Sefer *Sh’mot*, and to people like Yeshayahu, and Yirmayahu, and Daniel, and Yechezkiel, and Zecharyah (to name a few)? What if in Shaul’s mind the word we translate into English as “evangelists” was not meant to refer to powerful gospel preachers like Billy Graham, but to Aharon and his sons, about whom we read in Sefer *Vayikra*, who called people to the altar of the Holy One, and whose descendants, the Maccabees, had evangelized all of Israel after it had been overrun by Hellenism? What if in Shaul’s mind the word we

commonly translate into English as ‘pastors’¹⁵ [literally, *shepherds*, as in the above quotation] was not meant to refer to modern day heads of local religious organizations but was instead intended to refer to the tribal leaders of whom we read in Sefer *B’midbar* [the book of Numbers], and to the kings of Israel who followed them, of whom David, the *shepherd king*, is the loftiest example? And is it possible that the word we translate into English as “teachers” was not intended to refer to modern-day Bible lecturers but was instead referencing ordinary God-fearing fathers and mothers who live by, and teach their children, according to the *sh’ma* principle, about which we have been reading in Sefer *D’varim* [Deuteronomy]? Is it possible that Shaul was merely making a *drash* on Torah rather than declaring a new model or hierarchy of leadership for ‘local church’ organizations? Is it possible the “*five-fold*” *ministry*¹⁶ Shaul is referencing is nothing more than a midrashic metaphor for *the five books of Torah*, and *the five specific prototypes of leadership that are revealed by the Holy One in each of those five books*?

Such things are indeed possible if Torah is *the foundation of all Scriptural revelation* and the *eternal standard against which all revelation is to be judged and according to which all revelation is to be interpreted*.

A Brief Introduction to Haftarah Shoftim

Isaiah 51:12 – 52:12

Anochi anochi hu menachemchem – i.e I, (even) I, am He Who comforts you ... ***mi-at vatir’i me’enosh yamut*** – Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die ... ***umiben-adam chatzir yinaten*** - and of the son of a man who will be made like grass? *** ***Va’asim devarai beficha*** – But I put My words in your mouth ... ***uvetzel yadi*** – and covered you with My Hand ... ***kisiticha lintoa shamayim v’lisod aretz*** – while planting the Heavens, and laying the foundations of the earth ... ***v’lemor l’Tziyon ami-atah*** – and have said of Tziyon ‘you are My People!’. **Isaiah 51:12, 16.**

A new week brings a fresh word of consolation - mingled with powerful exhortation - from the prophet. The season of prophetic consolation is now in its fourth week, and this is the 'tipping point' week. This week the focus of the consolation prophecies begins to shift. From this point forward it will include not only what the Holy One plans to do to redeem Jerusalem and restore His Kingdom's glory and influence on planet earth, but what OUR responsibility is in His Plan.

¹⁵ It should be noted that this one verse in Ephesians is the only place anywhere in the apostolic Scriptures that the word we translate as “*pastor(s)*” is found. The Greek word, *poimen*, Strong’s Greek word # 4166, pronounced *poy-mane*, is always used to refer to a *shepherd*, watching over sheep – or metaphorically, to a *Melech Yisrael*, like unto David.

¹⁶ This phrase is not mentioned anywhere in Scripture. It is merely a popular shorthand “church-ese” way of referring to the five categories of leaders referenced in Ephesians 4:11.

First Yeshayahu is going to issue a call upon all people in Covenant relationship with the Holy One to remember who our God is and what marvelous works and creative miracles He has on His “resume”. Secondly the prophet will exhort us to lift up our heads and look for our soon and coming redemption and restoration. He will proclaim boldly that “all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.” And then will come the most challenging message of all - the true *'tipping point'* message of the season of consolation. Yeshayahu will, you see, make it clear that in order for these glorious things to happen in our households and spheres of influence some drastic and dramatic changes have to take place in us and the way we both look at and interact with the world. Yeshayahu is going to passionately call on all who belong to the Holy One to “*depart, depart*” from their places and mindsets into which we have settled, and to no longer “*touch any unclean [Hebrew, tamei] thing*”.

Only when we are ready to see the false comforts and security of the cultures and economic systems of the nations for what they are and make our Exodus from them will we see His Kingdom operate the way He has promised. The Holy One is calling forth a great *Latter-Days' exodus* – a season of *radical disentanglement and departure*. This is His Plan for all the Holy One's people. Even as He called forth our ancestors to leave places like Ur of the Chaldees, Charan, Egypt, and Babylon, He now calls all who have ears to *sh'ma* to disentangle from that which is too familiar, too comfortable, and far too beloved to our flesh to allow us to let Him do what He wants to do to deliver us, our households, our generations, and our nation from our present-day enslavement.

Restoration is coming to us. *Hear, O Israel!* But ... the coming restoration will require some re-evaluation of both our *relationships* and our *associations*. There are, you see, some *things* – and some *organizations*, and some *systems of theology*, and yes, perhaps even some *people* – that we are going to be called to *leave behind*. Leaving – i.e. moving on in response to the Divine Bridegroom's call – is a part of our destiny. It has been since the time of Avram. It will continue until the Messiah comes to rule and reign. The key is going to be knowing what to leave, when to leave, and where we are to go from here, and how all this can be accomplished in a way that both honors the Holy One and furthers the advancement of His Kingdom.

A word of warning. Whatever the Holy One of Israel tells you to leave behind, it is altogether likely that *some people are not going to like it*. If you leave behind what and who the Holy One tells you to I dare say you may just see the modern equivalent of Pharaoh's chariot corps kicking up some serious dust in your rear-

view mirror. You may just hear the old accusations, perhaps whispered behind your back, perhaps stated as open condemnation, that you are “going back under the law”, and “forsaking the assembling”, and – my personal favorite - “walking in deception”. Which brings us to the Apostolic Writings we will study this week.

The Apostolic Writings For the Week of Shoftim **John 1:19-20**

Now this is the testimony [Grk. martyria] of Yochanan (i.e. ‘John’) ... John 1:19a.

In this week’s excerpt from the writings of Messiah’s chosen talmidim we find ourselves in the Jordan River Valley, witnessing a fascinating encounter between *Yochanan the Immerser* [John the Baptist] and a delegation of religious leaders of Israel. Those religious leaders were not happy. Vast crowds of people – including many of their associates – were suddenly flocking to the River to hear Yochanan. They simply could not understand or appreciate what this non-conformist – though by birthright a *kohen* [priest] of the highest order - could possibly be doing declaring the Word of the Holy One ‘outside the system’, standing in the Jordan Rift Valley, knee deep in muddy water. Yochanan’s message was, we will find, about like Yeshayahu’s ‘*depart, depart*’, ‘*go out from there*’, and ‘*touch not the unclean thing*’ message. What Yochanan was doing, you see, was calling people to come out of the hallowed halls of organized religion to join him on the muddy banks of the Jordan River.

Who Do You Think You Are?

In John 1:19 a set of religious leaders from Jerusalem go out to Yochanan as he is calling people to make *mikveh* in the Jordan. These religious leaders confront Yochanan about what he is doing. They begin by asking Yochanan the exact same question the Holy One asked in Isaiah 51:12 [*Who are you?*] as he was in the process of encouraging many to turn back to the Holy One and express their commitment to return to the ancient paths of Torah visibly by undergoing *mikveh*.

Here was their question: *Why was Yochanan not in the synagogue - or at least in the Temple courts?* The guy was clearly of the *priestly lineage* – his father being the *kohen* Zechariah. He was also clearly a *gifted teacher*. So why, the religious leaders wanted to know, did he *stay ‘outside’ organized religion, calling people out?* In their minds Yochanan had done the absolutely *unthinkable*. He had *traded his father’s priestly robes for ... a camel hair loincloth*. He had traded his right, as a *kohen*, to dine on the *korbanot* [approach surrogates] and first fruit presentations of Am Yisrael for ... *locusts and wild honey!* He had traded the hallowed halls of organized religion and the honor of positions and titles for a muddy riverbank and a life of speaking only words people did not, by and large, want to hear. “*Who was this guy indeed!*” they demanded to know.

In order to be able to answer that in any meaningful way one must understand that the person serving as *kohen gadol* [high priest] in Yochanan's time had not been 'raised up' and placed in his position by the Holy One. Neither had his predecessor, or his predecessor's predecessor before him. In fact ever since Rome had been invited into Jerusalem to resolve some infighting in the Hasmonean dynasty that followed the Maccabees, the high priesthood had become nothing more than a political 'pawn' in the hands of Rome. For exorbitant sums of money – some would call it *bribes* - Rome was happy to appoint - and then unceremoniously depose – ambitious people aspiring to the title 'high priest'.

The role of High Priest had been desecrated by greed. And as a consequence the Temple – and the whole system of worship it was supposed to represent - had become *horribly* and *irretrievably* polluted. Indeed much of what Antiochus Epiphanes and his mighty Syrian army could not do 170 or so years previously by force the Romans were able to do by the process of *political appointment*. If Rome appoints a high priest, you see, the high priest is *beholden to Rome* and therefore *must do what pleases Rome*. That is – and always will be - the way religious 'appointments' work, Beloved.

The Breaking of the Bonds of Dependency To A Corrupted Priesthood

The *purists* of the Hebrew populace had therefore pulled out long ago. To distance themselves from the corruption of the priesthood they had abandoned the Temple and moved to places like *Qumran*. Indeed, by Yochanan's time many of the best and brightest of Israel had long since left the corrupted and spiritually empty Temple - and the religious system of the country - to the Sadducees and the *P'rushim* [Pharisees] to fight over. And fight those two groups did! And as each sought Rome's assistance in getting 'one leg up' on the other, each was, unwittingly, used by Rome to keep the other 'in line'. So Yochanan would have no part of it. He preferred a *desert*, a *cave*, and a *muddy riverbank*. But do not misunderstand the motive or intent of Yochanan's move as some kind of aesthetic retreat. The son of Zecharyah and Elisheva was no hermit or monk. The Holy One established his address – and brought people to him by the droves. He stood outside the system, it is true, but he did not retreat from its evils. He stood in the river and called all people whom the Holy One sent his way to flee that corrupt system just as he had and return to *the ancient paths of Torah*.

A New Beginning – Back to the Jordan, Where It All Began!

The watercourse at which Yochanan was stationed by the Holy One to call all who had ears to *sh'ma* was not just the nearest body of water. Have you ever noticed that not once is Yochanan described as 'baptizing' at the Sea of Galilee, in the

Mediterranean Sea, or in any of Eretz Yisrael's hundreds of *wadis and pools*? Have you ever wondered why only one source of water – the Jordan River - would do for the particular *mikveh* to which Yochanan called the nation on his particular watch? Why did Yochanan always call people to immersion in the water of *that particular river*? Ah Beloved – that was Yochanan's *whole point*. The Jordan was *the place where our descendants first entered the Land of the patriarchs*. Under Y'hoshua and Kalev, the generation of the conquest had crossed this very river with Moshe's words of exhortation and teaching ringing in their ears. And when the people had all crossed the River in the days of Y'hoshua and Kalev, Y'hoshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood, to serve as a sign to future generations of the faithfulness of the Holy One to His covenant with Avram and his descendants. **Joshua 4:1-9**.

The Jordan River was therefore EXACTLY where we all needed to return if we were to get a fresh start. We needed to identify with the zeal of our forefathers rather than the political and religious systems with which we had become familiar. What Yochanan was doing was calling all who were fed up with the corrupt and meaningless religious system that was operating under Roman auspices to return to 'square one' and to make new 'start'. The only place this could be done was at the 'entry point' – the place [physically and spiritually] where our descendants first embarked upon the Divine Mission of being a HOLY PEOPLE inhabiting a HOLY LAND. Yochanan's *mikveh* was not, you see, primarily a matter of *water*. It was primarily a matter of making *a new beginning*.

The Inquisition

In the passage we read this week Yochanan will be given the 'third degree' by the delegation of *kohanim* [priests] and *Levi'im* [Levites] sent out by the ruling party of the Sanhedrin, the *P'rushim* [Pharisees], to confront him. The *P'rushim* delegation will demand to know of Yochanan exactly what he thinks he is doing "outside the system". They will demand to know the theology of this upstart outsider – a man who did not even attend a synagogue – who had what appeared to them the *unmitigated gall* to stand in a stream of *mayim chayim* [living water] and call people to make *t'shuvah* [return to the *sh'ma* lifestyle of Torah] and announce 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. "***Are you the Messiah?***" they will ask. "***Are you the Prophet?***" they will interrogate. Well then "JUST WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?" they will demand to know.

We must pause for a moment, even before considering Yochanan's responses to these questions, and ask *ourselves* a question - *why did the P'rushim care?* Why was it of any concern to these religious leaders what Zechariah's black-sheep son Yochanan did or said way out in the hinterlands of the Jordan River

Valley. The answer is simple. They cared because their precious religious kingdom was crumbling around them like a house of cards. They cared because people were running away in droves from the entrenched religious world in which these men, and their ilk lived and functioned, and which provided not only their means of financial support but also their perception of their purpose in life.

The Essenes and groups like them [i.e. the *Qumran* sect which we learn about in the Dead Sea Scrolls] had left as soon as the High Priesthood became a *political office* – a branch office of the Roman government - instead of the reflection of Heavenly intercession and blessing which Torah prescribed. And over the years at first just a trickle, and now a flood, of people had determined, like the Essenes and other separatist sects, that the entrenched religious system – now run by a high priesthood sold by Rome to the highest bidder, and torn apart by bitter infighting between *P'rushim* [Pharisees] and Sadducees - had simply strayed too far off the Biblical foundation, and become far too corrupt, to be of any substantial benefit. Add to that the realization of the fact that thanks to Herod's lavish redecorating the Temple now looked much more like the Parthenon of Athens or the Coliseum of Rome than either the house that Shlomo built for the Holy One or the Tabernacle Moshe described as built "after the pattern" the Holy One had shown him on Mount Sinai. And add as well the realization there was in that gaudy Romanesque structure neither Ark of the Covenant nor mercy seat nor tablets of the Torah, nor the Radiant Cloud of the Holy One's Presence – for not one of these had been present at any time since the Babylonian captivity. On top of all this add the fact that the person wearing Aharon's robes in Yochanan's day was, instead of a Biblically selected High Priest, a *stooge of Rome* who had bribed his way into power so that he and his cronies could reap its financial rewards.

Considering all this it is understandable why the *kohanim* and Levi'im were sensing a growing dissatisfaction of *Am Yisrael* [the people of Israel] with the religious system as it existed on THEIR WATCH. The closer the *kohanim* got to the Romans, you see, the farther they drifted from their Divine purpose and destiny. And the *kohanim* – except for a certain rebel named Yochanan - were at the time Yochanan began to call people to *teshuvah* by the waters of the Jordan 'tighter than tight' with the Romans. The influence of the *kohanim* was fading right along with their legitimacy. And they simply *could not understand why*. So they *blamed everyone but themselves*. And thus when they heard reports that people were rushing out of the system to go hear what a guy in camel hair and sandals had to say about a real Torah-lifestyle they decided it was *time to put their foot down*. They confronted the young upstart. They tried to put him on

the defensive. They questioned him. They tried to trap him in his words. They were there to make mincemeat out of him, and to shame those who dared to listen to him into returning to ‘the fold’ where they belonged.

The early readings for this week will lay out the barrage of questions and veiled threats they all hurled at young Yochanan. They were questions that, as Tevye said in *Fiddler on the Roof*, would ‘cross a rabbi’s eyes’.

Yochanan’s Response

Beginning with Thursday’s *shiur this week* however we will begin see the tables will quickly turn. It will suddenly be Yochanan doing the talking. And he will not speak his own words, but will speak instead words that were placed in His mouth by the Holy One. He will draw first blood by telling them, in the aliyah we will read on Thursday, that he is a “***voice crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Holy One.***” Ouch! You don’t have to *make straight* that which is not *crooked*. The *kohanim* and Levi’im therefore stopped up their ears. People do that when something is said they do not want to hear. But Yochanan was not through yet. Let’s eavesdrop a little. Yochanan says:

I immerse in water, but among you stands One whom you don't know. He is the one who comes after me, who is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to loosen.

[John 1:26]

May you always pursue justice with the long-term perspective and gentleness of the Holy One, and may you always be a vessel of healing and a calm voice of wisdom in the gates

The Rabbi’s son

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week

The 2nd Petition – ***T’shuvah*** – *The Prayer of Repentance*

Ha-shiveinu Avinu l’Torahteichah

Bring us back, Our Father, to Your Torah

v’koraveinu malkiyinu l’avodeicha

and bring us close to You, Our King, that we may serve You

v’ha-chazireinu b’t’shuvah sh’leymah l’fanecha

may our repentance bring us Face-to-face with You

Baruch Atah Adonai

Blessed are You, O Holy One

ha-rotze b’t’shuvah

Who stirs in us a desire to repent