

Why Torah's Instructions, Today?

In this week's Parashah, Mishpatim, rules, judgments, we begin a thorough outline of the life instructions Adonai Elohim has for us. Although we may believe the list of instructions and commands we receive is exhaustive, it is nothing compared to how the rabbis, in Gemara and in Mishna, have expanded them. However, do these life instructions, these teachings, which many erroneously call 'law', serve a useful purpose? We talk about them a great deal in Kehilah but, really, they are so old; how could they possibly have any relation to our situation today? And, so, in this week's message, we will examine the question, why the instructions today?

Avenu Malkenu, our Father, our King, you dictated Torah to Moshe, to the elders of Israel and to the Israelites, at the base of Mount Sinai. You provided them with a set of life instructions which would guide and direct them, as they lived in community. Help us understand, this day, how these rules and judgments are relevant to us today, almost four thousand years later. In Your precious Name I pray.

I have often heard it said we live in a society which is free from the restrictions of religion. Thankfully, those who take this viewpoint say, we are mature and advanced enough to recognize the state and religion are separate entities and, therefore, there is no need for us to adhere or even reflect upon the laws that come to us from the Old Testament. Really? From my observation of the world today, I find very little evidence of this maturity or the ethical/moral advancement which would free us of the need for a higher set of guiding principles. David's words to us, in Psalm 15, ring particularly true today, *Those*

who live a blameless life, who behave uprightly, who speak truth from their hearts and keep their tongues from slander; who never do harm to others or seek to discredit neighbors; who look with scorn on the vile, but honor those who fear ADONAI . . . Those who do these things never will be moved. (Psalm 15:2-5) How many of us are able to call ourselves blameless? How many of us dare to say we do not sin? Indeed, as Yochanan, the Apostle of Love shares with us, in 1 John 1: *If we claim not to have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* (1 John 1:8) Even as we proclaim Mashiach and His Grace, through His sacrifice before the creation of the world, as we read in Revelation 13:8, we sin. And, as we sin, we need the guidance, support and direction of Adonai Elohim's Life Instructions in our lives to maintain our walk on the narrow path.

In Yahweh's universe, there is no religion. Do you find this a startling statement, coming from a spiritual leader? Yes, Messianic Judaism is not a religion, it is a relationship with our Adonai Elohim, our Lord God. And, as a relationship, it needs to have some boundaries. Why? As I have shared with you before, every relationship needs boundaries. When we were children, so many years ago, our parents created boundaries for us. These were used to guide us, as we developed and matured to the point we were able to make wise decisions for ourselves. Even so, often, and in my case frequently, we stretched and strained the boundaries, to see how far we could go. When we crossed those guiding lines and expectations, there were consequences to pay. And so it is with the life instructions, which form the boundaries of our relationship with Abba B'Shamayim.

The focus of this message is not to review God's instructions for our lives but to address the questions why should we follow His Torah and what are the benefits of following His Torah today? Our first issue, then, why should we follow His life instructions, found in Torah?

The easy answer to this question is because He commanded us. We read this imperative in John 14, when Adonai Yeshua tells us, *If you love me, you will keep my commands.* (John 14:15) The conditional relationship of this covenant indicates His understanding of our free choice. *If you love me* is a very clear indication of His relationship with us. He loves us with an unfathomable depth. Remember, God gave His own life for us so we would be freed from the grip of sin and of death. Within His promise is the understanding we are the ones loved by Adonai Yeshua. Beloved, this is not love as the world knows love; this is love of such magnitude, its blessings are unimaginable. **With His love come such gifts!** Following along from verse 15, we read, *I will ask the Father, and He will give you another comforting Counselor like Me, the Spirit of Truth, to be with you forever.* (John 14:16) When He loves you and me He gives us the gift of Ruach HaKadosh, the Holy Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit of Adonai Yeshua to guide us, comfort us, counsel us, provide for us and protect us, while we sojourn on this earth. Then, let's skip down to verse 21, *Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me, and the one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.* (John 14:21) Once again, this is not love as the world knows love; this is the most intimate love we will ever experience, even greater than the most perfect love we could have received from our parents and even greater than the love we could have received from perfect

spouses. As John Piper phrased this love, it is *a personal, intimate, relational, affectionate, committed love from the Father only for those who love Jesus.* (John Piper, *Desiring God*) If we try to quantify His love for us, we will diminish it; if we try to qualify His love for us, we will enclose it. This is love beyond our understanding and beyond our reasoning abilities. And look how many times Adonai Yeshua repeats the same relational boundary:

John 14:

Verse 15: *If you love Me, you will keep My commands.*

Verse 21: *Whoever has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me.*

Verse 23: *If someone loves Me, he will keep My word.*

Verse 24: *Someone who doesn't love Me doesn't keep My words.*

By repeating this understanding four times, we receive the message of the importance of following His Torah, for in doing so we receive the gift of unfathomable Love from Adonai Elohim, from Adonai Yeshua, along with the guidance, leadership, counseling and protection of the Holy Spirit. Let us be very clear about the relationship between His love for us and our keeping His word. We do not follow Torah, in order to receive His love, rather, **we follow His Torah because we Love Him!**

King David certainly understood the value of reading and following Torah, as he wrote in Psalm 119: *Your word is a lamp for my foot and light on my path.* (Psalm 119:105) David understood how valuable Torah is for guiding and illuminating our path through life. He understood clearly, Torah is our teacher

and provides clarity for living we will find nowhere else – it comes from the Living Torah Himself.

In 1 John 2, we read the words, *The way we can be sure we know him is if we are obeying his commands.* (1 John 2:3) Beloved, this is a call to obedience. If we know Him, that is we have an intimate relationship with Him – we are in Him and He is in us – then following Torah will be an authentic expression of the covenantal relationship, the kinship relationship we have with the Lover of our souls. Think of the opposite, the situation where there is no expectation of being obedient to Him; if there was no call to obedience, then anything is tolerated. It wouldn't matter whom we loved as our god, because love for any god would be tolerated. It wouldn't matter what we believed as truth because any truth would be subjective truth and would be tolerated. My truth would be my truth and your truth would be your truth – there would be no universal, over-arching, life-generating truth. In other words, *a man simply did whatever he thought was right.* (Judges 21:25) Without universal truth, there would be no sin. Even infringe upon other people's persons or property would be justified as falling under my truth. There would be no right or wrong. If there was no universal truth, there would be no need for forgiveness, for nothing wrong would have happened. Each person would feel vindicated for doing what he did, in the name of his truth. Can you imagine living in a world like that, dear ones?

But in Torah there is forgiveness, which comes through Adonai Yeshua. We find this to be quite explicit in 2 Chronicles 7: *if my people, who bear my name, will humble themselves, pray, seek my face and turn from their evil ways, I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land.* (2 Chronicles 7:14) and in 1 John

1, we are told, *If we acknowledge our sins, then, since he is trustworthy and just, he will forgive them and purify us from all wrongdoing.* (1 John 1:9)

Well, let's look at the benefits Torah offers us. Since we have been focusing on forgiveness, for the past few minutes, take a look at the following verse from Numbers 5: *He must confess the sin which he has committed; and he must make full restitution for his guilt, add twenty percent and give it to the victim of his sin.* (Numbers 5:6-8) Look at the steps Torah lays out for us here: 1. there is a requirement for confession of sin; 2. there is, embedded within confession, the desire for repentance; 3. there is full restitution for the damage caused to another, plus an additional twenty per cent.

What I find intriguing in this command is the phrase, *and give it to the victim of his sin.* Do you understand the import of this phrase? All of these steps must be completed in the presence of the victim or the victim's family. I can almost guarantee, if we followed God's approach today in our justice system, the recidivism rate, or the rate of convicted persons returning to prison, would decline noticeably. Almost 3500 years ago, God outlined the requirements for a restitution circle. I understand our First Nations brothers and sisters have been conducting such circles for many centuries, before the Europeans came to North America. I must chuckle at the thought of the developers of modern restitution circles patenting their 'creation'. How many of them understand God patented this strategy those many thousands of years ago and shared it with us in Torah.

In this week's parashah, we find an addition to the restitution process found in Numbers 5. In Exodus 22 we read, *if he has nothing, he himself is to be sold to make good the loss from the theft.* (Exodus 22:2) This brings us to the

understanding any damage against the property of a person must be compensated and if the criminal is unable to pay the penalty, he is required to be indentured, with the profits from the sale going to the victim. From Torah we know indentured servants were not mistreated; they were to be respected as human beings and, when their indentured costs were paid through their work, they were to be released. I suppose there is nothing like this in modern society, as it would not be politically correct. From what I see, it is deemed more appropriate to lock people away, with little chance of their providing restitution directly to their victims. I wonder at our perception of this modern system being better than the biblical model.

Now, what other benefits and blessings come from developing an understanding of Torah and following Adonai's Life Instructions? Let's look at Proverbs 7: *Say to wisdom, "You are my sister"; call understanding your kinswoman.* (Proverbs 7:4) When we call Wisdom our sister, there is the understanding of a deep and personal relationship with this gift from Adonai Elohim. There is also an understanding wisdom is a defining element of Adonai Yeshua, such that, when we understand and follow His commands, we gain wisdom, through the Holy Spirit, and Adonai Yeshua lives in us and we in Him.

Wisdom is akin to an addiction; once we taste of it, we cannot stop using. Can you think of a better addiction to have, than the constant using of wisdom? When we seek after wisdom, it will be written on our hearts; this immeasurable gift from Adonai Elohim Tzivaot, Lord God Almighty, will be forever with us and we are able no longer to return to our former state of ignorance.

As Messianic believers, we have as a guiding light the command to grow in our understanding of Torah. Where do we find this? First, in Leviticus 19, *You are to be holy because I, ADONAI your God, am holy*, (Leviticus 19:2) we are told the development of mature faith is to be found in an understanding of God's Life Instructions, His Torah. How do we know this from this verse? We, Messianic Believers, are to be set-apart. Being set-apart by and for Adonai Elohim, comes with the command to keep His word. This means our understanding of His word must grow each and every day. The Apostle Peter reinforces this understanding, in 1 Peter 1, *following the Holy One who called you, become holy yourselves in your entire way of life*. (1 Peter 1:15) How do we become set-apart in every way of our lives? That again is the command to follow His Word, through developing knowledge by digging into Torah and asking The Holy Spirit to share His insights and wisdom with us.

Remember what Rav Sha'ul advised his spiritual son, Timothy, *All Scripture is God-breathed and is valuable for teaching the truth, convicting of sin, correcting faults and training in right living*, (2 Timothy 3:16) as we read in 2 Timothy 3. From studying Torah and following its instructions we *may be fully equipped for every good work*. (2 Timothy 3:17)

Finally, although our studying Torah and gaining knowledge and wisdom through this practice does not give us salvation nor does it create a better righteousness for us, it does draw us closer to our beloved Abba and to His Son, Adonai Yeshua. In James 4, we read, *Come close to God, and he will come close to you*. (James 4:8) This leads us to the understanding we are to come so close to Adonai Elohim, we are able to spiritually touch Him and He will touch us. Do you

desire to have a more intimate relationship with the Lover of your soul, the creator of the universe? One of the ways of doing this is to study and understand our relationship with Him, through the studying of His Word and following His Word throughout our days.

Beloved, if you are not in His Word daily, digging deeply into the meanings He has for you; if you are not mining the wisdom contained in His Life Instructions, you are in spiritual poverty. And what He has for you is not impossible for you to find. It is not above your ability to understand it, at an important level. His Word will require you, though, to devote time and effort; if you are not prepared to put in the time and effort required of you to study and dig into His Truth, do you really desire to be close to Him? Is He really not worth the effort? These are questions we all must ask of ourselves, if we wish to have an intimate relationship with our Messiah. Remember His Word: If you love me, you will obey my commands.

Pray . . .