



הַמִּזְרָחִי HAMIZRACHI PARSHA WEEKLY

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PARSHAT SHOFTIM 5783 • 2023









ISRAEL
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לא תשחית את עצה...
כי האדם עץ השדה
לבא מפניך בַּמְצוֹר









במדבר כו:ג

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Sorcerers and Spirit Seekers

Living with the Unpredictability of Life



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

One of the greatest challenges of life, arguably the greatest, is living with life's never ending uncertainty.

Nothing in life is for certain, except death. Even this certainty of the end of life is unpredictable. When and how and in what manner we pass on is totally unknown to us' and myriads of ever changing variables beyond our control will dictate the final outcome.

So too in our daily lives. Infinite unpredictable circumstances determine what happens to us. There is none who walks this earth who can accurately know what the future holds – not in any area of human life. Not in years from now, not next month or next week. Not tomorrow, not today and not even in the seconds that follow. Life can unexpectedly turn on its head in a flashing moment, altering lives forever – both our personal and collective lives.

The World Turned Upside Down in an Instant

Who could have predicted what chaos a tiny, microscopic virus would have wrought across the world. In the era of our greatest technological advancements, nothing could prevent the Covid-19 contagion – the devastating spread of pandemic proportions to practically every place on earth. The invisible virus killed almost seven million people and infected seven hundred million and brought so much of routine life to a standstill for almost two years. The uncertainty of life humbled us and tangibly showed how little we can anticipate with any level of certainty.

This built-in uncertainty of life begets an incessant sense of vulnerability to the changing unpredictable vicissitudes of life. This creates an existential crisis at the heart of the human condition. For many it provokes anxiety; for others both fear and dread.

The World to Come or World of Souls in the Afterlife is something we have absolutely faith in. Yet, at the same time it is totally unknowable to us and is an enigma. No one has been there and returned to tell us the tale. We spend our days essentially living in darkness with respect to every aspect of our future.

If we only knew what the future held, our lives would be entirely transformed. We could avoid almost any danger, drastically alter the course of our lives and prepare to confront and accept whatever cannot be changed. If we knew what would happen even for the shortest time – perhaps over the next hour or so – we could profit immeasurably from this knowledge. We would be billionaires by trading on the stock markets and placing bets on sports outcomes and in casinos.²

The smallest certain knowledge of the future would transform our lives in unimaginable ways. But the harsh truth is that even the most brilliant among us simply do not know.³ Only G-d does. This is one small yet infinite difference between man and G-d. G-d knows every aspect of the future with absolute certainty. We know almost nothing. If only we did.

It is this desperate desire for knowledge of the future which is at the core of the

prohibitions of the nine different occult practices of black magic, witchcraft and sorcery mentioned in this week's *parasha*.⁴ They are all “futures traders” and false prophetic practitioners who aim to answer our deepest existential needs by convincing us that they know or can predict what lies in the future. Whether it be about the living or the dead, whether it be soothsayers, diviners, fortune tellers, necromancers, ghost whispers and speakers with spirits – these occult practices all tap into our existential human crisis and need to know that which cannot be known to us today. To have one final connection with someone who has passed or to know how better to face the future.

Why is it so Bad to Dabble in the Future?

The prohibition of these nine types of occult practices is explicit in Chumash as an abominable practices of the people of Cana'an that is to be avoided:

“When you come into the land which the Lord your G-d has given you, you should not learn to act as the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that uses divination, astrologers or an enchanter, or a witch. Or a charmer, a medium, an oracle and a necromancer. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord your G-d drives them out from before you. You should be wholehearted with the Lord your G-d. For these nations, who you shall possess, hearkened to astrologers and to diviners: but as for you, not as these has the Lord your G-d given you. The Lord your G-d will raise up for you a Prophet from your midst, of your brethren, to him ye shall hearken” (Devarim 18:9-15).

Why are we forbidden by strict Torah law to engage in these occult practices? Why is it such an abominable act?

Rambam vs Ramban

There is a fascinating and fundamental dispute between two of our greatest medieval rabbinic leaders on this very topic – between Rambam and Ramban, Maimonides and Nachmanides.

Rambam maintains that the reason for this prohibition is because we are engaging in irrational, foolish and silly behavior which the Torah forbids for the Jewish people

who are charged to live by truth and intellectual integrity. Rambam believes that none of these practitioners have any knowledge whatsoever of the future. Each and every one acts with dishonesty, deceit and chicanery. They are professional deceivers and masters of manipulation who profit by manipulating the weak and vulnerable hearts and minds of those who want to know – how a loved one who has passed on doing or what fortune lies in our future. These practitioners make their living by cleverly reading people and cunningly telling them what they want to hear. We are absolutely forbidden, says the Rambam, as a people chosen to live in accordance with the higher morality of G-d's truth, to pursue a course of action which is illusory and nonsensical as are these practices.⁵

The Ramban strongly disagrees with this line of reasoning. He believes that there can be a measure of truth in these practices. There most certainly are people who have some type of extraordinary ability to predict the future through these types of mystical wisdom. Indeed, explains Ramban, Hashem fashioned two systems in creation – the natural world and the supernatural world. The natural world with laws of cause and effect can by and large be understood. One can accurately predict that the sun will rise in the morning and set in the evening. A cause has a resulting effect and an effect can be traced back to a cause. The challenge is to penetrate the external “natural” appearance of this world by seeing G-d as the Creator and Power behind it with ongoing “hidden” miracles.

The supernatural system is a quasi-spiritual realm where nature's rules can be impacted. Although there is supernatural power, this realm still remains very much under the aegis of G-d. And it is within this latter system that these occult supernatural practitioners operate.

If there are supernatural powers then why is it forbidden to engage them?

The reason is understood only when juxtaposing them to true prophecy which is allowed as the verse stipulates. Prophecy coming directly from G-d and is therefore accurate, occult practices are not. They may attract many people who have no ability whatsoever to foresee the future and are therefore charlatans misleading

people. Even if they do have such abilities, they may only be partial and therefore wholly inaccurately conveyed and therefore also misleading. Furthermore, prophecy is aimed at moral and spiritual rectification, occult practices are not. There these vague, inaccurate, amoral forces are not to be dabbled with.⁶

Rather as the Torah says “תמים תהיה עם ה' – אלקיך” – Be wholeheartedly committed to the Lord your G-d”. Only G-d knows what will be and therefore we should put our trust and faith in Him alone.

In an era of His prophets who through divine grace are able to accurately and morally guide us, we should heed their words. In the post biblical era, where prophecy is not yet accessible, we should place our faith in G-d, follow his commandments given to us for our own good and be morally and spiritually proactive.

There are no shortcuts to living life the best way it should be lived. There is no way to escape the reality of human life – the built-in unpredictability and precariousness of life. It ought to be embraced.

May we all have the fortitude and the strength to be able to embrace the challenge of living with the vulnerability and uncertainty of life. May we be wholehearted in our belief and faith in Hashem that everything that happens in the future is from Hashem and for the best. May we all strive always to live with wisdom and foresight, according to the will of G-d and striving always for ethical and spiritual growth. May we all be blessed that tomorrow be the best for each one of us individually and for all of us together.

1. Unless Heaven Forbid, a person takes their own life.
2. This also explains why insider trading is a felony. Simple insider knowledge changes everything and allows people to unfairly profit. So too sport rigging is harshly punishable for it not ruins the integrity and beauty of the game and allows others to unfairly profit.
3. The only exception is true prophecy which was accessed in the biblical era and not yet in ours. Furthermore, even an event clearly foreseen by the prophets could be altered through a change in moral and spiritual behavior.
4. Ramban gives this reasoning in his commentary to Devarim 18:12.
5. Rambam, Mishne Torah, Laws of Idolatry 11:16.
6. Ramban in his commentary to Devarim 18:12.

PERSONAL GROWTH

How To Live Without Worry



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Bitachon is not just a mitzvah. It is also the only way to live without worry.

Most people are beset with worry. They worry about their health and security, *parnassah*, children, and many other aspects of life. This can negatively impact both the mind and body. It magnifies stressors by constantly raising negative possibilities, leading to more stress¹ and keeping people from enjoying the time and resources Hashem blesses them with.

There Will Be More Tomorrow

The way Hashem distributed the *mun* in the desert addressed this issue.² Hashem permitted taking only the amount needed for the day and prohibited saving from day to day. Any *mun* people tried to save rotted.³

This taught them to use what they had each day without worrying about what they would have tomorrow.⁴ There was no need to save for a “rainy day” (or, in the case of the *mun*, a non-rainy day, a “non-Mon-day”). Just as Hashem provided *mun* each day (besides Shabbat) in the desert, we rely on Him to provide each day wherever we are.

This was the *Tanna* Hillel’s way of life. The gemara tells us that Hillel earned a *tragic* (an ancient coin) each day and used half to support his family and the other half to pay for entry into the Beit Midrash.⁵ He did not need to make additional money to save for the next day because he relied upon Hashem’s future providence.

Hillel also relied on this faith for his leniency regarding the mitzvah to prepare special food for Shabbat. As opposed to Shamai, who would put special food aside already on Sunday, Hillel’s faith that Hashem would provide for him made him comfortable waiting until the end of the week.⁶

In more recent times, the Brisker Rav also lived this way. When the Nazis invaded Poland, the Brisker Rav and his family joined other Jews hiding in Polish forests. Unlike others, who took large amounts of food with

them, the Rav instructed his family to rely on Hashem to provide for them.

Indeed, on their first day in the forest, a Jew showed up with baskets full of food to offer them. The invasion had forced him to cancel his daughter’s wedding, and he had a full four-course meal available. The Rav encouraged his family to enjoy the meal but not to take food for the next day.

Indeed, another surprise visitor came the next day with a meal — but this time, there was no dessert. While the family enjoyed their meal, the Rav was concerned about the lack of dessert. He gathered the family together and asked whether anyone had saved food from yesterday. A young boy eventually admitted that because he was concerned that there might not be food on the second day, he had saved an extra dessert from the day before. This, explained the Brisker Rav, is why the second day’s meal did not include dessert.⁷

Peace of Mind

This kind of *bitachon* facilitates peace of mind. It helps you live life without worry.⁸

Avraham Avinu was an example of such peace of mind. Though commanded to set off to sacrifice his son, Avraham’s faith in Hashem helped him sleep that night.⁹ He knew that Hashem was handling things and that the result would be what needed to be.

Rav Aryeh Levine, the kind-hearted Yerushalayim rabbi, pointed out that the Hebrew word for worry, “*de’aga*,” consists of the first five letters of the Hebrew alphabet except for the letter *bet*. This, he explained, is because one has worries only if he lacks (the *bet* for) *bitachon*.

The Ability to Focus on What Matters Most

Bitachon also allows people to devote time and energy to meaningful pursuits. Though we need to work to support ourselves, our realization that Hashem provides for us and our trust in Him to do so should curb the impulse to allow work to take over life. We

should be able to devote time and energy to other things — the things our lives are meant to be about.

Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai gave the example of Torah learning. He taught that the Torah needed to be given specifically to those who ate the *mun*.¹⁰ Only people who fully rely on Hashem’s providence are able to focus properly on Torah learning.

Hashem commanded Moshe to save *mun* in a flask for future generations¹¹ so that they, too, could be inspired by the *mun* to trust in Hashem enough to devote time to serious, consistent Torah study.¹²

Indeed, Chazal tell us that over 800 years later, Yirmiyahu used the flask to inspire people slacking in their Torah learning. In response to their explanation that they needed to focus on supporting themselves, Yirmiyahu reminded them how Hashem provided *mun* to their ancestors in the desert.¹³ They, too, could rely upon Hashem’s providence and devote time to Torah learning.

We saw that Hillel was a model of someone who internalized this message. His reliance on Hashem gave him the confidence to focus on his Torah learning after earning the money he needed for the day.

Hillel should be a model for us all. Hashem Himself uses Hillel as the example to respond to those who claim (after their lives) that they were too poor to devote time to Torah learning. The tension of living paycheck to paycheck can understandably distract one from focusing on Torah learning. Hillel exemplifies how *bitachon* should help one focus on learning nonetheless.

The dependency of our ability to commit to Torah study upon the strength of our faith is why the Heavenly Tribunal asks whether we devoted time to daily Torah learning only after it asks whether we conducted faithful business practices. Only one who trusts that Hashem determines how much he earns has the confidence to consistently stop working and start learning (after having invested a

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HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

Half-Way There....



Rabbanit Shani Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

This week we find ourselves at the “half-way mark” between Tish’a b’Av and Rosh haShana, halfway in the process of national consolation. As we’ve noted in previous shiurim, the structure of the seven *haftarot* of consolation reflect the transition from mourning and despair to comfort and repair. Each week’s *haftarah* provides us with more strength to move past destruction of the past and to work towards restoring our relationship with Hashem.

The *midrash* quoted by the Avudraham in his commentary on the order of the *parashiot* and *haftarot* poignantly expresses this development: The Midrash suggests... that they (Chazal) established that the first of these *haftarot* would be “Comfort, comfort My people” – as though Hashem is commanding the prophets to comfort His nation. To this Knesset Yisrael responds: “And Tzion says, ‘Hashem has abandoned me’” – i.e., she is not consoled by the comfort of the prophets... And where the *haftarah* is “a stormy afflicted one who will not be comforted,” it is as if the prophets once again declare before the Holy One: See, Knesset Yisrael is not appeased with our consolations. **Therefore the Holy One Himself again speaks: “I, I am your comforter,”** and then He says, “Rejoice, O barren one who has not given birth,” and also “Arise and shine, for your light has come.” To this, Knesset Yisrael responds: “I shall surely rejoice in Hashem” – as if to say, now I have reason to rejoice and to be joyful, “My soul will rejoice in my G-d for He has dressed me in garments of salvation....”

Through this week’s *haftarah*, states the *midrash*, we are finally appeased and may begin to rejoice once more. Hashem “personally” comes to console us – “I, I am your comforter” (Yeshayahu 51:12-52:12)

instead of employing messengers. But there is even greater comfort in these words as we compare them to the laments of Eicha. Dr. Yael Ziegler notes (etzion.org.il eikha-chapter-2-part-9) *how the narrator [of Eicha] fails to offer comfort in the wake of Jerusalem’s unfathomable situation, leaving the reader submerged in the limitless depths of Jerusalem’s immeasurable pain....Nevertheless, Isaiah’s prophecies of comfort seem to refer to these verses in Eikha, filling the void created by the narrator’s inadequacies. First, Isaiah calls to G-d, who can control the irrepressible sea, to restore order to a chaotic world:*

Awaken, awaken, garb yourself with strength, arm of G-d,

Awaken like days of old, like ancient generations...

Are You not the One who dried up yam (the sea), the great depths of the waters? (Isaiah 51:9-10)

Isaiah then cites G-d, who promises Israel that He himself will offer them solace, and that He can absolutely control the wild sea:

I, I, am He who comforts you (*men-achemchem*)... And I am your G-d, [Who] calms the sea and churns up its waves... (Isaiah 51:12, 15)

Following this, Isaiah addresses Jerusalem directly, recognizing her brokenness and her misery, due especially to the misfortunes of the wretched children, who faint and lie in the streets:

Awaken, awaken! Arise Jerusalem, for you have drunk from the hands of G-d the cup of His wrath... There was none to guide her from all of the children that she birthed, and there is none to support her hand from all of the children that she raised. Two [calamities] have befallen you. Who will show sympathy to you? Plundering and

brokenness (*shever*), starvation and sword: Who can console you? Your children fainting, lying prone on every street corner... who are filled with the wrath of G-d, with the rebuke of your G-d (Isaiah 51:17-20).

Finally, Isaiah promises the reversal of Jerusalem’s misfortunes, the recovery of her dignity and future:

Awaken, awaken! Garb [yourself] in strength, Zion!

Garb yourself in clothes of majesty, Jerusalem, Holy City!

For no longer will the uncircumcised and impure come against you.

Shake yourself off, arise from the dust, captives of Jerusalem.

Unfasten the chains on your neck, captives of the Daughter of Zion! (Isaiah 52:1-2)

This week’s *haftarah* of consolation encourages us to “cease the dismal mourning of exile and captivity, and replace it with the joy and dignity of liberation, a celebration of the rectification of *Eikha*’s dreadful scene.” The tempestuous seas of destruction are replaced with Divine calm, the dreadful loneliness replaced with a city filled once more, and the dust of despair shaken off. The hallmark of encouragement is broadcast in the final verses of the *haftarah* reading: “Hark, thy watchmen! they lift up the voice, together do they sing; for they shall see, eye to eye, Hashem returning to Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, waste places of Jerusalem; for Hashem has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 52:8-9). The lack of a relationship with Hashem is replaced with eye-to-eye contact. The eyes filled with tears in Eicha, now look directly at G-d once more. Yerushalayim once ruined is now Yerushalayim redeemed!

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Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council
Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

Question: In my house we are very stringent about the food we eat. I have been invited for a Shabbat meal in a friend's house, and it seems to me that his family does not observe the strict kashrut laws the way we do at home. Examples would be that they might not wait a full twenty-four hours between heating meat and milk in an oven, or immersion of their dishes in a mikveh, or checking rice for contamination – and other matters about which we in my house are very stringent. What should I do?

Answer: The Talmud tells us that in spite of many disputes between Rav and Shmuel, Rav visited Shmuel and was confident that Shmuel never gave him anything that was prohibited according to Rav's approach. "Clearly the offspring of his grandfather would never give me anything that I think is forbidden" [Chulin 111a].

The RAMA accepts this ruling as *halacha* (Yoreh Dei'ah 111:2). Thus, when a person who maintains regular *kashrut* (all year round, not including Pesach) invites a guest who insists on a more stringent "mehadrin" level of *kashrut*, it is clear that the host should make an effort to raise the *kashrut* for this meal, so that the guest can eat food at the level which he usually eats. Otherwise it would be as if a host invites a vegetarian to a meal and gives him meat. In general, a host is responsible to provide food that the guests will consider tasty and at the proper level of *kashrut*. He will therefore raise the level when necessary to accommodate all of his guests.

When a Guest can Deviate from his or her Usual Custom

What should a person do if he fears that he will be given something that would be forbidden according to his normal stan-

dard? If this entails something that is *halachically* forbidden, one is not allowed to treat the matter leniently (see Shulchan Aruch and the RAMA, Yoreh Dei'ah 112:13,19, and the SHACH). However, if it is a stringency, the guest can temporarily relax his standard and eat what his host gives him. We therefore customarily eat at the home of a friend who is religious (during the year), even though some of our usual customs might not be observed. Specifically:

Waiting 24 hours between meat and milk to use an oven: Since after the fact food cooked in this way can be eaten (Responsa Tuv, Taam, Vadaat, 1:176; Igrot Moshe Yoreh Dei'ah 1:59), we can be lenient in this matter.

Dishes that have not been immersed in a *mikveh*: Since food placed in dishes that have not been immersed is not prohibited, and since there are many reasons to allow a guest to eat from such dishes (Igrot Moshe Yoreh Dei'ah 3:22; Responsa Beit Avi, and more), we can be lenient.

Rice or flour that was not fully checked: Since the infection of rice is not usually very great, it is possible to be lenient after the rice has been cooked. (Contamination of rice is usually at a minor level, and the Rashba feels (Torat Habayit Hakatzar 2,3) that one can be lenient after the rice has been cooked. The same is true for flour that was not sifted – after the fact, one can be lenient.

Kashrut of the Host's Dishes

Should the guest worry in a case that the host accepts relatively lenient rulings (that the guest usually does not accept) that the dishes have been contaminated?

The Shulcha Aruch rules that a specific type of fat found near the intestine is forbidden, but the RAMA notes the following:

"This is the custom everywhere, except for

the sons of Reimus, some of whom allow eating it. And they should not be scolded for this, since this is what they have been taught by a wise man. And wherever it is considered as forbidden it can be ignored as usual if it comprises less than one-sixtieth of a mixture. But the dishes of the sons of Reimus are not prohibited, since they feel that this is permitted."

That is, in spite of the dispute about *kashrut*, their dishes are not considered unkosher. Thus, one who is stringent about a specific *halacha* is allowed to eat in the home of a friend who does not observe the *halacha*. Similarly, it is the usual custom to be lenient and eat at a friend's home, even when one of them eats only "glatt" meat and the other does not observe this stringency (as long as the host provides "glatt" meat for this specific meal). In this case, the dishes are not considered to be unkosher (since in general dishes are not used within 24 hours of their last use). (See Darchei Teshuva Yoreh Dei'ah 122:27).

This ruling implies that when the host relies on a lenient approach, his or her dishes are not considered to be unkosher even for those who are more stringent in the matter. This is also the ruling with respect to Shemitta of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Minchat Shlomo 1:44), and Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu (Shemitta Guidebook for Consumers, 5754, page 3, note 18).

The Importance of Eating at a Friend's Home

Aside from the discussion of detailed *halachic* considerations, it should be emphasized that it is very important to encourage having people eat at the home of friends. It is written in the Talmud, that "an individual witness can be believed in matters of prohibitions" [Gittin 2b]. Rashi explains:

Continued on next page

פרשת שופטים - תמימות

הרבנית שרון רימון
Tanach teacher and author



”תמימות תהיה עם ה' א-להיך” (דברים י"ח, ג).

הפניה אל מגידי עתידות ומכשפים למיניהם נובעת מהקושי לחיות בעולם בו העתיד לא ידוע, ואין שליטה על התוצאות. חוסר הוודאות לגבי העתיד מביא את האדם לתחושת חוסר בטחון, חוסר אונים ואפילו חרדה. לכן, אנשים מנסים לשלוט בכמה שיותר מרכיבים בחייהם, ולהשיג מקסימום וודאות. לשם כך הם משתמשים באמצעים שונים (המשתנים בכל דור). אולם, האמת היא שאדם יכול לשלוט רק במעשי, ולא בתוצאות ובהשלכות שלהם, ובוודאי שאינו יכול לשלוט באנשים אחרים או בכל הנתונים והגורמים. ככל שחשוב לאדם יותר לשלוט בתוצאות ולהשיג ודאות, הוא נכנס לסחרור גדול יותר של ניסיונות שליטה ומכאן קצרה הדרך אל החרדה, מכיוון שהוא מרגיש שאם לא יקרה בדיוק מה שהוא רוצה - יחרב עליו עולמו. לעומת זאת, כאשר אדם מתהלך בתמימות, עושה ככל יכולתו ומתגמש אל נוכח המציאות, הוא חי את חייו בשמחה, בנחת ובטוב. אין הכוונה לשבת בבטלה ולא לדאוג לצרכים קיומיים; אין הכוונה להתנהל בנאיביות או בחוסר אחריות. הצינוי "תמימות תהיה עם ה' אלקיך" מלמד אותנו לעבוד את ה' בלב שלם, ללא תלות בתוצאות, פשוט מפני שזו חובתנו בעולם הזה. ומצד שני - לבטוח בה' ולקבל באהבה את המציאות, מתוך הבנה שהכל מגיע מאת ה', והוא מכוון את הדברים אל מקומם הנכון ואל הטוב האמתי.

בתום לב, לעשות כרצונו בלב שלם, ולקבל כל דבר שמגיע אלינו בתמימות ובאהבה. הצינוי לאברהם "התהלך לפני ה' תמים" (בראשית י"ז, א), קשור אף הוא לאותו עניין. המדרש מתאר כיצד אברהם אבינו חושש שלא יהיה לו ילד, מכיוון שלפי המזלות ובצורה טבעית זה לא יתכן, ואילו הקב"ה מוציא אותו מהתפיסה הזו: "אמר לו צא מאצטגנינות שלך. אמת אברם אינו מוליד, אברהם מוליד..." (פסיקתא זוטרותא בראשית ט"ו, ה). ה' מבהיר לאברהם שהכל בידיו, ויש אפשרות לשינוי בניגוד לכל התחזיות, המזלות ומגידי העתידות, כפי שמפרש רמב"ן: "שיאמין בלבו כי הקדוש ברוך הוא לבדו הוא בעל היכולת בתחילה ובסוף, הוא היכול לעשות ולבטל, ולא ישמעו אל מעוננים ואל קוסמים או למנחש ומכשף, ולא יאמין שיבאו דבריהם על כל פנים, אבל יגזור בלבו שהכל ביד עליון העליונים, שהוא "אל" והוא "אל שדי", עושה טובה שלא היה במזל ומביא רעה בהיות המזל טוב ויפה, כפי שיתהלך האדם לפניו". התמימות הנדרשת מאברהם היא להמשיך להאמין שהבטחת ה' תתקיים, בניגוד לכל הגיון ומציאות טבעית. אפשרות השינוי נתונה ביד ה', ותלויה במעשי האדם המתהלך בתמימות לפני ה'. מאברהם אבינו אנו למדים, שדווקא התמימות, ההליכה בדרך ה' ללא נסיון לשלוט בתוצאות ולדעת מה יקרה בעתיד, היא הדרך לעשות שינוי ולקבל שפע מאת ה'.

הי התמימות הנדרשת מהאדם?

מ אין מדובר בנאיביות ובמתן אמון יתר בזולת. תמימות כזו עלולה לגרום לעיוות ולניצול, וברור שהתורה איננה דורשת זאת. אנו מוצאים את אבותינו מתנהלים בחכמת חיים (ולעיתים אף בערמה אל מול אנשים מסויימים), על מנת לעשות את הדבר הנכון הנדרש, בבחינת "עם חסיד תתחפד עם גבור תמים תתמם: עם נבך תתבר ועם עקש תתפל" (שמו"ב כ"ב, כו-כז).

התמימות הנדרשת מהאדם, לפי התורה, היא תמימות מול אלקים ולא מול בני אדם - "תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך", או כפי שנאמר לאברהם אבינו: "התהלך לפני ה' תמים". על תמימות כזו נאמר "אשרי תמימי דרך ההולכים בתורת ה'" (תהלים קי"ט, א). אם כן, מהי מידת התמימות הנכונה, בה צריך האדם להתהלך לפני ה'?

לפי ההקשר של הפסוקים, נראה שהכוונה היא לעבודת ה' בשלמות ובבלעדיות, ללא פניה לאמצעי קסם, ניחוש או כישוף אחרים: "לא ימצא בך... קסם קסמים מעונן ומנחש ומכשף... ושאיל אוב וידעני ודרש אל המתים... תמים תהיה עם ה' אלהיך (י-ג). כך מפרש רש"י (בפס' ג): "התהלך עמו בתמימות ותצפה לו ולא תחקור אחר העתידות, אלא כל מה שיבא עליך קבל בתמימות ואז תהיה עמו ולחלקו". לפי רש"י, התמימות הנדרשת היא לעבוד את ה'

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"If this would not be so, nobody would be able to eat at a friend's home and no person could ever rely on the people in his own home" [Yevamot 88a].

If we could not rely on a single person as a witness, nobody would ever be able to be invited to a friend to eat. It is true that the matter we are dealing with is different, because in our case we know that the host does not fully understand some of the laws (such as the halacha of checking for worms and how serious a matter it is, or that he relies on his feeling that maaser must have been taken from all fruits and vegetables in the open markets). However, the above quote from the

Talmud can teach us one principle: It is important for a person to visit a friend and to eat in his home! The ideal is for Jews to eat in the homes of their friends.

Summary

One is permitted (and even encouraged) to visit a religious family even if there is a possibility that their level of *kashrut* is lower than what the guest usually observes. A priori, the host should make sure to raise the level of *kashrut* to what is normally observed by the guests, but if he or she has not done so, many different types of food can be eaten. (It is not necessary to worry about problems with the

oven or the dishes.) One should be wary of leafy vegetables which have not been grown under special bug-free conditions or were not washed properly. However, rice that was not fully inspected or cake and bread made from unsifted flour can be eaten.

There are other matters to which we should pay attention, but this is not the place to go into detail - such as the *kashrut* of meat and chicken, setting aside *teruma* and *maaser*, and *challah*.

● This article was translated by the Tzomet Institute.

Torah Scroll



Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

“**A**nd it shall be that when he occupies the throne of his kingdom, he must write for himself a duplicate of this Torah in a scroll form (the scroll) before the *kohanim* – the Levites. It is to accompany him and he is to read in it all the days of his life, in order that he learn to fear Adonav, his G-d, to guard every word of this Torah and these statutes to fulfill them; That his pride not increase over his brothers and he does not stray from the commandments right or left; so that the days of his reign are lengthy over his kingdom, he and his sons within Israel.”

There is a long discussion as to whether there is an initial obligation to appoint a Jewish king or if the obligation is only accepted *ex post facto*. There is also a discussion as to whether each person today has an obligation to write a Torah scroll or not, but we are not getting into either one of these issues.

The commentators explain that we cannot allow ourselves to be mistaken or confused; the fact that someone becomes king does not make him stronger – more immune to sin – but rather the opposite. He becomes more fragile. He is likely to become confused from all the honor he receives and swell up with pride. Someone who rises to greatness requires increased watchfulness, increased blessing, and this is true regarding each one of us. An exalted position carries with it added responsibility and you need to pay closer attention to everything.

I think that this *mitzvah* contains a great truth: we triumph over and outlive all the nations of the world through our words. Neither through pyramids nor through palaces. Words have carried us through thousands of years until our return to the Land of Israel. A Torah scroll is stronger than any weapon, more protective than any border or political regime.



ובכל זמן. זה מחייב אותנו להסתכל ברגישות על כל חפץ בעולם, ולהיזהר לא להרוס.

מהרב יעקב אדלשטיין שמעתי פעם סיפור קטן- גדול על אדם שבאמת חי כך: הרב אברהם ישעיהו קרליץ כונה החזון אי"ש. הוא היה הרב של הרב אדלשטיין, וביקש ממנו פעם לכתוב עבורו כמה שורות, בבלוק של נייר מכתבים. הרב אדלשטיין כמעט התחיל לכתוב בראש העמוד, אבל החזון אי"ש ביקש שיתחיל בחלק התחתון של הדף, כדי שהוא יוכל לחתוך את החלק הזה, ועדיין ישאר לו חצי דף ריק, לשימוש בהמשך.

“למדתי ממנו כמה צריך לנצל כל משאב, כמה צריך לחיות עם עדינות ומודעות כלפי העולם”, סיפר הרב אדלשטיין. “אני רואה לפעמים אדם שיושב באירוע ולוקח כמה כוסות חד פעמיות בערב אחד, סתם. ‘בל תשחית’ הוא ציווי כללי וכל אחד צריך לחשוב איך הוא מיישם אותו בחיים שלו”.

הוא מנחמכם. לא לחשוש מאתגרים, משינויים, מהתחלות חדשות, מאנשים שמקטינים אותנו.

ברגעים של חולשה או מצוקה, אפשר לנסות לשאול את עצמנו כך “למה מי את/ה?”, אבל לא באופן שמקטין אותנו, אלא כפי שהביטוי הובא במקור, באופן מגדיל ומעצים.



תודעה ירוקה. קיימות. שמירה על הסביבה. תפיסת העולם היהודית בנושאים האלה צומחת גם מתוך פרשת השבוע. הפרשה קובעת שגם בזמן שמטילים מצור על עיר, אסור לפגוע בעצים שבה: “לא תשחית אֶת עֵצָה לְנֶדַח עָלֶיךָ גֵרְזֶן, כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאוֹתוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת”.

חכמינו לומדים מהפסוק הזה איסור כולל ושמו “בל תשחית”: לא רק עצים אסור להשחית, אלא כל דבר שיש בו תועלת. ולא רק במלחמה, אלא בכל מקום

Jack Ma, the founder of Alibaba, is the richest man in Asia. When he visited Israel he said, in the same vein: “I came to discover your secret and I think I now understand. For 2,000 years, you were homeless. You could always be exiled, you could always be kicked out, you were always ‘the wandering Jew.’ And everything was temporary and fragile and transient. Therefore, you did not invest in physical things, you did not build tangible things, because there was no reason to do so. This caused you to invest in the most important things – in study, in thought, and in the development of the mind and the heart. This is your secret.”

The question is whether or not we remember that this is still our secret today when we are blessed with relatively comfortable and stable physical circumstances, *baruch Hashem*.

אנחנו רגילים לשמוע את הביטוי “למה מי אתה?” בצורה מקטינה, מעליבה. למה מי אתה שתדבר אליי ככה? למה מי את שתנסי בכלל להתקבל? למה מי אתם שאתם חושבים שאתם שווים משהו?

ההפטרות המקסימה שקראנו בשבת – מתוך שבע הפטרות הנחמה שקוראים בשבועות האלה – מציעה לנו פרשנות הפוכה, של גדלות:

“אֲנֹכִי אֲנֹכִי הוּא מְנַחֵמְכֶם”, אומר לנו אלוקים, ואז שואל: “מִי אַתָּה וּמִי־אֵי מֵאֲנוּשׁ יְמוֹת, וּמִכֶּן אֲדָם תִּצְרִי יָתוֹן?”.

למה מי את, שואל אותך אישית ריבונו של עולם, שתפחדי מאדם שימות בסוף, ושיחלוף כמו חציר? רש"י מסביר את המשפט הזה כך: “מי את בת צדיקים כמותך ומלאה זכויות, למה תיראי מאנוש אשר סופו למות?”.

ההפטרות של השבועות האלה נועדו לחזק ולנחם, לגרום לנו להאמין בעצמנו. להזכיר לנו ש“אנוכי

For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis
Deputy CEO, World Mizrahi
Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“You shall place judges and officers for you in all your gates which Hashem your G-d gives to you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice, you shall not recognize faces (i.e. you shall be impartial) and you shall not take a bribe, for the bribe will blind the eyes of the wise and confuse the words of the righteous” (Devarim 16:18-19).

In the opening verses of this week's Parsha, we are commanded to establish a fair and equitable system of justice. However, these verses provide us with a grammatical challenge.

In the first verse, we are commanded to appoint judges and officers and told that they should judge righteously. The next verse includes guidelines of how to judge. Assuming these rules are aimed at the judges, one would expect this

verse to be written in the third person, i.e. “THEY shall not pervert justice, THEY shall be impartial, and THEY shall not accept a bribe...”. If we have just been commanded to appoint judges and told that they should be the ones who judge fairly, why are these laws written in the second person?

Perhaps we can answer that while these laws are directed at judges in a formal legal setting, they apply to every single one of us as well. Whilst it is easy and noble to say that people should not judge others, the reality is that we all naturally reach conclusions about the people, places and events around us. Whilst we may think our attributions are accurate and impartial, the Torah commands us to be extra careful in our judgment and to avoid jumping to conclusions or being swayed by self-serving considerations.

The following verse stresses how far we should go for the sake of justice:

“You shall surely pursue justice, in order that you shall live, and you shall inherit the land that Hashem your G-d gives you” (Devarim 16:20).

It is not enough to prefer justice, seek justice, or even fight injustice. “You shall surely pursue justice” – we must surely pursue justice in every area of our lives.

As we commence the month of Elul and our build up to the Day of Judgment, these are important messages to keep in mind. By judging others fairly and giving them the benefit of the doubt, may Hashem only judge our actions in a positive light as well.

Shabbat Shalom!

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proper effort).¹⁴ As Hashem determines the degree of our success, there is no need to overwork, and good reason to focus on Torah learning.

We, Too

We, too, should emulate the *bitachon* of the generation who first received the Torah — those who lived off the *mun* Hashem provided for them. Though we work for a living, we should develop the *bitachon* rooted in the recognition that Hashem is the one who provides.

● Summarized by Joshua Pomerantz.

1. It can also cause negative thinking, insomnia, headaches, stomach problems, muscle tension, and difficulty concentrating. Other effects include disrupted sleep, nausea, exhaustion,

irritability, elevated levels of the stress hormone cortisol, and difficulty making decisions. See this and more in “Why Worrying Is Unhelpful, and One Thing You Can Do Instead” (psychology.com). See also Talmud Yerushalmi, Masechet Shabbat (14:3) which describes fear as a disease. See also Rav Kook’s Ma’amar Hapachad (Ikvei Hatzon, pg. 119) which depicts the psychological damage of fear and worry.

2. This is why the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 1:5) recommends reciting the parsha of the *mun* each day. See also Mishneh Berurah et al.
3. Sefer Shemot 16:16-20. See Rashi 16:4.
4. Ha’Emek Davar, Devarim 8:3.
5. Talmud Bavli, Masechet Yoma 35b.
6. Talmud Bavli, Masechet Beitzah 15b and Rashi 16a D”H L’Shem. Understandably, the gemara juxtaposes this point with the statement that Hashem determines salaries during the Aseret Y’mei Teshuvah.
7. Story told in Be’er HaParshah Ha’azinu 5783.

8. See Chovot Halevavot Sha’ar Daled — Sha’ar HaBitachon, Hakdamah and Perek 1.
9. The Lev Simcha (Parshat Vayera) infers this from the fact that the Torah mentions that Avraham woke up on the morning he left for Har HaMoriah (Bereishit 22:3).
10. Mechilta, Vayisa 2. Basis for the dependency of Torah on the *mun* can be found in the Torah itself (Shemot 16:4).
11. Sefer Shemot 16:32.
12. See Mechilta, Vayisa 2.
13. Medrash Tanchuma, Beshalach 21. Also quoted by Rashi, Shemot 16:32. See also Talmud Bavli, Masechet Bava Metzia (85b) which describes another aspect of that generation’s lack of appreciation for Torah learning.
14. See Talmud Yerushalmi (Masechet Sotah 45b) which explains that the term “*anshei amanah* (men of faith)” refers to people whose faith allows them to block out the world and possible business ventures during their daily Torah study session.

The Greatness of Humility



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

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,¹ 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 G-d 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)



Great leaders have many qualities, but humility is usually not one of them.

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 G-d Himself, “Wherever you find His greatness, there you find His humility.”²

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 G-d in whose presence we stand means that we are not the centre of our world.* G-d 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 G-d on the justice of His proposed punishment of Sodom and the cities of the plain. It was Moses, the humblest of men, who urged G-d 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.³ 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 more successful than others. You are secure because you live in G-d’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 G-d, 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*.”⁴ 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



Humility is not thinking you are small. It is thinking that other people have greatness within them.

the *Harvard Business Review* published the results of a survey that showed that “The best leaders are humble leaders.”⁵ 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 G-d in love, said Maimonides, is to do what

is truly right because it is truly right and for no other reason.⁶ 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 G-d 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.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- Why would a king (and perhaps any kind of leader) need the law of writing a Torah scroll?
- Why is there a danger that too much humility will lead to *shiflut* (self-abasement)? How can we avoid this?
- How does placing G-d at the centre of our lives allow us to achieve humility?

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).

2. Pesikta Zutrata, Eikev.

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.

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.

6. Maimonides, *Hilchot Teshuvah 10:2*.

Continued from page 5

Lastly, we also note connections with this week’s *parasha* – Parshat Shoftim. The *parasha* deals with the institutions of leadership of the nation: judges, officers, the king, *kohanim*, prophets. In the *haftarah* as well, we hear about leadership: “There is no leader for her among all the children she has borne; there is none who holds her hand of all the children she has

raised” (51:18). “Their rulers yell” (52:5), “the voice of your watchmen – they have lifted their voices” (52:8). The *haftarah* reminds us of the calamities that befall due to improper and immoral leadership and underscores the importance of the institutions of legal, religious and political legislation dictated by the *parasha*. Once again, we are comforted with the

final words of the *haftarah* and exegesis on the *parasha* – “for Hashem will go before you, and the G-d of Israel will be your rear guard” (52:12). Ultimately, Divine leadership is supreme, protective and reassuring. May these words comfort and invigorate us in preparation for Rosh HaShana.

Middas Haga'avah



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

So that his heart does not become haughty over his brethren and not turn from the commandment right or left (Devarim 17:20)

This *passuk*, though stated in reference to the *melech*, adjures every person to be careful not to exaggerate his importance. One who is very good-looking, very bright, or very wealthy, or, for that matter, who possesses any *ma'alah* (quality) over others, may become arrogant as a result. On the contrary though, he should be mindful of the *passuk*, "Let not the wise man glorify himself with his wisdom, and let not the strong man glorify himself with his strength, let not the rich man glorify himself with his wealth" (Yirmiyah 9:22).

One's talents and gifts are all *min ha-Shamayim*. Hashem decides one's basic predispositions and which experiences will befall him. The Gemara in Niddah (16b) teaches that the *mal'ach* appointed to oversee conception of new embryos takes the drop from which a child will be conceived, sets it before *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and says before Him: "*Ribbono shel Olam!* This drop, what is its destiny? [Will the person who develops from it be] mighty or weak, intelligent or foolish, wealthy or poor?" One's degree of strength, intelligence, and wealth are determined at the time of conception. There is nothing to boast about; he was simply born this way.

The Gemara notes that the *mal'ach* does not mention whether the child is destined to be a *rasha* or a *tzaddik*. This accords with the principle "Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for the fear of Heaven." The Maharsha explains that this observation of the Gemara follows from the very next *passuk* in Yirmiyah, "For only with this may one glorify himself – contemplating and knowing Me"

(9:23). Exercising one's *bechirah chofshis* (free will) properly in accordance with *yir'as Shamayim* is the only thing worthy of praise.

Rav Soloveitchik recounted that in the Hakdamah to the Smag, Rav Moshe Mi-Coucy writes that after he had completed his list of *taryag mitzvos*, he was shown in a dream that he had mistakenly omitted the *mitzvah*, "Take care, lest you forget Hashem, your G-d ... and your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem, your G-d" (Devarim 8:11-14). He reconsidered his count of *mitzvos* when he awoke in the morning, and, realizing that this prohibition represents a major principle in one's *yir'as Hashem*, he included it in the Smag (lo sa'aseh 64).

Indeed, the Gemara in Sotah (5a) derives the prohibition against exhibiting haughty behavior from this *passuk*, to make sure that one's *ma'alos* do not lead him to forget Hashem. It is possible for one to observe all of the *taryag mitzvos* but, out of a sense of arrogance, fail to be properly mindful of the existence of the *Ribbono shel Olam*. It is a tragedy when Jewish leaders view the Jewish religion as revolving about them, as if G-d dances around them. In our religion, G-d is supposed to be in the center; we are supposed to dance around G-d.

The Gemara continues to explain that one should learn to desire humility from his Creator, who, when giving the Torah, passed over all the great mountains and instead rested His Presence on the modest Har Sinai. Likewise, when He first communicated with Moshe, instead of appearing on a majestic tree, He chose the lowly and humble thornbush. The Gemara in Shabbos (104a) similarly teaches that it is through extraordinary humility that a person merits the acquisition of Torah knowledge.

Several *meforshim* interpret the opening words of Maseches Avos, משה קיבל תורה, מסניי – "Moshe received the Torah at Har Sinai," along these lines. They see in these words an added lesson, implied by the word מסניי, instead of בסניי. Hashem appreciates humility, and that is why He chose to give the Torah particularly through Moshe, whose extreme humility was akin to the modest elevation of Har Sinai.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner elaborates on this idea through a *mashal* to a *kli*. The thinner the *kli*'s walls, the more it can hold. Taken further, if a *kli* were to have as its walls only mathematical "lines," it would be entirely a receptacle and could hold the greatest possible amount. With regard to one's capacity to absorb words of Torah as well, the lowlier one's spirit, the more "empty space" he has to receive Torah.

Along these lines, the Rav poignantly described how he felt as if Hashem revealed Himself to him when he discovered a new insight in Torah, as if he perceived a glimpse of Elokus at that time. This, the Rav felt, should lead the student of Torah to melt into insignificance, to be overcome with a profound sense of humility, never arrogance.

In the vast majority of disputes between Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel, the *psak* is in accordance with Beis Hillel, and the Gemara in Eiruvin (13b) attributes this to the fact that the talmidei Beis Hillel were deferential to the talmidei Beis Shamai and were exceedingly humble. The explanation is that there is a greater likelihood that a person who is humble will arrive at a correct *psak*. He will be able to reconsider his own first impression in the face of challenges from his peers, and he will be willing to admit that he may have made a mistake.

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha II.

Bein Adam L'Atzmo – When We Know That We Care



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

There are two ways that we may understand the first *pasuk* in our *parsha*. One is from the perspective of the community's responsibility and the other is from the responsibility that we owe to ourselves. This *pasuk* ends by saying “*B'Chol Sha'arecha*” implying that there is a communal need to instill *Shoftim* and *Shotrim*, judges and officers in every city. As Am Yisrael we are responsible for ensuring that the places which we live are directed accordingly. On the other hand, Rav Moshe Feinstein ZT”L (Drash Moshe Chelek Aleph Page #154) based on the Ba’alei HaMachshava gives a different approach. שפטים ושוטרים תתן לך – judges and officers you shall appoint for yourself. One must remember that he needs to manage himself, consider his own actions and make sure that he is conducting himself in the proper way. Understanding the need to judge ourselves is clear, but what does it mean for us to have officers appointed upon us? How would this differ from judges?

Rav Moshe explains that this means every individual must be willing to accept different things upon yourself. The Gemara in Nedarim (8A) explains that the purpose of one taking a *neder* (vow) is to motivate himself to come closer to Hashem. This puts one in the position where he would now be obligated to perform a certain

action or *mitzvah*, the means of this would be the strengthening of his relationship with Hashem. For every person it may be something different, but we should consider what it is that perhaps we struggle doing. Perhaps with Elul approaching now is the best time for us to think about what we can add (or remove) from our daily routine in order to strengthen our *Avodas Hashem*.

Before the Yamim Noraim, we spend so much time thinking of what changes we can make with those around us, *Bein Adam L'Chavero*, and how we can bring ourselves closer to Hashem, *Bein Adam L'Makom*, but how much time do we worry about *Bein Adam L'Atzmo*? Do we take time to think about the relationship we have had with ourselves over the previous year? We need to be honest with ourselves about the people we are now and the people we want to be. Being truthful with ourselves about the things we may find difficult in our lives is not something that will come simply to us but rather is a trait which requires great amounts of time to be properly worked on.

I remember that I was once in Camp Waunakee a few summers ago during the pandemic. The amount of *mesiras nefesh* in Camp Waunakee was amazing to see. There were 11 married families with close

to 500 people working in the camp and there truly was a tremendous *ruach* and an extraordinary *Siyata Dish'maya*. There were also non-Jewish workers at the camp who had never seen religious Jews before. On Shiva Asar B'Tammuz I was riding the ferry boat that took us between the two sides of the camp and I struck up a conversation with the driver who was not Jewish. He said to me that he heard there was a Jewish fast that day and that the boys will refrain from eating or drinking until nightfall. He looked and asked if I really thought this was true. There really won't be any boy that sneaks a snack into his bunk or takes a few sips of water throughout the day? To him this idea was ridiculous, it was impossible. Why would they do it? This is what *Bein Adam L'Atzmo* looks like. It is a relationship with the *Borei Olam* where we are in control of our own *middos*, and our own actions to become better people. That is with which we need to approach the upcoming days, *B'ezras Hashem* – with an internal desire to constantly be thinking about what we are able to do to bring ourselves a little higher and a little closer to Hashem.

● Edited by Zac Winkler.

Our Internal Policeman Should Monitor Our Conduct



Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef
Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel

It states in this week's *parashah*, "Appoint for you [in the singular] judges and police for all your tribes in all your settlements" (Devarim 16:18).

Our *chachamim* analyzed this *passuk* and said that one would have expected the *passuk* to state, "Appoint for you [in the plural] judges and police for all your tribes in all your settlements," using the Hebrew word "you" in the plural and not in the singular as stated, because this obligation is incumbent upon the congregation. If so, why is this *mitzvah* stated in the singular?

Our *chachamim* explained that the *passuk* intends to indicate that every single person is obligated to examine his soul as best as he is able. To judge himself and his actions as to whether every *mitzvah* that he performs is correct according to *halachah* based on what has been ruled in the Shulchan Aruch. Or whether his *mitzvot* and other actions just have the "value" like those performed by most people that they fulfill part of the *mitzvot* like those who have become used to "fulfilling their *mitzvot* by rote." Purely out of habit, with no thought about the root of the *mitzvah*, its purpose, Who commanded it and how He commanded its observance.

For example, when fulfilling the *mitzvah* of the *etrog*, many people have no idea about the *mitzvah* [when they purchase it]. They observe it purely from the perspective that they must purchase an *etrog* and they don't know whether or not the *etrog* is grafted, or whether it is unfit for use due to having a hole in it or something similar which would invalidate it. They also don't know in which hand to take the *lulav*. They simply look in the *Bet Keneset*

at the other people around them to see how they all do it. A person who follows this path has no judgment over himself and will guide himself to fulfill the *mitzvot* correctly. This is what is meant in the *passuk*, "you shall appoint for you [in the singular] judges." "Judges," are the *chachamim*, who lead the people how to live.

And when it states, "Appoint for yourselves [in the singular] police," this is the policeman that a person must appoint over himself who will caution him not to do things that are against Hashem's will; That he not offend another, he must not take that which is not rightfully his and that he not damage his neighbours or the members of his household. In fact, this is the hardest of them all, that he does not harm his household, for there are many who are scrupulous not to offend another. All their interaction with others is "keeping up appearances," but when they are at home they allow themselves to behave with a lack of patience and without any due consideration.

The Gaon Rabbeinu Ben Tzion Abba Shaul zt"l said that if a person's hands are soiled with oil, he will wash his hands and dry them with a towel. However, if he wipes his hands on the towel whilst they are dirty with the oil, he transgresses a Torah law, as it states, "However, where your fellow Israelites are concerned, you must not dominate one another to break one's spirit" (Vayikra 25:46). It is forbidden for a person to cause his spouse to unnecessarily work harder to clean the towel!

Many times people damage the property of other members of their household. They take from the little ones whatever

they want, even though the children are particular about this. The older ones sometimes think that everything is theirs and act as if they have control over the little ones. Likewise, the parents must realize that the principles of "man and his fellow" apply equally to young children. To assist a person in contemplating this and other similar matters, he requires an inner policeman. Every person should be open to the idea of such a policeman as G-d-fearing people are accustomed to, and so they will avoid sinning.

The Torah cautions us that the judges and police must be free from the sin of "bribery." By a person appointing his individual "judge and policeman" for his inner conscience, he will be careful not to allow his personal decisions to have ulterior motives, but rather to assess everything objectively.

Every year we read Parashat Shofetim during the first week of Elul. This is to indicate to us that we must get ready in the month of mercy and selichot to greet the *Yamim Noraim* that are coming to us for good with a spiritual reckoning. How has the past year been? What must we rectify in our behavior and improve our conduct as we greet the new year?

With this may we merit, with Hashem's help, though personal contemplation, to arrive appropriately prepared for the Day of Judgement, which is coming to us for goodness and *berachah*.

Uncover the Inner Beauty



Rabbi Shalom Rosner
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

You shall not plant for yourself an asherah, [or] any tree, near the altar of G-d... (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* (altar). 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 נטע אשירה בישראל (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 aesthetically 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 *mizbe'ach*. One is naturally drawn to beauty. When one sees magnificent mountains or a stunning sunset, they are immediately 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 לְמַאֲכָל וְכִי תְאוּהָהוּא לְעֵינַיִם** *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.

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, we 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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The Enigma of the Forbidden Pillar



Michal Horowitz
Judaic Studies Teacher

In *Parshas Shoftim* the Torah warns us against foreign and idolatrous worship. The *pasuk* says: *And you shall not erect for yourself a pillar, which Hashem, your G-d, hates* (Devarim 16:22).

Rashi teaches:

And you shall not erect for yourself a pillar: A pillar of a single stone to bring offerings upon it, even for the sake of Heaven.

Which [Hashem your G-d] hates - An altar of stones (plural) and an altar of earth He commanded to make, but this, He hates, for it was a custom for the Canaanites (they customarily used it for idolatry). And even though it had been beloved by Him in the days of the Patriarchs, now, He hates it, since the Canaanites made it a custom for idolatry.

In a Torah whose every word is eternally relevant, how can we understand this prohibition today, and what lessons can we derive for ourselves in our day and age? Clearly, none of us are making single-stone altars and pillars upon which to worship, and yet, even this seemingly antiquated command carries a message for us all.

We will offer two different approaches and answers, each which contains valuable pearls of wisdom as to how we must live our lives as Torah Jews.

HaRav Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986) *zt'l* teaches, "Since the giving of the Torah, each Jew is required to strive constantly to raise himself to ever higher levels of observance of Torah and *mitzvos*, both in quality and in quantity. Even if one attains the age of seventy and had acted righteously with a full lifetime of good deeds behind him, that would surely outweigh any slackening and any misdeeds which might occur in his last years. Nonetheless, he is not allowed to think

that his share in the World to Come is assured for him on the strength of the merits previously accumulated...

"The truth is that even someone whose total merits far outweigh his sins cannot be considered a *tzaddik* unless he continues to do *mitzvos* until the end of his life, even though he may sin inadvertently at times. If, however, he decides that he has already done enough *mitzvos* and has no need to do more, then all of his merits, however many they may be, count for naught.

"Thus, the Torah prohibits a monolithic pillar because it suggests immutability, never accumulating further merits. Before the Torah was given, a pillar could also be beloved to Hashem, since Jews were not obligated to do *mitzvos* and whatever they did do was counted to their credit! However, since the giving of the Torah, we are obligated to do more than the minimum required by the Torah, to do as many *mitzvos* as we can and to strive to grow constantly. Therefore, a pillar, which remains forever static, is hateful to Hashem and hence, it is forbidden to us to construct and worship upon" (Darash Moshe on the Torah, Artscroll Mesorah, p.304-305).

And you shall not erect for yourself a pillar, which Hashem, your G-d, hates. One who is unwilling, unmotivated and uninterested in further growth in the realm of *avodas Hashem* is akin to an unmoving *matzayvah*, a static pillar. One who believes he is finished with the performance of *mitzvos* and accumulating merits for himself is akin to a static pillar, which is detestable before Hashem. Man was put here to toil, to work, and to better himself through the service of G-d. One who wants simply to 'stand still,' and not grow further is abhorrent to

G-d and has forfeited his purpose in this world.

We must be ever sure that we are striving for growth, moving forward, building upon past successes and learning from past errors. In this way, we will live lives full of meaning and closeness to Hashem.

In his *Growth Through Torah*, Rabbi Zelig Pliskin offers an alternative interpretation. He teaches, "Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dinov (1783-1841, famously known as the Bnei Yissaschar) commented: 'There are people who are rigid and inflexible. They have certain habits and customs and are unwilling to deviate from them. But this is a mistake. This day is not similar to any previous day, and no two situations are exactly alike. What is the right thing to do in any situation is dependent upon all the unique circumstances of that situation. This can be understood from our verse. Do not erect a way that is rigid or stubbornly unbending regardless of the situation (*מַצְבָּה* means a pillar; but it is also the root of the word *matzav*, which means situation). Rather, you should always take action according to the needs of that particular moment.

"What could be a *mitzvah* in one situation may be considered a transgression in another situation. At times a certain act may be a *kiddush Hashem*, and other times would constitute a *chillul Hashem*. A person who does things compulsively without wisdom will make many mistakes. Only someone who has a grasp of the full panoramic view of Torah principles, will have the necessary wisdom to judge what is the correct thing to do in every situation. The more Torah you learn, the greater will be your ability to make distinctions between different sit-

Continued on page 18

Long Live the King



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag
Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

“You shall appoint Shoftim v'shotrim” (judges and officers) at ALL YOUR GATES (i.e., in every city) that G-d is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice... JUSTICE, JUSTICE, you must pursue, IN ORDER that you thrive and inherit the LAND...” (Devarim 16:18-20).

Several psukim later, Parshat Shoftim continues this theme with the commandment to establish a SUPREME COURT at the NATIONAL CENTER: “If there is a case too baffling for you to decide...matters of dispute in your courts - YOU SHALL GO UP to HAMAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM, before the KOHANIM, LEVIIM, or SHOFET, and present your case...” (17:8-11).

This institution serves as the HIGHEST authority for both civil disputes and halachic questions. Both TORAH and JUSTICE must emanate specifically from the site of the Temple, the National Center.

Not only does the Torah require the appointment of judges, it also commissions an entire tribe - SHEVET LEVI - to become “civil servants” for this purpose. The Leviim are not only to officiate in the Temple, but they must also serve as judges. Additionally, they are responsible for the teaching of Torah and the instruction of the halacha (Jewish Law).

This section, which deals with shevet Levi, is immediately followed by a discussion of to WHOM Bnei Yisrael should [and should not] turn for guidance: “When you ENTER THE LAND which G-d is giving you, DO NOT learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. Let no one become...a soothsayer, a sorcerer, one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts and spirits, or inquires of the dead. For anyone who does such things is abhorrent

to the Lord... [INSTEAD] G-d will raise up for you a NAVI - a Prophet, like myself (Moshe Rabeinu). To HIM you shall listen...I will put My words in his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I command him...” (18:9-22).

Thus far, we have encountered a court system, judges, the tribe of Levi (the Torah instructors), and the NAVI (who offers spiritual guidance). However, are any one of these leaders expected to provide political leadership as well?

The answer to this question lies in one last category of national leadership discussed in Parshat Shoftim - the “melech” (king): “When you have entered the land... and you will say: ‘I want to have a KING, as do all the nations surrounding me,’ appoint a KING over yourself, ONE CHOSEN BY G-d...

- * He must NOT keep too many horses...;
- * He must NOT have too many wives...;
- * He must NOT amass too much silver and gold.

When he is seated on his royal throne

- * He must WRITE down this MISHNEH TORAH (the laws of Sefer Devarim) from in front of the Kohanim and Leviim;
- * He must KEEP IT with him and READ IT every day of his life IN ORDER that he learn to FEAR G-d....
- * Thus, he will not act haughtily...or deviate from the Torah...IN ORDER that he and his children may continue to reign over Am Yisrael...”(see Devarim 17:14-20).

It appears from the CONTEXT of these psukim, especially in their relation to the other types of national leadership presented in Parshat Shoftim, that

specifically the king is expected to provide political leadership.

One could suggest that when the Torah speaks of a king, it may be referring to any type of political leadership with central authority, regardless of the political system by which he is elected. The Torah speaks specifically of a “kingdom,” for at the time of Matan Torah, that form of government was the most common. However, these laws regarding “the king” would apply equally to any form of political leadership.

This interpretation may help us understand the phrase “melech k'chol ha'goyim” - a king like the other nations. The Torah is not encouraging Bnei Yisrael to request a king who ACTS like the kings of neighboring countries. Rather, they will request a FORM OF GOVERNMENT similar to that of the neighboring countries.

Although we must remain different from other nations, we must still be a nation, in the full sense of the term. Hence, Am Yisrael does not need to be different from other nations with regard to the FORM of its political leadership, rather in the MANNER by which its political leaderships acts!

Once a specific leader is chosen, the Torah must guarantee that he does not grow too proud of his stature. Instead, he should use his invested powers to lead Am Yisrael towards becoming an “am kadosh.” To this end, he must review the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim - MISHNEH TORAH - on a daily basis. This is how we can become a “model nation.”

“Parshat ha'Melech” in Sefer Devarim sets the “guidelines” for the behavior of the political leadership of Am Yisrael so that they fulfill G-d's destiny. Whereas this constitutes a primary theme of the

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The Ends and The Means



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The Torah in the beginning of Parashat Shofetim speaks about the judicial system, and it famously exhorts, “*Sedek Sedek Tirdof*” – “You shall pursue justice.” Already the Gemara raises the question of why the Torah found it necessary to repeat the word “*Sedek*” (justice) in this verse. What message does the Torah seek to convey with this additional emphasis?

The Gemara explains that the additional word “*Sedek*” teaches that when choosing a *Bet Din* (Rabbinical Court) for settling a dispute, one should select the court with the greatest expertise and highest professional standards. The Torah instructs us not only to settle our legal disputes in an established *Bet Din*, but to ensure to choose the most qualified *Bet Din* available.

There is, however, an additional reason for why the Torah repeats the word “*Sedek*” in this verse – to teach us that we must not sacrifice “*Sedek*” in the pursuit of “*Sedek*.”

Many people set for themselves lofty, noble objectives, but act ignobly in their pursuit of those objectives. The Communists, for example, sincerely believed that their movement would solve the world’s problems and create a utopian society. And this conviction led them to slaughter an estimated 15 million people in the process of promoting and establishing Communist rule. They felt that the lofty end of equality justified the violent means of bloodshed and warfare. They pursued

“*Sedek*,” but ignored “*Sedek*” in the course of this pursuit.

The Torah does not subscribe to this belief that “the ends justify the means.” From the Torah’s perspective, the means must be as kosher as the ends.

When G-d appeared to Moshe at the burning bush and instructed him to return to Egypt and lead Beneh Yisrael to freedom, Moshe initially refused to accept the mission. One of the reasons for his refusal was his concern for the feelings of his older brother, Aharon. Moshe had been away from Egypt for many years, during which time Aharon had been serving as spiritual leader, tending to the many needs and hardships facing the people. If Moshe would suddenly return to Egypt and present himself as leader, this might trouble Aharon and offend him. G-d assured Moshe that Aharon, in his selfless piety, would actually rejoice upon hearing of Moshe’s appointment as leader.

If we analyze Moshe’s situation a bit more closely, we learn a very powerful lesson about the ends and the means. Moshe was offered the sacred mission of leading Beneh Yisrael out of Egypt to become G-d’s nation, and taking them to Mount Sinai, where he would be the one to bring them the Torah and spend forty days personally learning the Torah from G-d. Yet, he was prepared to forfeit this opportunity because of the infinitesimal chance of possibly offending his brother.

This was undoubtedly a lofty goal – can we think of any loftier goal? – but it was not worth the expense of offending somebody, or even the risk of possibly offending somebody. We may not act wrongly to do something right. We must never trample on “*Sedek*” in the pursuit of “*Sedek*.”

Our Sages teach that the one who arrives first in the synagogue for the Minyan gets as much credit as everyone in the Minyan combined. But if a person gets there first by pushing and shoving, or by speeding or parking illegally, then he does not get any credit. The person who shows up last gets more credit than him.

And the same is true about finances. Unfortunately, we often hear of people involved in financial scandals who try to justify their corruption on the basis of the large sums of charity they donate from their ill-begotten gains. This is reminiscent of the Robin Hood system of stealing from the rich to give to the poor. The Torah absolutely rejects such an approach. It requires “*Sedek Sedek Tirdof*” – pursuing righteous goals through righteous means.

The road to justice must pass through justice; a noble end does not justify unjust means. Our determination to do great things must never lead us to compromise our values in the process. We must pursue “*Sedek*” only through the means of “*Sedek*.”

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uations” (*Growth Through Torah*, p.427).

From here we learn that though we must be unbending when it comes to *asi’as ha’mitzvos* and matters of *halacha*, one who is too rigid, like an inflexible pillar, who is unwilling to assess each

unique situation through the lens of Torah, will commit grave errors in how he lives his life. While we must always uphold the *truth* of Torah in this world, that truth may vary from time to time. Only through *da’as Torah* can we know when

to be rigid, and when to be bending, living *b’shalom* with fellow man.

The Best Kiruv Tool



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Every Jew carries the weight of responsibility not only for his own actions, but for those of all other Jews as well. As the Gemara (Sanhedrin 27b) says, “All Jews are responsible for one another.” This teaching means that each person is considered a “guarantor” for every other. This concept of interpersonal responsibility is the basis of, for example, one person's ability to make *kiddush* for another even if he has already fulfilled his own obligation to make *kiddush*. While we have heard this teaching before and know its implications on a *halachic* level, how does it actually work? Why should one Jew be held responsible for the actions of others even if they have never met and they live on opposite sides of the world?

At the very end of *parshas* Shoftim (Devarim 21:1-9), the Torah teaches us the *mitzva* of *Egla Arufa* which applies where a dead body is found between two cities. The sages of each city come with a calf to the place where the body was found and perform the ritual of the *Egla Arufa*, saying... (Devarim 21:8) “Aton for your people Israel.” And then the *parsha* concludes (Ibid. at 9) “And you shall remove the innocent blood from among you when you do that which is upright in the eyes of Hashem.” The Ibn Ezra on this *pasuk* makes the following brief, but difficult, comment: “I believe the correct explanation is that which I have mentioned, that innocent blood will not be spilled in your land if you do that which is upright in Hashem's eyes.” The Avi Ezer, explaining the Ibn Ezra's words, says that if a person does that which is right in Hashem's eyes in his personal life, the result is that he prevents innocent blood from being spilled and saves the would-be murderer spiritually from the desire to murder.

This teaching of the Ibn Ezra has wondrous implications. Hashem created the world in such a way that if I, in my own

personal life, live a life of “that which is upright in the eyes of Hashem,” I can prevent the world from descending to a lower level and lift up the Jewish people to a higher plane of existence. The Gemara (Moed Katan 25b) illustrates this reality by recounting how, after the Amora Rabbi Elyashiv passed onto the next world, there were seventy burglaries in his town of Neharda. Rashi explains that until that time, Rabbi Elyashiv's merit prevented people from committing acts of theft. As long as Rabbi Elyashiv was alive, the power of his holiness prevented at least seventy criminals from carrying out the types of crimes they normally committed. We see that when even one Jew lives according to Hashem's will, it “remove[s] the innocent blood from among” the Jewish people. The Jewish people become better and there is less murder, bullying, and hatred.

How does this take place? How can one Jew's actions affect people he has never met? Rav Chaim Vital, in his sefer *Pri Eitz Chaim* (Shaar Haslichos Ch. 8) explains, “The entire Jewish people are one body and every individual Jew is one limb [of that body]. This is the [the underlying reason for] the fact of responsibility, that one person is responsible for his friend if he sins.” Because we are all literally connected, every good thing that each of us does in our private lives uplifts the the whole Jewish nation.

The Gemara (Avoda Zara 5a) explains a *pasuk* in Shmuel (2:23:1), which says “the saying of Dovid ben Yishai, the saying of the man who was placed on high” based on the similarity of the word for “placed” which can also mean “established” and the word for “on high” which can also mean “yoke.” The Gemara then taught that Dovid Hamelech established the yoke of *teshuva* in the world. People had done *teshuva* before Dovid Hamelech, but the difference was that he was so in tune

with the interconnection between all Jews that whenever he did a *mitzva*, it was not only for himself, but was done in order to awake and uplift other Jews. His own personal *teshuva* unleashed a torrent of *teshuva* within the hearts of countless Jews.

The Divrei Chaim of Tzantz once said that in the beginning, he attempted to rectify the entire world. But after working for some time, he realized that he would not be able to do it, so he resolved to at least rectify his city. Later on, he saw that even this was not realistic, so he decided to just try and fix his family. Near the end of his life, he realized that he could not fix his family, so he finally decided to simply try and perfect himself. After working on this for some time, he finally realized that by focusing on perfecting himself, he accomplished more in improving the world than he was ever able to when he was trying to repair the world.

Our goal in life is to do that which is upright in Hashem's eyes. This does not mean we should do it specifically in order to elevate others. But we must know that every good thought, every good word, every good act, every *pasuk* we learn, every *mishna* we understand, every page of Gemara, Tosafos, or *pshat* in Torah we understand on any level, every time we overlook it when someone slights us in some way, counts in the deepest way. By doing any of these things, we rectify ourselves and everyone else as well because we are an inseparable part of the singular entity called “the Jewish people.” Because of the inner nature of our responsibility for others, we have an unlimited sphere of influence.

May each of us merit to internalize the great importance of every thought, word, and action, and never minimize our importance in the great scheme of Hashem's plan.

Why Atheism Struggles with Genuine Diversity



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Parshat Shoftim communicates the following interesting commandment: “You shall not erect for yourself a pillar; this is something which the Lord your G-d despises.”

Rashi, explains this as a prohibition against erecting an altar of a single stone, even if the intent was to use this altar as a place for Divine worship, where offerings would be presented to G-d.

Though the Torah elsewhere allows the existence of altars made of stone in the Holy Temple and in the Tabernacle, Rashi explains that this is only true of altars comprised of many stones, not of a single stone.

But what’s the logic? Does it make a difference whether you present an offering on an altar of one stone or of many stones?

Rashi explains that the difference is not intrinsic but historical. In the times of the Patriarchs, Rashi writes, our forefathers built single stone pillars for Divine service, and “it was beloved by G-d.” However, once the Canaanites adopted this practice and began building single-stone altars for idolatrous offerings, including the horrific practices of ancient idolatry, G-d rejected them.

But why? The Pagans would also worship the sun, the moon, or water, but we still use them and enjoy them in a beneficial way.

What this prohibition against the single-stone pillar may be teaching us is that though there is one G-d, the altars constructed by the human being to serve Him should not, and could not be of one

stone, of one color, dimension, shape and quality.

In paganism, or modern atheism, a human being creates a god, or some higher power, in his or her own individual image. My mind and ego define what is essential, and what is of supreme importance. When god is a product of my image, that god is inevitably defined by the properties of that image. Since no two human images are identical, it follows that your god, the god of your image, cannot serve as my god as well. My god must be worshiped in my way, based on my perception of who he is and what he stands for. My altar must be constructed of one stone: my own.

Sure, I will tolerate those people and views that my “image” of my god can make peace with. But if you step out of line, I will hunt you down. I have no genuine room for your position.

The faith of Judaism, the idea of Monotheism, declares the oneness of G-d and the plurality of man. The transcendental G-d of Judaism transcends the natural universe but also any spiritual definition. G-d is undefined by any form, shape, or characteristic, physical or spiritual. We do not create Him in our image; He creates us in His image. Judaism thus challenges me to see G-d’s image in the one who is not in my image, for every person knows and feels something about reality, about truth, about G-d that no one else does.

None of us knows all the truth and each of us knows some of it. Like a symphony composed of many notes, each of us constitutes an individual note in the divine symphony, and together we complete the

music. If G-d wanted you and me to experience Him and serve Him in the same way, one of us would be superfluous.

Diversity within religion is not only a factor we must reluctantly accept; it is a cause for genuine celebration. It grants us the opportunity to encounter G-d since it is only in the face of the other that we can discover the part of G-d that we lack in our own face. The result of a relationship with a transcendental G-d is a growing appreciation of people’s differences, not merely as tolerable, but as the essence of a rich and rewarding human and religious experience.

“Diversity is the one true thing we all have in common, celebrate it every day,” a wise man once said. Diversity is the trace of an undefined G-d on the human species.

One of the challenges facing many communities today is a sense of tribalism that found a nest among many devout Jews. My way of serving G-d is the only true way, and if you have a different path, you are on the “wrong team.” I can’t respect you.

Many of us feel that in the construction of the “altars,” the structures in which we serve G-d, there is room for only a single stone, a single path, one flavor, and one style – to the exclusion of anything else that does not fit our religious imagination or upbringing. Yet, paradoxically, it is precisely the paths of paganism, polytheism, or atheism, that invite a singular altar, made of one stone, while the monotheistic path of a singular G-d welcomes the diverse altar, made of many distinct stones. The structures constructed

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Shoftim: The True Judge



Rabbi Judah Mischel

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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 wellbeing of all those involved:

“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 *לְשֹׁפֵט 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*: *שׁוֹפֵטִים וְשׁוֹטְרִים תַּעֲשֶׂה*, you appoint the judge, meaning it is in our hands to determine how our judgment will turn out. *Vasita mishpat tzedek*, “And judge our nation favorably,” *b’kaf zechus*, and that will be the way the judge sees us. For ultimately, *מִיִּדָה כְּנֹגֵד מִיִּדָה*, 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, *בְּצַדִּיק תִּשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיִּךָ*, “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: *וְהָיָה דֵן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת*, “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.

Elul Smooth Sailing

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What is the connection between the cities of refuge and the month of Elul?

Rav Freifeld discusses an intriguing Midrash in Parshat Achrei Mot on the verse, “*B’zot yavo Aharon el hako-desh.*” The simple meaning is that Aharon was commanded to offer the incense on the altar. But if we look deeper, we find that our sages gave us the keys to attain holiness.

The first way is through the experience of Shabbat. The Matnat Chaim explains that we say in *Lecha Dodi*, “*Likrat Shabbat lechu v’nelcha.*” Let us greet the Shabbat. To the extent one invests before Shabbat, to that extent will we be able to access the wellspring of blessing inherent in the day. We begin Kiddush with the words, “*Yom hashishi.*” This hints that the preparations on the sixth day for Shabbat are intrinsically connected to Shabbat. The aspect of *shamor*, guarding the Shabbat, means anticipating its coming. The Ben Ish Chai said that one can merit wealth

and blessing by bringing in the Shabbat early. The holy Rebbe of Lechovitz taught that the impact of Shabbat is so strong it cannot be concentrated in the world of materialism. All the physical blessings come in the merit of bringing in Shabbat early. The earlier we bring it in, the more bounty we draw down upon ourselves. When we expand the borders of the *kedusha* of Shabbat, Hashem will expand our borders by giving us our deepest desires.

The second way is by learning Torah. The enlightenment of Torah enables a person to enter into the *kodesh*. Although a woman is not commanded to study Torah for its own sake, she is obligated to learn about the *mitzvot* that she is required to fulfill. This includes all the negative *mitzvot* and all positive non time related *mitzvot*. If she has more time, it is praiseworthy for her to study works of *mussar* and *yirat shamayim*. We find that Jewish women throughout the ages studied Torah. The Gra wrote a letter home that his daughters should spend Shabbat studying

mussar and works of Torah thought. The Chatam Sofer studied Agadata with his daughters. Rav Sonnenfeld studied Orach Chaim a half an hour each day with his wife. The Tiv Hamoadim points out that just as a person gets weak if he doesn’t eat all day, our souls should feel weak if we don’t learn. Take a few minutes every day and dedicate it to Torah study. Choose a *halacha* book or *mussar* work. In this way, the light of Torah will illuminate your soul and bring you more *kedusha*.

With this we can understand the connection of Elul and the cities of refuge. When we don’t live up to our inherent potential, we’ve killed an aspect of who we could have been. Elul is focusing in on our true selves. We can enter into the *kodesh*, into the holy month preceding the Days of Awe, by bringing in Shabbat early, dedicating a few minutes every day to Torah, and doing *mitzvot* with love and joy.

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by man to serve G-d are, by definition, diverse and individualistic.

This does not mean that G-d condones every act done in His name. The G-d of the Bible created absolute universal standards of morality and ethics that bind us all. But these rules do not step from my ego and comfort zone, but rather from an absolute truth that includes and benefits every human being.

To the Jewish people, G-d presented an absolute system of Torah and *mitzvos*.

Yet within this framework, every human possesses his or her unique path to Truth. One of the great masters put it this way: “The concrete laws of Torah are the same for us all, but the spiritual experience of Torah, the feelings of love and awe, contain infinite pathways, one for each person, according to his (or her) individual identity.”

We may compare it to the 88 keys of the piano that lend themselves to infinite combinations. The very same keys allow for so many different expressions.

Authentic religion must welcome, not fear, diversity and individualistic expression. When you truly cultivate a relationship with G-d, a G-d who is undefined by any image or color, you know that in the presence of other-ness, you can encounter a fragment of truth that you could never access within your own framework.

A Judge or a Police Officer?



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

If you were to ask a boy or girl what they would most like to do when they grow up, would they like to be a judge or a policeman? I think the answer is clear.

It's not just the negative image attached to the police and its officers, it's the difference between people who think and people who act.

I remember well the aura that surrounded me when I wrote judgments as an intern at the district court. It was intellectual work, an attempt to prescribe a "higher" behavior to the world. I did not want to be the policeman escorting the defendant from the cell to the courtroom. Less.

This way you may miss Elul, and in this age, perhaps all of Judaism. Who will execute the sentence? Engage in this unheroic act? Leave the air-conditioned hall of justice? Not point out a loophole in the law, but fear the hacking of the cell phone or the handcuffs? And Elul prescribes exactly this step. It is clear that the Batei Midrash in Elul are an air for the soul. It is clear that the discussion about the answer is vital and hurtful. Is the answer goodness or freedom? And what about the sincerity of the answer when we repeat ourselves every year? This teaching is a

sin, but it also misses the point: If there are no policemen, there are no judges.

The enormous gap between the Judaism of thought and the Judaism of behavior is widening. Many people think. Few people act.

This is where the women will act boldly. They too will learn of an idyllic world to which they aspire, but they will not shrink from the world of correction. They will strive to carry it out, even if it is a less "prestigious" job.

Rabbi Moisha Shapira zt'l renews a wonderful innovation: the month of Elul is the only one whose sign in the gematria is feminine and "Elul": "Bina."

"Wisdom is in the root of a mistake, and from the mistake man nourishes the next, right behavior. And this is the difference between knowledge and wisdom: knowledge is the degree in which there is no possibility of error: This is how things should be and not otherwise! There is only simple light there. "Wisdom" is when reality requires a course of correction, and that is the realization of reality after there is the possibility of rupture and error." Wow.

To give birth, a woman breaks. Her actual body. In the language of Chazal it is "her limbs dislocate." It is a physical movement

no matter how much we try to disguise it with a garment of deep thought.

In the first tablets, the angels will also ask, "What is the birth of a woman among us?" They are the judges of the corrected reality.

By the second tablets carved in the month of Elul, they will ask nothing more. They will know that only he who was born of a woman knows brokenness, knows a cry, knows a rebellious thought, "Perhaps I was wrong?" Only he sat in crisis, only he will cry out, "Harani Na!!!" Only he knows rampant sin from the moment he came out of his mother's womb. Only he will bring to the world what only a mother's womb understands: measures of mercy.

In the month of Elul, we will go to the police. We will be executed, we will be escorted from prison to the courtroom, we will correct what the judges never corrected from their high chairs, and we will be good.

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main speech of Sefer Devarim, it is only appropriate that Parshat Shoftim deals specifically with this aspect of political leadership.

Undoubtedly, an inherent danger exists once political power is invested in a strong central government. But without a stable, authoritative body, a country cannot

prosper and develop to its maximum potential.

It is the Torah's challenge to Am Yisrael to become a nation that resembles all other nations with regard to the establishment of a sovereign political entity. However, at the same time, it is the Torah's challenge to Am Yisrael that they be DIFFERENT from all other nations in the manner by

which that leadership behaves and governs; for we are to become G-d's "model nation."

This form of national government will not diminish the Kingdom of Heaven, but will rather promote the universal recognition of G-d's Kingdom and further the glorification and sanctification of His Name.

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Kehillat Nofei Hashemesh

Yeshivat Ashreinu

Yeshivat Hesder Lev HaTorah

HERZLIYA

Mizrachi OU-JLIC Herzliya

MEVASERET ZION

Yeshivat Mevaseret

RAMAT GAN

Israel XP at Bar Ilan University

THE NEGEV

Mechinat Ruach HaNegev

LATVIA

JURMALA

Jewrmala - the Jurmala Jewish Community

MALTA

Jewish Community

MEXICO

Mizrachi México

NORTH MACEDONIA

SCOPIA

Jewish Community

PANAMA

Centro comunitario BETH EL

POLAND

Chief Rabbinate of Poland

PORTUGAL

PORTO

Rabbi Daniel Litvak

SCOTLAND

EDINBORO

Edinboro Hebrew Congregation

SERBIA

BELGRADE

Rav Isak Asiel

SOUTH AFRICA

JOHANNESBURG

Mizrachi Glenhazel Shul

SWEDEN

The Jewish Community of Stockholm
Kehilat Adat Yeshurun
Kehiliat Adat Yisrael

SWITZERLAND

BERN

Jüdische Gemeinde Bern

ZURICH

HaKehila HaYehudit Zurich
HaKehila HaYehudit Lausanne
Mizrachi
Wollishofen

TANZANIA

ARUSHA

Bayit Kneset Shalem Al Shabazi

UNITED KINGDOM

Mizrachi UK

UNITED STATES

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Kol Hatorah Kulah
National Council of Young Israel
RZA-Mizrachi USA

CALIFORNIA

Beth Jacob Congregation
Harkham Hillel Hebrew Academy
West Coast Torah Center
Young Israel of North Beverly Hills
YULA High School
Young Israel of Century City

COLORADO

DAT Minyan
East Denver Orthodox Synagogue
The Denver Kehillah

CONNECTICUT

Beth David Synagogue
Congregation Agudath Sholom
Young Israel of West Hartford

FLORIDA

Beth Israel Congregation
Hebrew Academy RASG
PlayHard PrayHard
Congregation Torah Ohr
Sha'arei Bina Torah Academy for Girls
Young Israel of Hollywood-Ft. Lauderdale

GEORGIA

Congregation Beth Jacob
Congregation Ohr HaTorah

HAWAII

Kehilat Olam Ejad Ganim

ILLINOIS

Mizrachi-Religious Zionists of Chicago

MARYLAND

Kemp Mill Synagogue
Pikesville Jewish Congregation

Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion Congregation

MASSACHUSETTS

Congregation Beth El Atereth Israel
Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe
Congregation Shaarei Tefillah
Young Israel of Brookline

MICHIGAN

Young Israel of Oak Park
Young Israel of Southfield
Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe

MINNESOTA

Congregation Darchei Noam

MISSOURI

Yeshivat Kadimah High School Nusach
Hari B'nai Zion Congregation
Young Israel of St. Louis

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Hillel at Dartmouth

NEW JERSEY

Ahavas Achim
Volunteer Chaplain Middlesex County
Congregation AABJ&D
Congregation Adath Israel of the JEC
National Council of Young Israel
Congregation Ahavat Achim
Congregation Ahavath Torah
Congregation Brothers of Israel
Congregation Darchei Noam of Fair Lawn
Congregation Etz Chaim of Livingston
Congregation Israel of Springfield
Congregation Ohr Torah
Congregation Sons of Israel of Cherry Hill
Kehilat Keshet
Ma Tov Day Camp
Ohav Emeth
Pal Foundation
Shomrei Torah of Fair Lawn
Synagogue of the Suburban Torah Center
Yavneh Academy
National Council of Young Israel
Young Israel of Teaneck

NEW YORK

Beis Community
Congregation Anshei Shalom
Congregation B'nai Tzedek
Congregation Bais Tefilah of Woodmere
Congregation Beth Sholom
Ramaz
Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls
MTA – Yeshiva University High School for Boys
Young Israel of Merrick
Congregation Beth Torah
Congregation Etz Chaim of Kew Gardens Hills
Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun
Congregation Ohav Zedek
Great Neck Synagogue
Iranian Jewish Center/Beth Hadassah Synagogue
Irving Place Minyan

Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach

Kehilath Jershurun
Kingsway Jewish Center
Lincoln Square Synagogue
Merkaz Yisrael of Marine Park
North Shore Hebrew Academy
Young Israel of Merrick
NYC Department of Correction
OU-JLIC at Binghamton University
OU-JLIC at Cornell University
Queens Jewish Center
Stars of Israel Academy
The Jewish Center
The Riverdale Minyan
Vaad of Chevra Kadisha
West Side Institutional Synagogue
Yeshiva University High School for Girls
Young Israel of Hillcrest
Young Israel of Jamaica Estates
Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst
Young Israel of New Rochelle
Young Israel of North Woodmere
Young Israel of Oceanside
Young Israel of Scarsdale
Young Israel of Woodmere

OHIO

Beachwood Kehilla
Congregation Sha'arei Torah
Congregation Torat Emet
Green Road Synagogue
Fuchs Mizrachi School
Heights Jewish Center

PENNSYLVANIA

Shaare Torah Congregation

SOUTH CAROLINA

Brith Sholom Beth Israel
Congregation Dor Tikvah

TENNESSEE

Baron Hirsch Congregation

TEXAS

Mayerland Minyan Synagogue
Robert M. Beren Academy
United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston

VIRGINIA

Keneseth Beth Israel

WASHINGTON

Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath
Northwest Yeshiva High School
Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation

URUGUAY

Comunidad Yavne Uruguay

VENEZUELA

CARACAS
Ashkenazi Kehilla
Mizrachi Venezuela



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