

Thank you, Torah Readers: Helen and Ken Avner, Cheryl and Eliana Hurwitz

Torah: Rishon – Deuteronomy 19:14-21 (page 1468 / 1301 new)

Sheni – Deut. 20:1-4 Shlishi – Deut. 20:5-9

Maftir – Deut. 21:7-9 (page 1475 / 1303 new)

Haftarah - Isaiah 51-52 (p.1607/1316; todah Beth Richie)

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ
salaam
aleikum



Our warm **welcome** to many visiting journalists, with us via the East-West Center – from Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, New Zealand, Pakistan, The Philippines, UK and US – *Salaam Aleikum!*

Shoftim 5779

Deut. 19:14, “do not move your neighbor’s boundary stone”

Plaut summarizes Sifre Deut. 188: why is *lo tasig g’vul re’acha* necessary, when we’re already commanded “You shall not steal?!” -- to make clear that **ANY infringement of a neighbor’s rights is included.** See too D. Hoffman: “the law follows the warning (verse 13) to purge the land of innocent blood – since moving a landmark defiles the land like spilled blood.”

Deut. 20:1-9, Off to War – from R. Adam Greenwald, Ziegler School (aju.edu), Sept 2019

For all of recorded human history, one of the functions of religious leaders has been to give sacred sanction to warfare. Clergy of all varieties have inspired young men to fight, and often to die, on behalf of their nation or their God. Sermons like the one presented in Deuteronomy [20:1-9] were meant to stiffen spines and harden hearts, to inspire bravery in battle and reassure the troops that victory is inevitable because they fight “with God on their side.”

One of my favorite Torah commentators is Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (1816-1893), known as the *Netziv*, whose beautifully written commentary *Haemek ha-Dvar* (“The Depths of the Word”) is notable for its often stunningly subversive re-readings of the text. Writing on this passage, the *Netziv* adds his audacious spin on the line, “Do not let your heart falter” (Deuteronomy 20:3). He says: “**Do not let your heart falter... to cause you to do wrong to your enemies, after they fall into your hands.**”

In an instant, the priest’s role is transformed from exhorting the troops to be fearless in battle, to **warning them of the moral pitfalls of unchecked aggression.** Warfare, even in the most justified of circumstances, is always an ethically fraught undertaking. Religion’s proper role in it, the *Netziv* says, is to **teach responsibility and restraint** rather than inspire ferocity. We all have battles to be fought, some literal and some metaphorical, and in all cases, [we must not] lose our humanity in the process, lest we become exactly what we are fighting against.

[In this] month of preparation for the High Holy Days... we are cautioned to check in with ourselves to ensure that we are listening to the better angels of our nature. The *Netziv*’s re-reading of this parsha is a powerful example of the **inner work** that we are called to do during [Elul]. He teaches us that even when it appears that right thing to do is to harden our heart, we are to remember that that is the way of Pharaoh, not the way of holiness. **Our job is to keep our hearts open and pliable**, to fight our battles but not lose our compassion, to do what the moment demands without succumbing to the temptation to abandon our values. That’s how we enter into this time of transformation. That’s what it means to keep our heart from faltering.

Deut. 20:19-20 – “Thou Shalt Not Waste!”

In this Year of Feminist, Womanist, and Queer Torah Interpretation, we’ve been practicing “Proactive Kavod”: privileging the too-often-demeaned-and-marginalized wise sacred voices around us. Now, with the Global Climate Strike – shall we not add Voices of Creation, too! Voices of Youth!

כי ממנו תאכל. מצות עשה. "For from it you shall eat": a positive commandment; [SIFRE 203]

ואותו לא תכרות. זו מצות לא תעשה. "but it you shall not cut down": a negative commandment.

כי האדם עץ השדה. שחייו של אדם (אינו אלא) מן האילן. ר' ישמעאל אומר, מכאן חס המקום על פירות האילן, ק"ו מאילן. ומה אילן שעושה פירות, הוהירך הכתוב עליו; פירות עצמם, על אחת כמה וכמה. [ד"א, [הא אם מעכבך] לבא מפניך במצור - קצצהו [a] “**for the person is a tree of the field**” – **since the life of a person (exists only) from the tree.** [b] "for the person / tree of the field": since the person’s life comes from the tree. R. Yishmael reasoned hence: If God is so solicitous of the *fruits* of a tree, how much more so of the tree itself! And if Scripture exhorts against (cutting down) a tree, which only *produces* fruit, how much more so (does it exhort against destroying) fruit itself!

Rav Zutra said: Whoever covers an oil lamp, or uncovers a naphtha lamp, violates the law of *bal tashchit*. (Talmud Shabbat 67b) אמר רב זוטרא האי מאן דמיכסי שרגא דמשחא ומגלי נפטא קעבר משום בל תשחית

And not only [does *bal tashchit* apply] to the trees; rather, anyone who destroys dishes/vessels, or tears clothes, or demolishes a building, or stops up a spring, or destroys food wantonly -- they transgress the

law of bal tashchit. (But they only receive lashes, per the words of the rabbis). ולא האילנות בלבד. אלא כל המשבר כלים. וקורע בגדים. והורס בנים. וסותם מעין. ומאבד מאכלות דרך השחתה. עובר בלא תשחית. ואינו לוקה אלא מפת מרדות מדבריהם (Maimonides, Mishnah Torah Melakhim 6:10)



Righteous people of good deeds ... do not waste in this world even a mustard seed. They become sorrowful with every wasteful and destructive act that they see, and if they can they use all their strength to save everything possible from destruction. But the wicked are not thus; they are like demons. They rejoice in the destruction of the world, just as they destroy themselves.... וזהו דרך החסידים ואנשי מעשה אוהבים שלום ושמים בטוב הבריות ומקרבים אותן לתורה, ולא יאבדו אפילו גרגיר של חרדל בעולם, ויצר עליהם בכל אבדון והשחתה שיראון, ואם יוכלו להציל יצילו כל דבר מהשחית בכל כחם (Sefer HaChinuch 529; 13th century)

... Apply [*bal tashchit*] to your whole life -- and to every being which is subordinated to you -- from the Earth which bears them all up, to the garment which you have already transformed into your own cover. Yea, "Do not destroy anything!" is the first and most general call of God. (R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, 19th Century German Orthodox, on Deut. 20:20; Horeb 56)



Principles for Feminist Approaches to Torah - Shoftim (Rabbi Sue Fendrick, 2000)

The *parashah's* themes speak...to contemporary women's concerns. A theme that runs through so many of our portion's commandments—regarding appropriate worship, the nature of witnessing and prophecy, the nature of authority and its limits—is that of truth. **To whom should we listen? Which teachings and practices? Which words?** These questions are at the heart of contemporary Jewish women's journeys... [e.g.:] **Trees That Yield Fruit** The rabbinic principle of *bal tashchit* (literally, "do not destroy") is derived from this *parshah*, from Deut. 20:19-20. The biblical text itself contains the specific prohibition against destroying fruit-bearing trees during war. *Bal tashchit* has subsequently come to connote an **entire environmentally conscious category of behaviors**, in order to avoid wasting—and treating without respect—precious God-given resources.

This posture suggests a strategy for feminist Jewish approaches to Torah, to Jewish texts and teachings. It is all too easy to see women's exclusion, to name sexist traditions and interpretations, and to experience the pain of struggling toward full participation in Jewish life. ***Bal tashchit* reminds us that Torah, too, is an etz chayim**—a fruit-bearing tree of life.

We may be tempted at times to name certain texts as beyond the pale, outside the acceptable limits of Jewish tradition for Jewish women—in other words, to tear down this tree. Reading beyond the plain, contextual meaning, *bal tashchit* cautions us: this tree bears fruit. You **do not need to eat all its fruit**, but **neither should you tear it down**. It has been growing for a long time. You may yet find shade under its branches, or find its fruit sweet in ways that you cannot predict.

Adat Shalom: September 7th, 2019

Today: New and Prospective Member Oneg – and welcome back, **Torah School** families and *tzevet* (staff)!

Tomorrow: Makom Elul Yoga continues at 8:30 AM. And, with RRC's Rabbi Mordechai Liebling and Bend the Arc's Graie Hagans, Social Action **Workshop on Racism and Anti-Semitism**, 10am-4pm (bring lunch!). Also, downtown, the **Unity Walk** starts at 12:30 at Washington Hebrew, down to Dupont. Info at IFCMW.org.

Next Shabbat: Shabbat Morning Services, and Bar Mitzvah of Adar Weinman – plus Tot Shabbat with Miss Ellie at 10:30 AM; Morning Meditation with Fran Zamore at 11:15 AM; Makom Healing Circle at 1:00 PM

Sunday, **September 15th:** Makom Elul Yoga at 8:30 AM; and Shomrim Training with Shay at 9:30 AM – plus, Elul Learning with Rabbi Fred – "Deep Dive into Tshuvah; Preparing for the New Year" – at 10:00 AM

A meaningful month of Elul to all...

Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation strives to be a progressive, participatory, diverse, and inclusive synagogue community. As American Jews living in multiple civilizations, we revere Torah and our evolving Jewish tradition, while embracing meaningful innovation in all aspects of communal life. Guided by Reconstructionist principles, we heed our spiritual tradition's call to care for creation, pursue justice and peace, and nurture and support deep relationships with Israel. We are committed to educating and engaging our youth, fostering lifelong Jewish learning, and cultivating close interpersonal connections. We welcome all to embrace this Jewish path with us.

Two "**welcome tables**" are at the oneg, for guests, and anyone who'd like to meet new folks; if sitting elsewhere, stop by. Visit our website, www.adatshalom.net for calendar information, High Holidays information, and more.

Please return Siddurim, Chumashim & papers to lobby shelves. **Shabbat Shalom!**