

The Righteous Judge, the Comforter, and the Indwelling Presence of Elohim

Introduction

Shabbat Shalom, mishpocha/family.

This week's Torah portion, Shoftim, begins with the command:

“You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that your God יהוה is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice.

You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just.

Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that your God יהוה is giving you.” (Dt. 16:18-20, The Contemporary Torah, JPS, 2006)

Our Haftarah from Isaiah 51–52 proclaims:

“I, I am He who comforts you...”

And our reading from the Ketuvim haNotsrim, Yochanan 14, records Yeshua saying:

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another comforter, to be with you forever.”

So today, we see three threads woven together:

1. The call for righteous leadership and justice.
2. **Elohim Himself** as our source of comfort and redemption.
3. The promise of **Messiah’s spirit dwelling in us**, so that Elohim’s justice and comfort become alive in our lives.

That’s our theme: Justice, Comfort, and Elohim’s Presence — from Torah to Prophets to Messiah.

Part 1: The Call to Righteous Justice

In Shoftim, HaShem gives Israel a system of judges, officers, priests, and eventually kings. But their purpose was never to exalt themselves — their purpose was to ensure justice in the community.

Notice how the Torah insists:

“Justice, justice shall you pursue.”

The repetition is emphatic. It’s not optional. It’s not convenient justice, or selective justice. It’s consistent, impartial, Elohim-centered justice.

Think of it this way: the people of Israel were about to enter the land. They would have crops, livestock, wealth, and disputes. Without justice, there would be chaos.

Without righteous judges, the strong would exploit the weak.

I think about our own synagogue. From time to time, disagreements happen.

Personalities clash. And part of our calling as elders and leaders is not to take sides, but to pursue justice with fairness, humility, and love.

During the Civil War, a Union soldier named William Scott, from Vermont, was court-martialed for falling asleep at his post while on guard duty. According to military law, the punishment was death — because a sleeping guard could endanger the lives of the entire camp.

Scott had volunteered to take another man's guard duty, even though he was already exhausted. His fatigue overcame him, and he was found asleep at his post. A court-martial condemned him, and the sentence was scheduled to be carried out.

When the case reached President Abraham Lincoln, he personally reviewed the circumstances. He learned that Scott was otherwise a good soldier, well-liked, and had shown selflessness in volunteering for an extra shift. Lincoln said something along the lines of:

“It makes me too tired to think of executing a boy for sleeping when he was tired.”

Lincoln granted him full pardon.

But the story doesn't end there. Scott was so deeply moved by Lincoln's mercy that he returned to his regiment with renewed loyalty. Not long after, at the Battle of Lee's Mills in Virginia, he fought bravely and was mortally wounded while carrying out his duty. His comrades remembered him as a soldier whose second chance made him determined to honor the mercy shown to him.

- Justice with Mercy: True justice looks at the heart and the circumstances, not just the letter of the law.
- Second Chances Transform: Mercy has the power to inspire greater loyalty and faithfulness than fear of punishment.
- Leaders Judge the Spirit, Not Just the Rules: Lincoln modeled “justice, justice shall you pursue” by tempering law with compassion.

Even Israel's kings were not above the law. Deuteronomy 17 lays down rules for the king — he must not gather too much wealth, too many wives, or too many horses. He must write his own copy of the Torah and read it all his life.

Why? Because true leadership is measured not by power, but by how faithfully one walks in covenant with Elohim.

This lays the foundation for the ultimate King — the righteous Judge, the Messiah.

Part 2: The Elohim Who Comforts

The Haftarah from Isaiah brings us forward in time. Israel is under threat, suffering, scattered. And in that moment, Elohim says:

“I, I am He who comforts you.” (Isa. 51:12)

Notice, it is not simply that Elohim provides comfort. He is the comforter.

I want to pause here and let you ask yourself: When was the last time you truly needed Elohim's comfort?

— Perhaps after the loss of a loved one.

— Perhaps when the world felt overwhelming.

— Perhaps when you felt alone in your faith.

For me and my family, it was when we experienced the death of our dear Cassie. It was when I was going through a difficult divorce and faced loss, not only of my family, but our home and my job. When I had a business that was failing, and it sent me into bankruptcy. It was the nearly twelve years after moving here from Indiana, having no one local to worship with because I was an outsider with some weird beliefs and a wife who had even weirder ones.

Isaiah assures us that Elohim does NOT abandon His people. He promises redemption for Zion, salvation for His people, and good news that will reach to the ends of the earth.

And just as Israel longed for deliverance, so too we long for Messiah's reign of justice and peace.

Part 3: The Indwelling Presence through Messiah

Now let's turn to Yochanan 14. Yeshua is speaking to His disciples before His death. They are troubled, uncertain, and fearful. They have just heard their Rabbi say to them, "I am going away soon, and you are not going with me where I go at this time!"

He tells them:

"If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." (14:9)

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another comforter, the spirit of truth, to be with you forever." (14:16–17)

"I will not leave you as orphans; I WILL come to you." (14:18)

Do you hear the echoes of Isaiah?

— Elohim says, “I am He who comforts you.”

— Yeshua says, “I will not leave you as orphans... another comforter will be with you.”

It’s the same Mighty One, the same spirit, the same comfort — now dwelling within us.

This is breathtaking, is it not! Shoftim looked for righteous judges. Isaiah promised divine comfort. And Yeshua fulfills both, giving us His spirit so that Elohim’s justice and comfort are no longer external, but alive within us.

And then Yeshua adds:

“Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” (14:19–20)

[Pause, breathe, let this be a reflective moment for the congregation.]

This is covenantal closeness beyond anything Israel usually experienced. Not just a King ruling in Jerusalem. Not just a prophet proclaiming comfort, not just a Kohen Hagadol interceding for us at the throne of Elohim. But Elohim's spirit indwelling His people, empowering us to walk in His Torah, to pursue His justice, and to extend His comfort to the world.

Practical Application

So, what does this mean for us today?

1. **Pursue Justice** — in our homes, our community, our congregation. Let us not allow favoritism, gossip, or bitterness to take root. We must be fair, truthful, compassionate. And just like Kepha says in his first epistle to early believers that judgement begins within the household of Elohim, so too compassion begins with us.

[Pause, gesture to the congregation as if inviting participation.]

2. **Receive Elohim's Comfort** — some of us carry burdens silently.

Remember that our Elohim is not distant. He *is* our comforter. Turn to Him in prayer, in Scripture, in community.

3. **Live in Elohim's Presence** — The spirit of Messiah is not some abstract, theological idea. **It is the living presence of Messiah at work in us. The spirit of Elohim lives in us. And the evidence is our obedience to His Torah. If we keep ONE commandment, we have allowed Elohim's spirit, the RUACH HAQODESH, to dwell in us.** When we speak truth, forgive others, or show kindness, it is Elohim's spirit of justice and comfort flowing through us. The closer we live to Elohim, the more we are filled with this spirit.

Conclusion

As we bring these readings together:

- Shoftim teaches us about justice and the hope of a righteous King.

- Isaiah assures us of Elohim's comfort and coming redemption.
- Yochanan reveals that **Yeshua fulfills these promises by giving us the comforter**, so that Elohim's presence lives within us.

So, I leave you with these challenges:

How will you reflect Elohim's justice, how will you live in His comfort, and how will you walk in His spirit this week?

Because we are not waiting for some distant reality. Through Messiah, the kingdom is already breaking into the world. It has been breaking into our world for the past 2000 years or so. Though we await the establishment of his kingdom on this Earth, he already dwells among his family.

Shabbat Shalom and HaSof!