



**GEULAS YISRAEL**

**RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN**

**RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG**

# Shoftim: Systems Fail, Values Endure

Parshat Shoftim outlines the intricate framework of a just and civil society. It establishes five distinct channels of authority—Shoftim (who were more than judges in a court), Dayanim, Kohanim, Melachim, Nevi'im, and Shotrim. Each branch plays a unique role in upholding law and cultivating a society grounded in morality and ethics. Together, they provide a system of checks and balances, ensuring that power is not concentrated in a single arm of authority. For instance, the prophets' role in holding kings accountable is just one example of this broader system of checks and balances; unlike other cultures, where monarchs ruled unchecked, the Torah empowers Nevi'im to confront rulers morally. They spoke truth to power, often at great personal risk, exposing failings and holding leaders responsible for their actions.

Parshat Shoftim also provides systematic methods to cross-examine witnesses and arrive at truthful testimony. Courts are designed to be fair and unbiased, supported by a culture that rejects greed and corruption. The Sanhedrin holds centralized authority, and those who openly defy it are treated harshly as a *zaken mamre*.

Similarly, Nevi'im who deliver false prophecy face severe consequences. This was a serious ailment that undermined the First Beit Hamikdash, as false prophets offered comforting assurances that all was well despite the moral and spiritual decay around them, eroding accountability and dulling collective responsibility.

## GUARDIANS OF SPIRIT

Additionally, to ensure the spiritual well-being of society, Parshat Shoftim repeats the mission of Kohanim and Levi'im: to dedicate their lives to the service of the Mikdash, even at great financial strain. These groups are to be supported by the general population. Every society requires spiritual vitality, embodied in a group devoted to sacred work and sustained by the community. Contemporary debates, such as the issue of non-Charedi conscription, can sometimes obscure this principle. No one questions that a society should sustain those who pursue spiritual endeavors; the discussion



**Moving, Packing, Storage**  
**0547369550**  
 -Free Boxes With Your Move  
 -20% off for Seniors and Soldiers  
 -First-Time Customer? \$150 Off Your Move

centers on the cost and whether a particular group may claim exclusive authority over this role. Regardless of these debates, the Torah clearly instructs us to support those committed to the spiritual welfare of the nation.

Parshat Shoftim also addresses the delicate situation of a negligent murderer. On one hand, he cannot be executed by a Beit Din, since he did not commit intentional murder. On the other hand, he cannot simply return to life as if nothing has happened. The elaborate system of Ir Miklat provides a solution: the negligent murderer is exiled, yet still able to lead a semi-normal life under controlled circumstances.

### WAR AND MORALITY

Ethical integrity must guide our courts, prophets, and communal life, and it must shape how we prepare for and conduct war. Moral conscience and the sanctity of life extend to the battlefield as well as the city.

Parshat Shoftim exempts certain people from military service under specific circumstances. The Torah recognizes that a person's obligations to family and livelihood are deeply significant; it does not demand blind obedience to the state or army at the expense of foundational human and social bonds. Identity is shaped not only by collective action but also by care for home, family, and personal responsibilities. Of course, these exemptions apply only to optional wars—milchemet mitzvah or wars for pikuach nefesh require the participation of everyone, including, as the Gemara notes, the chatan who must leave his chupah.

After outlining how to prepare for war and mobilize an army, the Torah establishes moral parameters for warfare. Before drawing the sword, we must extend an offer of peace, allowing for the possibility of resolution without bloodshed.

Flawless Service  
25 years +

Highest Prices Paid  

# Buying

# Gold, Jewelry, Silver

# WANTED

Member Diamond Club  
 (All Types)

Diamonds, Gems, Precious Stones, Jade, Carvings, Fine Mineral Specimens, Etc.

\*\*\* Alan Sussman, "The Collector" \*\*\*

052-854-4504

Please call live, Text message or WhatsApp

Shoftim reminds us that redemption is not merely geographical; returning to the Land of Israel is not enough. Cultivating ethical character and social order is as vital as building cities, fortifications, and farmland. The parsha provides a balanced and comprehensive roadmap for creating a just and properly functioning society.

### WHEN THE SYSTEM FAILS

What happens when the system fails—when courts, forensic evidence, and even the authority of the king cannot resolve a crime? When a murder remains unsolved, the final section of the parsha, known as Eglah Arufah, addresses the issue. A murder has been committed, yet no culprit is identified. One might think the process comes to a halt, assuming that flaws in the system render action impossible.

Facing this predicament the Torah offers multiple layers of response, beginning with the preservation of human dignity. The person found in the field is likely marginalized, living on the fringes of society, and without family or community to seek him out. One might assume that for such an outlier, simply burying the

Mazal Tov to

Rabbi Chanoch and Esti Yeres

& family on the engagement

of their son

body would suffice. However, it is precisely at this moment—when human life is most at risk of being trivialized—that the Torah insists dignity must be honored.

When Shaul Hamelech wrestled with his mitzvah to eradicate Amalek, he invoked the example of Eglah Arufah as the epitome of moral conscience. If Hashem cares for a single anonymous corpse, how much more should He extend compassion to living Amalekites? While his reasoning was flawed, he correctly intuited the core lesson of Eglah Arufah: that the dignity of every human life must be preserved.

#### ETHICS MADE EXPLICIT

Additionally, the ceremony of Eglah Arufah ritualizes moral reflection, giving shape to our ethical consciousness and collective responsibility. While we are born with innate moral sensibilities, we often take them for granted, assuming morality is self-evident. Yet life's

pressures and distractions can cloud judgment and obscure ethical clarity. By articulating these responsibilities, Eglah Arufah makes explicit the moral obligations we hold—both individually and as a community.

#### NAVIGATING THE IMPERFECT

Eglah Arufah teaches that success is never absolute. Even in the face of failure, there are redeeming elements. No murderer is found, no punishment is meted out—yet ethics are upheld, and the dignity of human life is reaffirmed. It shows that even when the system falters, the values we enact and the care we preserve still matter profoundly. Our responses, even amid breakdowns, carry weight, sometimes more than our responses to large-scale triumphs.

What is true personally is also true nationally and socially. We may sense societal fractures and setbacks, that the ideals we aspire to and the unity we hope for remain out of reach. Yet the measure of a society lies not only in the gaps it confronts, but in how it responds—how it navigates failure, addresses breakdowns, and preserves ethical and moral integrity amid challenge. The story is never simply one of total success or complete collapse; significance lies in the care, thoughtfulness, and resilience with which we act.

Elul is a period of transcendence, a time to reclaim the ideal. It is also a time to recognize that the ideal rarely manifests fully in this world. Often, we must navigate life under less than perfect conditions, and Eglah Arufah teaches that our actions retain meaning even in incomplete circumstances. ■

## SMART BUYS IN ISRAEL

**Consider South Netanya**

**No Index Attached**

**10%, 15% Down Payment**

**Special Pricing In Effect**

**Close To Everything**

**Consider Rehovot**

**New Pre-Sales Near Weizman,**

**Near Berman Shul, Herzl St**

**2 Bedrooms from 2.8M NIS**

**3 Bedrooms from 3.15M NIS**

**KETER ADVISORS**

**Call Izzy Leizerowitz**

**IL: 972.52.682.9367**

**US: 786.385.8859**

**[www.keteradvisors.com](http://www.keteradvisors.com)**



Rabbi Taragin's newest sefer entitled **"To be Holy but Human: Reflections upon my Rebbe, Rav Yehuda Amital (Kodesh)"** is now available at: [mtaragininbooks.com](http://mtaragininbooks.com) and in bookstores