

Another (Greater?) Insight on Iniquity

*“⁷For the **mystery of lawlessness** (KJV, **iniquity**) is already operating; only there is one who holds back just now, until he is taken out of the way (2 Thessalonians 2:7)”... “²⁶See (**Re’eh**), I am setting before you today a blessing (**b’racha**) and a curse (**k’lalah**) – ²⁷the blessing, if you listen (**tish’ma**, future 2nd person, command form of **sh’ma**) to the mitzvot of Adonai your God that I am commanding you today, ²⁸but the curse, if you do not listen (**tish’ma**) to the mitzvot of Adonai your God, but turn from the way I am commanding you today, to go after other gods you have not known” (Deut 11:26-28)*

What is the **mystery of lawlessness** (KJV, **iniquity**) that is already operating in the world? Merriam-Webster states that the meaning of **INIQUITY** is **gross injustice** or **wickedness**. This mystery sounds like the awful sin of wickedness and gross injustice to me. What is the mystery in that?

The Psalmist states: *“Behold, I was born in iniquity and in sin when my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5)*. The Hebrew word translated **iniquity** is the word **avón** and the Hebrew word translated **sin** is the word **chet**. These are two different Hebrew words which are not really synonyms of each other and yet some Bible translations, such as the NIV, translate them both as sin. Is it likely that both words mean the same exact thing (to be sinful)? In the *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, **avón** is translated as an activity that is crooked or wrong, a **conscious and intentional** offense. On the other hand **chet** means to **miss the goal**, i.e., to sin against **The Almighty**. The *Orthodox Artscroll TNK* uses the word **fashioned** in the text. How were you and I **fashioned in an activity that is crooked or wrong with a conscious and intentional offense so we might miss the mark**?

In our reading we see that **The Almighty** gave us free moral agency with the power to choose between a blessed life (**The Blessing**) or living devoid of life (**living cursed**). In today’s Believing world the idea that **The Almighty** allows us to be cursed is foreign, almost unfathomable. This week’s **Torah Reading** is **Re’eh**, which means to *“Take a closer look or to behold or observe.”* The word shares the same root as the **Hebrew Pa’al** verb **to see** (**Roeh**). It is interesting that this verb and the Hebrew Word **Hineni** are both translated as **behold**. Indeed, today’s reading deals with the **choices we must make** in living a life dedicated to **Him** and His **Torah**. These choices ultimately **bring life or death**. It is **our choice**: **we can choose blessing/life or choose curses/death**.

We are all familiar with the story of **Adam** and **Eve** in the **Book of Genesis**. Like them, we are made in the image and likeness of **The Almighty** and we were also given dominion over all the created beings, including **dominion over ourselves**. **Yah Adonai** gave **Adam** (**Eve** was not yet created) a command, but left **Adam** to choose with his **free moral agency**, that is, the ability to choose for himself whether to do right or to do wrong. This was a sovereign decree, irrevocable and forever binding. Yes Virginia, you and I are always free to make our own choice when it comes to **The Almighty**, when it comes to life, and when it comes to death. He created human life for fellowship with him (**Adam** walked with **Yah Adonai** in the garden in the cool of the evening), and as such He desired to be loved and cherished and that is by free choice and not by force. If He is the **Sovereign One** (and He certainly is), He could have chosen differently, but He didn’t. We, as humans, have to make the choice.

In Isaiah we read: *“But He was pierced because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities. The chastisement for our shalom was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us turned to his own way. So Adonai has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5-6)*. Verse 6 has a great insight on iniquity: *“Each of us turned to his own way”* **Adam** and **Eve** did turn their own way, and you and I certainly do. It is **all selfishly about us, all the time**. It is *how I see it, how I interpret it, how I believe it, and what is relevant to me right now*. Our actions, especially when we are young, are based on **I, I, I, and Me, Me, Me**.

We were born in iniquity and created with free moral agency, but we were asked *to trade it* for fellowship with the Creator by *obedience*. The definition of iniquity is further understood in Scripture: *"²¹Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²²Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, and drive out demons in Your name, and perform many miracles in Your name?' ² Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Get away from Me, you workers of lawlessness (iniquity, KJV)!'" (Matt. 7:21-23)* We must ask, 'When is preaching and prophesying iniquity? When is casting-out-demons iniquity? And when is doing miracles iniquity?' The answer is in the verse: *when we do these activities in our own will rather than according to the Father's will*. It is the same story as in Genesis.

As Believers, we are called to follow in the steps of our Lord and Savior, *Messiah Yeshua*. It is significant that *Yeshua* did *nothing* of His own will, but *"only the will of His Heavenly Father (John 6:38)"*. *Yeshua's* refusal to follow His own will is lauded in the *Book of Hebrews*: *"You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness (iniquity /wickedness.); therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your companions" (Heb. 1:9).*

In a sovereign act our Creator endowed us with free moral agency, the right to choose between good and evil, between His Will and our will, between His Way and our way. But we humans have and continue to choose our own way – so a loving God and Father laid upon *Yeshua* the iniquity, self-will, and free moral of us all.

If we use the definition of *personal willfulness* for *iniquity*, Scripture bursts out with new clarity, meaning and application: *"Direct my footsteps in Your word, and let no iniquity get mastery over me" (Psalm 119:133)*. If our decisions are not based on Scripture, we will fall into destructive habits that come by relying on *personal willfulness*.

Scripture distinguishes *uncleanness* from *iniquity*: *"...For just as you yielded your body parts as slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness, so now yield your body parts as slaves to righteousness, resulting in holiness. ²⁰For when you were slaves of sin, you were free with regard to righteousness" (Ro. 6:19-20)*. Uncleanness involves a violation of *The Almighty's* physical or moral laws (sin). However, iniquity can involve doing good deeds when done in our *personal willfulness* and not by *The Almighty's* direction. Since self-willed actions tend to produce more self-willed actions, we go from what the KJV states: *iniquity unto iniquity*.

The *Mystery of Iniquity* is that we will follow our own faulty reasoning even when we have available *His infinite Wisdom*: *"For the mystery of lawlessness (iniquity) is already operating...because they did not accept the love of the truth so as to be saved...they will believe what is false (the lie)" (2 Thess. 2:7-11)*. When we persist in doing our own will, *The Almighty* turns us over to a *reprobate mind*, and we believe the lie that *we are equal with Him*. In reality, we have placed ourselves above *Him* by deciding what our will is in each matter rather than searching His Will.

Departing from iniquity (*"Get away from me, you workers of iniquity" Matthew 7:23*) means to stop doing what we are inclined and willfully want to do and to begin to *do the Will of Yah* (which will be good works) in acts of faith and righteousness. Only as we depart from the iniquity of works that are initiated by our own will, will we be able to recognize and achieve the good works that are initiated by the *Will of Yah*. Works that are directed by *The Almighty* fit into His bigger picture and His greater plan for the world.

Every good deed must be motivated by God's love and not by our own self-will. The Apostle Paul was motivated by the love of Messiah in his ministry among Believers and not by his own self-will (*2 Corinthians 5:14*).

How should we prepare for *Elul* and the High Holidays? May I suggest that the best way is that we examine ourselves and carefully consider our ways so that we *scrutinize our self-will*. It is possible that you are rejecting the *Yeshua* in your heart because of self-will. Remember that: *"he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, and the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity and lawlessness of us all"*. *Shabbat Shalom!*