

Parashat Shoftim

I have never been content to remain within my own cosy little faith 'bandbox', with regard to wider reading. It can become overly parochial. There is so much extra wisdom to be obtained by the study of holiness in the various faith-denominations. For instance, I have received Daily Bread Ministries excellent booklets for years. Only this week I read of a Polish lady, Teresa Prekerowa (nee Dobrska). A page contained mention of her courageous stand during World War 2 and I researched further. Born in 1921 to the Dobrska family of landowners, she was 18 when Nazis invaded Poland and in at the start of Holocaust. She met a Jewish girl called Alina Wolman on the street in Warsaw in 1940, after the family had moved there. They became close friends. After the Wolmans were imprisoned in the Warsaw Ghetto, Teresa would smuggle food in. Although so young, she convinced Alina to escape to the Aryan side of the city and even obtained work and a place for her to stay. When large-scale deportations commenced, Dobskra and friends smuggled Alina's brother and parents out of the ghetto. Communication and help continued until war's end.

In September 1941, Teresa found a little abandoned Jewish girl crying on the family doorstep. The child was taken in and dressed and taught how to behave as a Polish child before being taken to the safer haven of a convent. During the war Teresa married Mieczyslaw Preker and moved into the Skolimow estate near Warsaw. Here she hid a Jewish man, Jan Zieliriski, for many months in 1943. After the war she received recognition as a premier Polish historian with regard to the war and especially Holocaust. Teresa wrote on the rescue of Jews by Poles and estimated that between 160,000 and 360,000 Poles assisted in hiding Jews, amounting to between 1% and 2.5% of the Polish population. She categorised them as "those who could offer help" in saving Jews directly." It was not vague.

We recall that scripture has it that we must not expect justice in this world but, as part of Yeshua's body of faith, we ourselves must always try to give it in a fallen world. "Don't be surprised if you see a poor person being oppressed by the powerful and if justice is being miscarried throughout the land," King Solomon wrote in Eccles.5:8. Matters of justice get lost in red tape and bureaucracy, and rulers milk the land. However, we thank God that there are millions of people today with a concern for justice couched with mercy, who cry with Moses, "*Tzedek, tzedek tiredof,*" and have the guts to take action, be it at physical risk, financial cost, or simply the speaking up by e-mail or letter.

It is badly needed, as even the briefest study of world and UK happenings indicates. The list and variety of injustices are endless. No need to enumerate further - you all have "eyes to see and ears to hear." We could easily become timid in our thinking; after all, "What can little old me do about that injustice. I have little money and no influence?" Sometimes, reading of injustice in a newspaper or 'liking' a cause on Facebook is taking by us as 'action.' It is not. All courageous Teresa did to save Jews was motivated by altruism, for which she neither asked for nor received anything in return and was at great risk. On March 4 1985, Had Vashem recognised Teresa Prekerowa (nee Dobrska) as a "Righteous Among the Nations".

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How does all this relate to today's parashat? It may surprise you to know that one of the most impassioned phrases in Torah is about justice. In the midst of instructions on establishing a proper legal system, Moses suddenly cries out to Israel, *Tzedek, tzedek tiredof* - 'Justice, justice you shall pursue" (Deut.16:20). *Tzedek*, or justice, can also be translated as righteousness. You will recall that earlier in Deuteronomy, the Lord commands Israel to circumcise their hearts (10:6), that is, to cultivate a right attitude that will produce righteous behaviour. Indeed, later, in Deut.30:6, God promises that He Himself will circumcise their hearts, as His gift of righteousness to those who truly follow His ways. How to attain/maintain that righteousness would be a great subject for a future talk.

What a great prophet Moses was. It is not easy to be a prophet. They are called to go against the grain, to upset the apple cart, to expose hypocrisy, challenge the status quo, and to get under peoples' thick skins. Prophets make us very uncomfortable, since, if they are right, we are wrong - nobody likes to be wrong and that's why injustice is so hard to eradicate in a fallen world. That great Hebrew prophet Isaiah had the effrontery to address Jerusalem's leaders as the "rulers of Sodom" and also called his own people the 'people of Gomorrah". "What did you say?", they cried. "God will not listen to our prayers or accept our offerings?" Isaiah, you should be put to death. Jewish tradition, sadly, says that he was.

A century later, Jeremiah blasted the Temple that bore God's name, as a "den of robbers." He prophesied that it would be destroyed by invading armies, and it was. Priests, people, false prophets, all were against him. He barely escaped with his life. Tradition says that he lost it later. Six centuries later, another prophet stood in Jerusalem's Temple - the Second Temple this time. He, too, exposed religious hypocrisy, rebuked the corrupt establishment, and prophesied its destruction. Prophets are often rejected before they are accepted and murdered before they are demoralised. Yeshua suffered that very same fate.

Astonishingly, back in the days of Deuteronomy, in Ch.18:18-19, God, via His great prophet, Moses, says, 'I will raise up for them a prophet like you (Moses) from among their brothers; I will put My words in to His mouth, and He will tell them everything I will command Him. If anyone does not listen to My words that the prophet speaks in My name, I Myself will call him to account." We know that Moses had a special place before God compared with no other prophet, bar one. That one is the One promised here, the supreme Prophet, God's Son, Yeshua - in Him and through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. A prophet speaks for God, which Yeshua did; but He also spoke, and speaks, as God. Yeshua was and is the last ideal Prophet of Israel.

Victimisation, then, is compounded by an absence of justice. But this is not to be permanent condition. Next time round, the gathering of the people will not be at the foot of Mount Sinai with Moses as great leader, spokesman and prophet, but at the foot of the Mount of Olives. On that Mount will stand Yeshua and He will be greeted with joy and cries of "Blessed is He

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who comes in the name of the Lord." A stream of blessing and justice will flood over Israel and indeed, the whole of the human race. True peace will have finally come to the world. Until then, in our world of injustice, we can serve to point others to God's divine justice. We can echo those words of Amos (Amos 5:24) - let "justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream." With Micah (Micah 6:8), we can act humbly, justly, and walk with our God. As Marlene Graves wrote this month in "Our Daily Journey", "let us engage in prayer, sacrificial giving, raising public awareness and perhaps even contacting our law-makers. Through the Holy Spirit's guidance and power, may we choose to join God's work of bringing justice." *Tzedek, tzedek tiradof!*

Father, help us to work for Your justice now where we live, even as we await the day when You will make everything right. We long for that day.