

ב"ה  
**Torah  
Tidbits**

ISSUE 1529

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ישראל

19 AUGUST 2023 • ב' אלול תשפ"ג

פרשת שופטים  
PARSHAT SHOFTIM

AVOT CHAPTER 1



"Anarchy or Utopia?"  
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כי האדם עץ השדה דברים כ"ט

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT TIMES PARSHAT SHOFTIM

CANDLES 6:44PM • EARLIEST 5:57PM • HAVDALA 7:57PM • RABBEINU TAM 8:36PM



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To View Rabbi Nachman Winkler's  
Article Please See: [TorahTidbits.com](https://TorahTidbits.com) >  
**Individual Articles**

## HELPFUL REMINDERS

With the onset of the month of Elul we begin to recite **LaDavid Hashem Ori** both evening and morning. We also sound the **Shofar** throughout the month each morning

**Earliest Kiddush Levana** 3 Days After Molad 3 Elul/ Sat. night Aug. 19

**7 Days After Molad** 7 Elul/ Wed. night ,Aug. 23

**Last Opportunity to Say Kiddush Levana** until 14 Elul, Wed. night. Aug. 30, all night



# CANDLE LIGHTING AND HAVDALA TIMES



## OTHER Z'MANIM



	SHOFTIM			KI TEITZEI		
	CANDLES	EARLY	HAVDALA	CANDLES	EARLY	HAVDALA
Yerushalayim / Maale Adumim	6:44	5:57	7:57	6:36	5:50	7:49
Aza Area (Netivot, Sderot et al)	7:02	5:59	7:59	6:54	5:53	7:51
Beit Shemesh / RBS	7:03	5:58	7:58	6:55	5:51	7:50
Alon Shvut	7:00	5:57	7:58	6:52	5:51	7:49
Raanana / Tel Mond / Herzliya / K. Saba	7:01	5:59	7:59	6:53	5:52	7:51
Modiin / Chashmonaim	7:00	5:58	7:58	6:53	5:52	7:50
Netanya	7:02	5:59	8:00	6:54	5:53	7:51
Be'er Sheva	7:01	5:58	7:58	6:53	5:52	7:50
Rehovot	7:01	5:59	7:59	6:53	5:52	7:51
Petach Tikva	6:44	5:59	7:59	6:36	5:52	7:51
Ginot Shomron	7:01	5:58	7:59	6:52	5:51	7:50
Haifa / Zichron	6:52	5:59	8:00	6:44	5:52	7:51
Gush Shiloh	7:00	5:57	7:58	6:52	5:51	7:49
Tel Aviv / Givat Shmuel	7:02	5:59	8:00	6:54	5:53	7:51
Givat Zeev	7:04	5:57	7:58	6:56	5:51	7:49
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	7:02	5:57	7:57	6:52	5:51	7:49
Ashkelon	7:02	5:59	8:00	6:54	5:53	7:51
Yad Binyamin	7:01	5:59	7:59	6:53	5:52	7:50
Tzfat / Bikat HaYarden	6:55	5:57	7:58	6:47	5:50	7:50
Golan	6:59	5:57	7:57	6:51	5:50	7:49
Nahariya/Maalot	7:01	5:59	8:00	6:53	5:52	7:51
Afula	7:00	5:58	7:59	6:52	5:51	7:50
<b>Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem) - 8:36PM • Next Week - 8:28PM</b>						

All Times According to MyZmanim (20 mins before Sunset in most Cities;  
40 mins in Yerushalayim and Petach Tikva; 30 mins in Tzfat and Haifa)

**Daf Yomi this Shabbat: Kidushin 6**

## JERUSALEM

**Ranges 11 days Wed - Shabbat  
August 16 - 26 / 29 Av - 9 Elul**

Earliest Tallit and Tefilin	<b>5:10 - 5:18</b>
Sunrise	<b>6:04 - 6:11</b>
Sof Zman Kriat Shema	<b>9:23 - 9:25</b>
Magen Avraham	<b>8:44 - 8:47</b>
Sof Zman Tefila	<b>10:30</b>
(According to the Gra and Baal HaTanaya)	
Chatzot (Halachic Noon)	<b>12:43 - 12:40</b>
Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha)	<b>1:16 - 1:13</b>
Plag Mincha	<b>5:59 - 5:49</b>
Sunset (Including Elevation)	<b>7:26 - 7:15</b>



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Editor Emeritus: Phil Chernofsky  
Editor: Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider | aaron@ouisrael.org  
Advertising: Ita Rochel | 02-5609125 or ttads@ouisrael.org  
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## DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

**RABBI AVI BERMAN**  
Executive Director, OU Israel

“Excuse me, you’re in my seat...” is one of the more common phrases a Jew hears in shul. Although I share this in jest, whenever we travel together as a family with eight men/boys, we are conscious of taking up community members’ seats and try to find seats that seem less utilized.

This past Shabbat my wife and I took seven of our children to Netanya and were touched by the ways in which communities welcomed us into their respective shuls. To give you an idea, despite the fact that the shul we visited on Shabbat morning was celebrating two *smachot*, the *gabbai* himself - a man named Eli - approached us and brought us to our seats. This was one of the many moments throughout Shabbat when we were reminded how incredible our nation is and how fortunate we are to be a part of it.

Every Wednesday and Thursday, the OU Israel building is filled with volunteers who come to *schlep* large boxes filled with the week’s issue of Torah Tidbits from our offices to communities around the country. Rabbi Baruch Taub, who gives a weekly

*Parshat HaShavua shiur* at OU Israel, is among the crowd of volunteers and brings large boxes of Torah Tidbits to Netanya where they are distributed to local shuls.

Having spent many *Shabbatot* with my family in Netanya, we are well acquainted with some of the Anglo shuls in the city, including the McDonald International and the South Netanya Ashkenazi Congregation (SNAC). And yet, despite many visits to the area, we feel we have only begun to scratch the surface in exploring the new Anglo communities that have developed within the city, as evident by the growing piles of Torah Tidbits boxes picked up and delivered by Rabbi Taub each week.

Although my family decided to spend Shabbat in southern Netanya once more, we stayed in Ir Yamim right next to Ramat Poleg. On our way to shul on Friday night I was greeted by a friendly face, that of Rabbi Stewart Weiss from Ra’anana who often spends Shabbat in Ir Yamim with his wife. Of course, I gave him a copy of Torah Tidbits in exchange for his personally penned weekly *parshat HaShavuah* sheet which offers unique ideas and personal anecdotes relating to the *parsha*.

Eager to explore new areas of the community I decided to join Rabbi Weiss at a shul I had never been to - Tefilat Yamim - led by Rabbi Mendel Wuensch. The *davening* was beautiful and filled with lively singing. Rabbi Wuensch addressed the crowd in English. I was also delighted to

May the Torah learned from this issue  
be לעילוי נשמת

our beloved husband, father,  
grandfather and great grandfather

**RABBI I. FRED HOLLANDER z”l**

on his *yahrzeit*  
**ROSH CHODESH ELUL**



see my second cousin in shul, Ronnie Katz, who made *aliyah* from Dallas to Ir Yamim. He told me about the shul's Monday morning *Kollel* and the vibrancy and growth of the community since its founding. All in all, it was well worth the humid walk to and from the apartment we stayed in.

On *Shabbat* morning Rabbi Weiss took us to the Young Israel of Ramat Poleg led by a newly appointed rabbi, Rav Yuval Granot. As soon as we entered the shul we knew we were somewhere special. Walking into a shul with five of my boys presented yet again a challenge and we expected to separate ourselves in order to find seats throughout the crowd, but as I mentioned earlier, the *gabbai* made sure we were taken care of.

This was particularly notable as the shul was celebrating both a *sheva brachot* and a Bar Mitzvah and was therefore packed.

The beauty of the community's *hachnasat orchim* was extended to friends and families of the *baalei simcha*. After reading *Maftir* and the *Haftorah* flawlessly, and

with a pride that was palpable for all those present, congregants embraced the boy. I found this touching because it was clear that the Bar Mitzvah boy and his family were not regular "shul goers," yet the community did what they could to make the day a meaningful experience for them. The boy was elated. I daven this experience stays with him throughout his lifetime. We also benefited from hearing Rabbi Weiss's shiur after kiddush.

We davened *Mincha* and *Maariv* at Heichal Eliyahu, named after my Rav, the former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rav Mordechai Eliyahu zt"l. The shul is led by his granddaughter Rachel's husband, Rav Betzalel Bazak. While Rav Bazak attracted an Israeli *baalei teshuvah*

crowd for his hour and a half *Shabbat shiur* that touched upon topics such as *daf yomi*, *hashkafah* and *halachah* which my boys and I attended, his wife gave a *shiur* in an open outdoor area to a crowd of over 100 women, which my wife and daughters enjoyed immensely. Per their request, during *seudah shlishit* I spoke about the OU's work in kashrut and our programs for at-risk youth,



May the Torah learned from  
this issue of Torah Tidbits be לע"נ

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including our OU Israel Youth Center in Netanya, as well as my relationship with Rav Mordechai Eliyahu zt"l.

We ended *Shabbat* with my kids asking us to take them to SNAC for *Shacharit* the next morning before heading home. We saw many familiar faces there and once again felt the warm embrace of the local community.

When reflecting on the *Shabbat* my family experienced in Netanya I cannot help but feel inspired by the Anglo communities developing across the country, each one offering warmth to strangers. I appreciated the integration efforts of these communities and took note of the fact that the *drasha* on Friday night was given in English, and on *Shabbat* morning in Hebrew. *Kibbutz galuyot* is taking place before our eyes and we are fortunate to witness the miracles around us.

I am grateful for all those who made our *Shabbat* so special and for Rabbi Stewart and Rebbetzin Susie Weiss who guided us around Netanya and allowed us to experience the beauty of its communities. I was proud to see Torah Tidbits prominently displayed in every Shul I walked into and to hear from so many how much they enjoy reading them. A very special thanks to the wonderful member of our family who allows us to stay in their Netanya apartment.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring *Shabbat*,



Rabbi Avi Berman  
Executive Director, OU Israel  
aberman@ouisrael.org

## רפואה שלמה

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Chana bat Bruriah

Feyge Sara bas Chaya Peshe

Nechama Charna bat Feigel

Leah Naomi bat Tova

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FROM THE DESK OF  
RABBI MOSHE HAUER

OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

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# Trust: The Bedrock of Faith

Trust is a critical component of any relationship. And it is essential to our faith in G-d.

“Tamim tih’yeh im Hasem Elokecha, Have complete trust in Hashem your G-d.” (Devarim 18:13)

Trusting Hashem grants us a broad sense of security, eliminating the need to muse about the future or pursue sorcerers to discover what lies ahead. It permits us to follow G-d’s word with the confidence that He does not lead us down unhealthy and unproductive paths, and that in His world we will ultimately never lose by doing the right thing.

This value of trust was present at critical junctures in the development of our relationship with Hashem. When the bris was established with Avraham, it was presented as an expression of trust (Bereishis 17:1, see Ramban there): His-haleich l’fanai v’heyey tamim, “Walk before me and be trusting.” And when we as a nation accepted the Torah by declaring na’aseh v’nishma, we unconditionally accepted whatever Hashem would ask of us, evidencing our complete trust in Him, “characteristic of those who act with love, relying on Him not to burden us with something we could not bear (Rashi to TB Shabbos 88b).”

There were and are many who completely believe in Hashem’s power but not in His goodness. Our heritage, as children of Avraham who discovered and loved the G-d of kindness, is to believe in and remind ourselves constantly of His goodness. Before we recite the Shema as our declaration of faith, we remind ourselves of His love for us: “oheiv amo Yisrael,” “bocher b’amo Yisrael b’ahavah.” And we begin every Amidah by noting that the One to

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**DANNY FREI** דני פריי

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> August 2023  
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by Jonny Kirsch  
on חילך לאורייתא

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Inspired by and in memory of  
my friend Danny Frei דני פריי

at Beit Knesset  
Shimon HaTzadik  
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whom we turn in prayer created the world as an act of loving kindness, "gomel chas-sadim tovim v'koneh hakol."

In the classic Chovos Halevavos, "Duties of the Heart," the author underscores this critical point. Yes, to have faith and trust in G-d one has to believe that He is Almighty. But beyond that one must also believe, first and last, that G-d is good. Because you cannot have faith in someone that does not care for you. And so, wrote the author (Rabbenu Bachye ibn Pekuda):

*When he knows that the other has mercy and compassion for him, he trusts and relies upon him whatever he burdens him with.... (All the more so) when he knows that the one upon whom he is relying is consummately generous and kind, to those who deserve it and to those who do not, and that his generosity is constant and his kindness consistent, unending and uninterrupted.*

It is that faith that we restore and strengthen during this special time of year. It is trust that we build as we repeat twice daily in l'David Ori (Tehillim 27:1), "G-d is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?!" ■

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### PARSHAT SHOFTIM

Parshat Shoftim is the 2nd of 3 parshiot that have a total of 170 mitzvot. Shoftim has 41 of those. Sefer Devarim has 3 sections; this is the middle parsha of the middle section. The first section, Parshiot Devarim, Va'etchanan 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 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 Shenit: 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?" Ridding the Land of idol worship needs brakes. We need to rid the Land of the physical idols; but ridding the Land of the

Mazal Tov to

**Greg & Chanie Geller and family**

on the birth of their **grandson**





people, the idol worshippers, that must be done with care. It is not for me to step into the breach. The 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. Defer to the wise judges.



### 2ND ALIYA (17:14-20)

**King:** When settled in the Land, appoint a Jewish king. He may not accumulate 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. Monarchy's weakness occurs when the King no longer serves the people, but serves his 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. And not to serve his own interests.



### 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.

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. But make sure the power that comes with high religious office

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is not abused. You get support; but only this, not more. 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 albeit 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, 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 content of the law itself. Wouldn't legislation be so much easier if we knew the future? And even more basically, who are we to know what laws are wise and effective? If only we could tap into the secrets of the world, the hidden mysteries. There is a lot of mystery in our world. There are displays of unusual powers, inexplicable sources of knowledge, a world of unseen forces. Whether these powers are real or illusory is the stuff of debate. But it isn't for you. Stay away. 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. 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.

May the Torah learned from this issue of Torah Tidbits be לע"נ my father

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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. In so doing, the Torah spares 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 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.

#### YESHAYAHU 51:12 - 52:12

This week's haftorah is the fourth of a series of seven "Haftarot of Consolation."

The recent haftorahs have alluded to the fear of the nation of Israel that perhaps they have been abandoned by God. In response, this week's haftorah 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 haftorah 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 Devarim.



## 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).

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BY RABBI CHANUCH YERES

Rav, Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

לא תטע לך אשרה כל עץ אצל מזבח ה' אלוהיך אשר תעשה לך (טז:כא)

"You shall not plant an Asheira, of any kind of tree, beside the altar of G-d." (16:21)

Why is the discussion of an Asheira (Idolatry) tree in proximity to the appointment of judges in this Parsha?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 7b) quotes Reish Lakish who says, "He who appoints an incompetent judge over the community is as though he had planted an Asheira in Israel,"

What is this moral connection between an incompetent corrupt judge and an Asheira tree?

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik (1853-1918) mentioned that any idolatry is recognizable. You see an idol, you distance yourself.

Not so by an Asheira tree. Externally it looks like any other majestic tree, only internally was it sanctioned as idolatry. Similarly, a corrupt judge looks externally like a respected honest judge but internally he is corrupt and mistaking many.

~ Shabbat Shalom





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Yoni thanks Hashem for having the opportunity of having Tziporah in his life, to learn of her caring, patience and happiness, to overcome her challenges. May Tziporah's Neshama be a light onto the world, in a time of darkness, and may her Neshama shine to Gan Eden. Yoni misses Tziporah with tears in his eyes, as Hashem gave him a gift, a crown jewel, now he returns her to Hashem.

With thanks and Toda. Love, Yoni

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# THE PERSON

# IN THE PARSHA

**BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB**

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## “Anarchy or Utopia?”

Who would you consult if you wanted to know a thing or two about the perfect society? Would you ask a politician? A professor of government? A philosopher expert in theories of utopia? Or perhaps a historian familiar with successful societies across the ages?

Would it even occur to you to ask an entomologist, a scientist who studies insect life? But it is precisely such a person whom the Bible suggests we consult if we want to learn a thing or two about the ideal society. In fact, it is the wisest man in the Bible, King Solomon, who suggests that we observe insect life. I refer to the following passage in the book of Proverbs:

"Lazy bones, go to the ant; Study its ways and learn. Without leaders, officers, or rulers, it lays up its stores during the summer, Gathers in its food at the harvest." (Proverbs 6:6-8)

Already in antiquity men observed colonies of mere ants and noticed how remarkably efficient they were. Today, we would attribute that efficiency to the power of instinct. But those of us who retain a sense of the wondrous ways of nature are impressed by the complexity of tasks that ant colonies perform, without an

instruction manual, without training, and, above all, without leaders.

The Midrash, in the Torah portion of Shoftim which we read this Shabbat, is not only in awe of the complexity of the ants' tasks, but is astonished at the moral lesson which we can learn from this lowly creature:

"Behold the ethical behavior of the ants as it avoids theft. Said Rabbi Simon ben Chalafta: 'I once observed an ant who dropped a kernel of wheat, which then rolled down the ant hill. All the ants came, one by one, and sniffed it. No ant dared take it, until the one who dropped it came and took it for herself. Behold the wisdom of the ant, which is to be praised, for it did not receive instruction from any other creature, and has neither judges nor policeman.'" (Deuteronomy Rabba, Shoftim, 3.)

There are many ways to understand the verse in Proverbs and the Midrashic passage just quoted, and each time I personally encounter these texts, I understand them differently. But this year, I found myself fascinated by the possibility that King Solomon and Rabbi Simon ben Chalafta ask us to take a glimpse of what a perfect society might look like.

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It would be a society that had no leadership hierarchy and in which all were truly equal. It would be a society in which everyone contributed to the extent that he could, and would, do so diligently and industriously. Furthermore, it would be a society in which each individual respected the other and would not dream of taking something which belonged to someone else.

In short, it would be an efficient society and an ethical one. And it would have no leader, no need for judges, no necessity for policemen to assure that crimes were not committed.

This week's Torah portion describes a society which is far from that ideal. It opens with the command that we "appoint magistrates and officials...who shall govern the people and do justice." The Torah insists upon a judicial system and personnel to enforce its laws. It speaks of a judicial hierarchy with lower courts consulting higher ones. It speaks of a king. It describes a military system and outlines the roles of priests, sergeants, and generals. It describes a system of government which is comprised of several different institutions, each with its own set of responsibilities and privileges.

This week's Torah portion leaves us with the following question: is it the ideal society that is being described herein, or do the systems elaborated upon in this parsha reflect the Torah's concessions to human frailty? Perhaps the long list of laws that comprise this week's parsha is a response to the tragic fact that real societies do not resemble the utopian ideal and, therefore, require judges and policemen, overseers and enforcers, kings and generals.

Taking the latter approach and

understanding that the royal, military, and judicial institutions described in detail in this week's Torah portion are necessary because mankind is not perfect, enable us to understand a puzzle which confronts every careful reader of this week's text.

For, you see, there is one passage in our parsha which just doesn't seem to fit. It is the subject of chapter 19, in which the children of Israel are commanded to set aside three cities to serve as sanctuaries for a person who was guilty of killing another unwittingly. How does this unspeakable calamity, unintentional manslaughter, fit into the rubric of the other passages of this week's Torah portion which deal with institutions of government?

This is a question asked by numerous commentators, beginning with Abraham ibn Ezra in the early Middle Ages, and including Obadiah Sforno who lived in Renaissance Italy, the Safed Kabbalist Moshe Alshich, and the German Jewish 20th century scholar David Tzvi Hoffman.

I recently came across an answer to this question which appeals to me. It is offered by a contemporary Rabbi, Yehuda Shaviv, whose work on the weekly Torah portion, MiSinai Ba, I have referred to previously in this column.

He suggests that the passage describing in detail how to treat an unintentional murderer illustrates the simple human lesson that accidents will happen. "It would be wonderful indeed," writes Rabbi Shaviv,

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The lesson of this week's parsha is that human beings require external controls in the form of law, systems of justice and enforcement, kings and political leaders, and even militias and generals. King

Anarchy must be avoided, but utopia is not realistic. The Torah is designed to help us deal with the realities of existence, which are typically far from ideal. Nevertheless, the Torah holds open the possibility that a utopia might one day emerge. After all, if the ants can achieve an efficient and ethical society, why can't we?" ■

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# The Greatness of Humility

At a dinner to celebrate the work of a communal leader, the guest speaker paid tribute to his many qualities: his dedication, hard work, and foresight. As he sat down, the leader leaned over and said, "You forgot to mention one thing." "What was that?" asked the speaker. The leader replied, "My humility."

Quite so. Great leaders have many qualities, but humility is usually not one of them. With rare exceptions they tend to be ambitious, with a high measure of self-regard. They expect to be obeyed, honoured, respected, even feared. They may wear their superiority effortlessly – Eleanor Roosevelt called this "wearing an invisible crown" – but there is a difference between this and humility.

This makes one provision in our parsha unexpected and powerful. The Torah is speaking about a king. Knowing, as Lord Acton put it, that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely,<sup>1</sup> it specifies three

temptations to which a king in ancient times was exposed. A king, it says, should not accumulate many horses or wives or wealth – the three traps into which, centuries later, King Solomon eventually fell. Then it adds:

When [the king] is established on his royal throne, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this Torah ... It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to be in awe of the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not feel superior to his brethren or turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time in the midst of Israel. (Deut. 17:18-20)

If a king, whom all are bound to honour, is commanded to be humble – "not feel superior to his brethren" – how much more so the rest of us. Moses, the greatest leader the Jewish people ever had, was "very humble, more so than anyone on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). Was it that he was great because he was humble, or humble because he was great? Either way, as R. Johanan said of God Himself, "Wherever you find His

1. Transcript of Letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, April 5, 1887, published in Historical

Essays and Studies, edited by J. N. Figgis and R. V. Laurence (London: Macmillan, 1907).



greatness, there you find His humility.”<sup>2</sup>

This is one of the genuine revolutions Judaism brought about in the history of spirituality. The idea that a king in the ancient world should be humble would have seemed farcical. We can still today see, in the ruins and relics of Mesopotamia and Egypt, an almost endless series of vanity projects created by rulers in honour of themselves. Ramses II had four statues of himself and two of Queen Nefertiti placed on the front of the Temple at Abu Simbel. At 33 feet high, they are almost twice the height of Lincoln’s statue in Washington.

Aristotle would not have understood the idea that humility is a virtue. For him the megalopsychos, the great-souled man, was an aristocrat, conscious of his superiority to the mass of humankind. Humility, along with obedience, servitude, and self-abasement, was for the lower orders, those who had been born not to rule but to be ruled. The idea that a king should be humble was a radically new idea introduced by Judaism and later adopted by Christianity.

This is a clear example of how spirituality makes a difference to the way we act, feel, and think. Believing that there is a God in whose presence we stand means that we are not the centre of our world. God is. “I am dust and ashes,” said Abraham, the father of faith. “Who am I?” said Moses, the greatest of the prophets. This did not render them servile or sycophantic. It was precisely at the moment Abraham called himself dust and ashes that he challenged God on the justice of His proposed punishment of Sodom and the cities of the

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2. Pesikta Zutrata, Eikev.

plain. It was Moses, the humblest of men, who urged God to forgive the people, and if not, “Blot me out of the book You have written.” These were among the boldest spirits humanity has ever produced.

There is a fundamental difference between two words in Hebrew: anivut, “humility”, and shiflut, “self-abasement”. So different are they that Maimonides defined humility as the middle path between shiflut and pride.<sup>3</sup> Humility is not low self-regard. That is shiflut. Humility means that you are secure enough not to need to be reassured by others. It means that you don’t feel you have to prove yourself by showing that you are cleverer, smarter, more gifted, or

3. Maimonides, Eight Chapters, ch. 4; Commentary to Avot 4:4. In Hilchot Teshuvah 9:1, Maimonides defines shiflut as the opposite of malchut, sovereignty.



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more successful than others. You are secure because you live in God’s love. He has faith in you even if you do not. You do not need to compare yourself to others. You have your task, they have theirs, and that leads you to co-operate, not compete.

This means that you can see other people and value them for what they are. They are not just a series of mirrors at which you look only to see your own reflection. Secure in yourself you can value others. Confident in your identity you can value the people not like you. Humility is the self turned outward. It is the understanding that “It’s not about you.”

Already in 1979, the late Christopher Lasch published a book entitled The Culture of Narcissism, subtitled, American Life in an Age of Diminished Expectations. It was a prophetic work. In it he argued that the breakdown of family, community, and faith had left us fundamentally insecure, deprived of the traditional supports of identity and worth. He did not live to see the age of the selfie, the Facebook profile, designer labels worn on the outside, and the many other forms of “advertisements for myself”, but he would not have been surprised. Narcissism, he argued, is a form of insecurity, needing constant reassurance and regular injections of self-esteem. It is, quite simply, not the best way to live.

I sometimes think that narcissism and the loss of religious faith go hand in hand. When we lose faith in God, what is left at the centre of consciousness is the self. It is no coincidence that the greatest of modern atheists, Nietzsche, was the man who saw humility as a vice, not a virtue. He described it as the revenge of the weak against the

strong. Nor is it accidental that one of his last works was entitled, “Why I am So Clever.”<sup>4</sup> Shortly after writing it he descended into the madness that enveloped him for the last eleven years of his life.

You do not have to be religious to understand the importance of humility. In 2014 the Harvard Business Review published the results of a survey that showed that “The best leaders are humble leaders.”<sup>5</sup> They learn from criticism. They are confident enough to empower others and praise their contributions. They take personal risks for the sake of the greater good. They inspire loyalty and strong team spirit. And what applies to leaders applies to each of us as marriage partners, parents, fellow-workers, members of communities, and friends.

One of the most humble people I ever met was the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. There was nothing self-abasing about him. He carried himself with quiet dignity. He was self-confident and had an almost regal bearing. But when you were alone with him, he made you feel you were the most important person in the room. It was an extraordinary gift. It was “royalty without a crown.” It was “greatness in plain clothes.” It taught me that humility is not thinking you are small. It is thinking that other people have greatness within them.

Ezra Taft Benson said that “pride is concerned with who is right; humility is concerned with what is right.” To serve God in love, said Maimonides, is to do what is

4. Part of the work published as *Ecce Homo*.

5. Jeanine Prime and Elizabeth Salib, ‘The Best Leaders are Humble Leaders’, Harvard Business Review, 12 May 2014.

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truly right because it is truly right and for no other reason.<sup>6</sup> Love is selfless. Forgiveness is selfless. So is altruism. When we place the self at the centre of our universe, we eventually turn everyone and everything into a means to our ends. That diminishes them, which diminishes us. Humility means living by the light of that-which-is-greater-than-me. When God is at the centre of our lives, we open ourselves up to the glory of creation and the beauty of other people. The smaller the self, the wider the radius of our world. ■

6. Maimonides, Hilchot Teshuvah 10:2.

These weekly teachings from Rabbi Sacks zt”l are part of his ‘Covenant & Conversation’ series on the weekly Torah teaching. With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel. Visit [www.RabbiSacks.org](http://www.RabbiSacks.org) for more.

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**Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler**  
(Resumes Aug. 27)

**11:30 AM**

Shivat Tzion in Tanach:  
**Rabbi Yitzchak  
Breitowitz**

**2:00 PM**

Men's Talmud  
**Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld**

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MON, AUG 21

**9:15 AM**

Sefer Kohelet (L'Ayla)  
**Rebbetzin Pearl Borow**

**10:30 AM**

The Thought of Rav Kook  
on Eretz Yisrael: A study of  
the sefer Eretz Chefetz  
**Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider**

**11:45 AM**

Novel Parsha Nuances  
**Rabbi Avi Herzog**

**8:30 PM**

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

TUE, AUG 22

**9:15 AM**

**Rebbetzin Shira Smiles**  
Torah Tapestries (L'Ayla)

**10:30 AM**

Parshat HaShavua  
**Rabbi Yosef Goldin**

**9:30AM**

Minchat Chinuch  
**Rabbi Breitowitz**

**2:00 PM**

Men's Talmud  
**Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld**

**7:30PM**

(The Bais) Safrus (Men)  
**Rabbi Tzvi Mauner**  
(Resumes Aug 29)

**8:00PM**

Sefer Shmuel **Rabbi Machlis**  
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WED, AUG 23

9:00 AM

Torah and Technology

**Rabbi Shimshon Nadel**

(Resumes Sept. 6)

10:15 AM

Contemporary Halachic  
Issues

**Rabbi Anthony Manning**

11:30 AM

Ani Maamin-But Do You  
Know if it's Really True?

**Rabbi Yitzchak  
Feigenbaum**

12:30 PM

Lunch and Learn

**Rabbi Neil Winkler**

8:00 PM

Halachic Controversies

**Rabbi Aschi Dick** (The Bais)

THURS, AUG 24

9:00 AM

Parshat HaShavua

**Rabbi Ari Kahn**

(Resumes Aug 31)

10:15 am

Parshat HaShavua

**Rabbi Baruch Taub**

11:30 AM

Unlocking the Messages  
of Chazal

**Rabbi Shai Finkelstein**

(Resumes Aug 31)

2:00 PM

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Halacha, 7:00PM Wed

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Parshat HaShavua

Wed. 8:30PM

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# Lessons in Judgement

Parshat Shoftim opens with a directive to appoint Judges. The judges are warned not to favor one party over another (לא תכיר פנים), not to accept bribes (לא תקח שוחד), and to pursue justice (צדק צדק תדרוף).

After these opening pesukim regarding judgement, the following three pesukim appear:

לֹא־תִטֵּעַ לָךְ אֲשֶׁרָה כְּלֶעָץ אֲצִל מִזְבַּח ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ

*You shall not plant for yourself an **asherah**, [or] any tree, near the altar of the Lord, your God, which you shall make for yourself.*

וְלֹא־תִקֵּים לָךְ מִצֵּבָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁנָא ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ  
*And you shall not set up for yourself a **monument**, which the Lord, your God hates.*

לֹא־תִזְבַּח לָהּ אֱלֹקֶיךָ שׁוֹר וְשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בּוֹ מוֹם כֹּל דָּבָר רָע כִּי תוֹעֵבֶת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ הוּא

*You shall not sacrifice to the Lord, your God, an ox or a sheep that has in it a **blemish** or any bad thing, for that is an abomination to the Lord, your God.*

These three prohibitions are then followed by laws of witnesses (עדים), and a directive not to divert from the word of the Rabbis (לא תסור).

The Seforno questions the sequence of these commands. The Parsha opens with a directive to the judges, is “**interrupted**” with three halachot (not to plant an Ashera (tree) on Har Habayit; no to sacrifice on a matzeva; and not to sacrifice an animal with a blemish), and then returns to items connected to judgement (witnesses, and obeying Rabbis). Why are the three halachot of Ashera, Matzeva and Ba'al Mum, sandwiched between the two sections of directives about judgement?

The Seforno cleverly derives an important lesson from the placement of these three restrictions in between the two segments about judgement. Each of these three restrictions teaches us not to “judge a book by its cover”. This is applicable to judges and to every individual.

## אשרה - ASHERA

One may conjecture that it would be appropriate to place trees on Har Habayit to beautify its landscape. The Torah is teaching us that although to one's eye trees may appear aesthetically pleasing, they are indeed spiritually blemished, as they are utilized in acts of avoda zara (idolatry). A judge may have an attractive outward appearance but not the proper qualifications. One should not be overly swayed by the exterior.

## מצבה - MATZEVA

A matzeva is a monument or platform upon which one used to offer sacrifices.



One is now prohibited to offer sacrifices on a matzeva. An individual may speculate that offering a sacrifice to God is a positive act, no matter where it is performed. The Torah warns that this is not viewed favorably by Hashem. Another example of an act that may appear to be noble but that is spiritually flawed.

### BA'AL MUM - בעל מום

One is prohibited from offering an animal with a blemish. It may be a strong and beautiful ox, but if it has even a tiny blemish (like in the Kamsa and Bar Kamsa story), one is prohibited from sacrificing the animal. A third example of how one's judgement should not be tainted solely by appearances. Even a tiny blemish can turn an exquisite cow into a spiritually undesired sacrifice.

### Common Denominator – Judgement

The three halachot placed in between

the two sections dealing with judgement, do not interrupt the flow of this idea. Ashera, Matzeva and Ba'al Mum teach us not to **judge** others by appearance. This is applicable not just to judges but to all people. At times we may form an opinion of another based on a first impression or based on their appearance. It is crucial to look through the exterior and to be able to see the beauty within and the special qualities and characteristics of others. A wise man once said: Don't judge people by their covers, most of their books are still being written. ■

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# Perfect Protection

The end of our parashah deals with the laws of eglah arufah. If a corpse is found and the murderer is unknown, the elders of the closest city must take a calf and decapitate it in a valley, declaring that they are innocent of shedding this blood.

The Ibn Ezra explains that Hashem orchestrates this circumstance; the body should be found specifically near this city since the residents need expiation for similar sins that were committed in their midst. The Abarbanel adds that these sins may have been unknown to them, rendering it necessary to invoke the tefilah of the Kohanim to atone for them.

Rashi (Devarim 27:7) explains that although no one would think that the elders are murderers, they still must proclaim that they did not see this person leave their city and send him off without food and escort. The Maharal adds that when one accompanies another, he is treating him with kavod, giving him a sense that he possesses inherent value. The converse is also true. When we allow a person to travel alone, we give him the impression that he is not inherently worthy. Psychologically, this can diminish his sense of self, how precious he is to the world. In such a case, with this

reduced spirit, he may not have the inner strength to ward off any threat or attempt to cause him harm.

Maharal further explains that when one is sent off by himself, he is viewed as an individual without the zechut and protection of a community. When one is attended by members of a community, he becomes attached to them and thereby gains their merit for protection. In a similar vein, Rav Scheinerman in Ohel Moshe adds that this is one of the reasons a bride and groom are escorted to the chuppah by their parents. The couple's past and future becomes fused with a greater whole.

Rabbi Naiman z"l, in Darchei Mussar understands this Rashi from a different perspective. When a beit din cares for guests by providing their basic needs of food and escort, it impacts the entire city. When there is an outpouring of love from the top, the rest of the community is influenced, inspiring them to act with benevolence and goodwill. Therefore, a person who would potentially be low enough to murder would be affected by the increased good spirit of the city and would not commit such an act. The elders' declaration is a testimony that they have led their people with kindness and engendered a mindset of generosity, precluding any violence in their midst.

Each of us must recognize our mutual responsibility and the power our behavior triggers in those who live in our sphere. ■



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**RABBI JUDAH**

**MISCHEL**

Executive Director, Camp HASC

Author of *Baderech: Along the Path of Teshuva* (Mosaica 2021)

## The True Judge

Late one night, Yankeleh knocked at the door of his rebbe. Exasperated, he was barely able to breathe, let alone speak. “Rebbe” he gasped, “I saw the town shochet eating on Yom Kippur! What are we to do? How can we trust any of the kashrus in the city?” The rebbe was taken aback. “Yankeleh, you saw him? With your own eyes?”

“Well...,” paused Yankeleh, “to be completely honest, I didn’t see him myself; Velvel the tailor, he is the one who told me.” The Rebbe raised his eyebrows. “Ah, OK. Please bring Velvel here.”

When Velvel arrived, the rebbe asked him directly: “Tell me, did you see our shochet eating on Yom Kippur?” “So, Rebbe, here’s the thing. It wasn’t Yom Kippur, it was on Tisha B’Av.” With an intense look, the rebbe asked Velvel again, “You saw him? With your own eyes?” Velvel shifted from one foot to the other. “To be truthful, I didn’t see him myself, but Shmelkeh the Cobbler, he is the one who was there, and he told me!” “I think I understand,” said the rebbe. “Bring Shmelkeh right away please.”

When Shmelkeh arrived, the rebbe asked him, “Did you see the shochet eating on Tisha b’Av?” “Tisha b’Av!?” cried Shmelkeh, “No, no, chas v’shalom, Heaven forbid! It was Tzom Gedalya when he ate!” The Rebbe gave him a stern look. “But you saw him,

Shmelkeh? With your own eyes?” Shmelkeh blushed and answered with hesitation, “Der emeser emes is, I didn’t actually see him eating. It was Moishe the Tinsmith who saw him... he is the one who told me.” The rebbe rolled his eyes. “What is going on with you guys?! Quickly, bring me Moishe Tinsmith so we can get to the bottom of this already!”

Finally, Moishe arrived at the rebbe’s home. “Is it true? Did you see the shochet eating during the fast of Tzom Gedalya?” “No, no, Rebbe, not at all! It was just a couple of days ago. I saw the shochet eating before davening in the morning.”

At the end of his rope, the rebbe pleaded, “Please tell me that you, Moishe, yourself, saw with your own eyes the shochet eating before Shachris.” “Forgive me, Rebbe, not really! But I did see him walk into shul with a big smile on his face, and laughing. And let’s be honest: who comes into shul smiling and laughing — in the morning, before davening — without having some coffee and cake?”

Our sedra lays the groundwork for a system of enforcement and oversight of community standards and law, which we are commanded to administer justly and with fairness. Conviction, condemnation and punishment can only happen after a balanced, thorough investigation with a minimum of two credible



witnesses. And this is only valid with due process by well trained judges who seek the well-being of all those involved:

שִׁפְטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים תִּתֵּן לָךְ בְּכָל־שְׁעָרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר  
ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ לְשִׁבְטֶיךָ וּשְׁפֹטוּ אֶת־הָעָם  
מִשְׁפָּט־צָדֵק

“You shall set up judges and law enforcement officials for yourself in all your cities that Hashem is giving you, for your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.” (16:18)

Rashi comments: “(They shall) appoint judges who are לְשִׁפְטֵי וְצַדִּיקִים expert and righteous so that they will judge justly.”

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, zy’a, the great ‘Defender of Israel’, interprets our pasuk expansively, providing us a meaningful instruction and insight as we approach a new year and prepare to stand in judgment before Hashem. The Torah is telling us that we hold the key to our own g’zar din: שופטים ושוטרים תעשה, you appoint the judge, meaning it is in our hands to determine how our judgment will turn out. V’asita mishpat tzedek, ‘And judge our nation favorably, b’kaf zechus, and that will be the way the judge sees us. For ultimately, מידה כנגד מידה, the way we judge others will be the way Hashem acts toward us.

One of the sources for this mitzvah of giving others the benefit of the doubt is the verse, בְּצַדֵּק תִּשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיתָךְ, “You shall judge your fellow with righteousness” (Vayikra 19:15).

The Targum translates this as B’kushta t’dinei l’chavrach, “Judge your friend in

truth.” By judging favorably, we reveal the inner truth of our friend, who they really are. In the Torah, b’tzedek usually means ‘fair’. Here it implies focusing on

the merits and tzidkus, the inner righteousness or saintliness, of the other.

Judging negatively, especially on hearsay, with an incomplete picture or without all the facts or backstory, is not due process, for we have a Divine command: והוי דן את Judge every person favorably, on the side of their merits.”

Seeing the good in others, and judging them favorably, not only reveals the authentic merits and righteousness of our friends, it reveals ours as well. Then, when we stand before the True Judge, we will be conscious of the fact that we are filled with merits like a pomegranate is filled with juicy seeds. And b’ezer Hashem, we will then be signed and sealed for a good, sweet year, filled with smiles and laughter — with or without coffee and cake before shul. ■

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# SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR

Program Director, OU Israel Center

This week we commemorated Rosh Chodesh Elul. Chodesh Elul, in the annals of Jewish life, is a time of reflection, introspection, and personal growth.

Our Sedra this week, begins with these familiar words:

*Shoftim V'Shotrim Titein Lecha B'Chol Shaarecha- Judges and officers shall you place at all your gateways..."*

Parshat Shoftim opens with an apparent clear directive to establish a system of law and order, both officers to ensure the security of our community, and judges to oversee that justice is indeed enforced. However, the Chasidic Masters see great symbolism in this opening verse.

**Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov, the Bnai Yissascher zy'a**, suggests that the words b'chol shaarecha- all your gateways. is alluding to the seven openings in a person's face- two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and our mouths. It is through these openings that most of our senses are manifest and activated. Our verse, explains the Bnai Yissascher, is teaching us the importance of safeguarding and protecting how we use each of our senses- what images we might look at, what type of speech we might choose to listen to, what foods we might smell and taste, how we use our capacity to speak- each of these senses can be used for great good, or can be misused for harm.

The **Netivot Shalom, the Slonimer Rebbe zy'a**, points out that Parshat

Shoftim is always read during the month of Elul. Elul is the time of year when we make every effort to elevate our spiritual awareness and conduct, and therefore our pasuk is reminding us that we must utilize all our senses and capabilities to accomplish this goal of growth and self improvement.

The **Chidushei HaRim, the first Gerer Rebbe zy'a**, adds that the pasuk continues Shoftim V'Shotrim Titein Lecha B'Chol Shaarecha- **asher Hashem Elokecha Notein Lecha** - if one would only realize that all our capabilities and strength, all bracha that comes into our lives, is indeed a gift from Hakadosh Baruch Hu, then of course we will use those gifts to elevate ourselves, and to elevate our surroundings.

As we enter into this incredible month of Elul, may each of us be blessed to embody these beautiful ideas, and reach great heights in our Avodat Hashem.

*Chodesh Tov!* ■

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## Shoftim: The Biggest Ir Miklat in History

Redemption is woven into the fabric of both Jewish history and human history. Towards the end of history, Moshiach arrives, a third Mikdash is constructed, and the knowledge of Hashem extends across this world “as the waters cover the ocean beds.” Redemption and Moshaiach are each so central to Jewish belief that, according to many, their denial is tantamount to heresy.

Yet strangely, the Torah doesn’t explicitly mention Moshiach. By suppressing direct reference to Moshiach, the Torah firmly anchors us to the affairs of this world. Excess focus on the next era distracts us from the responsibilities and obligations of our current reality. Looking to thwart reckless escapism, the Torah avoids any overt mention of Moshiach.

The Torah does, however, lace numerous pesukim with coded Messianic references. In his extensive comments about the Messianic era, the Rambam (Hilchos Melachim, chapter 11) quotes three of these verses. The first pasuk, taken from Devarim 30:3 describes the return of Jewish exiles from galut:

וְשׁוּב יִקְוֶה אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֶת־שְׁבוּתָהּ וְרִחַמְךָ וְשׁוּב יִקְבְּצֶךָ מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפִּיצְךָ יִקְוֶה אֱלֹקֶיךָ שָׁמָּה

The second pasuk, taken from Bilam’s end-of-days prophecies in Bamidbar 24:17, describes a star discharging from Ya’akov and subduing our enemies:

אֲרָאֵנּוּ וְלֹא עָתָה אֲשׁוּרֵנּוּ וְלֹא קָרוֹב דֶּרֶךְ כּוֹכֵב מִיַּעֲקֹב וְקָם שִׁבְט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּמְחַץ פְּאֻתָּי מוֹאָב יִקְרָקֵר כָּל־בְּנֵי־שֵׁט

Each of these verses portray essential Messianic events such as the ingathering of Jewish exiles and the conquest of hostile nations.

The third “Messianic” pasuk cited by the Rambam is taken from parshat Shoftim, in Devarim 18: 8-9 and mandates the addition of three extra arei miklat, or cities of refuge, in our future expanded borders of Israel:

וְאִם־יִרְחִיב יִקְוֶה אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֶת־גְּבֻלְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתָּיִךְ וְנָתַן לְךָ אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר לָתֵת לְאַבְתָּיִךְ...וַיִּסְפַּף לְךָ עוֹד שְׁלֹשׁ עָרִים עַל הַשְּׁלֹשׁ הָאֵלֶּה

Initially three cities of refuge were designated in the East bank of the Jordan river and, subsequently, upon settling the Land of Israel proper, three additional cities were inaugurated. This Messianic pasuk in Shoftim, demands that, as our future country expands, three additional cities must be established.

Though territorial expansion is pivotal to the Messianic era, the concept of ir miklat




itself appears unrelated. Why did the Torah encode Messianic promises within the halacha of ir miklat? How does the twinning between Moshiach and ir miklat alter our Messianic perspective?

### **MOSHIACH AND HALACHA**

Unlike the first two pesukim which portray historical events, this third pasuk contains a mitzvah. As the borders of Messianic Israel expand, we are halachically obligated to install three additional cities of refuge. By tethering a Messianic promise to a halachic mandate, the Torah confirms the inevitability of Moshiach. Halacha is eternal, and, by association, so is the arrival of Moshiach. Each and every halacha instructed by Hashem, must, by definition, have applicability. Streaming Messianic predictions through halacha and not just through historical events, more firmly proves the certainty of Moshiach. If the arrival of Moshiach is associated with a halacha, it too must be inevitable.

Additionally, by signaling Moshiach through halacha, the Torah affirms the immutability of halacha during the Messianic era. There is a dangerous tendency to question the relevancy of halacha in a future redemptive era. The most notorious and extreme form of this anti-nomianist thought was practiced by Shabbat Tzvi, a self-proclaimed false messiah who brazenly violated severe halachic infractions claiming that halacha no longer applied in a utopian era. By fastening the announcement of Moshiach to a mitzvah, the Torah, implicitly upholds the lasting authority of halacha, even under the altered conditions of the Messianic era.




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### **UTOPIA?**

Binding a Messianic prediction to the halacha of ir miklat raises a different, but intriguing question. Will the Messianic era introduce a perfect world? Arei miklat cities provide safe-haven for unintentional murderers, protecting them against revenge killings by relatives of the victim. In a perfect world without violence, no unintentional murder occurs, and arei miklat, presumably, go extinct. Instead of adding three additional cities during the era of Moshiach, we should be dismantling the original six!

Evidently, at least according to this pasuk, the Messianic era will not be a complete overhaul of our current reality, but a continuation of our current order. Unintentional murder will still occur, necessitating cities of refuge and even requiring the

installment of additional cities to accommodate territorial expansion.

This view of Moshiach is consistent with the Rambam's own evolutionary view of Moshiach. For him, Moshiach isn't an apocalyptic shift of our current order but a more natural shift into a world of Jewish sovereignty in Israel centered around the Beit HaMikdash, the termination of war, and a worldwide religious revival. Everything else remains roughly similar to our current situation. Announcing Moshiach through the laws of arei miklat, presumes a Messianic world which includes unintentional murder and which closely resembles our own.

### THE IR MIKLAT OF HISTORY

Finally, by encoding the promise of Moshiach within the halacha of ir miklat, the Torah also provides a map or a timeline for the arrival of Moshiach. Our modern return to Israel has aroused broad ideological beliefs and ambitious Messianic assertions. For many, the restoration of Jewish sovereignty, the ingathering of exiles to our ancient homeland are some of the many signs that our long-awaited process of redemption had gradually begun. Yet, Messianic events are shrouded in mystery and draped in confusion, often

leaving us with little other than conjecture. Sadly, our sovereignty isn't complete or ideal, and the ingathering of exiles is still unfinished. We see these as unfinished redemptive "starts" but they come with serious questions marks.

However, there is one event which leaves little to the imagination. The founding of the state of Israel provided refuge for millions of our people fleeing antisemitism. Symbolically It has been the largest ir miklat in our history.

The hundred years prior to the founding of the state were some of the bloodiest years in our long exile, laced with grisly pogroms and, tragically, capped off by the genocidal nightmare of the Holocaust. Independent of any ideological assumptions, at a very basic level, millions of Jews needed an ir miklat to protect them. It is difficult to imagine the fate of our people post- Holocaust without the State of Israel.

In the years since the founding of Israel, it has continued to serve as an ir miklat for Jews fleeing Arabic persecution, European antisemitism, and Communist-era religious suppression. While we still wait for other messianic signals to become absolutely clear, the miracle of the state of Israel as the largest ir miklat in history is undeniable. ■



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## HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

BY REBBETZIN DR.  
ADINA SHMIDMAN



YESHAYAHU 51:12-52:12

# Heaven on Earth: A Spiritual Home for a Unified People

This week, we continue the series of ten Haftorot that are connected to the time of year rather than a haftorah thematically related to the weekly Parsha. This week's Haftorah is the fourth of the seven Haftorot of consolation.

In this week's Haftorah, Yeshayahu consoles the Jewish people with Hashem's technicolor message, וְאָשַׁם דְּבָרִי בְּפִיךָ וּבִצֵּל יְדִי כְּפִתִּיךָ לִנְטֹעַ שָׁמַיִם וְלִסְדֹּךְ אֶרֶץ וְלֵאמֹר לְצִיּוֹן עַמִּי אֶתָּה, And I will put My words in your mouth and shelter you with My hand; To plant the skies and make firm the earth, to say to Zion: You are My people! The phrase וְלֵאמֹר לְצִיּוֹן עַמִּי אֶתָּה, to say to Zion: You are My people, is understood by the Pesikta d'Rav Kahana, Piska 19 to be the only place in Tanach where Tzion refers to the Jewish people. The obvious question is why?

In this same pasuk, we find unusual imagery לִנְטֹעַ שָׁמַיִם וְלִסְדֹּךְ אֶרֶץ, to plant the skies and make firm the earth. The words evoke a picture in which heaven is planted on earth. What is the meaning of this expression?

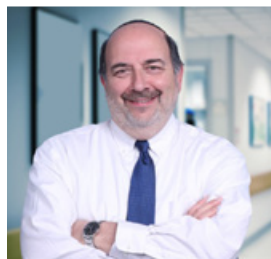
We know that heaven and earth are distinct, the heavens are on high while the earth is down low. Normally, when we speak of heaven and earth, we envision a great distance, an unbridgeable chasm between them. What the Navi Yeshayahu seems to be suggesting is

that heaven and earth can be brought together. The Navi speaks of a time when the fractured universe will be unified, a time where there will be no divisions and no disputes.

This consolation is most manifest when the Jewish people achieves oneness with the Torah, the essence of which is expressed by the word Tzion. Tzion is the spiritual epicenter of the Jewish people. Ordinarily, it means a place, such as in the phrase, כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה וּדְבָרֶיהָ מִירוּשָׁלַיִם, For Torah shall come forth from Zion, The word of the L-RD from Jerusalem (Yeshayahu 2:3). Here in our Haftorah the Navi foretells of a time when the observance of and commitment to the Torah by the Jewish people will be so strong and so obvious, that they themselves will be called Tzion.

May we merit this day of spiritual unification speedily in our days. ■

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## Real Life Rescues

### Akko Woman in her 30s Saved by EMT On Vacation

A 30-year-old woman with a history of epilepsy was discovered unconscious on the floor of her home by her parents last Wednesday afternoon in Akko. Upon discovering their daughter unresponsive, the parents immediately dialed emergency services for assistance.

Yehoshua Shetrit, a volunteer EMT with United Hatzalah and a resident of Jerusalem happened to be in Akko on vacation. Alerted to the situation, he apologized to his family and rushed to the location of the emergency.

Upon reaching the scene three minutes later, Shetrit encountered another first responder in the building's stairwell. The two responders quickly proceeded together to the woman's apartment. Upon arrival, they found the young woman without a detectable pulse and not breathing.

The two responders initiated CPR and attached a defibrillator. Coordinating their efforts they rotated performing chest compressions and providing assisted ventilation. Approximately five minutes later, an intensive care ambulance arrived at the scene and the paramedic on board began administering medications.

An electric shock was advised by the defibrillator and administered by the responders. Shortly thereafter, the woman's pulse returned as her heartbeat regained a steady rhythm. The parents breathed a deep sigh of relief. The woman was then transferred to the awaiting ambulance, which transported her to the nearest hospital for further medical attention.

Reflecting on the successful rescue, Yehoshua Shetrit expressed his gratitude for being in the right place at the right time: "I'm really glad that I was in the area and alerted in a timely fashion by the dispatch center, even though I'm not from here. To be able to help bring someone back to life is incredibly rewarding, and worth giving up some time on my vacation for."



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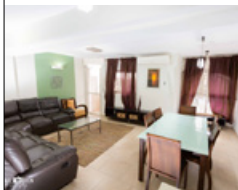


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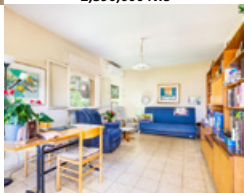
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## An Ashkenazi Joining Sephardi *Selichot*

לעילוי נשמת  
יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

**Question:** My neighborhood's small Sephardi beit kneset has difficulty maintaining an (early-morning) Elul Selichot minyan. I (an Ashkenazi) have joined them a few times during Elul and found it uplifting, but someone claimed that I cannot count for a minyan because according to my minhag, I am not obligated in Selichot then. Do I count toward the minyan, and is it a good idea to spend time and energy on it? May I continue with them after Ashkenazim start Selichot?

**Answer:** Selichot consist of supplications to Hashem to have mercy on us despite our shortcomings and are an aid to our regimen of teshuva. They are said at times when there is heightened need (e.g., on fast days over national tragedies and Behab, anticipating the need for teshuva) and/or heightened chance of success (during the days around the Yamim Noraim – see Rambam's (Teshuva 2:6) formulation about this period).

There do not appear to be sources indicating Selichot are ever an independent obligation, certainly not found in Chazal but not even as a formal, binding,

post-Talmudic minhag. On fast days, it is a way of strengthening Shemoneh Esrei's request for forgiveness –some even inserted it there (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 566:4). Selichot around the Yamim Noraim may be a more independent tefilla (see Batei Yosef 581:2, in the name of Rav Soloveitchik). Even so, it was not formally instituted as an extra tefilla like Ne'ila. Rather, it is a spiritual tool Hashem provided to use at our discretion (see Rosh Hashana 17b), which has developed a schedule over the centuries. All agree that from the beginning of Elul until Yom Kippur is a time for heightened spiritual steps. We start blowing shofar and reciting L'David Hashem Ori. The Ashkenazi minhag of having at least 10 days of Selichot beginning slightly before Rosh Hashana (this is tellingly fluid) is the same basic minhag as the Sephardi one that begins earlier. Therefore, there is no issue of your not being obligated. On the one hand, no one is **obligated** (see Yechaveh Da'at III:44 on when Sephardim do not have to do Elul Selichot), and everyone is strongly recommended to take part when appropriate.

Note also that while consisting of different texts, Ashkenazim and Sephardim

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.



share the structure and critical parts of Selichot. There is Ashrei and Chatzi Kadish, then many supplications, separated by the 13 Middot, then there is a viduy, and final supplications; we finish with Kaddish. The parts that require a minyan (devarim shebekdusha), Kaddish and the 13 Middot, do not need ten people to recite the identical text beforehand to precede it (see Igrot Moshe, OC IV:33; this column, Shemini 5777), but must just be united for the devarim shebekdusha. Therefore, even one who (quietly) recites Ashkenazi piyutim counts for the minyan if he joins the Sephardi tzibbur for the 13 Middot.

We applaud your joining your neighbors for a few reasons. First, you help people "use a powerful tool," as Selichot's devarim shebekedusha parts must have a minyan, and everything is accepted better with a minyan (see Rosh Hashana 18a). Also, while Ashkenazim start Selichot later in Elul, you receive spiritual benefits for the early ones (we cannot evaluate any price you might pay). Learning new, beautiful liturgy is also a positive experience. Finally, although there are many "bridges" between Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities, more achdut experiences are always welcome, especially at times when we need z'chuyot.

Do things change when Ashkenazi Selichot have begun? Their difficulty in finding a minyan is a crucial factor, which can outweigh the modest advantages of keeping one's own nusach hatefilla (see Igrot

Moshe ibid.). It is possible but not required (a matter of taste and circumstances) for you to recite **some** Ashkenazi piyutim in between the 13 Middot. It is particularly appropriate to daven with them if yirat shamayim concerns so dictate (ibid.), although if it insults one's natural community, that is also a serious factor. ■

## Having a dispute?



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# Some Thoughts Concerning Shabbat

"Shabbat is not a problem, it's a solution." These words were spoken by **Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein**, the Chief Rabbi of South Africa. Regarding Israel, he stated: "Shabbat is not something that we need to put up with in order to make this a normal country, but an absolute value that makes this country unique." Rabbi Goldstein recently published a book titled: **Shabbat. A Day To Create Yourself: Building character, shaping perspectives, and finding happiness through Shabbat**. Here are several additional thoughts that he shared with me when we met:

"Jewish identity in the world today rests on three pillars: the pillar of Zionism, the pillar of the Holocaust, and the pillar of contemporary anti-Semitism. Yet I meet young people throughout the world and see that this may have been true for their grandparents, but it's not enough for them. They want more. **They want spirituality, inspiration, holiness. We are obligated to add to Jewish identity another pillar: the pillar of Shabbat.**"

"There are communities where Shabbat observance has become the latest trend. It's considered fashionable to turn off your cell phone and not to be available one day of the week. The idea of making

Shabbat plans with friends and preparing tasty food ahead of time has proven to be a revelation. **Not because of reward in the world to come, but because of reward in this world.** To transition from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional perspective once a week."

"Whoever is connected to social media 24/7 never has a chance for quiet contemplation. If we never step outside the digital loop, how is it possible to visit new places and discover creative solutions? **My goal is to look at the world all week long with Shabbat eyes.** The thought of Shabbat brings humility, wisdom, security, optimism, and meaning into everything I do. **Ultimately, Shabbat shapes the greatest creation that we can create in life: ourselves.**"

Shabbat shalom. ■

Sivan Rahav-Meir is a media personality and lecturer. Married to Yedidya, the mother of five. Lives in Jerusalem, and formerly served as the World Mizrahi Shlichah to North America. Sivan lectures in Israel and overseas about the media, Judaism, Zionism and new media. She was voted by Globes newspaper as most popular female media personality in Israel and by the Jerusalem Post as one of the 50 most influential Jews in the world.





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WHAT? CUT!

OH, NO, NO, DON'T CUT ON MY BEHALF, I'M JUST A POOR BEAST LOOKING FOR MY MISSING NOGGIN'.  
YOU'VE HEARD OF "NEARLY HEADLESS NICK", WELL, I'M "RATHER CLEARLY HEADLESS...  
ERM... RICK!" MOOOO!

URGH, MR. YERUSHALMI,  
YOU ARE **SUCH** A SORE LOSER!

I AM NOT! THAT WAS COMPLETELY UNFAIR!  
A ROTTEN OFFSIDE PENATLY FOWL  
PEA-ROLLER AND...  
PEGLEG!

I... I MEAN...  
MR. YERUSHALMI?  
WHAT MR. YERUSHALMI?  
I SEE NO MR. YERUSHALMI!  
OF COURSE, LACKING THE  
BODY-PART THAT HAS EYES  
ON IT MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING  
TO DO WITH IT...

WELL, "RATHER CLEARLY HEADLESS  
WHAT'S-HIS-NAME" - YOU SEEM TO  
BE MANAGING VERY WELL WITHOUT  
A MOUTH TO SPEAK OF...

OR... WITH...

BUT, HEY, MAYBE THAT'S ANOTHER  
REASON TO FILM THIS LOCATION  
AND NOT THE ONE YOU WANTED...

WHY, PRAY,  
IS THAT?

BECAUSE...  
THE SANHEDRIN ARE CALLED  
"THE EYES OF THE PEOPLE!"

LOOK, WE PUT IT TO VOTE -  
DVIR AND I VOTED THAT FOR  
PARSHAT "SHOFTIM" WE FOCUS  
ON THE TOMBS OF THE  
SANHEDRIN, WHEREAS YOUR  
SUGGESTION TO COVER  
"NACHAL SHOFEI" WAS...

...WAS EVEN MORE GENIUS  
THOUGH I SAY SO MYSELF!

NOT ONLY IS THE SHOFEI STREAM  
NAMED AFTER A JUDGE,  
IT TIES IN NEATLY WITH THE  
"BEHEADED CALF" CEREMONY  
AT THE END, PERFORMED ON  
THE BANKS OF A STRONG-  
CURRENTED STREAM! Q. E. D!

WELL, IT WAS STILL OUT-VOTED,  
SO KINDLY RESPECT THE WILL OF  
THE MAJORITY...

WELL, MADAME ZORRO,  
MAYBE YOU CAN EXPLAIN TO  
ME WHY THERE NEEDS TO BE A  
MAJORITY AT ALL? THERE  
SHOULDN'T BE A VOTE - THIS  
IS, AFTER ALL, MY SHOW...

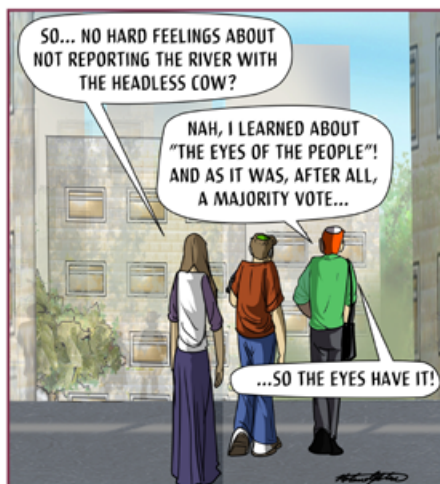
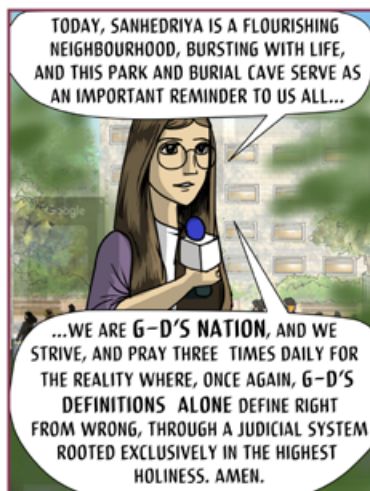
...AND MY DAD'S NETWORK, AND HE FELT  
THAT THIS WEEK THERE SHOULD BE MORE...  
CODSHOW INVOLVEMENT THIS WEEK  
PARTICULARLY. CAN'T SAY I WAS DANCING  
WITH JOY AT THE IDEA, BUT HERE I AM...

SO IF YOU DON'T WISH  
TO PARTAKE IN FILMING  
THIS SITE, THAT'S FINE  
BY US, JUST PLEASE  
STOP WITH THE COW  
IMPRESSIONS!

BAH!

OR SHEEP IMPRESSIONS,  
FOR THAT MATTER







**Ian Schwartz**

**Gush Chapter Director**

### **I Just Can't Wait to be King**

In Parshat Shoftim we receive the Mitzvah to appoint a king over the Jewish people in the land of Israel. The Torah gives the following commandment to the king **”והיה כשבתו על כסא ממלכתו הזאת על ספר מלפני”** **“הכהנים הלויים”** **“And it will be, when he sits upon his royal throne, that he shall write for himself two copies of this Torah on a scroll from [that Torah which is] before the Levitic kohanim.”** (Devarim 17:18).

A Jewish king is obligated to have two Torah scrolls. Rashi explains the function of each of these Torahs, one the king kept with him at all times wherever he went. This had the clear purpose of constantly reminding the king of the mitzvot of the Torah and the divine standard of the Torah. No matter if he was in a budget meeting or at war as a leader he must keep the Torah at the forefront of his thoughts.

Interestingly, Rashi says the other Torah scroll was kept hidden in the inner chamber of the king and was never removed. The Maor Veshemesh asks what's the point of writing a sefer torah for the king that will sit in a closet somewhere in the palace? He explains as follows: one sefer Torah is needed so that even when the king is dealing with the outside world he will be reminded of the Torah and act in

accordance with the Halacha. However the second sefer Torah must stay hidden in the king's palace, in his inner chamber. This represents that not only on the outside should the king be acting externally in the way of Torah but internally in his pnimiyus the fire of Torah should be burning strong.

We should all be zoche not to just mechanically ‘go through the motions’ of Judaism, but to strive that passion and inspiration should be blazing within us.



**Ometz Shmidman**

**11th Grade, Alon Shvut**

### **With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility**

Anyone in the audience hear the phrase: **“With great power comes great responsibility”**?

It's a very common phrase that is mentioned in many movies, including spiderman.

I am going to show how this phrase is shown in the Bible in this Dvar Torah.

This Parsha starts off with **שופטים** **”ושוטרים תתן לך בכל שעריך”**. We can trace this back to **במדבר** when G-D tells Moshe to take **70 זקנים** to help him lead the nation, albeit not whom. How does Moshe know which people to pick? This Parsha ties everything together. Here we see **”שוטרים”**, where have we seen this before? **שמות!** **”ויכו שוטרי בני ישראל”**. When the Jews were building the pyramids, if



they didn't finish on time the שוטרי בני "got hit."

Here we can see that "שוטרי בני ישראל" had the power of leading the nation and making decisions in Halachic matters while carrying the responsibility of the nation's actions, not only their own.

Here I would like to sign off by noting how true is the phrase "הפוך בה והפוך בה דכולה בה" – You can find everything in the torah! ■

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A collage of nine photographs of women, some wearing head coverings, smiling and interacting in various settings, including a library. The images are arranged in a grid-like fashion with a diagonal white line separating the top and bottom sections. The top section features three photos: three women standing together, a woman in a headscarf smiling, and a woman looking down. The bottom section features six photos: three women in a library, a woman smiling, a woman in a headscarf looking down, and two women smiling. The entire collage is set against a background of a white diagonal line on a dark grey field.



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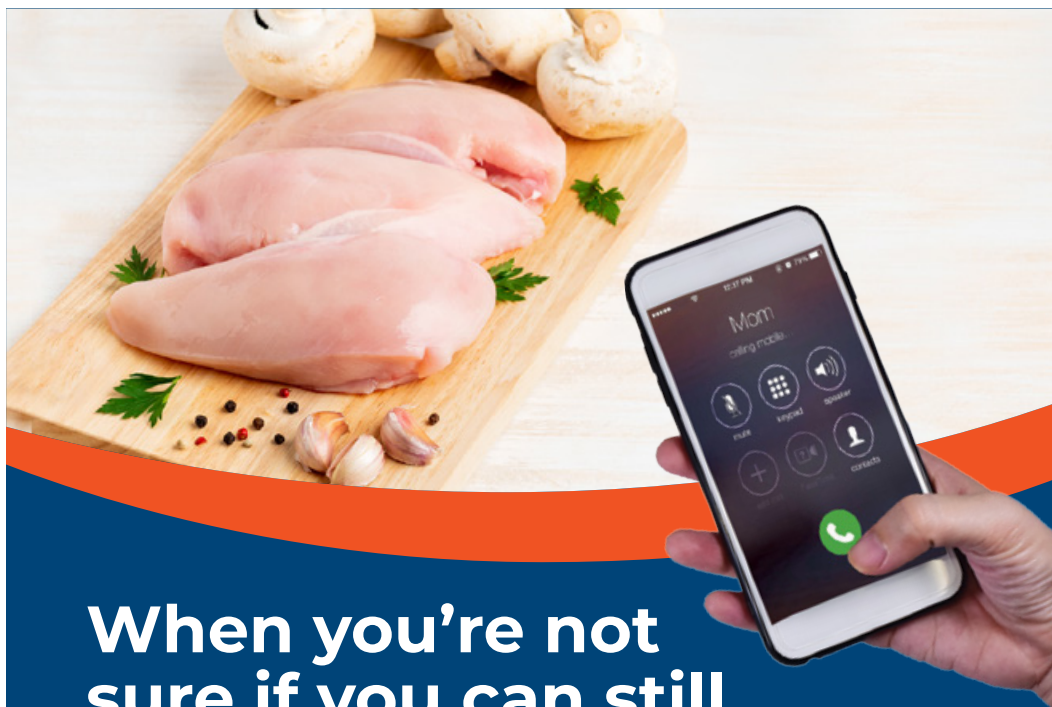


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