

ב"ה Torah Tidbits

ISSUE 1483 SEP 3RD '22 ז' אלול תשפ"ב

פרשת שופטים

PARSHAT SHOFTIM
AVOT CHAPTER 2

OU
ישראל

שפטים
ושטרים
תתן-לך

דברים עז: פסוק יח

Corridor in the Israel Supreme Court building, Jerusalem



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Rabbi Daniel Mann
Eretz Hemdah
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YERUSHALAYIM IN/OUT TIMES FOR SHABBAT PARSHAT SHOFTIM

CANDLES 6:26PM • EARLIEST 5:42PM • HAVDALA 7:38PM • RABBEINU TAM 8:18PM

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Asher Manning // Talia Agatstein



Kiddush Levana

7 Days After Molad 8 Elul/ Motzei Shabbat Sept. 3

Last Opportunity to Say Kiddush Levana Until 15 Elul, Motzei Shabbat Sept. 10,
until 3:07 am



This week's Torah Tidbits cover image!

Photo By: Daniel Santacruz, I made Aliyah 10 years ago and live in Maale Adumim

Where: Corridor in the Israel Supreme Court building, Jerusalem

About the Photo: Architectonically, the columns of the hallway represent two ideals of justice: balance and equality. Historically, the Supreme Court is the culmination of what the Jews strove for during centuries: self-governance, independence and the fulfilment of prophecies.

CANDLE LIGHTING AND HAVDALA TIMES



| CANDLES | EARLIEST | SHOFTIM | HAVDALA | KI TEITZE | | |
|-------------|----------|---|-------------|-----------|----------|---------|
| | | | | Candles | Earliest | Havdala |
| 6:26 | 5:42 | Yerushalayim / Maale Adumim | 7:38 | 6:17 | 5:34 | 7:29 |
| 6:44 | 5:44 | Aza area (Netivot, S'derot, Et al) | 7:40 | 6:35 | 5:37 | 7:31 |
| 6:45 | 5:43 | Beit Shemesh / RBS | 7:39 | 6:36 | 5:35 | 7:30 |
| 6:42 | 5:42 | Gush Etzion | 7:38 | 6:33 | 5:35 | 7:29 |
| 6:43 | 5:44 | Raanana / Tel Mond / Herzliya / K. Saba | 7:40 | 6:34 | 5:36 | 7:31 |
| 6:42 | 5:43 | Modi'in / Chashmona'im | 7:39 | 6:34 | 5:35 | 7:30 |
| 6:43 | 5:44 | Netanya | 7:40 | 6:34 | 5:36 | 7:31 |
| 6:43 | 5:44 | Be'er Sheva | 7:39 | 6:34 | 5:36 | 7:30 |
| 6:43 | 5:44 | Rehovot | 7:40 | 6:34 | 5:36 | 7:31 |
| 6:26 | 5:44 | Petach Tikva | 7:40 | 6:17 | 5:36 | 7:30 |
| 6:42 | 5:43 | Ginot Shomron | 7:39 | 6:33 | 5:35 | 7:30 |
| 6:33 | 5:44 | Haifa / Zichron | 7:40 | 6:24 | 5:36 | 7:31 |
| 6:41 | 5:42 | Gush Shiloh | 7:38 | 6:32 | 5:34 | 7:29 |
| 6:44 | 5:44 | Tel Aviv / Giv'at Shmuel | 7:40 | 6:35 | 5:36 | 7:31 |
| 6:42 | 5:42 | Giv'at Ze'ev | 7:38 | 6:33 | 5:35 | 7:29 |
| 6:42 | 5:42 | Chevron / Kiryat Arba | 7:38 | 6:33 | 5:35 | 7:29 |
| 6:44 | 5:45 | Ashkelon | 7:41 | 6:35 | 5:37 | 7:31 |
| 6:43 | 5:44 | Yad Binyamin | 7:40 | 6:34 | 5:36 | 7:30 |
| 6:36 | 5:42 | Tzfat / Bik'at HaYarden | 7:38 | 6:27 | 5:34 | 7:29 |
| 6:41 | 5:41 | Golan | 7:38 | 6:32 | 5:33 | 7:28 |

Rabbeinu Tam (J'lem) - 8:18 PM • next week - 8:09 pm

Times According to MyZmanim (20 min. before sundown in most cities,
40 min. in Yerushalayim and Petach Tikva, 30 min. in Tzfat/Haifa)



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OTHER Z'MANIM



JERUSALEM

Ranges 11 days Wed. - Shabbat
Aug. 31 - Sept. 10 / 4-14 Elul

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| Earliest Tallit and Tefillin | 5:22 - 5:29 |
| Sunrise | 6:14 - 6:20 |
| Sof Zman Kriat Shema | 9:26 - 9:28 |
| Magen Avraham | 8:49 - 8:51 |
| Sof Zman Tefila | 10:30 |
| (According to the Gra and Baal HaTanaya) | |
| Chatzot (Halachic Noon) | 12:49 - 12:35 |
| Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha) | 1:11 - 1:07 |
| Plag Mincha | 5:44 - 5:33 |
| Sunset (Including Elevation) | 7:09 - 6:56 |

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DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN

Executive Director, OU Israel



Last week I issued a challenge to readers to help those looking to find their *zivug*. With the overwhelming responses I've received from Torah Tidbits readers affirming their dedication to help make *shidduchim*, I will be bold and issue the next challenge.

Beginning this coming week, thousands of students will land in Ben Gurion Airport and start their gap year. Some will attend *yeshiva* or seminary, while others will spend the year in a collegiate program. What is most exciting is the impact that this year will have on the rest of their lives. Many of these students will have experiences that will spark and foster their love for *Eretz Yisrael*, ultimately paving the road toward their *aliyah*. Many will take what they learn as a spring-board for *Klal* work in their communities in North America – giving shiurim, joining boards, etc.

Demonstrating the force of the love and chessed that *Klal Yisrael* is known for can help incoming students find their place among *Am Yisrael* in *Medinat Yisrael*. My challenge to Torah Tidbits readers is to seize every opportunity available to play an active role in welcoming visiting students, showering them with warmth and

lending a helping hand when needed. While I am fully confident that gap year programs do a wonderful job providing diverse experiences for students, each of us can play a meaningful role in helping the next generation of *Am Yisrael* feel at home in this precious Land.

Personally, my family enjoys hosting gap year students for *Shabbat* whenever possible. At times we can feel overwhelmed by the volume of students looking for a place to stay but my family has benefited tremendously from opening our home. My wife and I are particularly aware of the positive impact hosting students has on our children, and try to accommodate students as often as we can. Meeting people from diverse backgrounds gives our children the opportunity to learn about different cultures, listen to the questions my wife and I are asked, learn from the answers we provide and practice the *mitzvah* of *hachnasat orchim*. It has been particularly meaningful when students maintain contact with my kids even after they return to *chutz laaretz*.

With so many students in need of *Shabbat* plans, I invite you all to make an effort this year to open your home in whatever way you can. The power of hosting even one *Shabbat* meal can make a big difference in how students experience *Eretz Yisrael*. First, from a practical standpoint, students often scramble each week to find a place to stay. Second, from an emotional

Mazal Tov to

Avigayil Ellen & Tuvia Koenigsberg
and families on their forthcoming marriage

standpoint, many students are spending more time away from their families than ever before and miss them terribly. Welcoming them into our homes can ease the transition, particularly in the first few months of the school year. Reaching out directly to Yeshiva and Seminaries or contacting friends abroad who have children here for the year are easy ways to connect.



Shaalavim for Women learning practical Kashrut in Israel with OU Israel's Gustave & Carol Jacobs Center for Kashrut Education

Beyond hosting meals, there are countless opportunities to practically help students doing their best to navigate around Israel. I was once in the *shuk* with my kids and bought popcorn from a local vendor. A few seminary students came in and asked how much the popcorn cost, and he quoted them a much higher price. Not wanting to cause a *chillul HaShem*, I waited until the students left before approaching the store owner to let him know how disappointed I was by what he had done. As *olim* we can appreciate how overwhelming shopping and traveling can be for foreigners. Let's do our part to keep an eye out for those looking for support, whether it be at a bus stop, in line at the supermarket or in a doctor's office.

As *Am Yisrael* we have a responsibility to care for our brothers and sisters and I believe we can do so while also positively contributing to their experiences in Israel. As we head into the month of *Elul*, I have no doubt that we will be presented with many opportunities to help someone in need. May we recognize the opportunities before us and embrace them!

I'll take this opportunity to wish all incoming students a wonderful year, filled with meaning, clarity and joy-filled moments. Welcome home!

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,

Rabbi Avi Berman

Executive Director, OU Israel

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SHOFTIM



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY



**Rabbi Reuven
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Parshat Shoftim is the 2nd of 3 parshiot that have a total of 170 mitzvot. Shoftim has 41 of those. These 3 parshiot are the middle of 3 sections of Sefer Devarim. The first section, Parshiot Devarim, Vaetchanan and Eikev were Moshe's narrative of the lessons of the past. Don't be skeptical about your ability to enter the Land; that was the sin of the spies and you don't want to repeat their fate. He went over the lessons of the pivotal stories of the Torah: Mt. Sinai, the golden calf, the spies, manna as well as others. The last of the 3 sections in Devarim returns to the preparation to enter the Land, including 4 very short parshiot. These middle 3 parshiot are nation building: they express the vision of what type of society we want to build in the Land of Israel. Last week we saw the introduction of the first pillar of the Jewish society: the establishment of a monotheistic society, including the centrality of what will be Jerusalem and avoidance of the lure of idol worship. We saw the pillar of chesed and mitzvot legislating care for the needy in Shemita and in Maaser Sheni: in a word, ethical monotheism. Shoftim is the building of national institutions: the judiciary, the executive and the legislature, including courts, the king, prophets

and proper conduct of war. While there are many laws introduced, it is all in a natural flow, outlining the crucial aspects of all these branches of government. A theme that animates many of these national institutions is not only their roles, but as importantly their limits; what we call today the checks and balances of power.



1st aliya (Devarim 16:18-17:13)

Courts: Establish courts and be vigilant in fairness; do not show

favoritism or accept bribes for they blur good judgment. Do not plant a tree next to the altar, nor establish a stone monument, nor offer blemished sacrifices. If one is found to worship idols, examine the case carefully in court: guilt must be established through the testimony of witnesses. If established to be true, put that person to death and remove evil from your midst. Should a ruling be elusive, refer it to the higher court; its decision is binding. Do not deviate from its ruling.

Judiciary: What is stated here is the importance of fair and just courts; however, what it seeks to avoid is more important. No vigilantism. Don't fight the Lord's battles declaring "that person is worshipping idols. I will step into the breach and eliminate them. Who needs courts?". A court system is a check and balance on religious zeal, G-d's warrior. A commitment to justice requires restraint of the people; you can't just do what you think is right. Bow to the wise judges.



2nd aliya (17:14-20) King: When settled in the Land, appoint a Jewish king. He may not accu-

mulate excessive horses, nor too many wives, nor silver and gold. He shall have his own Torah with him at all times in order to avoid self-aggrandizement and to ensure allegiance

to the mitzvot.

Executive Branch: There are strengths and weaknesses in every system of governance known to man. The weakness of any ruler occurs when they no longer serve the people, but serve their own interests. Hence, the checks and balances: a) limit the horses, meaning the power of the military b) limit wives, self indulgence and license and 3) limit gold, the greed of possessions. Rather, read the Torah. The King is to serve G-d and His people. Sounds like a good system: at least when it works.



3rd aliya (18:1-5) Kohen, Levi:

The tribe of Levi, including Kohanim, shall not have a portion in the Land of Israel for the holy service is their lot. The Kohen, who serves G-d, shall be given portions of animals, produce and shearing.

Religious servants: These religious leaders are supported by a type of tax on the people. But with limits. No Land. And only these portions. It is not what is given to support the Kohanim and Leviim; it is what is not. Every society supports its religious leaders. The power is in the check on their abuse of position by declaring what they receive: this, and only this. As the zealot must retreat and allow the courts to manage the idol worshipper. And as the king must retreat and limit his power and personal license to lust and wealth. So too, the religious leaders must retreat and serve G-d and the people; being supported but with modesty.



4th aliya (18:6-12) The Levi is permitted to serve in the Temple whenever he chooses. Sorcery:

Avoid the practices of the people in the Land, such as child sacrifice, divination,

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omens, sorcery, communicating with the dead. Your allegiance is to G-d.

While the previous aliya gave checks and balances to the Kohen in accumulating wealth, when it comes to doing the service itself in the Temple, the Levi is welcomed whenever his heart stirs him. For that is his true task. When the heart stirs for corruption and abuse of position, it needs brakes. When the heart is stirred for Divine service it is welcomed.

Legislature: The discussion here of sorcery and divination is an introduction to the legislature, the source of wisdom, direction and the law itself. There is a lot of mystery in our world. There are displays of unusual powers, inexplicable sources of knowledge, a world of unseen forces. But society becomes chaotic when subjected to those speaking in the name of unseen powers. The clairvoyant

will demand that their voice be heard for they alone know truth. The Torah requires powerful restraint. That is not our source of truth. As the next aliya outlines, our source of truth is G-d through the prophet.



5th aliya (18:13-19:13) Prophet:

While the people in the Land seek wisdom through magical techniques, you seek yours through G-d Himself. Although you said at Sinai that you did not want to hear His voice directly, nonetheless you have the Prophet to convey G-d's directives. Heed the words of the prophet, though not of the false prophet. The true prophet's predictions come true: not so for the false prophet. Prepare 3 cities on the east bank of the Jordan and 3 cities in the Land of Israel as refuge for the accidental murderer. He is not subject to the death penalty. Innocent blood ought not be spilled in the Land.

Our parsha has outlined the judiciary, the judges and the executive, the king. The legislature, the branch that creates the laws, is trickier; the source of our laws is G-d, related through the prophet. But within this little section is an expression of Moshe's humility. Because tradition maintains that the prophets after the time of Moshe are not to be legislators. They do not introduce new laws. All legislation rests in the hands of the rabbinic leaders. We saw that above: should a case be too difficult, refer it to the higher court and then you are bound by its decision. Law, from here on in, is in the hands of the rabbis, not in the hands of the prophet. When Moshe says here to heed the voice of the prophet, he is really speaking of himself. Prophets in the future will encourage, scold, criticize, and direct the people: but not with new ground.

Please join us for a Shiur in memory
of Danny Frei z"l

on
Monday 5th September 2022
at 7.30 pm

To be given by
Daniel Greenberg CB
on

"Where does Secular Humanism
Stop and "Ve'ahavta
LeRei'acha Kamocha" Begin"
at
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Moshe doesn't want to say "listen to me and me alone". Rather, he says "Follow the laws of the true prophet". Which is Moshe.



6th aliya (19:14-20:9) Do not encroach over the borders of your property. **Testimony:** One

witness is insufficient in court. Conniving witnesses who intend harm through their testimony shall themselves receive the harm they intended. **War:** Do not be afraid of the enemy in war, for G-d champions your battles. A specially appointed Kohen shall encourage the soldiers. In addition, he shall exempt some of the soldiers: those who have a new home, a new vineyard, a betrothed wife, or are afraid. These shall not demoralize the other soldiers.

Having outlined the judiciary, the executive and the legislature, one of the primary functions of the executive, the King, is to protect his people militarily. Some laws of war are outlined. Morale of the army is paramount. The Kohen's presence reminds the soldiers that they are G-d's army. Nonetheless, morale may be damaged by soldiers preoccupied with their personal worries. The Midrash maintains that a new home or a new vineyard is hardly sufficient reason to receive a draft exemption. These are put there so that the one who is really plain scared can leave the battlefield and not demoralize the others, under the cover that perhaps he has a new vineyard. Thus sparing the pride of the frightened soldier.



7th aliya (20:10-21:9) In approaching war, try peace first. But if refused, fight the

war to the end, lest those who survive lead you astray. Do not destroy fruit trees while laying siege to a city. When a body is found

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dead in the field, the nearest city shall perform a ceremony declaring them not responsible for this death. The Land needs to be cleansed of innocent blood.

After the laws of war, the Torah circles back to one lone body found dead in the field. And the need to cleanse both the leadership and the Land of this innocent blood. This too is a kind of check and balance on the military. Oh, don't think we have a low regard for life. Loss of innocent life defiles the Land – and us. Embark on war with sobriety.

HAFTARAH

YESHAYAHU 51:12 - 52:12

This week's *haftarah* is the fourth of a series of seven “*Haftarot* of Consolation.”

The recent *haftarahs* have alluded to the fear of the nation of Israel that perhaps they have been abandoned by God. In response, this week's *haftarah* begins with God's response: “I, indeed I, will comfort you.”

After castigating Israel for forgetting their Creator, the prophet describes the suffering and tribulations which Israel has endured. However, the time has come for Israel's

oppressors to drink the “cup of suffering.”
Yeshayahu announces the good tidings of Redemption. “Burst out in song, sing together; O ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has consoled His people; He has redeemed Jerusalem.”

The *haftarah* concludes by spotlighting the difference between the Egyptian Exodus, when the Israelites quickly hurried out of their exile, and the future Redemption: “For not with haste shall you go forth and not in a flurry of flight shall you go, for the Lord goes before you, and your rear guard is the God of Israel.” ■

STATS

48th of the 54 sedras;
5th of 11 in Devarim,
Written on 191.6 lines (rank: 27)
18 Parshiyot; 3 open, 15 closed,
97 pesukim - rank: 36 - 7th in Devarim (tied with Tzav, but larger)
1523 words - rank: 28 - 7th in Devarim
5590 letters - rank: 31 - 7th in D'varim

MITZVOT

41 mitzvot - 14 positive, 27 prohibitions; ranks 6th among the sedras, in mitzvot. The top 6 mitzva-sedras - contain 55% of the Torah's mitzvot (31 other sedras have the other 45%; 17 have none).

A SHORT VORT | BY RABBI CHANUCH YERES
Rav, Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

“תמים תהיה עם ה' אלוך” (יח:יג)

“You shall be whole-hearted with Hashem, your G-d. (18:13)
What does it mean to be “Tamim”- “Whole-hearted” with G-d?
What is the attribute that the Pasuk is referring us to acquire?

The word “Tamim” is mentioned throughout Tanach explained as completeness, without blemish or wholeness.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev (1740-1809) inverted the words to mean “If you will be with G-d, then you will be whole, not lacking anything.

Rashi (1040-1105) pointed out that “Walk with him in whole-heartedness and depend only on Him and do not seek out the future, but whatever befalls you, accept it with whole-heartedness and then you will be with Him and become His portion.”

Even when we are not certain what future lies ahead of us, we must lovingly follow wherever the path may lead. Shabbat Shalom



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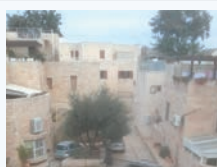
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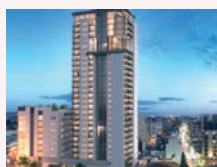
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THE PERSON

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB

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IN THE PARSHA

We Are All Judges and Kings

It is at this point in time that we all begin to realize that the summer is ending. There is something about mid-August that says, “The summer is waning.” School children begin to experience the anxieties that come with the anticipation of the return to school; vacationers hasten to relish the last of the “lazy, hazy days;” and the baseball season is at the stage when the pennant and wild-card races begin to really heat up.

Spiritually too, there is a change going on inside of us. The month of Elul, the last month before the New Year, will begin, and with it comes the sound of the shofar which literally signals the fast approaching High Holidays and Days of Awe. The shofar simply gives voice to the inner feeling of “the fun times are over, it is time to get serious.”

It is precisely at this season that we read the Torah portion, Parshat Shoftim (Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9). We open our bibles to this Torah portion in anticipation of some words to edify each of us as individuals. We hope to find verses which will goad us toward introspection and inspire us to improve ourselves in many ways.

But that is not what we find in the parsha

of Shoftim. We are disappointed in our search for a deeply personal message in this week’s Torah selection.

What we find instead are laws and narratives which seem to be meant for someone else, not for us mere struggling ordinary mortals. The passages which we read are directed toward the elite stratum of our society, to the leaders, to the judges and kings.

The parsha opens with a description of the judicial and legal institutions, and with the establishment of a locale which we are to visit if we wish to consult priests and Levites, and experts in the law. The parsha proceeds to speak of kingship and royalty, of the privileges and responsibilities of the priestly class, of the role of prophets, and even of the structure of the military.

Where is the role of the individual in all of this? At this time of year, when those of us who are serious about our religious responsibilities are searching for personal guidance and spiritual illumination, what lessons can we learn from these texts which seem to be addressing a more lofty audience? What is a humble person to gain from laws of societal governance? Of what relevance are the responsibilities of judges and priests and kings to those of us with pedestrian concerns?

There are, of course, numerous approaches to resolving this quandary. But there is one approach which I would like to suggest and which seems to me to be of

great practical utility.

To explain this approach, I must remind you of an important movement in the history of the Jewish people which had its roots in the middle of the 19th century. A man named Rabbi Israel Salanter was disturbed at the superficiality of the religious life that he observed even in the most traditional and observant communities of the Eastern Europe of his time. He felt that people were numb, or at least indifferent, to the important ethical issues which he considered to be the core of our faith.

And so he initiated a religious revolution known as the Mussar Movement, which was designed to once again place ethics and spirituality at the center of Jewish religious life.

This column is not the place to describe in detail the development of this movement over the course of the last century and a half. Suffice it to say that this movement, like so many similar ones, splintered into a number of different streams. One of these was centered in the small Lithuanian village of Kelm, and another in a suburb of the large city of Kovno, Slobodka.

The “old man” of Kelm, Rabbi Simcha Zissel, emphasized man’s limitations, his frailties and vulnerabilities. His followers would spend the days of Elul in fear and trepidation, hoping to overcome the burdens of their sins.

The other “old man,” Rabbi Nosson Zvi Finkel of Slobodka, had a very different spiritual strategy. He encouraged his disciples to recognize gadlut ha’adam, the greatness of man. He urged his followers to recognize their strength and near infinite potential.

Far be it from me to decide which approach is correct. I believe that they are both correct, but I feel that each is designed for its own time and place. In our time and in our place, I am convinced that it is the Slobodka approach which is preferable.

Nowadays, paradoxically, our external demeanor of arrogance and hubris is but a mask for deep inner feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. We fail to understand that we are capable, as individuals and as a nation, of gigantic accomplishments. We need to be reminded not of our limitations, but of our capabilities.

Perhaps it is for this reason that we read the parsha of Shoftim at this time of year. It reminds us that we are all “judges and kings.” We all need to take our responsibilities seriously. Each and every one of us is a leader, if not over throngs of thousands, then over our communities, neighborhoods and families. Or at the very least, over ourselves.

This week, we are reminded that from our very beginnings we were given the appellation “a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.” The road to teshuvah, to authentic repentance, is not a private and solitary road. It is not a road which we travel as isolated individuals, with the puny tools of introspection and contemplation.

Rather, with the approach of the New Year, we must regard ourselves as part of a great nation, and imagine ourselves as leaders of that nation. That is why the parsha of Shoftim, with its emphasis upon large social institutions and systems of governance and military defense, is read at this time of year. It is to remind us, nay to persuade us, that we are all “judges and kings.” ■



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Environmental Responsibility

Some commands in the Torah were understood so narrowly by the Sages that they were rendered almost inapplicable. One example is the *ir ha-nidachat*, the city led astray into idolatry, about which the Torah states that “you shall put the inhabitants of that town to the sword.” (Deut. 13:16) Another is the *ben sorer umoreh*, the stubborn and rebellious child, brought by his parents to the court and, if found guilty, put to death. (Deut. 21:18-21)

In both of these cases some Sages then interpreted the law so restrictively that they said “there never was and never will be” a case in which the law was applied. (Sanhedrin 71a) As for the condemned city, Rabbi Eliezer said that if it contained a single mezuzah, the law was not enforced (ibid.). In the case of the rebellious child,

R. Yehuda taught that if the mother and father did not sound or look alike, the law did not apply (ibid.). According to these interpretations, the two laws were never meant to be put into practice, but were written solely “so that we should expound them and receive reward.”¹ They had only an educational - not a legal - function.

In the opposite direction, some laws were held to be far more extensive than they seemed at first sight. One striking example occurs in this week's parsha. It refers to the conduct of a siege during wartime. The Torah states:

When you lay siege to a town and wage war against it for a long time to capture it, do not destroy its trees; do not wield an axe against them. You may eat from them; you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human beings, that you should besiege them too? Only trees that you know do not produce food may you cut down for use building siege works until the town that has made war against you falls. (Deut. 20:19-20)

This prohibition against destroying fruit-bearing trees was known as the rule of *bal tashchit*, “do not destroy”. On the face of it, it is highly limited in scope. It does

¹ Tosefta Sanhedrin 11:6, 14:1.

no more than forbid a “scorched earth” policy in the conduct of war. It seems to have no peacetime application. However, the Sages understood it very broadly to include any act of needless destruction. Maimonides states the law thus: “Not only does this apply to trees, but also whoever breaks vessels or tears garments, destroys a building, blocks a wellspring of water, or destructively wastes food transgresses the command of *bal tashchit*.”² This is the halachic basis of an ethic of environmental responsibility.

Why did the Oral Tradition, or at least some of its exponents, narrow the scope of the law in some cases, and broaden it in others? The short answer is: we do not know. The rabbinic literature does not tell us. But we can speculate. A *posek*, seeking to interpret Divine law in specific cases, will endeavour to do so in a way consistent with the total structure of biblical teaching. If a text seems to conflict with a basic principle of Jewish law, it will be understood restrictively, at least by some. If it exemplifies such a principle, it will be understood broadly.

The law of the condemned city, where all the inhabitants were sentenced to death, seems to conflict with the principle of individual justice. When Sodom was threatened with such a fate, Abraham argued that if there were only ten innocent people, the destruction of the entire population would be manifestly unfair: “Shall the judge of all the earth not do justice?”

The law of the stubborn and rebellious son was explained in the Talmud by R. Jose the Galilean on the grounds that: “The

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Torah foresaw his ultimate destiny.” He had begun with theft. The likelihood was that he would go on to violence and then to murder. “Therefore the Torah ordained: Let him die innocent rather than die guilty.”³ This is pre-emptive punishment. The child is punished less for what he has done than for what he may go on to do. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who said the law never was or would be applied, may have believed that in Judaism there is a contrary principle, that people are only judged for what they have done, not for what they will do. Retributive punishment is justice; pre-emptive punishment is not.

To repeat: this is speculative. There may have been other reasons at work. But it makes sense to suppose that the Sages sought as far as possible to make their individual rulings consistent with the value-structure of Jewish law as they understood it. On this view, the law of the condemned city exists to teach us that idolatry, once accepted in public, is contagious, as we see from the history of Israel’s kings. The law of the stubborn and rebellious child is there to teach us how steep is the downward slope from juvenile delinquency to adult crime. Law exists not just to regulate but also to educate.

In the case of *bal tashchit*, however, there is an obvious fit with much else in Jewish law and thought. The Torah is concerned with what we would nowadays call ‘sustainability.’ This is particularly true of the three commands ordaining periodic rest: the Sabbath, the Sabbatical year, and the Jubilee year.

On the Sabbath all agricultural work is forbidden, ‘so that your ox and your donkey may rest.’ (Ex. 23:12) It sets a limit to our intervention in nature and the pursuit of economic growth. We become conscious that we are creations, not just creators. The earth is not ours but God’s. For six days it is handed over to us, but on the seventh we symbolically abdicate that power. We may perform no ‘work’, which is to say, an act that alters the state of something for human purposes. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder of the integrity of nature and the boundaries of human striving.

What the Sabbath does for humans and animals, the Sabbatical and Jubilee years do for the land. The earth, too, is entitled to its periodic rest. The Torah warns that if the Israelites do not respect this, they will suffer exile, ‘Then shall the land make appeasement for its Sabbaths, for as long as it lies desolate and you are in your enemies’ lands. Then the land will rest and make appeasement for its Sabbaths.’ (Lev. 26:34)

Behind this are two concerns. One is environmental. As Maimonides points out, land which is overexploited eventually erodes and loses its fertility. The Israelites were therefore commanded to conserve the soil by giving it periodic fallow years, not pursuing short-term gain at the cost of long-term desolation.⁴ The second, no less significant, is theological. ‘The land,’ says God, ‘is Mine; you are merely migrants and visitors to Me.’ (Lev. 25:23)

We are guests on earth.

There is another group of commands

4 Rambam, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:39.

which directs us against over-interference with nature. The Torah forbids crossbreeding livestock, planting a field with mixed seeds, and wearing a garment of mixed wool and linen. These rules are called *chukim* or 'statutes'. Nahmanides understood this term to mean *laws that respect the integrity of nature*. To mix different species, he argued, was to presume to be able to improve on creation, and is thus an affront to the Creator. Each species has its own internal laws of development and reproduction, and these must not be tampered with: 'One who combines two different species thereby changes and defies the work of creation, as if he believes that the Holy One, blessed be He, has not completely perfected the world and he now wishes to improve it by adding new kinds of creatures.'²⁵ Deuteronomy also contains a law forbidding taking a young bird together with its mother. Nahmanides sees this as having the same underlying concern, namely of protecting species. Though the Bible permits us to use some animals for food, we must not cull them to extinction.

Samson Raphael Hirsch in the nineteenth century gave the most forcible interpretation of biblical law. The statutes relating to environmental protection, he said, represent the principle that 'the same regard which you show to humanity you must also demonstrate to every lower creature, to the earth which bears and sustains all, and to the world of plants and animals.' They are a kind of social justice applied to the natural world: 'They ask you to regard

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all living things as God's property. Destroy none; abuse none; waste nothing; employ all things wisely ... Look upon all creatures as servants in the household of creation.'⁶

Hirsch also gave a novel interpretation to the phrase in Genesis 1, 'Let Us make man in Our image after Our own likeness.' The passage is puzzling, for at that stage, prior to the creation of man, God was alone. The 'Us', says Hirsch, refers to the rest of creation. Because man alone would develop the capacity to change and possibly endanger the natural world, nature itself was consulted as to whether it approved of such a being. The implied condition is that humans may use nature only in such a way as to enhance it, not put it at risk. Anything else is *ultra vires*, outside the remit of our stewardship of the planet.

In this context, a phrase in Genesis 2 is decisive. Man was set in the Garden of Eden 'to work it and safeguard it' (Gen. 2:15). The two Hebrew verbs are significant. The first – *le'ovdah* – literally means 'to serve it'. Man is not just a master but also a servant of nature. The second – *leshomrah* – means 'to guard it'. This is the verb used in later Torah legislation to describe the responsibilities of a guardian of property that does not belong to him. He must exercise

vigilance in its protection and is liable for loss through negligence. This is perhaps the best short definition of humanity's responsibility for nature as the Bible conceives it.

Man's dominion over nature is thus limited by the requirement to serve and conserve. The famous story of Genesis 2-3 – eating the forbidden fruit, and the subsequent exile from Eden – makes just this point. Not everything we can do, may we do. Transgress the limits, and disaster follows. All of this is summed up by a simple Midrash:

"When God made man, He showed him the panoply of creation and said to him: 'See all My works, how beautiful they are. All I have made, I have made for you. Take care, therefore, that you do not destroy My world, for if you do, there will be no one left to mend what you have destroyed.'⁷

We know much more than we once did about the dangers to the earth's ecology by the ceaseless pursuit of economic gain. The guidance of the Oral tradition in interpreting "do not destroy" expansively, not restrictively, should inspire us now. We should expand our horizons of environmental responsibility for the sake of generations not yet born, and for the sake of God, whose guests on earth we are. ■

6 S. R. Hirsch, *The Nineteen Letters*, Letter 11.

7 *Kohelet Rabbah* 7:13.

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In his classic eighteenth century commentary on the Tanach, the Malbim enlightens our understanding of the opening words of this week's haftarah. In the past, we have focused upon these words as the source of comfort for the nation. G-d calls out that HE and only HE ("Anochi, Anochi") can-and will-comfort His people. Certainly, a stirring beginning to the navi's message. The Malbim, however, turns our attention to those psukim that precede Hashem's powerful declaration and are found earlier in this same perek (51).

In those verses, Israel calls out to G-d "Uri, Uri", to "awaken" His strength and power that He revealed to them in the past so that He could bring redemption to His people in their own time. The words that begin this haftarah, are, the Malbim declares, Hashem's response to the people. "Anochi, Anochi", "It is I, I," He says, "for I am the same as I was in the past! I need not 'reawaken' My power," He tells them, "for I have not changed at all". And then G-d

continues: "Mi Aht??" He asks, "But who are YOU??? What happened to YOU??? YOU are the ones who have changed – not I!!" And, as the haftarah continues, Hashem reasserts the truth of His unchanging nature, explaining to Israel that their fear of the enemy – a fear they did not have in their glorious past - was only due to their loss of faith in G-d.

The Malbim's understanding of our haftarah offers us a fresh look into what the navi hopes to explain to the mournful and frightened nation: Stop looking at your Creator as the source of your failures. Do not plead with G-d to become your "hero" once again! Start looking at yourselves and, perhaps then, you will realize that the tragedies you have suffered are not based upon G-d's "inaction" – but upon your actions!

Often the common reaction one has when suffering defeat, loss, or even when facing simple difficulties, is to find someone (or something) else to blame. And probably, one's least common reaction is to turn inward and ask "Where have I gone wrong?" "What did I do?...or NOT do?" It is, after all, merely simple human nature to look beyond the self as the source of our problem. Yes, it is natural. But it is wrong and destructive. For this reason, it should not surprise us when Hashem "turns the tables" on Israel by repeating the very words Israel addressed to G-d and now telling them: (51;17): "Hit'oreri,

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Hit'oreri!"-Awaken!" and then adding (52; 1): "Uri! Uri" "Rise up Tziyon!" and saying (ibid 2) "Hitna'ari...Kumi!", "Shake off your dust and Get up!!!"

It is certainly true that this selection is replete with comforting prophecies and reassuring words. The message from Yishayahu that G-d's punishment had been completed and that Israel's suffering would cease is certainly a comforting one. But more essential to the ability of the people to accept the words of consolation is their knowledge that they themselves caused the tragedies, so they themselves can repair their mistakes and reverse their sad condition.

The navi's lesson to his people that THEY can avert tragedies and mitigate the pain is the crucial ingredient to a successful recovery from loss and repair of our relationship with G-d. ■

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Uncover the Inner Beauty

לֹא-תִטַּע לְךָ אֲשֶׁרָה כְּלִטְעַן אֶצֶל מִזְבֵּחַ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר
תִּעֲשֶׂה לְךָ:

You shall not plant for yourself an ash-
erah, [or] any tree, near the altar of God....
(Devarim 16:21).

Our parsha begins with an imperative
to appoint judges. Immediately thereafter
appears the prohibition of planting trees
next to the mizbe'ach (alter). Chazal derive
from the positioning of these two ideas
that one who appoints a judge who is not
worthy, it is as if he planted a tree next to
the mizbe'ach. כל המעמיד דיין שאינו הגון, כאילו
(Sanhedrin 7b). We need
to better understand the meaning of this
statement.

First of all, why is it forbidden to plant a
tree next to the mizbe'ach? Trees are aes-
thetically pleasing. We are told that one
should not be distracted when learning

and state how beautiful a particular tree
appears מה נאה אילן זה (Avot 3:7). It would
seem appropriate to plant trees on Har
Habayit to beautify its surroundings. Why
are we restricted from doing so?

In Siman L'banim Rav Kastiel offers an
interesting perspective. Citing the Sforno
he explains that due to its esthetic beauty
it is forbidden to plant a tree near the miz-
be'ach. One is naturally drawn to beauty.
When one sees magnificent mountains
or a stunning sunset, they are immedi-
ately taken in by its beauty. People are
initially attracted to others based on their
appearance.

The Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 1:2)
states that the first transgression, eating
from the forbidden tree was in fact due to
Chava being attracted to the beauty of the
fruit, which distorted her ability to reason.
As the Torah states: כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֵאֲכָל וְכִי תָאוֹה הָיוּ
לְעֵינֶיהָ And the woman saw that the tree was
good for food and that it was a delight to the
eyes (Bereshit 3: 6). She was drawn by the
superficial beauty of the tree and its fruit.



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Beauty is something that can be appreciated but one has to be able to look beyond the surface. Perhaps we are restricted from planting trees on Har Habayit to teach us that when surrounded by kedusha at this most holy site, one should not allow our attention to be diverted by material beauty and dilute the spiritually inspiring venue.


The statement in the gemara comparing an unfit judge to one who plants a tree on Har Habyit now becomes clear. Don't be swayed by the appearance of a witness, plaintiff or defendant. Be sure to pursue justice and look beyond the surface to achieve it.

In a way, we all serve as judges, voicing our opinions in political, social and ideological matters. We have to be careful not to allow ourselves to judge or formulate opinions based on superficial appearances. This may be the source for the famous and important statement: "don't judge a book by its cover". May we be able to always uncover the true beauty that lies beyond the surface. ■

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Elul Elevation

Our *parashah* commences with the obligation to appoint *shoftim*, judges and officers in all our cities and settlements. Clearly, this is a command highlighting the importance of the justice system, our moral obligation to ensure judicial fairness and lawfulness in our societies. Considering that every concept and topic in Torah is relevant on multiple levels, let us look at this first *passuk* of our *parashah* on a deeper, more personal level and see how it contains profound lessons for our individual lives.

Rabbi Friedman, in *Shevilei Pinchas*, notes that one of the well-known acronyms for Elul is “*Echad Lema’alah, U-sheva Lematah* - one upwards and seven downwards.” This phrase alludes to the service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur. As he sprinkled the blood of his *korban* in the *Kodesh Hakedoshim*, he would count,

“One, one and one, one and two...one and seven.” Why do we highlight the service of *Yom Kippur* in the month of Elul? Just as one must be aware of his destination as he begins a new journey, we must keep our goal of this *tekufah* at the forefront of our consciousness. Every day of Elul reminds us to work on achieving forgiveness from Hashem through our *teshuvah* and *ma’asim tovim*, culminating in the *Yom Kippur avodah*.

The Remah in *Torat HaOlah* understands the ‘one’ upward as referring to the *yetzer tov*, the force that helps a person direct all his efforts to reach closeness to Hashem. The ‘seven’ down, refers to the *yetzer hara*, which *chazal* teaches us has seven names - *ra, arel, tamei, sonei, michshol, even, and tzifoni*. Thus, the Kohen Gadol would count “one” before each time he sprinkled downward, using the positive force to exert its powerful influence over the negative forces that drive us downward into the mire of sin.

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The *Bnei Yissachar* notes that *parashat Shoftim* always coincides with the beginning of Elul. The Torah instructs us to put judges and officers at our gateways. These hint at the senses that Hashem has given us through which we interact with the world. They include our two eyes, two nostrils, two ears, and our mouth. Elul is the month when we focus our efforts to use our *yetzer tov*, the ‘one,’ to control these seven gateways, ensuring that we use them all properly to serve Hashem. Likewise, if we realize that we have misused one of these gateways, we must be the “*shotrim*” to take accountability and rectify our misdeeds.

The Slonimer Rebbe in *Netivot Shalom* expands this idea further. “*Shoftim ve’shotrim titen lecha bechal she’arecha* - appoint for **yourselves** judges and officers.” (*Devarim 16:18*) The word “*lecha* - yourselves” is expressed in the singular. It is a direct injunction to each of us to continually judge and guard ourselves. Each person is charged with the responsibility to evaluate all he sees, hears, and says and decide whether it is aligned with Hashem’s Will, and if what he does brings him closer and strengthens his relationship with Hashem. ■

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Reb Yitzchok Meir Gershtenkorn was a man of vision and action, a builder of both the People of Israel and the Land of Israel. As the driving force behind the founding of Bnei Brak as well as its' first mayor, Reb "Itche Meir" was intimately involved in every facet of the urban planning, funding and creation of the city. A scholar who authored eight volumes of commentary on *Sefer Tehillim*, Reb Itche Meir is remembered for his great *mesiras nefesh*, personal sacrifice, as he bore the financial burden behind the unique pioneering endeavor and spent years traveling the globe raising capital to fund the project of building a city of Torah in Eretz Yisrael.

For more than a decade leading up to World War II, Reb Itche Meir would *shlep* around the world, going door to door, collecting donations. He would make appeals in shuls all across Europe, the United States and South Africa in order to secure financial support for the purchase of sand dunes and rural land, all the while encouraging Jews to come home to the Land of Israel and join the agricultural settlement that would one day become Bnei Brak. He was a man on a mission, on fire with a love of Torah, Yidishkeit and our Homeland.

Not everyone was supportive of Reb Itche Meir's efforts; his views on Zionism were

often perceived as being too progressive and anything hinting toward nationalism and state-building remained a trigger for many in the traditional community. Over the years, Reb Itche Meir encountered tension and opposition and would often feel frustrated coming up empty-handed.

On one of his journeys, Reb Itche Meir arrived in the town of Piacetzna forlorn, drained from the road and the challenges of his mission, on the verge of *yiush*, giving up hope. Having grown up in a Polish *Chasidishe* home — a chasid of the Vorka dynasty — Reb Itche Meir maintained relationships with many of the great Rabbinic figures of the generation. These included his friend and confidant, the saintly Rebbe Klonymous Kalman Shapira of Piacetzna, zy'a, author of *Chovas HaTalmidim* and ground-breaking pedagogue. The Piacetzner would later become widely known as a martyred leader of the Warsaw Ghetto, the shards of his faith-giving talks salvaged from the ashes and compiled in the *Sefer Aish Kodesh*, "Holy Fire".

In Piacentzna, Reb Itche Meir poured out his heart to the Rebbe. The Rebbe listened empathetically and placed his warm hand on his cheek, wiping away a tear. He shared soft words of *chizuk*, encouraging Reb Itche Meir to stick with his worthy and essential project, emphasizing how critical it was for *Am Yisrael*. But from the depth of exhaustion and bitterness, Reb Itche Meir finally

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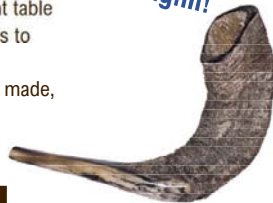
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sighed, “If building this city is so *chashuv*, so important, why doesn’t *the Rebbe himself* do it?”

The wise Rebbe of Piacetzna then shared a thought from our *sedra*:

Parshas Shoftim frames various rules related to Am Yisrael going out to war and includes a list of those exempt from battle. The officers inform the nation that one who has just built a home but has not yet inaugurated it and moved in, or who has planted a vineyard that has not yet been redeemed, or who was recently betrothed, should return home. Included in those who do not join the war effort is an *איש* *יִלֵּךְ הָיָא וְנִשֵּׁב לְבֵיתוֹ*, “a man who is fearful and faint-hearted”. Someone who feels unable to handle the pressure, danger and responsibility may harm the morale of other soldiers at the front and ought not join his brethren on the battlefield. All of these men are provided with ‘an out’: *וְיָלֵךְ וְיָשֹׁב לְבֵיתוֹ*, “Let them go and return to their homes; they are absolved from the fight” (20:5-8).

However, once this group has been separated out, Army officers assume command of the remaining troops:

וְהָיָה כָּכֵלֶת הַשָּׂרִים לְדָבָר אֱלֹהֵיָם וּפָקְדוֹ שָׂרֵי צְבָאוֹת בְּרֹאשׁ הָעָם:

“And it shall be, when the officials have finished addressing the troops, they shall appoint officers of the legions at the edges of the people” (20:9).

Rashi explains that *זָקָפִין*, ‘armed guards’, were stationed in front of them and behind them to prevent desertions. If anyone attempted to retreat or give up their commitment, the guards had the authority to strike his legs. The *זָקָפִין* played another role as well in “picking up” *לִזְקֹף* those soldiers

whose spirit has fallen, by being *mechazeik b’dvarim*, encouraging them with words. They would convey *שובו אל המלחמה ולא תנוסו*, *שׁוּבוּ אֶל הַמִּלְחָמָה וְלֹא תִנּוּסוּ*, “Return to the battle and do not flee, for flight is the beginning of defeat.” (*Gemara Sotah*, 44a).

The Piacetzna Rebbe then stood *zakuf*, straight and tall, and looked Reb Itche Meir deeply in the eyes. “When you began this project, you committed yourself to ‘go out to battle’ for the cause. All the frustration, disappointment, ups and downs and challenges along the way are part of that battle. At the very outset, you did have an opportunity to ‘return home’ and do something else meaningful. But now that you are fully engaged in this *avodah*, amid this holy struggle, you are forbidden to ‘flee’....

“And here lies the difference between you and I — and the reason why *you* must continue your mission. I personally never began it. It is *you* who were inspired to build the city and pursue this *avodah*, and *you* who have the ability and responsibility to continue to follow through and see the effort to completion!”

Until his final days, out of a keen sense of responsibility and for the wellbeing of the Jews of Eretz Yisrael, Reb Itche Meir ‘strengthened his heart’ to continue raising money to support the infrastructure and institutions of Bnei Brak and cover the deficits which the city had incurred. Today, the thriving metropolis of *yeshivos* and holy families is the legacy of the faith and determination of a man who remained at the battle-front.

May we strengthen our hearts, and one another’s, to begin — and to follow through and complete — many holy tasks! ■

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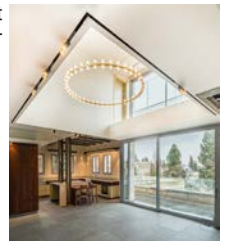
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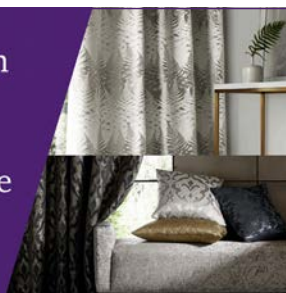


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7:30 PM

Hashkafa and Gemara
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2:00 PM

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Perek 4 **Rabbi Jeff
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8:45AM-1:00PM

L'ayla Rosh Chodesh Elul
Seminar for women

MON, SEP 5

9:15 AM

**Rebbetzin
Pearl Borow**
Divrei HaYamim (L'Ayla)

10:30 AM

The Thought of Rav
Soloveitchik
**Rabbi Aaron
Goldscheider**

11:45 AM

Halacha and Agada in
Contemporary Society
**Rabbi Shmuel
Herschler**

8:30 PM

Semichat Chaver Program
**Rabbi Elyada
Goldwicht** (The Bais)

TUE, SEP 6

9:15 AM

Rebbetzin Smiles
Torah Tapestries (L'Ayla)

9:30AM

Minchat Chinuch-Meaning
in Mitzvot **Rabbi Yitzchak
Breitowitz**

10:30AM

Parshat HaShavua
Rabbi Yossi Goldin

2:00 pm

Men's Talmud-Sanhedrin
Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

6:30 PM

Halacha Brought to Life (The Bais)
Rabbi Kalman Flaks

7:30 PM

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WED, SEP 7

9:00 AM

Medina and Halacha

Rabbi Shimshon Nadel

10:15 AM

Contemporary Issues in
Halacha and Hashkafa

**Rabbi Anthony
Manning**

11:30 AM

Great Jewish Thinkers

Rabbi Alan Kimche
(Resumes in Fall)

12:30 PM- Trailblazing
the Text of Tanach-
Lunch and Learn

Rabbi Neil Winkler
(Resumes Sept 14)

8:30 PM

Halachic Controversies

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THURS, SEP 8

9:00 AM

Parshat HaShavua

Rabbi Ari Kahn

(Resumes Sept 15)

10:15 am

Parshat HaShavua

Rabbi Baruch Taub

(Resumes Sept 15)

11:30 AM

Unlocking the
Messages
of Chazal

**Rabbi Shai
Finkelstein**

2:00 PM

Men's Talmud-
Sanhedrin Perek 4

**Rabbi Jeff
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Rabbi Taub

Parsha, 7:00PM Mon

(Resumes Sept 12)

Halacha, 7:00PM Wed

(Resumes Sept 14)

Rebbitzin Shatz

(L'Ayla)-Insights of
Chazal- Tues, 5:00PM

Rabbi Goldwicht

Parshat HaShavua

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An Important Update from OU Israel

As we look ahead toward the conclusion of the summer and the month of Elul, there will be a number of changes and additions to the current roster of shiurim being offered both during the daytime and evenings.

After careful consideration and discussion, we must share this important program update with you.

Beginning the week of Sunday August 28, all regular Avrom Silver College morning classes will be available in person here at the OU Israel Center and will no longer be available via Zoom.

For those who are unable to join us in person for classes, all shiurim will continue to be recorded, and available to view for free within 48 hours following the shiur via the video archive at: www.ouisrael.org/video-library/

At this time, we are making this change for our regular morning classes throughout the week. Afternoon and evening classes that are currently available via hybrid and Zoom will continue to be offered via both formats.

We look forward to seeing even more familiar faces join us back at the

OU Israel Center in the month of Elul. Please keep an eye on the Torah Tidbits for some new classes and the return of some of our veteran teachers. (We welcome back Rabbi David Walk, Rabbi Neil Winkler, Rabbi Mordechai Machlis and Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler).

Please also note the updated schedule for The Bais - our evening Men's Beit Midrash Program:

- Sunday evening - Hashkafa and Gemara with HaRav Azarya Berzon
- Monday evening - Semichat Chaver with Rav Elyada Goldwicht
- Tuesday evening - Practical Halacha with Rabbi Kalman Flaks, and Safrut course with Rabbi Tzvi Mauner
- Wednesday evening- Halachic Controversies with Rav Aschi Dick.

We look forward to the fresh start that the Fall term will provide as an opportunity to reconnect with the many teachers and community members that make the Avrom Silver College and the OU Israel Center a vibrant hub of Torah learning and inspiration for English-Speakers here in Yerushalayim.

Bivracha,
Rabbi Sam Shor
Program Director



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR

Program Director, OU Israel Center

Chodesh Elul is a time of introspection, a time when we make every effort to dedicate ourselves to growth and self improvement.

The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* cites several *pesukim* as allusions to the *avoda* of the month of *Elul*. Indeed, the very word *Elul* is an acronym composed of the *roshei teivot* - the first letters of the words in each of these verses.

One such verse is the familiar *pasuk* from *Megilat Esther*:

Eesh L'reayhu Umatanot L'evyonim- Each person should give food packages to their fellow and charitable gifts to the impoverished.

Giving to others, acts of kindness, friendship and especially *tzedaka* are indeed important values for us to focus on always, and particularly during these days of *Elul*.

In our *sedra*, *Parshat Shoftim*, we are instructed:

Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof - Righteousness, Righteousness you shall pursue....

The first *Slonimer Rebbe*, the *Yesod HaAvoda zy'a*, offers a beautiful insight on this apparent redundancy- *Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof*. The Rebbe explains that it is not enough to simply think kindly, but we must work to actualize that kindness through justice, charitable giving, and other acts of loving kindness. *Parshat Shoftim* is always read during *Chodesh Elul*, as a reminder to each of us of this important fundamental during these days of *Elul*.

The story is told of the **Alter of Novardok zt'l**, one of the great *Baalei Musar*, that every single *Erev Shabbat*, the *Alter* would return from the *mikva*, wearing his undershirt and *tzitzit* and missing his formal shirt. When his *Rebbetzin* would ask him what had happened, each week the *Alter* gave a different explanation.

"I forgot my shirt." "I tore my shirt accidentally." "I mistakenly knocked into a house painter and paint spilled all over my shirt."

The reality was of course, that each week the *Alter* gave his shirt to an impoverished individual. Each and every week, the *Alter* would literally give the shirt off his back to help a fellow Jew.

These days of *Elul* also re-introduce us to the powerful sounds of the *shofar*, which is sounded throughout this entire month to prepare us for *Rosh HaShana*. There is a powerful story related to *Tekiat Shofar*, which I think echoes this beautiful story of the *Alter* of Novardok.

It became known to **Rav Kook zy'a** on the eve of *Rosh Hashana* that there was a particular construction project that was quickly nearing completion, and that those involved in building this particular edifice, planned to continue to work toward completing this project, even on *Rosh Hashana*. Obviously saddened by this news, Rav Kook decided upon a strategy as to how he must address this situation.

The next morning, Rav Kook sent one of

his *gabbaim* (ritual assistants) to visit the workers, and to bring a *Shofar* with him. Rav Kook gave the *gabbai* careful instructions not to speak any harsh words, rather to merely go to the construction site, and to simply sound the *shofar*.

Upon hearing the familiar sounds of the *Shofar*, construction ceased, and most of the laborers quickly changed their clothing and made their way to synagogues. When the *gabbai* returned to the synagogue, he asked Rav Kook how come the rabbi did not simply go and address these workers himself; surely a visit from the esteemed Chief Rabbi would have encouraged all of the laborers to join the many who had decided to return to the synagogue with the *gabbai*. Rav Kook's answer is perhaps the most powerful point of this entire story. Rav Kook explained that had he arrived at the site, surely he would have caused great embarrassment, even shame to the many workers! Although the public desecration of this holiest of days certainly pained him deeply, the pain he felt when the Torah's honor was tarnished in such a public manner enveloped his entire being; but **what pained him most was to know that there were Jews who might go through an entire *Rosh Hashana* and not hear the beautiful sweet sounds of the *Shofar*.**

During these days ahead, as we prepare ourselves for the *Yamim Noraim*, may we internalize this important message, and may we merit to actualize and prioritize that *tzedaka*, loving kindness, and genuine concern for one another are indeed among our most important pursuits- *Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof*. ■



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The Moral Tradition

Chazal appended a nickname to each of the five books of the Torah. For obvious reasons, Breishit is often dubbed the “Book of Creation”. It is also referred to as the “Book of Yescharim” or the book of kind and moral people.

Before our avot arrived on the scene, humanity was trapped in a violent nightmare of savagery and bloodshed. Conditions for survival were harsh and the human mind could not imagine a gentler world of kindheartedness and compassion. Avraham intuitively sensed that there was something more to this world than power and might. He detected a moral energy which orchestrated life and prosperity. He didn’t detect Hashem through cold and impersonal science, but through the moral pulse he sensed coursing through our universe. He identified an intelligent Creator who was also compassionate, a grand architect who also cared lovingly for His creatures.

Avraham craved to discover this Being, and to spread knowledge of His presence, but, most of all, to mimic His moral behavior. Avraham introduced a brave new concept into the theater of human ideas - a world driven by charity, generosity and

kindness was more sustainable than one ruled by iron fists of violence. Avraham launched the great moral tradition of humanity.

A Higher Morality

We, his children, were tasked with aspiring to an even higher standard of moral behavior – one framed by the directly-revealed word of Hashem. During our formative years in Egypt, we endured terrible slavery, in part, so we would witness first-hand, the horrors of dehumanizing another human being. We would never sink to that level and would always provide a moral lighthouse for humanity.

Even before the directly revealed word of God at Sinai, we dreamed of an ethical society. Parshat Yitro portrays the Jews seeking moral instruction from Moshe *even before Sinai*. Torah had not yet been delivered and, still, we sensed that, in the word of God we could discover a higher moral code. In the divine will we sensed a blueprint for a society of equality and justice.

Jews have always possessed that “inner voice” urging us to act morally and to model a society of ethics and sympathy. We are ambassadors of divine morality, and we must answer to a higher standard.

The Modern Shift

For centuries we “lost” this moral tradition. We were pushed to the margins of history, persecuted, and often relegated to second class status. The notion of

“ambassadors to humanity” was absurd, when more frequently we were hunted as victims. We almost forgot our assignment as moral role models for society. Society, for its part, wasn’t interested in receiving moral instruction from a people they viewed as outcasts and religious infidels.

After two thousand years of moral irrelevance the world is searching for identity and moral guidance

Moreover, for much of our exile, the world was stuck in a dark abyss. Humanity was terrorized by violence and endless war, and the belief that a tiny nation possessed a moral code to advance the world to a better place was farfetched at best. Our moral tradition was silenced.

But we persisted, and finally history began to catch up with us. We tenaciously upheld the notion that God loved every one of His creatures and that this divine interest made every individual deserving of freedom, opportunity, and dignity. We upheld the notion of a compassionate God who wanted his subjects to behave morally like Him.

Slowly but surely the world came around and has begun to transform into a more civil, and less brutal society. Against all odds, our moral message has begun to sink in.

Modern society has achieved moral sensibility and is ripe for moral improvement. Once again, Jews have ascended to the world stage, and we now possess a nation-state capable of broadcasting

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Jewish notions of society and or morality. Additionally, Jews across the globe have achieved positions of influence. After two thousand years of moral irrelevance the world is searching for identity and moral guidance.

Are we capable of appreciating the shift in history and resuming our moral tradition? Can we act up to this historical shift? It isn't easy to live through historical revolutions, it takes imagination and adaptation.

Have Some Shifted Too Far?

Sadly, there are many who adamantly maintain the moral tradition of Avraham, but now face a thorny dilemma. Our return to Israel hasn't been universally welcomed, and we have been vilified as "immoral colonialists" administering a racist and bigoted state. The correlation of these claims to fact and truth is irrelevant to many. The world has spoken, and we have been found guilty of moral crimes. None of this is new and, throughout our tortured history, we have withstood far more outrageous accusations. To paraphrase Yeshayahu (54:17) the "tongues which rise up against you will themselves be indicted". Jewish history and prophecy provide the backbone and courage to weather this type of aggression.

However, the worldwide swell in anti-Israel opinion has taken a heavy toll on many Jews. Unable to reconcile modern conventions of morality with our Biblical right to this Land, many have, themselves, become outspoken opponents of Israeli policies, or

even the state of Israel itself. As we struggle with the final chapters of history, it is difficult to imagine a situation more painful than Jews who stand opposed to our biblical return and sometimes, inadvertently aid our enemies by providing a "Jewish voice" for these spurious accusations.

Though this situation is infuriating, and these anti-Israel efforts must be blunted, it is still crucial to appreciate that this voice is, ironically, the voice of *our* moral tradition. It may be a garbled voice, but it is part of the moral voice of Avraham. From their perspective, these Jews are upholding the moral values of Avraham, which are being trampled under our nationalistic agenda.

Sadly, they may not be sensitive enough to the Messianic nature of our return, or to the surpassing divine code of morality which supersedes human moral conventions. Behavior should be judged as moral if it conforms to divine prophecy, and not if it adheres to prejudicial UN resolutions.

However, despite these shortcomings, Jewish opponents of Israel largely view themselves as preserving the moral tradition of Avraham. This moral tradition is our common legacy, and as exasperating as it may be to watch it wielded against our national return to Israel, it is still our shared spiritual commonwealth.

Redemption isn't always smooth. More often, its course is jagged, and its texture uneven. Redemptive courage demands imagination, equanimity, and patience. ■

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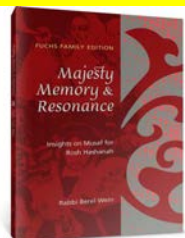


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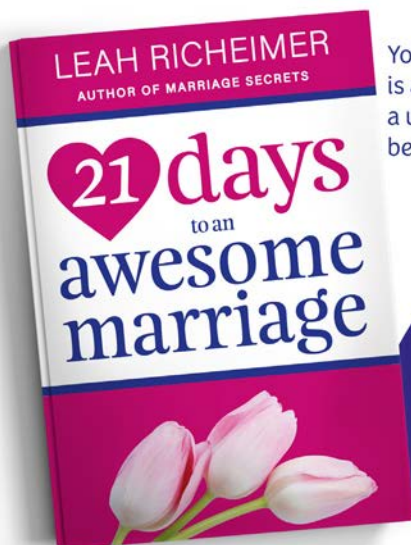
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FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE

RAV DANIEL MANN



Tasting Meat Liquids

Question: When I cook for Shabbat, I like to taste the chicken soup and gravies to make sure they are properly spiced. Does that “make me *fleishig*”?

Answer: In many areas of Halacha, such a question would be easier to decide conclusively, but for whatever reason, *Klal Yisrael* shies away from leniency regarding meat and milk. We start by telegraphically mentioning multiple ways that such a case is or may be distanced from the Torah-level prohibition.

1) If the meat is poultry, not beef; 2) Perhaps, if you are tasting only gravies and not the meat itself; 3) The meat and milk were not cooked together; 4) You are eating one after the other, not together.

Different *Rishonim* give different reasons to wait six hours (or a different *minhag's* time) between *fleishig* followed by *milchig* foods. Rashi (Chulin 105a) says that “meat exudes fat, and it sticks to the mouth and gives taste for a long time.” The Rambam (Ma’achalot Asurot 9:28) says that we are concerned that meat got stuck between the teeth in a manner that it is difficult to remove. The Tur (Yoreh Deah 89) brings

nafka minot between the opinions: 1. If meat is found between the teeth after 6 hours, is the meat still *fleishig*? (Rambam- no; Rashi- yes); 2. If it was chewed but not swallowed (Rambam- must wait, as meat could be between teeth; Rashi – no wait, as swallowing is what makes the taste linger). The Tur and Shulchan Aruch (YD 89:1) rule like the stringencies of both positions, therefore even if one does not eat the *fleishig* food but chews and then spits out (e.g., to feed to one’s baby), he still has to wait before eating *milchigs*. The Pri Megadim (MZ 89:1) reasons that our being *machmir* for both opinions is logical either due to our carefulness about *safek* in all the relevant cases, or because the two reasons could both be true.

The Pri Megadim continues that if one chewed *pareve* food that absorbed *fleishig* taste, but does not contain pieces of meat (e.g., chicken soup broth), neither reason indicates having to wait. However, he says that holy Jews do not distinguish (*lo plug*) between similar cases and always wait, and the Pitchei Teshuva (YD 89:1) accepts his opinion. How broad is this *lo plug*? While some *rabbanim* view it as applying to everything that is put in the mouth, the more accepted opinion is that tasting with the tongue (without chewing) and then



The Orthodox Union - via its website - fields questions of all types in areas of kashrut, Jewish law and values. Some of them are answered by Eretz Hemdah, the Institute for Advanced Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, headed by Rav Yosef Carmel and Rav Moshe Ehrenreich, founded by HaRav Shaul Yisraeli zt"l, to prepare rabbanim and dayanim to serve the National Religious community in Israel and abroad. Ask the Rabbi is a joint venture of the OU, Yerushalayim Network, Eretz Hemdah... and OU Israel's Torah Tidbits.



spitting out the *fleishig* food does not make waiting necessary (Pri Chadash, YD 89:18; Aruch Hashulchan, YD 89:14; Darchei Teshuva 89:22). (There are discussions in other *kashrut* areas on the extent to which tasting with the tongue alone is an especially lenient case – see Pitchei Teshuva, YD 98:1). Among Sephardi *poskim* as well, the mainstream approach is to be lenient (Kaf Hachayim, YD 89:4; Yalkut Yosef, YD 89:13). (See also a similar discussion in Living the Halachic Process, III, E-1).

There are some provisos, though. First, just as between milk followed by meat, we require washing the mouth by first eating liquid and solid *pareve* food (Shulchan Aruch ibid. 2), so too this is needed to remove the tasted meat residue (see the aforementioned lenient opinions). Since there is no minimum amount for how much one needs to eat to become *fleishig* (Badei Hashulchan 89:2), one would have to determine that the tasting included **no** swallowing.

These rules can be burdensome to follow. Consider also that on a day of substantial *fleishig* cooking, some people tend to eat samples of their food without giving it much thought and forget thereafter that they are *fleishig*. Therefore, it might be prudent for

many home Shabbat chefs who want to eat *milchig* food around the time of their major cooking, to eat the real *milchig* food prior to tasting *fleishig* food and spending a long time around them.

However, this suggestion is no more than practical advice where it applies. As far as a halachic ruling is concerned, if one just tasted *fleishig* food with his tongue, spat it out, and washed his mouth, he does not need to wait six hours before eating *milchig* food. ■

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How Many Eggs?

Last time we discussed the potential benefit for a woman to freeze her eggs, enabling her to preserve and extend her fertility. However, while there are clear benefits, the woman must take into account the problem with relying on egg freezing to extend and preserve fertility. There are many factors that impact the success of the procedure. The quality of the eggs, often as a result of the woman's age or medical condition, the process of freezing and subsequently thawing, and the relatively low success rates of IVF, all impact and may reduce the chances of pregnancy using frozen eggs.

We stressed last time that the reality is far from the simple equation freezing one egg will result in the birth of one child. So how many eggs must the woman need to freeze in order to have a child?

There have been attempts to create an equation to predict the minimum number of eggs needed to be frozen in order to produce a child. It is difficult to make an accurate prediction since there are many factors in play that influence the final result. An estimate a few years ago suggested that if a woman freezes her eggs at the age of 30 years old she would need to freeze twenty eggs to have one

child. If she did so at the age of 35 then she would need to freeze thirty six eggs to have one child. If she freezes at the age of 40 then the number of eggs needed to have one child increases significantly to sixty eggs. In each cycle of freezing a number of eggs are produced, this number usually decreases as the woman gets older. Therefore, a woman would need multiple treatments in order to freeze enough eggs to have one child.

Of course, this is a statistic and is not an exact predictor of the results in each specific case, but it does give us a fair indication of what should be realistic expectations of the procedure of egg freezing and the anticipated outcome.

It seems that egg freezing is far from the golden ticket or the elixir of youth that it is sometimes purported to be. Given the choice, for married couples the best chance of getting pregnant and having a healthy child may well be simply trying naturally.

So what message does this convey to the woman considering freezing her eggs?

More on this next time. ■

The Puah Institute is based in Jerusalem and helps couples from all over the world who are experiencing fertility problems. Offices in Jerusalem, New York, Los Angeles & Paris. Contact (Isr) 02-651-5050 (US) 718-336-0603 www.puahonline.org



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RABBI AARON

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Love Them Even More

A prized pupil of Rabbi Soloveitchik from his earliest years at Yeshiva University was Rabbi Meir Fulda. Rabbi Fulda attended the Rav's shiurim in the 1950's. After coming to Yeshiva University's high school, Rabbi Fulda never left Yeshiva. He became a beloved and illustrious teacher of Torah for over sixty years at Yeshiva college.

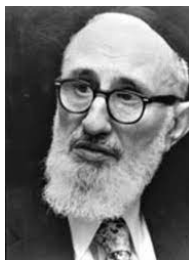
Following the passing of Rabbi Solovietick, Rabbi Fulda was asked to share personal memories of the Rav. Speaking in the beis medrash he relayed a story that he shared with Rabbi Solovetchik when they had first met.

Rabbi Solovetichik met young Meir Fulda and he asked him where he had grown up in Europe. Meir answered that he had come from the town of Fulda, Germany. The Rav responded, "Did you know that Fulda was a city that was known for its commitment to Torah and religious devotion and therefore, unlike so many other cities at that time, a Reform synagogue was never established in that place. So many other cities were ravaged by assimilation and Jews defecting from a Orthodox life.

"How could it be," asked the Rav, "that the town of Fulda never succumbed to these winds of change and secularization?"

"Rebbe," answered Rav Meir Fulda, "There were two distinct traits that characterized the Jewish community of Fulda. One, the Jews of Fulda never looked down upon another person. Second, those who were religious did everything they could to positively influence others to want to become more like them." Rabbi Fulda

added: "Loving your neighbor" as yourself does not mean to love only those that are similar to us; to 'love,' with true conviction, means to love those who are different. If you don't love them more then they will never want to return to Judaism."



There was a large department store owned by a gentile and naturally the store was open for business on Friday night and Saturday. When the owner of the store decided it was time to retire, he couldn't easily find someone to purchase the store. Finally a certain

individual made an offer; a Jew from Frankfurt, who happened not to be a religious Jew. He moved to the town of Fulda. He purchased the store and decided that it would remain open for business on Shabbos.

The rabbis of the community were dismayed. How could a major store in town,

owned by a Jew, be conducting business openly on Shabbat?

The rabbis met with the new store owner and respectfully requested he close for Shabbat. He responded that he desperately needed the money and could not close the store on Saturday. He did offer, though, that he would place a sign in the window directing Jewish patrons to use a side door if they purchased items on Shabbat, limiting the public nature of the transgression. The rabbis were far from satisfied. The fact that the store was open on Shabbat dishonored the sanctity of the day.

The esteemed *Beit Din* (rabbinical court) of Fulda met in private in order to formulate a plan. The three members of the court were *geonei olam* (world class Torah scholars): Rabbi Michoel Kahn, the spiritual leader of the community, who later perished in Buchenwald, Rabbi Kalman Kahane, who later became a Rav in Kibbutz *Chafetz Chaim* in Israel, and Rabbi Baruch Kunstadt, the third *dayan*, would go on to be a founder of the famed *Yeshivat Kol Torah* in Jerusalem. The three sat together and debated for many hours how to best proceed. They arrived at a ruling.

On that Shabbos morning in Shul, Rabbi Michoel Kahn, member of the *Beit Din* and the *morah de'asra* of the community, spoke from the pulpit. He shared with the people the plan of action: "We request of every man, woman and child, at the conclusion of Shabbos morning prayers, to proceed directly to the department store and warmly wish a "gut Shabbos" to our new neighbor. Not to give *mussar*, just stop by and wish him well. Don't go home and make *kiddush* until each family has greeted

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our friend. Just because he does not attend shul doesn't mean that he is any less a dear member of Klal Yisrael."

And so, on Shabbos morning, everyone went directly from the Shul to the department store and wished the owner *Gut Shabbos*. This happened not only that first Shabbos morning. Two weeks, three weeks, four weeks, five weeks. This gesture became the practice each Shabbos for every Shul member.

On the sixth Shabbos the Rabbi of the Shul got up toward the end of davening, before *Ein Kelokeiu* and he announced, 'I want to share some good news: Today, right after we conclude the prayers we can all go home and recite *kiddush*.' He then immediately called to the front of the congregation the owner of the department store. The man stepped forward. He was crying. With

tears in his eyes he said, "Each of you acted with such *menschlichkeit*, kindness and compassion. My wife and I have decided that as of today we are going to be *shomer Shabbos*. The store will be closed in honor of Shabbos."

Rabbi Meir Fulda proudly said "That is where I grew up. That was the kind of city Fulda was in my youth, which made it so special."

Rabbi Soloveitchik was so delighted by this story that he excitedly responded, "Tell that story over and over and over again! Because whenever a fellow Jew is distant from Judaism you have to love him even more."

Rabbi Fulda told the above story in order to emphasize a unique character trait he noted in the personality of Rabbi Soloveitchik. Rabbi Fulda declared: "If there was one thing I learned from Rabbi Soloveit-

chik it was the message: "*Le'olam yehe adam yerei shamayim*." First and foremost, *le'olam*, one must be an *adam* - a *mensch*. This is a prerequisite to everything else. To achieve *yirat shamayim* requires that one must accentuate the *midot* that demonstrate consideration for others, concern and compassion for every person no matter their level of commitment. (You-Tube, Rabbi Meir Fulda - Remembering my Rebbe, Rav Solovetichik, July 21, 2018) ■

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A King or Not? – That is the Question!

Parshat Shoftim introduces the concept of kingship in Israeli society – likely not a very good idea. After all, in the Book of Shmuel, the prophet Shmuel rants at the people for thinking about a king, perhaps on several accounts.

First, Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the ultimate King to whom we owe allegiance. Any “replacement” diminishes faith in Hashem as we turn to the mortal king for guidance and assistance. We shall likely find ourselves increasingly in that monarch’s service, obliged to accede to his every whim, to the point that we forget to do Hashem’s bidding!

Shmuel appears to have taken the people’s wish for a king personally as if the rank and file were dissatisfied with his leadership. However, the most cogent argument against the establishment of the monarchy, from a Torah perspective, was that the people wanted a king to mimic other nations (Shmuel I, 8:5).

Strange, because in those days, kings introduced forced labor, grabbed lands and vineyards, forced their subjects to pay high taxes, and even recruited sons to their

armies – reasons enough for the people to think twice. But they insisted: “*We shall be like all the nations; our king will judge us, go forth before us and wage our wars.*”

Now, in our Parsha, however, it states categorically that “*you will [at some future time] say, I will set a king over myself like all the nations around me*” (Devarim 17:14). Moreover, the passuk continues with the command, “*You shall surely set over yourself a king whom Hashem, your God, shall choose from among your brothers*” (ibid 17:15). Furthermore, requesting a king was one of three commandments imposed on Israel as a nation, once the people were established in its Land (cf. Sanhedrin 20b).

So, is kingship in Israel desirable or not? In answer to that question, we observe the many strictures placed on the king’s head. He is to keep away from material excesses and write a Sefer Torah, keep it close, and observe its decrees so that he will learn to fear Hashem, his God, and so that his heart does not become haughty.

Clearly, from a halachic perspective, a king (who is upright and God-fearing) is not only a desirable “commodity” but also kingship is a command to be fulfilled. Notably, the people demanded a king when the judges were in decline. Thus, their comment to Shmuel that he was advanced in days and a new leader was appropriate appears legitimate.

We leave the answer to our question

in suspense. First, consider that even the wisest King Shlomo laid a heavy tax on the people and that later internecine power struggles in the royal family led to the nation's division. On the other hand, Sefer Shoftim intimates that had there been a righteous king at the time of the judges, two major tragedies of that period – Micha's graven image (Shoftim chaps. 17-18) and the "Concubine at Giv'a" (ibid. chaps. 19-21) – could have been avoided (cf. ibid 18:1; 19:1).

Shabbat Shalom ■

Menachem Persoff



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Shemitat Kesafim and Prozbul part 2

Last week we saw that everyone should sign a *prozbul*, yet we asked how can we nevertheless perform the *mitzvah* of *shemitat kesafim* today.

The Ben Ish Chai (*Ki Tavo*) instructed his community in Bagdad that after writing a *prozbul*, everyone should lend someone else a small amount. After the *shemita* year, when the borrower comes to repay the loan, the lender should say “*Meshamet ani*,” “I remit it,” and not accept repayment. This facilitates observing the *mitzvah* of *shemitat kesafim* even today. The Ben Ish Chai recommended that women lend a loaf of bread to a neighbor before the end of the *shemita* year, and afterwards remit her loan. Another option brought by later rabbis is giving a loan before writing the *prozbul*, but note in the *prozbul* that all loans are transferred to the *beit din* with the exception of a specific loan one wishes to cancel.

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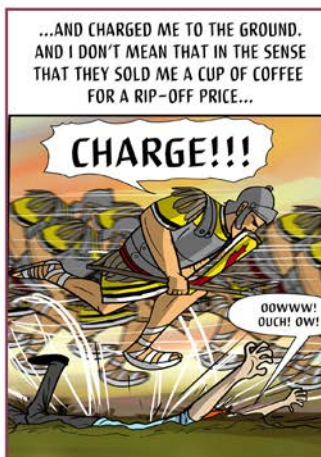
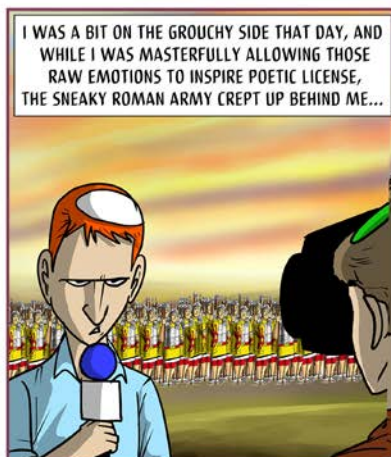
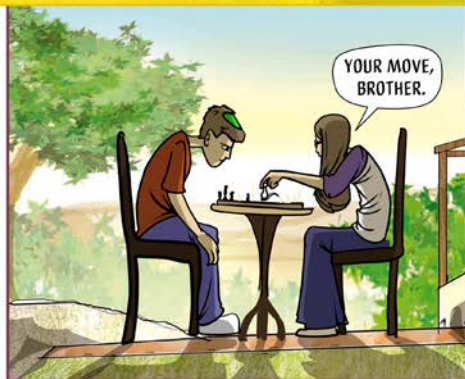
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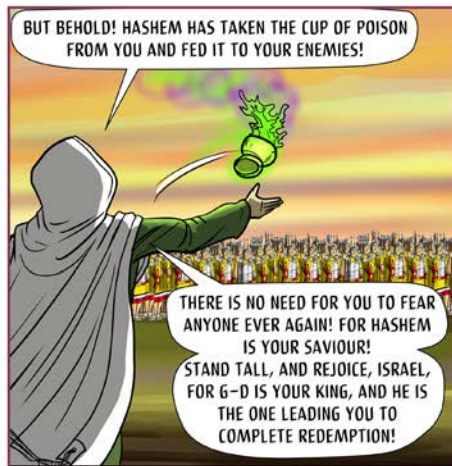
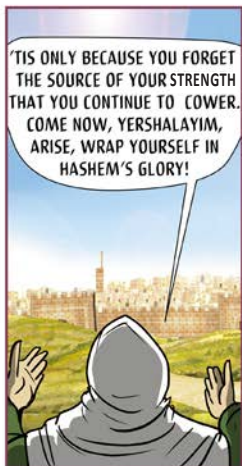
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Asher Manning Gush Chapter Director **Tree Hugging – An Ancient problem**

In our Parasha we come across a seemingly obscure Mitzvah: “Don’t plant a tree (Asherah) next to the Mizbe’ach”. Even without a Mizbe’ach, this Mitzvah contains a fundamental truth, that is especially relevant today.

In the ancient pagan world, trees were incredibly symbolic. As a predominantly agricultural society, every part of the tree had an important use in the day-to-day life of ancient civilization. Its fruit, refreshing and nourishing provided sustenance and vitamins and its wood and lumber served as the raw material for everything - from houses and ships to hand tools and utensils, not to mention fuel.

Indeed, the ‘tree’ as a religious focal point was a common staple of pagan belief, echoes

of which have survived today with the Christmas tree. But at its root, the tree as a symbol of nature goes a lot deeper. The Asherah tree was seen to represent the ‘Mother Goddess’, a feminine, motherly idealization of nature that can still be heard today in the concepts “Mother Nature” or “Mother Earth”.

This phraseology, describing nature as a sentient and sometimes vengeful being, can often be heard in the modern-day debates surrounding climate change and environmental action. The Torah warns us of this age-old misappropriation. The very first passuk in the Torah informs us of the hierarchy of creation – “In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth”. Nature is not divine. And we are not to treat it so, by worshiping it or trying to appease it. Indeed, mankind has an obligation to preserve nature and care for it – Hashem commanded Adam to work and preserve Gan Eden (“Leovdah uleshomrah”), but equally important is the placing of the “Tree of Life” into said garden, under man’s care. The Torah does not ignore the symbolism of the life-giving tree, rather it teaches us how to correctly relate to it in our world. For example, the environmental Mitzvah of Bal Tashchit specifically stems from guidelines against the misuse and exploitation of life-giving fruit trees. And yet, there must be a separation between worshiping G-d (the mizbe’ach) and the value of nature (the Asherah tree).



We want to thank

Asher and Lia Manning

for 3 incredible years of service and inspiration to the teens and families of Gush Etzion and wish them much Hatzlacha in their next stage.

Even today, we are in danger of the 'Asherah' fallacy, and the misconceptions regarding the correct relationship between the triad of G-d, man and nature.



Talia Agatstein **11th Grade, Jerusalem** **Right to Left,** **Left to Right**

In Parshat Shoftim, one of the things the Torah discusses is the בית דין and all the rules required when attending the court. One of the things we learn about in this topic is how the בית דין always knows best.

Rashi quotes: לֹא תִסּוּר בְּדִבּוּר אֲשֶׁר יִגִּיד לְךָ, "יִמֵּן אוּ שְׂמָאל", "You shall not deviate from the word that they (the judges of the Jewish courts) will tell you, right or left." Rashi goes on to quote the Sifri, "אֲפִילוּ אִם", "יִאמְרוּ לְךָ עַל יְמִין שִׁיְהִיה שְׂמָאל וְעַל שְׂמָאל שִׁיְהִיה יְמִין", "You must obey the decision of the courts even if they are telling you that right is left and left is right." Essentially what Rashi is saying is you shouldn't deviate from what the בית דין says even if you think they are wrong. Such a beit din should be comprised of the truest tzaddikim and talmidei chachamim. The question that arises is why does Rashi use the terminology "right and left", and not something else?

In order to answer this question we need to look at other places in the Torah.

The Torah is written without vowels and in many places, when you are given the letters shin or sin the rabbis tell us whether the letter is to be read as a sin or shin. Sometimes, Chazal tell us to decipher the meaning using the other letter than what we originally thought. For example, in Psalms 50:23 you shouldn't read the word

'vesam' with a sin, as in "and he places", but instead you should read it 'vesham' with a shin: 'He who improves', this is a very common way of reading and understanding the Torah. We can learn from here that one can think that they understand something but in reality it means something completely different. So even if one thinks that the dot is on the left side of the shin or the right, we need to listen to our rabbis to tell us which way to go, shin or sin because they know best and even when one thinks he understand something completely he can still be wrong. So too when being judged and getting our verdict you must always follow what the rabbis tell you and not use your own sense of judgment because they know what's correct. Sometimes, our chachamim can show us how to view a situation with an entirely new perspective. So whether you're talking about a shofet in the בית דין or a true gadol hador when any of them tell us something, we should not deviate from their judgment. Shabbat Shalom. ■

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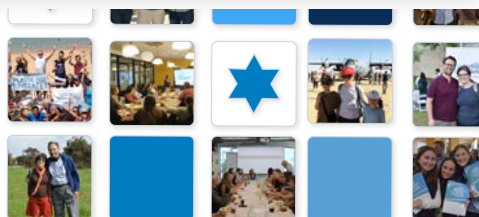
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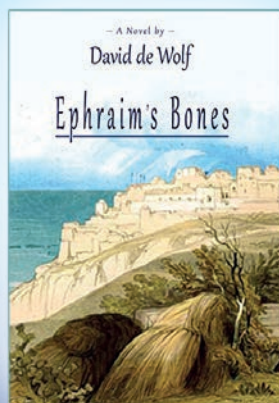
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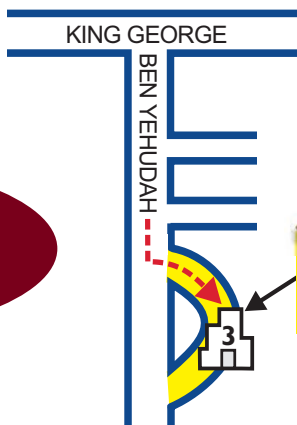
David de Wolf was born in the Netherlands and studied Dutch Language and the History of Art. He graduated with a Master of Arts on the architecture of the Italian Renaissance. Since then he has worked as journalist and as a tour guide in Italy. In 2011, he moved to Israel with his family.

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