

# Torah Weekly



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## Parshas Shoftim

For the week ending 7 Elul 5755  
1 & 2 September 1995

### Summary

**M**oshe tells the Bnei Yisrael to appoint judges and officers in their cities. A bribe of even an insignificant sum is forbidden. Trees are not to be planted near Hashem's altar as was the way of idolaters. Blemishes in animals designated for offerings and other points of disqualification are listed. The Great Sanhedrin is to make binding decisions on new situations according to Torah criteria to prevent the fragmentation of the Torah. A very learned scholar who refuses to accept the Halachic decisions of the Sanhedrin incurs the death penalty. A Jewish king may only have possessions and symbols of power commensurate with the honor of his office, but not for self-aggrandizement. He is to write for himself two *Sifrei Torah*, one to be kept with him wherever he goes, so that he doesn't become haughty. Neither the *Kohanim* nor the Levites are to inherit land in the Land of Israel, rather they are to be supported by the community, by a system of tithes. All divination is prohibited. Hashem promises the Jewish People that He will send them prophets to guide them, and Moshe explains how a genuine prophet may be distinguished from a false one. Cities of refuge are to be provided for someone who kills accidentally, in order to escape the blood-avenger from the family of the deceased. However someone who kills with malice is to be handed over to the blood-avenger who may exact his revenge. Moshe cautions the Bnei Yisrael not to move boundary markers to increase their property. Two witnesses who conspire to "frame" a third are to be punished with that same punishment that they conspired to bring upon the innocent party. A *Kohen* is to be anointed specifically for when Israel goes to war, to instill trust in Hashem. Amongst those who are disqualified from going to war is anyone who has built a new house, but not lived in it yet or anyone who is fearful or fainthearted. An enemy must be given chance to make peace, but if they refuse, all the males are to be killed. Fruit trees are to be preserved and not cut down during the siege. If a corpse is found between cities, the elders of the nearest city must take a heifer, slaughter it, and wash their hands over it, saying that they are not guilty of the death.

**The last scene is where the Vilna Gaon and the Sha'agas Arieh win the war...**

### Commentaries

**"When you go out to the battle to meet your enemy...the officers shall speak to the people, saying: 'Who is the man who has built a new house and not inaugurated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the war and another man will inaugurate it...Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted, let him go and return to his house, and let him not melt the heart of his fellows like his heart'" (20:1**

**Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the war and another man will inaugurate it...Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted, let him go and return to his house, and let him not melt the heart of his fellows like his heart'" (20:1**

The Yiddish Theater was not known for its championing of Torah values, and so, it was not surprising when two talmidim came running to The Brisker Rav, breathless with

indignation: "Does the Rav know about the new sketch the Yiddish theater has put on? They should all be put in *cherem* (excommunication)! They've made a satire on the Torah!

First, one of the actors says 'Who is the man who has built a new house and not inaugurated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the war and another man will inaugurate it...' So ten people get up and walk off the stage.

Then he says 'And who is the man who has planted a vineyard and not redeemed it? Let him go home lest he die and another man redeem it.' So another ten people get up and leave the stage.

Then he says 'And who is the man who has betrothed a woman and not married her? Let him go home lest he die in the war and another man marry her.' So another twenty people get up and walk off the stage.

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And then he says 'Whoever is afraid, let him go home so he won't scare everyone else.' So now *everyone* leaves the stage except two actors playing the Vilna Gaon and the Sha'agas Arieh.

The Vilna Gaon says to the Sha'agas Arieh 'K'vod HaRav — you take the first shot.' and the Sha'agas Arieh replies 'No, No, I insist — after you...' As they argue who's going to start the war, the curtain falls and the audience laughs and claps. It's terrible!" Said The Brisker Rav to the two irate talmidim "Well — what's wrong with that?" The jaws of the two talmidim dropped. They gazed at their Rebbe dumbstruck. The Brisker Rav continued "They only thing they forgot is the last scene."

"What last scene?"

"The last scene is where the Vilna Gaon and the Sha'agas Arieh win the war..."

The strength of the Jewish people is not in the vastness of its numbers nor its military might, for we are the *smallest of the nations*. Our strength is our *tzadikim* and our faithfulness to Hashem — the Master of Wars.

(Heard from Rabbi Mordechai Perlman)

**"When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it...do not destroy its trees by swinging an ax against them" (20:19).**

If, in the midst of the destruction of war, a person can still maintain an awareness of the general welfare by not harming the environment, this is a certain sign that he can steadily perfect his whole character. If, despite the brutality and brutalization of war, during times when the basest instincts surface, a person is still concerned with what is right and what is good; if he will even try not to waste so much as a mustard seed, then he will eventually reach perfection of character.

(Based on the Sefer HaChinuch)

**"Is the tree of the field a man?" (21:19)**

The *fruit* of our labors in this world is our spiritual produce which should blossom and bloom into a harvest of moral and intellectual truth. This is why Man is compared to the tree. Just as the tree must grow branches, blossom and bear fruit to fulfill the purpose of its creation, so Man's purpose is to sow and reap the *fruit* of his labors — which are the *mitzvos* that he *cultivates*.

(Based on the Maharal)

## Haftorah: Isaiah 51:22-52:12

**T**hroughout the long night of exile, it is only the promise that Hashem will one day redeem us and bring us consolation for all the tragedies which have befallen us that sustains the Jewish People. We know that Hashem is close at hand, and even when the darkness threatens to overwhelm us, we take strength from the words of the Prophet, "It is I, It is I, Who comforts you..."

# Pirkei Avos

Perek 2

## Good Friends and Good Neighbors

**Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai asked his disciples to name the characteristic which a man should cleave to in order to perfect himself. Rabbi Yehoshua said: 'A good friend'. Rabbi Yossi said: 'A good neighbor'.**

(Avos 2:9)

There are two ways of looking at this counsel. It is important to seek the positive influence of a friend who is a good person and to select a neighborhood which provides a wholesome environment. But it is even more important for you to be a good friend to others by being absolutely honest and faithful in your relationship and thus win the love of all men. In a similar fashion you must make yourself a good neighbor and from your sincere affection for a handful of people you will develop a love for all men and be blessed with every good character trait.

Rabbeinu Yonah

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## Seasons of the Moon

The Jewish Year Seen Through Its Months...

A new monthly newsletter that shows you the Jewish Year through its seasons of the moon. Look for the first edition this Tishrei whenever Ohr Somayach Publications are found.

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For the week ending 7 Elul 5755, 1 & 2 September 1995

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