



Parshas Shoftim in a Nutshell

(Deuteronomy 16:18–21:9)

Moses instructs the people of Israel to appoint judges and law enforcement officers in every city. "Justice, justice shall you pursue," he commands them, and you must administer it without corruption or favoritism. Crimes must be meticulously investigated and evidence thoroughly examined—a minimum of two credible witnesses is required for conviction and punishment.

In every generation, says Moses, there will be those entrusted with the task of interpreting and applying the laws of the Torah. "According to the law that they will teach you, and the judgment they will instruct you, you shall do; you shall not turn away from the thing that they say to you, to the right nor to the left."

Shoftim also includes the prohibitions against idolatry and sorcery; laws governing the appointment and behavior of a king; and guidelines for the creation of "cities of refuge" for the inadvertent murderer.

(continued next column)

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A person should be continually prepared to subject himself and his conduct to the review of an outside, objective authority. That authority, however, is not merely another person wiser and/or more experienced than oneself, but rather a repository of Torah knowledge. His decisions reflect the Torah's wisdom, and not his own. -- *The Rebbe*

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Also set forth are many of the rules of war: the exemption from battle for one who has just built a home, planted a vineyard, married, or is "afraid and soft-hearted"; the requirement to offer terms of peace before attacking a city; and the prohibition against wanton destruction of something of value, exemplified by the law that forbids to cut down a fruit tree when laying siege (in this context the Torah makes the famous statement, "For man is a tree of the field").

The Parshah concludes with the law of the eglah arufah—the special procedure to be followed when a person is killed by an unknown murderer and his body is found in a field — which underscores the responsibility of the community and its leaders not only for what they do, but also for what they might have prevented from being done. ❖

Join us each weekday morning Mon-Fri as we delve into the mysteries of Chassidic concepts. 5:55 am, followed immediately by Shacharis.

Halachic Zmanim

Shabbos, Sep 3, 2022
Daylight Savings Time

Earliest Tallis..... 5:27 AM
Latest Morning Shema 9:38 AM
Earliest Mincha (Gedola).. 1:29 PM
Plag Hamincha..... 6:08 PM
Earliest Evening Shema 7:54 PM

Anshei Lubavitch Congregation

Rabbi Levi and Leah Neubort

Adult education:

Rabbi Avrohom and Rivky Bergstein

Youth Outreach:

Rabbi Eli and Ruty Steinhauser

Shabbos Schedule

Erev Shabbos – Sep 2 / Elul 6

Candle Lighting..... 7:09 pm

Mincha 7:10 pm

Shabbos Day – Sep 3 / Elul 7

Shacharis 10:00 am*

Torah Reading 11:00 am

Kiddush 12:00 pm

Mincha 7:10 pm

Mevorchim Farbrengen 7:30 pm

Shabbos Ends 8:07 pm

**Latest morning Shema is now 9:38 AM. Be sure to recite the Shema at or before that time (even if at home).*

Weekday Schedule (not on a holiday):

Minyan

Shacharis (Mon-Fri) 6:15 am

Shacharis (Sunday) 9:00 am

Mincha (Sun-Thurs)..... 1:45 pm

Maariv (Sun-Thurs) 9:15 pm

Bulletin

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Chassidic Masters

The Judge and the Refugee

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

In the Torah section of Shoftim (Deuteronomy 16:18–21:9) we read of the cities of refuge, to which a man who had killed accidentally could flee, finding sanctuary and atonement. The chassidic masters note that Shoftim is always read in the month of Elul—for Elul is, in time, what the cities of refuge were in space. It is a month of sanctuary and repentance, a protected time in which a person can turn from the shortcomings of his past and dedicate himself to a new and sanctified future.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe analyzes an important feature of the cities: they were only to be found in the land of Israel, even though the judges and officers who executed Torah law were to be appointed wherever Jews live. Why does the law extend everywhere, while refuge belongs to the Holy Land? And what does this imply for the month of Elul, our place of spiritual refuge in the Jewish calendar year?

A Paradox

Sifri interprets the opening verse of our Parshah, “You shall set judges and officers in all your gates,” to apply to “all your dwelling places,” even those outside Israel. It then continues: One might think that cities of refuge were also to exist outside the land of Israel. Therefore the Torah uses the restrictive expression “these are the cities of refuge” to indicate that they were to be provided only within Israel.

Nonetheless, Sifri says that someone who committed accidental homicide outside the land of Israel and fled to one of the cities of refuge would be granted sanctuary there. It was the cities themselves, not the people they protected, that were confined to the land of Israel.

The fact that Sifri initiates a comparison between the “judges and officers” and the cities of refuge indicates that they have a relationship to one another. It is this: The judges who applied the law and the officers who executed the sentences did not aim at retribution, but at the refinement of the guilty. And the aim of the cities of refuge was to impose on the fugitive an atoning exile—atonement in the sense of a remorse which effaces the crime until he regains his original closeness to G-d’s will.

We might then have thought that if this safeguard, this place of atonement, was available in the holy environment of the land of Israel, it would be all the more necessary outside its borders, where it was easier to fall into wrongdoing. And yet only judges and officers were to be provided beyond Israel’s borders—only the agents of the law, not its refuge.

Transcendence or Empathy

There are two phases in teshuvah, or repentance. There is remorse over what has been done, and commitment to act differently in the future. These are inextricably connected. For the only test of sincere remorse is the subsequent commitment to a better way of life. To be contrite about the past without changing one’s behavior is a hollow gesture.

This is the deeper significance of the law that the city of refuge is found only in the land of Israel. For a man could not atone while clinging to the environment which led him to sin. He might feel remorse, but he would not have taken the decisive step away from his past. For this, he had to escape to the “land of Israel,” i.e., to holiness. There, on its sanctified earth, his commitment to a better future could have substance.

Judges, however, could be appointed outside the land of Israel. For it is written in Ethics of the Fathers, “Do not judge your fellow man until you come to his place.” A court which sits in the land of Israel cannot know the trials and temptations which exist outside, or the difficulties of being loyal to one’s faith in a place of exile. The land of Israel is a land where “the eyes of the L-rd your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.” It is a land of divine grace. One cannot judge a man by its standards if that man lives outside its protection.

So judges had to be drawn from the same environment as their defendants. They had not only to know what he had done; they had to experience for themselves the environment which brought him to it.

Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch (the second Chabad rebbe) was once giving private audiences, when he interrupted them for some time before continuing. It transpired that a man who had had an audience wanted the rebbe’s help in setting right a particularly degrading act he had done.

(Continued next page)

The rebbe later said to one of his close disciples that one must discover some analogous quality in oneself, on however refined a level, before one can help someone to remedy his sin. His interruption of the audiences had been to attempt to find in himself this point from which he could identify with the sinner.

It was this principle that lay behind G-d's command to Moses when the Israelites had made the Golden Calf: "Go, get yourself down, for your people have dealt corruptly." For at that moment, Moses was inhabiting the spiritual heights of Mount Sinai, neither eating nor drinking, divorced from the world. The Israelites were degraded through their sin. But by telling him to "go down" to "your people," G-d created a bond between Moses and the people, on the basis of which Moses was able to plead on their behalf.

Three Degrees of Refuge

Although all the cities of refuge were to be in the land of Israel, they were not all in the same territory. There were the three in the land of Israel proper—the Holy Land. Three were in the territories east of the Jordan, where "manslaughter was common" (Talmud, Makkot 9b). And when in the messianic era "the L-rd your G-d will enlarge your borders," three more will be provided in the newly occupied land.

This means that every level of spirituality has its own refuge, from the relatively lawless eastern territories to the Holy Land, and even in the world of Moshiach. And this is true spiritually as well as geographically. At every stage of one's religious life, there is the possibility of some shortcoming for which there must be refuge and atonement.

Even if a person never disobeys G-d's will, he may still not have done all within his power to draw close to G-d.

This is the task of the month of Elul. It is a time of self-examination, when each person must ask himself whether what he has achieved was all that he could have achieved. And if not, he must repent, and strive towards a more fulfilled future. Businessman and scholar—the one who has lived in the world and the one who has spent his days under the canopy of the Torah—both must make Elul a time of self-reckoning and refuge.

It is the way of the Western world to make Elul, the month of high summer, a time for vacation from study. The opposite should be the case. It is, above all, the time for self-examination, a time to change one's life. And the place for this is the city of refuge in the "Holy Land," which, in the geography of the soul, is a place of Torah.

Each Jew should set aside Elul, or at least from the 18th onwards (the last 12 days, a day for each month of the year), or at any rate the days when selichot are said, and make his refuge in a place of Torah.

A refuge is a place to which one flees—that is, where one lays aside one's past and makes a new home. Elul is the sublimation of the past for the sake of a better future. And it is the necessary preparation for the blessings of Rosh Hashanah, the promise of plenty and fulfillment in the year to come. ❖

The Month of Elul

Elul is the 12th and final month in the Jewish calendar (the sixth month counting from Nisan). It is a month that connects the past year with the coming year—a time when we reflect on where we stand and where we should be going.

Every day of Elul we blow the shofar and recite special Psalms in anticipation of the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

(Continued next page)

The Month of Elul (continued)

Elul follows the two previous months of Tammuz and Av—months of tragedies that were brought upon us through our sins. In Tammuz, the Jews sinned with the golden calf; on Rosh Chodesh Elul, Moses ascended to Mount Sinai for a third 40-day period until Yom Kippur, when he descended with the second tablets (luchot) and G-d's word of joyful, wholehearted forgiveness. (The first time Moses ascended was to receive the first tablets; the second time was after the sin, to ask for forgiveness; and this third time was to receive the second set of tablets.) These were days when G-d revealed to the Jewish people great mercy. Since then, this time has been designated as a time of mercy and forgiveness, an opportune time for teshuvah—repentance.

The four letters of the name Elul are an acronym for the phrase in “Song of Songs” (6:3): “I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me.” “I am to my beloved”—we approach G-d with a desire to return and connect. “And my beloved is to me”—G-d reciprocates with Divine expressions of mercy and forgiveness.

This is the month when “the King is in the field.”

G-d, the King of all Kings, is accessible. All can approach Him, and He shines His countenance to all. ❖

From Our Sages – Shoftim

Judges and officers you shall place at all your city gates . . . (Deuteronomy 16:18)

The human body is a city with seven gates—seven portals to the outside world: the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and the mouth. Here, too, it is incumbent upon us to place internal “judges” to discriminate and regulate what should be admitted and what should be kept out, and “officers” to enforce the judges’ decisions . . .

(Siftei Kohan)

Justice, justice shall you pursue (Deuteronomy 16:20)

Why does the verse repeat itself? Is there a just justice and an unjust justice? Indeed there is. The Torah is telling us to be just also in the pursuit of justice—both the end and the means by which it is obtained must be just.

(Rabbi Bunim of Peshischa)

By virtue of three things the world endures: law, truth and peace.

(Ethics of Our Fathers 1:18)

The three are one and the same: if the law is upheld, there is truth and there is peace.

(Jerusalem Talmud, Taanit 4:2)

A judge who judges with absolute truth becomes a partner with G-d in creation.

(Talmud, Shabbat 10a)

According to the law they instruct you and according to the judgment they say to you, you shall do; you shall not diverge from the word they tell you, either right or left (Deuteronomy 17:11)

Even if this judge tells you that right is left and that left is right. How much more so, if he tells you that right is right and left is left!

(Sifri; Rashi) ❖

Haftorah for Parshas Shoftim in a nutshell

Isaiah 51:12-52:12

This week's haftorah is the fourth of a series of seven "Haftarot of Consolation." These seven haftarot commence on the Shabbat following Tisha b'Av and continue until Rosh Hashanah.

The haftorahs of the past two weeks open with Israel's complaint that they have been abandoned by G-d. Israel is not content with consolations offered by the prophets — instead they demand that G-d alone comfort them. In response, this week's haftorah begins with G-d's response: "I, indeed I, will comfort you."

After briefly reprimanding Israel for forgetting their Creator for fear of human and finite oppressors, the prophet describes the suffering and tribulations which Israel has endured. However, the time has arrived for the suffering to end. The time has come for Israel's oppressors to drink the "cup of suffering" which they had hitherto forced Israel to drink: "Awaken, awaken, put on your strength, O Zion; put on the garments of your beauty, Jerusalem the Holy City, for no longer shall the uncircumcised or the unclean continue to enter you. Shake yourselves from the dust, arise, sit down, O Jerusalem; free yourself of the bands of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion."

Isaiah extols the beauty of the messenger who will announce the good tidings of Redemption. "Burst out in song, sing together, O ruins of Jerusalem, for the L-rd has consoled His people; He has redeemed Jerusalem."

The haftorah ends by highlighting the difference between the Egyptian Exodus, when the Israelites hurried out of their exile and bondage, and the future Redemption: "For not with haste shall you go forth and not in a flurry of flight shall you go, for the L-rd goes before you, and your rear guard is the G-d of Israel." ❖



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Good Shabbos to all!