



Parshas Shoftim

For the week ending 2 Elul 5756
16 & 17 August 1996

Summary

Moshe 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.

Commentaries

A PACKET OF COOKIES

"One who will strike his fellow without knowledge...he shall flee to one of these cities (of refuge) and live." (19:4,6)

If a person accidentally killed someone, the Torah provides for him to flee to a 'city of refuge.' There he had to stay until the Kohen Gadol passed away. However, if the fugitive emerged before the death of the Kohen Gadol, he risked being killed by the slain person's 'blood avenger.'

It could well be that the Kohen would be a young man, and so the fugitive could be cooped many long years, not able to go home.

Thus, he had a vested interest in the Kohen's early demise.

To stop him from praying for the the Kohen's premature death, the Kohen's mother would send the fugitive regular "care packages" so that he shouldn't pray for her son to die.

But how could a mere 'packet of cookies' compete with the longing to return to his home and his family? Did the Kohen Gadol's mother really think that a little gastronomic bribery would stand up to the homesickness of the fugitive?

We can see from this a powerful idea: If we want our prayers to be answered we must pray **with every last ounce of conviction**. In *davening*, 99% is not enough. Just a packet of cookies was all that was needed to 'knock the gloss' off the prayers of the fugitive, and ensure a healthy, and long, life for the Kohen Gadol...

(Heard from Ephraim Hodes at his vort, in the name of Rabbi Eisenblatt)

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel
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Production Design: Lev Seltzer

STATUS SYMBOL

“...he (the king) shall write for himself two copies of this Torah in a book... It shall be with him and he shall read from it all the days of his life, so that he will learn to fear Hashem, his G-d...” (17:18,19)

During the *Amidah* — the standing prayer — a person bows four times. The *Kohen Gadol* (high priest), however, has to bow at the end of every bracha — 19 times. And a Jewish king has to bow at the beginning and the end of each and every bracha — 38 times!

Another opinion holds that the *Kohen Gadol* has to bow at the beginning and the end of every bracha, and a king bows once at the beginning of the prayer and stays bent over during the entire prayer.

The greater a person is the more he must humble himself before Hashem because the more Hashem has given him.

Also, the greater the person, the greater is the temptation to think that his greatness is of his own making.

For this reason, a king has *two* sifrei Torah, one of which he must keep with him the whole time. He needs a constant reminder that he is the servant of The Law, a servant of the Almighty, and all his power and status is only given to him to serve Hashem.

(Talmud Berachos 34, Rashi, heard from Rabbi Yehoshua Bertram)

LIVING LINKS

“And you will come to the priests, the Leviim, and the judge who will be in those days.” (17:9)

Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was extremely sensitive to the smell of garlic and could not tolerate its odor. Once, he was teaching a group of students. He paused, the smell of garlic reaching his nose... “Would the student who ate garlic, kindly leave the room?” he asked. Not just one, but many students left. One of them was Rabbi Chiya.

The next day, Rabbi Shimon (Rabbi Yehuda’s son) chided Rabbi Chiya for his lack of consideration in eating garlic before attending the lecture. Rabbi Chiya replied “I didn’t eat any garlic. The reason I left was so that the offender should not have to be embarrassed by revealing his identity.” Where did Rabbi Chiya learn the need for this sensitivity to the feelings of others? The Talmud teaches us that Rabbi Chiya learned this behavior from seeing Rabbi Meir conduct himself in a similar way. And from whom did Rabbi Meir learn it? From Shmuel HaKatan. And Shmuel? From Schania in the Book of Ezra. And Schania learned it from Yehoshua, who learned from Moshe Rabbeinu.

Why didn’t the Talmud skip all those generations and just get to the point? Why didn’t it just say “Rabbi Chiya learned his sensitivity and noble behavior from Moshe Rabbeinu?”

We stand at the end of an unbroken chain of generations. A chain of generations that stretches back ultimately to Moshe Rabbeinu and a moment of supreme contact with Hashem on Sinai. **But our contact with that moment is with the great sages of our own generation.** There are no “missing links” in the chain of the Torah. Every rebbe is a talmid of *his* rebbe.

When we seek wisdom and direction, we need look no further than our own living links to the past.

(Based on Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz zt”l)

Haftorah: Isaiah 51:12-52:12

Throughout 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...”



INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIROS
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.

BARUCH KEIL ELYON-*ihkg ke I urc*
“BLESSED IS G-D...”

Whoever observes the Shabbos
Will find Hashem’s favor like a meal-
offering...

השומר שבת הבן עם הבת
לקל ירצו כמנחה על מחבת

*hashomer shabbos haben im habas
lakel yeratzu k’mincha al machvas*

The *shomer Shabbos* is compared to one who offers a *mincha* – a meal offering – on the altar of the Beis Hamikdash. Our Sages (Menachos 104b) explain that the Torah uses the term “*nefesh*” (life) in describing the one who voluntarily offers a *mincha* because it is the poor man, without the means to offer a sacrifice of animal or bird, who usually offers a *mincha*. It is as if Hashem declares that He will consider such a humble offering as if the poor man offered his very life.

Observance of the Shabbos may also be viewed as a form of sacrifice for the *shomer Shabbos* gives up the opportunity to increase his wealth by engaging in his worldly affairs. Although the poor man’s sacrifice is considerably less than that of the prosperous one it is considered by Hashem as if he gave up his very life for the honor of the Day of Rest.

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