



BS"D

To: parsha@parsha.net  
From: cshulman@gmail.com

## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON SHOFTIM - 5770

In our 15th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to [subscribe@parsha.net](mailto:subscribe@parsha.net). Please also copy me at [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com). A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net>. It is also fully searchable.

To sponsor an issue (proceeds to Tzedaka) email [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com)

From Yeshivat Har Etzion <[office@etzion.org.il](mailto:office@etzion.org.il)> reply-to Yeshivat Har Etzion <[office@etzion.org.il](mailto:office@etzion.org.il)> to [yhe-central@etzion.org.il](mailto:yhe-central@etzion.org.il)  
date Mon, Aug 9, 2010 at 8:54 AM subject VBM - The Messages of Elul  
hide details Aug 9 (4 days ago) YESHIVAT HAR ETZION ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

**ROSH CHODESH ELUL** In order to mark **the sheloshim of moreinu Harav Yehuda Amital zt"l**, and in order to inaugurate the season of repentance beginning today (Rosh Chodesh Elul), we are pleased to present all VBM students with the following sicha. For more of Rav Amital's Torah, see here, and for more information about his life and thought, see these pages: biography, eulogies.

For easy printing: <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/sichot/shonot/elul170-rya.htm> **The Messages of Elul By Harav Yehuda Amital zt"l**  
**Adapted by Aviad Hacohen** Translated by Kaeren Fish What does Elul teach us? Several external features distinguish this month. Many communities recite selichot starting from Rosh Chodesh Elul; we blow the shofar every morning, and we add the psalm "Le-David Hashem ori veyish'i" each day at the conclusion of the prayer service. But what is the true significance of this month? At the end of his halakhot on massekhet Rosh Hashana, the Rosh quotes an excerpt from Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer (also quoted in the Tur, Orach Chaim): Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha said: For forty days Moshe stood on Mount Sinai. By day he would learn the Torah and by night he would study the Mishna. After forty days he descended, and broke the tablets on the 17th of Tammuz. Then he spent forty days in the camp, while the Leviim killed those who had worshipped the golden calf, and he burned the calf and banished idolatry from among Israel, and determined the proper place for each tribe. On Rosh Chodesh Elul, God said to Moshe: "Ascend to Me up the mountain." A shofar was blown throughout the camp, announcing that Moshe had ascended the mountain, in order that they not repeat the sin of idolatry. God was elevated by that shofar blast, as it is written, "The Lord rose in a shofar blast," and therefore Chazal ruled that the shofar should be blown on Rosh Chodesh Elul every year, in order to warn Israel that they should repent, as it is written, "Will the shofar be blown in the city and the nation not be afraid?" and also to confuse Satan, in order that he not prosecute Israel.

Elul marks Moshe's second ascent to receive the tablets, and the shofar blast is meant to serve as an announcement of that fact. This

announcement contains two central messages: first, notification to all of Israel, by means of the shofar blast, that Moshe is ascending to receive the Torah; second, a cry or warning to prevent further sin and idolatry. I. **SETTING GOALS** The first aspect – the notification as to Moshe's ascent – was meant to tell the nation, "The road is long and difficult. You have to prepare yourselves; you have to know what you're headed for. You are preparing to receive the Torah." Our first task for the month of Elul is to mark our destination, our goal. In parashat Ki Tetze, we read the parasha of the "ben sorer u-moreh" – the stubborn and rebellious son. All in all, he is a thirteen-year old boy; what is his sin? The Ramban explains that his first sin is that he curses his father and mother, and his second sin is that he is a glutton and a drunkard. This latter sin doesn't seem all that serious, especially if we bear in mind that the penalty of the ben sorer u-moreh (i.e., death) only applies if his gluttony is exercised on kosher meat; if he eats non-kosher meat, he no longer falls into this category. Moreover, even if he transgressed only a rabbinical command of kashrut in his eating, the penalty can no longer be applied to him. He has to eat food which is "kosher la-mehadrin." If this is so, what is so terrible about what he does? By eating like a glutton, he transgresses the command, "You shall be holy." The Torah teaches us, "You shall serve Him and you shall cleave to Him," and we demand even of a boy of thirteen, "Be holy."

In order to fulfill this command of "being holy," it is not sufficient to perform the mitzvot. This command contains an educational goal. Every person needs to strive to purify his personality, such that its very essence consists of being holy. If the Torah placed limits on the consumption of meat, it aims thereby to make man more spiritual, to ensure that material, bodily desires will not become the central focus of his life. A young person especially must strive to live a life which is more spiritual, more moral, more thought-out, more pure. He must strive to achieve closeness to God. This is what is demanded of every Jewish youth and of every person.

A Jew has to strive to build his character such that it will be more genuine, more moral. Otherwise, he will turn into a naval bi-reslut ha-Torah, "a scoundrel within the bounds of Torah." As mentioned, the Torah speaks about a "stubborn and rebellious son," who is careful with the tiniest details of the laws of kashrut. And yet it is specifically he, the Torah tells us – the same person who is so particular about the kashrut of what he eats – who is in danger of becoming a "scoundrel within the bounds of Torah."

The first foundation of Elul which is to be learned from Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer is that of destination, the goal. I believe that we have an obligation to translate the goal into one single expression: to become a talmid chakham, a scholar. One must aim at gaining knowledge of Torah and being constantly involved in it. Today more than at any other time in history, it is imperative to become a talmid chakham – even just in order to be a simple Jew! Of course, Jews have always believed that "An ignoramus cannot be pious" (Avot 2:5). At the same time, in the past it was possible to be a good Jew even without being a talmid chakham, without involving oneself in Torah. Previous generations included plenty of simple Jews, manual laborers, with no pretensions in the area of Torah study, but nevertheless "good Jews." Today this is simply no longer possible. Our era is characterized by a number of factors which no longer allow us to behave as previous generations did. Let us examine some of them. One factor is associated with the circumstances of our modern age. A Jew has to be aware of where and when he is living. At the beginning of Sefer Devarim the places and occasions when Moshe spoke his words to the nation are recorded: "on the other side of the Jordan," "in the land of Mo'av," "between Paran and Tofel, Lavan and Chatzerot and Di Zahav." This teaches us that a person has to know where he stands and in which period he is living.

We live in a period of massive exposure to street culture, and this culture infiltrates every nook and cranny, in many different ways. Once upon a time a Jew used to live in a small town and wasn't exposed to anything. His entire society was homogenous. He would go to the synagogue, return home, go to work. Today we find ourselves in a different world. We want to know what is going on in the world; we need

to be connected. And the moment you read the news – and, in fact, everywhere you go – you are exposed. Therefore today we need a different standard of *yir'at shamayim* (fear of Heaven). The second factor has to do with our lifestyle. Today, people have a lot of free time, and a whole culture has developed around that fact. This means more than just a five-day week. People no longer work from daybreak until nightfall. Life is built around a lot of leisure, and one of our main problems is what to do with so much free time. As technology progresses, so the problem of free time becomes an increasingly universal phenomenon. Whatever time one does not spend on Torah, one ends up spending on other things. No pursuit is neutral. There is no such thing as a person claiming, “I’m not a *lamdan*.” If you don’t fill your time with learning, you’ll end up spending your time on less valuable or even harmful activities. The third factor focuses on the intellectual conflict in which we find ourselves, sometimes even unconsciously, every day and every minute. We live in a secular environment, a secular culture, a secular world which day and night declares its supremacy. Conflict arises at every turn. We encounter problems in our faith, in our *yir'at shamayim*, in our performance of *mitzvot*. The most dangerous thing is that we aren’t always conscious of this conflict. In fact, we are unaware of most of the conflicts, even though they penetrate deep inside us, and for this reason we need strong intellectual tools and weapons, grounded in Torah. The fourth factor concerns the modern job market. Let’s be honest – for most of us, the concept of a job is connected in our minds with some kind of intellectual pursuit; most of us want a career which requires thinking. Obviously this applies not only to those who are gearing their futures towards the rabbinate or teaching, but to anyone who is considering studying towards a profession. What will we become if we use the most important part of ourselves – our brains – purely for the purposes of making a living, promotion, a career, while leaving our Divine service to our mouths – we’ll eat matza; to our hands – we’ll wash them; to our legs – we’ll walk to the synagogue; but not to our minds? How can the intellect, the mind, the pride of mankind, not be the center of our service of the Creator? At a time when people in any case never dealt with theoretical questions or information – one person worked as a carpenter, another as a shoemaker – it didn’t matter so much. But we are accustomed to engaging our brains. Dare we do so only for our bodily needs, and not for our spiritual needs too? The fifth factor involves the events which have taken place in our era. We have merited to see hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews immigrating to Israel in recent years. I doubt whether a thousand of them knew when they arrived what Torah is, whether they had ever heard of Avraham Avinu. Their arrival in Israel is going to change the country’s entire social balance. If today Jewish studies are the pursuit of a minority of the population, there is a real danger that the division within the Jewish nation will only increase. We need to emphasize the specialness of Torah. We cannot leave hundreds of thousands of people who have never heard of Torah in the hands of hundreds of thousands of others who are themselves completely ignorant. An educational elite needs to be established to deal effectively with this situation, and this will be achieved only through Torah study. The last factor which I want to mention concerns our status in Israeli society. We do not aspire to cut ourselves off from society and communal matters. We are involved in and concerned about what is happening to the nation. The whole concept of a “*hesder*” *yeshiva* is an expression of this involvement. And I believe that it is impossible to be involved in a secular society without a strong Torah basis. Without Torah we will be left with nothing. The basis of the Torah is the Oral Law. “The Holy One, Blessed be He, made a covenant with Israel only for [the sake of] the Oral Law” (Tanchuma Bereishit 58). Everything rests on the disputes of Abbayeh and Rabba. After that there is Tanakh, philosophy, etc., but the basis must be the Oral Law. It has its own special secret, its own magic. By studying the Oral Law a person communicates with God Himself. In the words of the Midrash on parashat Teruma (Shemot Rabba 33): “Let them take for Me a contribution” (Shemot 25:1) – to what can this be compared? To a

king who had a beloved only daughter. Then someone asked her hand in marriage... The king said to him, “She is my only one. I cannot tell you not to take her, for she is your wife. On the other hand, I cannot be separated from her, for she is my only daughter. I ask only this of you: Wherever you may go, build me a small chamber in order that I may dwell with you.” Similarly, God said to Israel: “I cannot be separated from the Torah.” Once you acquire Torah, you simultaneously acquire closeness to God.

No one understands this secret. But if a person attempts to base the crux of his learning on anything else – philosophy, Tanakh, other topics – it doesn’t work. The basis for everything – faith, Torah, fear of Heaven, love of *mitzvot* – is the Oral Law. Afterwards, of course, we have to add the rest – *aggada* and *mussar*, Tanakh and philosophy. But the foundation of all foundations is the Oral Law. II. CONSCIOUSNESS OF FAILURE

The second aspect which characterizes the month of Elul, following the excerpt from Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer quoted above, is the wish to avoid further sin, following the debacle of the golden calf. Let us imagine for a moment the feeling of frustration: once again the nation has to prepare itself to receive the Torah, following the failure of the first attempt when, upon receiving the Torah and the tablets, they immediately descended into idolatry. The memory of this failure plagued them as they prepared for the second set of tablets. “My sin is before me constantly” (Tehillim 51:5) is one of the principal themes of Elul. This does not apply to any single sin specifically. We need constantly to examine ourselves: How deep is our faith really? How careful are we in our performance of *mitzvot*? To what extent do we feel and express love for each *mitzva*? What is the nature of our relationship with others? What degree of responsibility do we display for our fellow man, for our society? What are our main goals in life, and what is secondary? What do we dream and strive for, and what problems occupy us? Our level of fear of Heaven, our relationship to Torah – are we really concerned enough about these? How many times a day do we repeat the words, “Who has sanctified us with His commandments?” This is more than simply the standard formulation of a *berakha*. As we recite these words we become, as it were, sanctified; we become different.

Let us not be content with simply reciting the prayers. We must pay attention to the way in which they are said. Are we truly capable of pouring out our hearts before God? Do we pray in the spirit of “Let a man speak of the trouble in his heart” (Mishlei 12:25)? Do we truly feel, each and every moment, the huge gain from studying Torah, from fulfilling *mitzvot*? The prophet Malachi (3:13) says, “Your words have been strong against Me, says the Lord, but you have said, What have we said against You?” God approaches the nation, claiming, “You have spoken harshly against Me.” Bnei Yisrael do not understand: “What did we say? Heaven forbid! We haven’t said anything against You!” The prophet rebukes them: “You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God; what have we gained by keeping His service, and by walking in abject awe of the Lord of Hosts? And so, we account the arrogant happy: they who have performed wickedness have endured; they have indeed dared God and escaped.’”

“It is useless to serve God” – people say, “What difference does it make why we keep the *mitzvot* – do we gain anything from this? God commanded us to do, and so we do. Just as it says in the Mishna Berura.”

If we do not constantly feel, every hour and every minute, what we gain by putting on *tefillin*, by keeping Shabbat, by performing the *mitzvot*, then our actions fall under the category of “Your words have been strong against Me... ‘It is useless to serve God.’” This is the second foundation of Elul – the consciousness of failure, the frustration.

III. CONSTANT EFFORT The third aspect of Elul is, “Carve yourself two tablets of stone” – God does not give us the tablets; we have to quarry the rock, to labor mightily. I once spoke about the *yetzer ha-ra* which is prevalent in the Beit Midrash. The gemara recommends, “If this contemptible creature (i.e., the evil impulse) attacks you, drag him into the Beit Midrash.” R. Menachem Mendel of Kotzk used to say, “Beware – in the Beit Midrash another contemptible creature awaits you.” One of the ways in which the *yetzer ha-ra* operates is that it inculcates within us

the feeling that “the Beit Midrash is the answer to everything” – you don’t need to make any kind of effort; the Beit Midrash will create the right atmosphere for you, it will influence you. But know this: there is no such thing as Elul without “Carve for yourself,” without hard work. Certainly, the atmosphere adds something, but anyone who builds his life on atmosphere isn’t going to get anywhere. A person has to invest himself personally. One can’t rely on being in the right “mood” – we have to get up and perform God’s work whether we feel like it or not. We have to get to the Beit Midrash on time, and to open the Gemara, no matter what mood we’re in.

Constant self-evaluation is hard work. Nothing reassures you. In other areas – preparing for an examination, for example – the moment you receive your grade, that’s the end. This isn’t true of avodah Hashem (serving God). The effort is constant and unrelenting.

These are the most productive years of your lives. I envy you. But you have to make proper use of this time. If a person is presented with such possibilities, can he possibly be forgiven for not making the most of the opportunity? IV. MODESTY

The last message Elul conveys is, “And no one will ascend with you” (Shemot 34:3). Rashi comments on this verse that the fate of the first tablets was due to the “ayin ha-ra” (evil eye) aroused as a result of the fanfare and noise accompanying their appearance.

There is no more worthy trait than that of modesty – not creating a big impression; not making a big noise; not the external aspect but the internal one. It expresses a different scale of values. Whoever feels that his external aspect is the dominant one, should correct the situation. Fear of Heaven as it is expressed externally and inner fear of Heaven are two completely different things. Our aim during Elul has to be the raising of the standards in all our personal characteristics. In this world we can increase our fear of Heaven with little effort. We can achieve integrity at little cost. Opportunities abound to increase our honesty. We go to the synagogue, buy kosher food, recite birkat ha-mazon. These things are so easy to do, but they must be elevated. If the basic standards which we expect from ourselves are raised, everything becomes much more difficult. Fear of Heaven is a great thing, and so is faith; so is love of mitzvot. We have to raise the standard.

We have to raise the standard – and that is why we gather in the Beit Midrash. Sometimes, we are likely to give up in despair. That is one of the dangers – that a person will lose faith in his own power. But we have to strengthen ourselves in faith, too, as Chazal taught: “Open for Me an opening the size of the eye of a needle” – that is sufficient – “and I will make an opening for you the size of the Temple doors.” The mussar masters taught: It is possible to create an opening the size of a needle in some fabric, and the opening immediately disappears. It’s there, but it’s invisible. The commitment here is that the opening the size of a needle will remain open, that there will truly be an “opening the size of a needle” – and then we are promised that God will grant us an opening as wide as the Temple doors.

---

<internetparshasheet@gmail.com> Rabbi Frand on Parshas Shoftim  
**Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> Thu, Aug 12, 2010 at 1:14 PM Reply-To: ryfrand@torah.org, genesis@torah.org To: ravfrand@torah.org Rabbi Yissocher Frand To sponsor an edition of the **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** e-mail list, click here

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Shoftim These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 778 – “I'm Bar Mitzvah” – Do We Believe Him? Good Shabbos!

Innocence in the Hand Is Better Than Two Birds In The Bush

They're here! ALL NEW Commuter's Chavrusa Devorim 23 is available, on tape or CD, to enlighten, inspire and perhaps amuse you with such fascinating topics as: "Finding Out The Future - Mutar or Asur?", "Can Your Mother Serve You Dinner?" and the NEWEST TESHUVA DRASHA - "Shabbos - The Key to A Lasting Teshuva". Also Available 2-

CD set of "Shabbos - The Key to A Lasting Teshuvaa" and "Kiddush Hashem" - The Mission Statement of K'lal Yisroel"

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE FOR RABBI FRAND'S CURRENT WEEKLY SHIUR ON MP3 IS NOW AVAILABLE. SEE OUR WEBSITE WWW.YADYECHIEL.ORG AND CLICK ON THE "NEVER MISS SUBSCRIPTION" BUTTON FOR DETAILS

For complete listings of all the new offerings, log onto our secure site at <http://www.yadyechiel.org> and select the "Timely Offers" button, or send e-mail to [tapes@yadyechiel.org](mailto:tapes@yadyechiel.org), or call us at 410-358-0416.

And while you're there, don't forget that the entire Yad Yechiel Library, featuring the complete collection of Rav Frand's shiurim, is also available for viewing online. At <http://www.yadyechiel.org>, you can browse through a comprehensive listing of 22 years of weekly shiurim, view Parsha Perceptions, Halacha Tapes, Hashkafa Tapes and Theme Sets. Plus, you'll find order information on this easy-to-navigate site.

Log on today, and enjoy the world of Torah Shiurim from Yad Yechiel!

The pasuk [verse] teaches, "You shall be innocent (tamim) with the L-rd your G-d" [Devarim 18:13]. Rashi interprets: Walk with Him with innocence (temimus) and accept what He has in store for you; do not try to divine the future; accept what the Almighty gives you with perfect faith.

According to the Ramba"n, this pasuk is a Biblical commandment. This is one of the places that Nachmanides disputes Maimonides in enumerating the 613 commandments. The Ramba"m does not count this as a mitvah; he holds it is merely good advice. The Ramba"n disagrees -- he does count being innocent and not trying to "outsmart" the Master of the Universe or figure out the future to be a mitzvah.

Rav Schach wrote a letter in which he was very critical of the practice he observed in many to seek out the future through palm reading or "kesubah reading" or the like. All such people who advertised such services, he insisted, were charlatans and frauds who were trying to make a quick and dishonest dollar. He forbade relying on the amulets and advice of people who obviously do not have the knowledge that they are allegedly sharing with people. Despite the fact that some practitioners had long white beards and appeared religious, Rav Schach emphasized that a person may not consult with or rely on the advice of such people, citing the pasuk in this week's parsha "You shall be Tamim with the L-rd your G-d" and referencing the Ramban's comments on the pasuk. Rav Schach concluded his letter: "We must only rely on Hashem, everything else is hevel [vanity]."

Our Sages teach a homiletic story regarding Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon]. The Medrash teaches that the wise king knew the language of the birds (sichas haTziparim). A person came to Shlomo HaMelech and asked that Shlomo HaMelech teach him this language. At first, the king refused but the man pestered him until he finally relented and taught him sichas haTziparim. The fellow was then walking in the field and heard two birds talking with one another. One bird told the other "You see this fellow; his entire flock of cattle are going to die within the next couple of weeks." The man went home and immediately sold his entire flock of cattle at the very first opportunity. Lo and behold, two weeks later the entire flock died. The man avoided a major financial setback!

Sometime later, the man was again walking in the field and heard one bird tell another that the fellow they saw was going to have his house and everything therein burn down within two weeks. Again, he sold his house and all his possessions lock stock and barrel. Sure enough, two weeks later the house burned to the ground. Again, he avoided catastrophe!

When he next went out to the field, he heard one bird tell the other that the fellow near them was going to drop dead the following week. He then went back to Shlomo HaMelech and desperately asked for his advice what to do. Shlomo HaMelech said "I told you that I did not want to teach you the language of the birds! You did something terribly wrong and G-d wanted to give you a punishment. He was going to punish you through the death of your cattle. However, you "outsmarted Him" and found out – through the birds – how to avoid that punishment. The punishment would

have been for your benefit – that financial setback would have shaken you up and forced you to repent and amend your ways.

Then the Almighty was going to get you to do Teshuva by burning your house down, but again you avoided the tragedy and hence the opportunity to repent. Your sins however now remain and the only option that you left the Almighty is to bring about your death as punishment for those sins.

There are two lessons to this story.

The first lesson is obviously the pasuk in this week's parsha: Be innocent (tamim) with the L-rd your G-d. Accept what comes your way. Do not always try to figure out how to "outsmart" the Almighty by seeking out His hidden plans for the future.

The second lesson is much easier in concept than in practice. It is much easier to teach academically than to apply practically. We should not encounter such tests. However, if troubles do befall us, we need to believe and realize that they are the best thing that could happen for us. This is a lesson that we have taught many times in the past. When such things happen we should take the attitude that: It could be worse. G-d is sending me a warning. This is a kapparah [atonement], and ultimately everything that G-d does is for the best.

Whether the story with Shlomo HaMelech is literal or is a parable is beside the point. The lesson that this story teaches is "you shall be innocent before the L-rd your G-d" and we have to believe that "all G-d does is for the best."

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Shoftim from the Commuter Chavrusah Series is provided below:

Tape # 019 - Copying Cassette Tapes Tape # 109 - Hasogas G'vul: Infringing on Another's Livelihood Tape # 155 - Ba'al Tashchis: Cutting Down That Troublesome Tree Tape # 202 - Melech v'lo Malkah: A Jewish Queen? Tape # 249 - May A Daughter Say Kaddish? Tape # 338 - Relying on a Goral Tape # 383 - Circumstantial Evidence Tape # 426 - The Mitzvah of Escorting Guests Tape # 470 - May a Convict Escape? Tape # 514 - Can a Ger Be a Rosh Yeshiva? Tape # 558 - Competition Among Teachers Tape # 602 - Saying Kaddish for 12 Months Tape # 646 - Cutting Branches of Fruit Trees Tape # 690 - The Grandson and Kaddish Tape # 734 - Making a Bracha on a New House Tape # 778 - "Im Bar Mitzvah" - Do We Believe Him? Tape # 822 - Making a Chanukas Habayis for a New Home

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD RavFrand, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org. Join the Jewish Learning Revolution! Torah.org: The Judaism Site brings this and a host of other classes to you every week. Visit <http://torah.org> or email [learn@torah.org](mailto:learn@torah.org) to get your own free copy of this mailing. Need to change or stop your subscription? Please visit our subscription center, <http://torah.org/subscribe/> -- see the links on that page. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Torah.org. Both the author and Torah.org reserve certain rights. Email [copyrights@torah.org](mailto:copyrights@torah.org) for full information.

Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 122 Slade Avenue, Suite 250 Baltimore, MD 21208 <http://www.torah.org/> [learn@torah.org](mailto:learn@torah.org) (410) 602-1350 FAX: (410) 510-1053

From Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh <dzahzt@kby.org> reply-todzahzt@kby.org to kby-parsha@kby.org date Fri, Aug 13, 2010 at 2:45 AM subject Parshat Shoftim

### **Teshuva - Fear and Joy**

**By: Rosh Hayeshiva Harav Mordechai Greenberg, shlita**  
(Translated by Rav Meir Orlian)

"Judges and officers you shall appoint in all your cities." (Devarim 16:18) The simple meaning of this verse is the obligation to appoint judges to rule between man and his friend and to teach G-d's laws and His Torah. However, there is an additional meaning that the Mussar masters talk much about. A person is commanded to be a judge of his own matters and to review himself at all times with discernment; thus, a person judges himself. It is not for naught that this parsha is always read at the beginning of the month of Elul, because the time of judgment is approaching, and therefore a person must place himself before the seat of judgment, before G-d does so on the Day of Judgment. The very fact that a person judges himself and appoints himself a judge is the beginning of the teshuva process.

However, every criticism causes a person discomfort. "My sin is before me always" (Tehillim 51:5) places the person before himself in a negative light. It leads to an attempt to escape and puts the person into depression. Therefore, Teshuva is always viewed as something burdensome, depressing and not natural.

In truth, though, Rav Kook zt"l writes in Orot HaTeshuva (15:9):

The upset thought, which comes through the connection to the depths of teshuva, is the source of joy. The basic nature of teshuva is the contemplation of the greatness of the supreme perfection of Divine spirituality. Through this, the sins stand out very much. "You have set our iniquities before Yourself, our immaturity before the light of your countenance." (Tehillim 90:8) And since we sense, as the sensation of sin is any case comes from the Divine shining on the soul, this idea itself fills with infinite joy and greatness. The delight of happiness increasingly strengthens simultaneous with the submission of the heart, which stands at the level of teshuva.

It is through closeness to G-d a person's sins are highlighted more. The sins depress the person, but the closeness to G-d leads to happiness.

"Teshuva does not come to make life bitter, but rather to make it pleasant." (ibid 16:7) Even though the person is still caught in the mud and does not know how to escape it, nonetheless, the very aspiration to free oneself from sin leads to a sense of satisfaction. Rav Kook further writes:

At the time that [a person] thinks all about the burning thought of full regret for all of his sins, at the time that his soul dotes with love for the beauty of sanctity and perfection, longs for her Lover, Creator ... even though he ponders much how to extricate himself from the mud of the sins, even though it is not at all clear to him how to repair the entire past, even though the ways of action are not at all paved before him, and they are full of stumbling rocks - however, the desire to be good - this is the spirit of G-d's Gan Eden, which blows in the soul and fills it with unlimited satisfaction, so that even the fire of Gehenom of deep suffering, also turns into a river of pleasure.

In a letter that Rav Kook wrote in the month of Elul to one of his disciple, he writes:

I would like to encourage the diligent, may there be many like them in Israel, and to remind you the basic ideas of the means of preparation that we should be involved in, for our true perfection at the year's end, and to prepare ourselves for the light of the holy days ... the Day of Remembrance (Rosh Hashana), the days of Teshuva, and the holy day Yom Kippur, and the days of happiness, the Festival of Succot and Simchat Torah that are coming upon us for good, G-d willing.

The preparations of the month of Elul come not only to impart trepidation and fear, but instead, from the fear of closeness to G-d to reach joy; from the days of Elul, the days of Teshuva, to reach the peak - Simchat Torah. The Chasidim say that all the days of Elul, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur,

and Chag Succot are only a preparation for "Ata Hor'eta" of Simchat Torah night.

---

<http://www.rabbiwein.com/Weekly-Parsha/2010/08/472.html>  
Weekly Parsha **SHOFTIM RABBI BEREL WEIN** Friday, August 3, 2010

The pursuit of justice is never-ending and true justice in its ultimate sense is rarely if ever achieved. Is there any punishment that truly deals with murder or terrible physical or sexual abuse? Ultimate justice is located in a realm that we are not privy to nor do we understand in any fashion or way.

Yet in this week's parsha the Torah demands that we continue in our pursuit of justice even though we may be aware that the ultimate goal is beyond our powers and abilities. The Talmud interprets this pursuit as being defined, in a practical manner, to finding the best possible court of justice to appeal to for justice. There is no perfect court, for it is made up of fallible individuals, so the Talmud only advises us to find the best possible courts that exist at that time and place. It lists the recommended courts and leading justices of its day but every generation has to continue its own search for the best courts and justice systems available. The pursuit of justice is an unending one but one that is the most vital component of a positive and harmonious society. A society that does not respect or trust its judicial system and its judges to be fair and efficient eventually disintegrates into lawlessness and resulting dictatorship and oppression. The rabbis of Midrash and Talmud commented regarding the opening verse in the book of Ruth which speaks about the era of the Judges of Israel after the death of Yehoshua, "woe to a generation that continually judges its judges negatively!" That is a warning that should be taken to heart equally by the judges of the generation and their public society. Because of the difficulty that always arises in attempting to achieve any modicum of true justice in civil disputes – and with Jewish society, for good or for better, a litigious society – the Talmud advocated mediation and arbitration as being the better way to solve disputed monetary issues. All lawyers in the United States are well aware of Lincoln's statement that "a poor settlement of a case is still better than a good lawsuit." Unfortunately, that does not appear to be a widely accepted tenet of behavior in the current increasingly aggressive methodology in the practice of law. Compromise forces us to acknowledge our imperfections and our inability to arrive at true and ultimate justice on our own. The rabbis of the Talmud again stated that a good and fair court composed of pious scholars will be granted Divine assistance in rendering its decision in a case that actually goes to final trial and judgment. Even such a court cannot achieve ultimate justice by its own human means. Divine aid is required to approach a fair and equitable decision in judicial matters. Since Divine aid is never guaranteed to any human endeavor, the rabbis strongly urged the idea of compromise and settlement for all issues in human dispute. The rabbis in Avot characterized the idea that "what is mine is mine and what is yours is yours" as possibly being a trait of the wicked people of Sodom. It allows no room to compromise and to move on in life. And, perhaps, that is the most practical type of justice – the idea of compromise and the realization that most instances in life less is more – that any human society can accomplish. Shabat shalom. **Rabbi Berel Wein**

---

[http://www.ou.org/torah/article/rabbi\\_weinrebs\\_torah\\_column\\_parshas\\_shoftim1](http://www.ou.org/torah/article/rabbi_weinrebs_torah_column_parshas_shoftim1)

Orthodox Union

[www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org) **Rabbi Weinreb's Torah Column, Parshas Shoftim**

**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb** Tree-like

I love metaphors. An apt metaphor can help stimulate boundless creativity and can lead to a deeper and richer understanding of the concept being studied.

Take, for example, the metaphor of a tree as representing a human being. We find this metaphor in this week's Torah portion, Shoftim, in the following verse:

"When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it, to seize it; do not destroy its tree, by swinging an ax against it; for from it you will eat, and you shall not cut it down; because man is a tree of the field, to come against you in a siege." (Deuteronomy 20:19)

I am aware that there are alternative translations of the phrase under consideration, and that some render it as a question, "Is a tree of the field like a man?" But the literal meaning of the phrase is declarative. Man is like a tree of the field.

How? Let us count the ways.

For starters, King David himself in the very first chapter of Psalms compares the righteous person to a tree. "He is like a tree planted beside streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose foliage never fades, and whatever he does prospers." Of all the metaphors available to the psalmist to paint the picture of the good man, the tree is the one he finds most fitting.

The rabbis also use the metaphor of the tree to capture the essence of one aspect of humanity. Thus, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah would say, "He whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, to what can he be compared? To a tree whose branches are many but whose roots are few, so that any wind can come and uproot it and turn it over on its face... But he whose deeds exceed his wisdom, to what can he be compared? To a tree whose branches are few but whose roots are many, so that even if all the winds of the worlds beset him, they cannot move him from his place..." (Avot 3:22)

The righteous person is like a tree beside a stream. The ethical man of action who puts his wisdom into practice has deep roots which give him confidence and security.

There are so many other ways in which we resemble the tree. The tree regenerates, and the wind carries its seeds to great distances. So too, mankind is perpetuated over the generations, and sometimes our descendants take root in corners of the earth that are far removed from us.

When I close my eyes and try to imagine the tree, two different images compete for my mind's attention. One is the tree standing alone in the field, with long and drooping overhanging branches, providing shade for those who sit under it. So too, I can imagine human beings in my own life and in the history of humanity who stood apart and were misunderstood, yet provided physical or spiritual shelter to so many others.

The other image I have is of one tree, not alone, but together with many others constituting an impenetrable and mysterious forest. And so too, human beings band together into social groups which contain their own idiosyncrasies, which seem impenetrable to the outsider.

There is a lesson in the metaphor of the tree for that most important human process: education. This lesson is so well-expressed in the lines of the poet, Alexander Pope: "Tis education forms the common mind: Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclin'd."

Trees left to their own devices grow wildly. Proper cultivation can direct their growth positively and productively. So too, humans benefit from proper "bending," discipline and training.

And then there is the sad, but ultimate, connection between the tree and the human being. Trees wither, and trees die. They are subject to the forces of nature: fire, wind, deterioration and decay. Yes, we know of trees that have endured for centuries, but even those lengthy life spans eventually come to an end.

I would like to end this brief contemplation of the many analogies between mankind and the trees with a passage from the ancient Greek poet, Aristophanes, which is so reminiscent of more than one passage in our High Holiday liturgy:

"Mankind, fleet of life, like tree leaves, weak creatures of clay, unsubstantial as shadows, wingless, ephemeral, wretched, mortal and dreamlike."

But there is a happier connection between people and trees, and that is through the Torah, which is itself compared to a tree, the tree of life; "eitz chaim hi."

Indeed, "Man is like the tree of the field," withering or able to thrive, depending on one's own life circumstances.

---

from ravadlerstein@torah.org reply-to editor@torah.org,  
ravadlerstein@torah.org to ravhirsch@torah.org date Thu, Aug 12,  
2010 at 4:05 PM subject **The Timeless Rav Hirsch - Parshas  
Shoftim mailed-by torah.org**  
**The Timeless Rav Hirsch**  
**by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein**

To sponsor an edition of the The Timeless Rav Hirsch e-mail list, click here  
Parshas Shoftim Altars Are Not Green1 You shall not plant an Asherah-  
tree – nor any tree – next to the altar of Hashem your G-d, which you make  
for yourself[2].

Who could object to decorating the altar with some of the natural beauty  
of G-d's creation? Besides adding some esthetically pleasing accents to the  
otherwise stark, stony expanse of the main altar, reminding us about  
Hashem's role as Master of Nature would seem to do us some good.

Clearly, the Torah feels otherwise – and with good reason. The worship  
of the G-d of Nature falls so far short of the Jewish mission, that the Torah  
bans it altogether.

The Asherah did not simply add a bit of green enhancement to a proper  
understanding of Hashem. The Asherah limited and distorted that  
understanding. It boxed G-d into Creation, into the physical and palpable  
world. Pagan gods were inseparable from forces of Nature. Their rule, their  
kingdoms, their spheres of influence were limited to the display of those  
forces within the world around, often pitting one god/force against another.  
Humans paid homage to these gods, hoping to tap into their physical power  
for some favor or gain. The word Asherah comes from the word asher, to  
make fulfilled or thrive. You tended to the Asherah planted in honor of a  
particular god. Your care made the tree flourish and thrive. In recognition  
of the honor you showed it, its god helped you out with some special  
assistance, placing some natural force at your disposal.

Such an approach is a primitive pantheism, seeing G-d everywhere in the  
physical universe, and nowhere else. The moral realm remains untouched  
by the gods, who have no interest in the inner refinement of puny ungodly  
Man. The Torah abhors this way of conceiving and serving G-d. The  
service of Hashem requires us to subjugate our inner lives to Him, to extend  
His influence to controlling our wants and desires, and the development of  
our character and personalities. We approach the physical world guided by  
His instruction, not armed by His power. Only when we introduce His Will  
to the moral sphere, when we respond to it and change our inner selves,  
have we accomplished anything of value. With it, we have done everything;  
without it, we have done nothing. Only one pasuk earlier[3], the Torah laid  
down the great principle of tzedek, tzedeh tirdof – you will surely and  
assiduously pursue righteousness. Banning the Asherah means focusing  
upon the power that recognizing Him should kindle within us, and not  
upon the power of G-d in the natural world. It is logical extension of the  
mitzvah of pursuing righteousness.

Chazal recognized the impulse to find G-d within Nature (an impulse  
which grows in popularity in the countries in which we live). They  
understood the danger that this impulse could easily lead people to worship  
the G-d of Nature rather than the G-d of morality. They went so far as to  
buttress the prohibition against planting Asherah trees by banning any kind  
of wooden structure surrounding the altar[4].

The next pasuk further distances ourselves from focusing upon the G-d of  
Nature. It prohibits using stone monuments to worship Hashem. It tells us  
that Hashem, as it were, "hates" such monuments.

This is puzzling. Our holy patriarchs made good use of these matzevos. It  
is difficult enough to understand why Hashem would end a practice that

served us well in the first generations of our peoplehood. It is much harder  
to comprehend why the cherished service of the Fathers becomes detested  
when practiced by the sons.

Yet, the idea that we have developed explains the shift admirably. In a  
world populated by pagan Nature-worshippers, the first order of business  
was to place all of Nature under the rule of a single Deity, bringing all the  
diversity and disunity under the direction of the One G-d, rather than the  
resultant of the turf battles between spoiled dysfunctional gods[5].

The stone monument was a perfect place to reject the pagan theology.  
The matzevah was nothing more than an outcropping of rock, a piece of G-  
d's creation that struck a human observer as interesting. It reminded the  
person of the Power of G-d in creation, and was the appropriate platform  
upon which to declare that the One G-d was responsible for all of Nature,  
not a gaggle of them. There was room for the matzevah alongside the altar,  
the mizbeach. Indeed, the avos used both.

Prior to the creation of a Jewish people, the service of G-d was limited.  
There was no large group, ready to take G-d consciousness, and live a  
national life so guided by His Will, that it paid homage to Him. The service  
of G-d, at least insofar as the message that it conveyed to the world at large,  
sought to convey the idea that there was a single G-d of Nature, and in the  
continuing unfolding of Nature in history. This is what the avos did, and  
why they frequently made use of the matzevah.

This all changed with the birth of the Jewish nation, and with its receiving  
its charter at Sinai. Now, the first phase had come to an end. G-d could be,  
and had to be, recognized for His mastery of our inner lives. This would  
come about chiefly through human activity, through changing our behavior  
at every juncture of life. Altars are not found in the natural world as are  
matzevos. They are built by human hands, placing stone on top of stone.

From this point on, any service of G-d that found Him to be the Master of  
Nature, but did not make Him Master of our inner lives, and hence our  
behavior, would be unacceptable. Moreover, it would be fully hated. The  
old matzevah has been replaced by the consciousness of the Oneness of  
Hashem that was one of the most important contributions Klal Yisrael has  
made to date to the civilized world. The next great contribution - showing  
how an entire people can invoke that consciousness to make their thoughts  
and behavior more G-d-like in a host of different countries, vocations, and  
circumstances – still remains to be perfectly conveyed. It is part of the  
importance of the altar.

1. Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Devarim 16:21-22 2. Devarim 16:21  
3. Devarim 16:20 4. Ramban, Avodah Zarah, 6:10 5. Furthermore, this  
Unity was something that Avraham discovered, according to Chazal, within  
Nature. He sensed the Designer from within the design, and understood the  
unity of a world that was a refraction of the Unity of its Creator.

---

**Penimim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas  
Shoftim Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>**

Thu, Aug 12, 2010 at 3:28 AM To: Penimim  
<penimim@shemayisrael.com> PARSHAS SHOFTIM Judges and officers  
shall you appoint for yourself in all your gates. (16:18) The word lecha, for  
yourself, seems to be superfluous. Obviously, the judges are "for yourself."  
For whom else shall they be? Horav Tzvi Hirsch Ferber, zl, views this issue  
pragmatically. I say this because he was the rav of London's West End  
during the early part of the twentieth century. Let us picture the scenario in  
many schools, shuls, religious organizations, who have selected a rav,  
principal, religious leader. The members of the selection committee/board  
feel that they are "calling the shots." The spiritual leader whom they have  
selected is there for the hamon am, common folk. Heaven forbid he should  
admonish them concerning any deficiencies on their part. "They" are above  
reproach. After all, "they" are in charge. The Torah responds to this  
common error with the pasuk, Shoftim v'shotrim titein lecha. "Judges and  
officers shall you appoint for yourself." You are no different than everyone

else in the community. Just because you have selected the spiritual leader, you sign his check and determine its amount, you are not exempt from being under his jurisdiction. The Torah continues, V'saftu ha'am mishpat tzedek. "And they shall judge the people with righteous judgment." When the judge does not act impartially towards his leadership; when all the members of the community must abide by the same code of law; when regulations apply equally to everyone, then we can be assured that the judges' decision will be just.

Similarly, Hashem alluded this concept to Moshe Rabbeinu when He told him to elevate Yehoshua to become his eventual successor. The Torah in Bamidbar 27:19, writes: Kach lecha Yehoshua...v'tzivisa os leineihem, "Take to yourself Yehoshua...and command him before their eyes."

Eineihem is usually translated as "their eyes." Rav Ferber interprets it homiletically as being related to *einei ha'eidah*, "the 'eyes' of the congregation," which is a reference to its leadership. Hashem is informing Moshe that Yehoshua's jurisdiction must also extend to the *einei ha'eidah*. His leadership should encompass the entire spectrum of the Jewish congregation.

When Yaakov Avinu fled his home ahead of his brother, Eisav, who was bent on killing him, he stopped to rest. There were no "rest areas" in those days, so the Patriarch laid down on the side of the road. His pillow consisted of one large stone. Chazal teach that originally there had been a number of stones-- twelve in total - who "argued" among themselves, each demanding: *alai yaniach tzadik es rosho*, "Upon me the righteous person shall rest his head." Yaakov put them all together, hoping that they would all meld into one stone. He realized that this would be a sign from Heaven that his twelve sons/tribes would eventually live in harmony and unite as one group. Rav Ferber interprets this Chazal anecdotally. Each stone demanding that the *tzadik* place his head upon him is an allusion to: "I want the *tzadik* to acquiesce to my demands. I want his head to lie on my shoulders. He will 'nod his head' in agreement with any concerns and demands."

The Patriarch understood that this deficiency in human character will destroy the underpinnings of the nation. Harmony must reign: *Klal Yisrael must unify under one head of state whose authority is unquestionable and whose power is unimpeachable. Only then will we survive the long galus, exile.*

You shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left. (17:11)

Chazal teach us that even if the *chachamim*, Torah leaders, inform us that our right is our left, and vice versa - in other words, even if what they tell us seems to contradict reality as we know it - we must, nevertheless, believe them. Belief in our sages, *emunas chachamim*, demands that we accept that the truth lies in the hands of the *chachamim* - not in our own understanding. This is the basis of Torah, without which our entire *mesorah*, tradition, is meaningless. The word of the *chacham* is the word of the Torah. One who defies the rulings of the *chachamim* rebels against the foundations of our Torah. Hence, the *zekein mamre*, rebellious elder, is put to death for his refusal to submit to the rulings of the Torah's leadership. This is what is meant by Chazal's statement, "Whoever transgresses the words of the sages is subject to death." (*Bereishis 4b*).

Chazal teach that the reverence/awe one has for his *rebbe*, Torah teacher, should be similar to the fear he has of Heaven (*Pirkei Avos 4:15*). At first glance, Chazal seem to be telling us how great our *rebbeim* are; how significant they must be in our eyes. There is, however, a deeper message to be gleaned from Chazal. *Horav Mordechai Gifter*, *zl*, explains that Chazal are suggesting to us that the manner in which we fear our Torah teachers should coincide with the manner in which we fear Heaven. Just as one cannot fear Heaven without first possessing *emunah*, faith, in Heaven, likewise, he cannot fear his *rebbe* unless he first places his trust in him. Reverence and fear are the natural consequences of faith and trust. Awe is the result of respect.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* points out that few people in life do not rely heavily on having trust and faith in others. Be it a student in the classroom, a

patient in the doctor's office, a passenger on board a jetliner; everyone, somehow, at some time, places his trust in others. Imagine a passenger who is onboard a flight which suddenly encounters severe turbulence. The last thing that the passenger considers is running down the aisle, forcing open the cockpit door, wresting the controls from the pilot and personally attempting to fly the airplane. Only a slightly disturbed individual would entertain such an idea, since he knows that he has no idea how to fly the plane. He will sit back, grip his seat, say *Tehillim*, and acquiesce to the notion that the experts know what they are doing. Since we are able to accept this notion concerning mundane, physical matters, why are we so insistent on being in control concerning spiritual matters? We seem to have a strong, almost insubordinate, desire to govern our own affairs to the point that if we fail to agree with a Torah leader, we immediately go into attack mode. Is our Torah leadership any less capable than the pilot in whose hands we supposedly place our lives?

Rav Gifter explains that man's ability to submit himself to another individual's expertise is a G-d given *chesed*, kindness. Indeed, without this *chesed*, the world would be in a constant state of chaos. Hashem provided this *chesed* only in the area of the mundane, physical, material component of our lives. He did not create man with a natural proclivity to submit himself to spiritual matters, because man has to labor long and hard on his own in order to achieve this spiritual plateau. Chazal teach us (*Berachos 33b*) *Ha'kol b'yeidei Shomayim chutz m'yiraas Shomayim*. "Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven." Hashem does not make us into G-d-fearing individuals. It is up to each and every one of us to achieve this goal on his own. Thus, we must channel our natural sense of submissiveness to all things physical, to the spiritual dimension. By putting it to use for spirituality, we will each ultimately achieve our goal.

You shall be wholehearted with Hashem, your G-d. (18:13)

Following on the heels of the prohibitions against seeking the advice of the soothsayer, astrologer, enchanter, sorcerer, charmer, or any other similar type of aberrant practitioner, the Torah admonishes the Jew to be wholesome in his belief in Hashem. A Jew has no need to inquire into the future because he believes in Hashem with perfect faith. He trusts in the Almighty to do for him what He sees fit. *Temimus*, wholeheartedness, is total commitment, total faith. Anything less than total is not considered whole. To trust in Hashem out of convenience, most of the time; to believe in Him for most everything - but when it concerns earning a living, he acts somewhat hypocritically - is not wholesome faith. We are never separated from Hashem and, therefore, every issue in life is to be decided by Him.

After all is said and done, we pay lip service to *emunah*, faith in Hashem. We trust in Him most of the time, but it is far from *temimus*. *Horav Pinchas Kornitzer*, *zl*, note that there are two areas of observance that are to be observed in Hashem *Elokecha*, "with Hashem, your G-d." They are the *temimus* and *tzinius*, modesty, as the *Navi Michah* (6:8) says, *V'hatznea leches im Hashem Elokecha*, "And walk modestly with Hashem, your G-d." Why is this? He explains that concerning these two ethical qualities, *temimus* and *tzinius*, genuine wholehearted faith and modesty, we can deceive people. There are those who present themselves as paragons of fidelity to Hashem, but really present nothing more than a *fa'ade*, a charade they play with people. They are masters of deception. Acting with great humility, presenting themselves as exemplars of modesty, Heaven help the one who does not grant them proper recognition or does not pay them the gratitude they expect. Yes, they insist that it is all *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven, but it is all a sham.

The only One Who knows the truth is Hashem. He sees into a person's heart; He delves into his essence. He knows how credible is his *temimus*, how veritable is his modesty. In order to be a true *maamin*, believer, and a *tzanua*, modest person, it must be in Hashem *Elokecha*, with the Almighty attesting to his mastery over these virtues.

The *Kohen* shall step forward and speak to the people. He shall say to them, "Listen, Yisrael! Today you are drawing near to battle against your

enemies. Do not be fainthearted, do not be afraid, do not panic, and do not be demoralized because of them. (20:2,3)

The Kohen Mashuach Milchamah, anointed to lead them in battle, addressed the soldiers with a "pep" talk to raise their morale as they prepared for battle. In his commentary, Rashi focuses on the opening statement, Shema Yisrael! "Hear O Yisrael! Even if you have no merit in your favor other than the recitation of the Shema, you are worthy of being saved." There is no question that Shema Yisrael is a compelling prayer which indicates our commitment to the Almighty, but is it all that powerful? Why does it have the ability to save a person from his enemy?

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, explains that the Shema Yisrael is a declaration of kabalas ol Malchus Shomayim, accepting the yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom upon oneself. The merit of this acceptance has the power to save a person from being killed in battle. Furthermore, even if death was decreed on a person, Shema Yisrael will ensure that he is on an elevated spiritual plane when he leaves this world.

The Maharal underscores the words Hashem Echad, G-d is One, which expresses the unity of G-d, as the pivotal phrase of this declaration. Articulating these words recapitulates man's conviction in the unity and exclusivity of Hashem: "The oneness in which they believed would triumph over the strength of their enemies, for the Jewish People were bound up with the power of Hashem's Oneness. Since there is nothing apart from Him, therefore, He triumphs over everything, there being no other power except for Him." Klal Yisrael's connection to this oneness grants them an aspect of this power - the power of One.

Maharal continues with an understanding of the connection between belief and victory. In proportion to the nation's internalization of belief in Hashem, dominion and strength, to that extent, they will be saved from their enemies. When the Kohen spoke to the soldiers, his purpose was to concretize their faith in Hashem so that they would emerge victorious.

This is a compelling statement. Does faith have the power to influence events on the battlefield? Why should the believer have greater chances of winning the war? Simply speaking, one places his trust in some power. It might be his own, or he might attribute his power to nature, weapons, his support system. He had better be correct, or he will wallow in defeat. One who places his faith in Hashem knows that when he truly believes in Hashem's Omnipotence - that only He can do anything, that in light of this belief - other powers are rendered futile and powerless. The Jew who goes into battle is firm in his belief. He feels that he is going to be victorious, because Hashem was on his side. With the power of our convictions, we can vanquish all of our enemies - physical and spiritual. The yetzer hora, evil inclination, cannot dominate those whose trust in Hashem is unequivocal.

Horav Mordechai Miller, zl, supports this idea with a number of proofs, of which I will cite a few. Yaakov Avinu worked seven long, hard years before Lavan would allow him to marry Rachel. These years could have been a most difficult span of time for him. Yet, the Torah writes: "Yaakov worked for Rachel seven years, and, in his love for her, they seemed like a few days." (Bereishis 29:20) Yaakov does not come across as looking for either a way out or a way to hasten his seven year "sentence." The years passed, and Yaakov worked. It was all a labor of love. He was preparing for the union that would create Klal Yisrael. His attitude made the difference.

Earlier, when Yaakov was fleeing from his brother, Eisav, we find that he experienced kefitzas ha'derech, Hashem shortened the geographical distance of his trip. He had passed by Bais El, missing the opportunity to pray there. Upset that he did not pray in the place where his father and grandfather before him had once prayed, he was prepared to return, despite the difficulty of the journey. His desire was so strong that Hashem literally shortened the distance.

It is all in the attitude. A positive attitude generates positive results, while a negative outlook brings about results that are not necessarily encouraging. Rav Miller feels that conviction can work inwards, as well. Every person should cultivate a deep sense of faith in himself - in his own talents, in his

own ability, and in his own personality. For only by believing in oneself can we transform our talents from potential to reality. He cites the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos 3:18: Chaviv adam she'nivra b'tzelem... "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of G-d. It was a special love that was made known to him that he was created in the image of G-d." Man is not only endowed with unlimited potential, but Hashem, whose love is boundless, informs man of his latent strengths. The awareness that man has of his incredible potential should constantly be reiterated and reflected upon. Thus, that which is still potential and abstract can be concretized and achieved, so that man can then infuse the world with light.

For some reason, however, many of us do not make it. We simply do not maximize our G-d-given potential. Why? The journey to self-discovery is very difficult. Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, was wont to say, "As unfortunate as it is for a person not to acknowledge his deficiencies, it is far worse for him to be unaware of his strong points, for it is through their implementation that he can achieve fulfillment and realize Hashem's Master Plan." Exactly why many of us fail to take note of our strengths, focusing rather on our weaknesses, is a point for discussion. I think we fear the added responsibilities, the extra work. We also fear failure. It is so much easier not to enter the race, than to enter, work hard and lose. We forget that unless we enter the race, we have no chance of winning. Last, if Hashem has provided us with great potential, He has done so for a reason. He believes in us. He trusts us. Yet, we are willing to "let Him down," because it serves us better.

Let me conclude with a well-known - but often ignored - vignette. The famous Rebbe, R' Zushe, zl, m'Annapole, was once weeping. Concerned with seeing their revered Rebbe in such a state of depressive emotion, they approached him and asked. "Rebbe, what is wrong?" "My students, I am worried about meeting my Maker. If on the Yom HaDin, Day of Judgment, I will be asked why I was not like Avraham Avinu, I have no fear. I will simply respond, 'Almighty G-d, You did not endow me with the spiritual qualities that comprised our Patriarch's spiritual persona. I could never possibly be like him.'"

He then went on to enumerate a number of other Torah giants from past generations, employing the same rationale: "I was not endowed with their qualities, so I could never have achieved their distinction!" "But," Rav Zushe cried out, "if Hashem asks me, 'Zushe, why were you not like Zushe?' What will I say? What excuse can I give? I have nothing to answer to Him."

Hashem has endowed each and every one of us with great potential. Our role is first to uncover and then to maximize this potential. If Hashem has given it to us, apparently He knows something that we refuse to recognize. How can we deny Hashem His nachas? How can we refuse to make use of the gifts that He, in His all-encompassing wisdom, has determined we could bring to fruition? One day we will stand before the Heavenly Tribunal. Then there will be no excuses. Why should we make them now?

"Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him return to his house." (20:8)

The Kohen was to announce to the Jewish soldiers who are about to go into battle that certain individuals were exempt from fighting. Their fear would overcome their ability to fight. Rashi explains what those soldiers feared. He cites Rabbi Yossi HaGellili who says that this declaration is addressed to someone who fears aveiros she'b'yado, "sins he has (in his hands)." This refers to one who has been very meticulous in his observance, such that the slightest infraction on his part brought him great anxiety, therefore distracting him from focusing on the battle. Chazal explain that these sins were of the same caliber as one who speaks between the recitation of brachos of Tefillin. In other words, even a rudimentary deficiency in his meticulous observance will cause him great concern. When we consider what kind of "sinner" this man must be, we are quite taken aback. There are those whose mitzvos pale in comparison to this person's aveiros. Clearly, he must be a righteous person, if he is anxious about even the smallest lapse in observance. One would think that fearing

aveiros she'be'yado is an enviable quality, in fact, a virtue, rather than a reason to return from battle. Why is this soldier considered less than meritorious?

Horav Avraham Schorr, Shlita, quotes the Baal HaTurim who cites the Mesorah, tradition, that there are two instances in the Torah where the word ha'yarei is used: The above pasuk, and Ha'yarei es d'var Hashem mei'avdei Pharaoh, "He, from among the servants of Pharaoh who feared G-d" (Shemos 9:20). Beyond defining yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, as a trait which reflects cognizance, awareness of Hashem, what connection is there between the two pesukim? One refers to the Jewish soldier who fears the negative effect his few sins would have on his emerging alive and well from battle, and the other one addresses the fear of G-d manifest by the G-d-fearing Egyptian.

Rav Schorr relates an incident which took place concerning the Bais Aharon, Horav Aharon Karliner, zl, who, one Succos, did not have a proper Succah ready in preparation for the Festival. It was Erev Succos, and it appeared that it would not happen. At the last minute, a chasid came forward and said that he had prepared a succah in accordance with the Rebbe's stringencies, and it was in "move-in" condition. The Rebbe was overjoyed, and he expressed his profound pleasure to the chasid. "In return for what you have done for me in availing me the opportunity to celebrate the holy festival of Succos properly, I will bless you with one of two rewards: outstanding wealth; or your place in Gan Eden will be next to mine - we will be together in Olam Habba."

One can imagine that any individual who has achieved a level of spiritual devotion such that he merits a place in Olam Habba next to the Bais Aharon was not a simple person. He is clearly an individual of spiritual repute. Thus, his response might cause us to wonder: "Rebbe, I request wealth!" Those in the Rebbe's immediate circle wondered at this reply. How could a person turn down the opportunity to bask in the proximity of the Rebbe's Olam Habba? When asked, the chasid explained, "To be in the Rebbe's proximity is 'ich' and more 'ich.' It is all about 'me.'" I would rather receive a blessing that will avail me the wherewithal to help others. My purpose in life is to do good for other Jews - not to just take care of 'me/myself!'"

This is a Jew's raison d'etre. In his preface to Nefesh HaChaim, Horav Chaim Volozhiner writes that man's purpose in this world is l'ho'il l'acharinei, "to help others." If the blessing was not going to further his role in the world, he was not interested. A similar incident is recorded with Horav Bunim, zl, m'Peshischa, who commented, "If Hashem would give me the opportunity to trade places with Avraham Avinu, I would not accept, because Hashem does not benefit from such an exchange. The world would continue to have the same two people. What advantage is there to that? My purpose is to do more for Hashem."

Horav Elimelech, zl, m'Grodzisk explains aveiros she'be'yado as referring to a person who is concerned only with those sins that are b'yado, his hand - his sins. He is not anxious about the sins of others - only those which he has personally committed. The G-d-fearing Egyptian acted in a similar manner. He was concerned with the safety of his animals. His fear was based on himself.

This idea is especially important as we are about to conclude another year. As we approach Elul/Tishrei and the Yamim Noraim, High Holy Days, we must remember why Hashem placed us on this world. Our greatest defense for continued good health and welfare is the fulfillment of our raison d'etre of l'ho'il l'acharinei. This should be our life-long goal. It is certainly never too late to start doing our part.

Va'ani Tefillah And you made his name Avraham You found his heart faithful before You.

Racheim means compassion. Rogez means anger. The gimatria, numerical equivalent, of racheim: reish, ches, mem - is 248. The numerical value of rogez: reish, vov, gimel - is 216. The difference between the two "attitudes" is 32 or the numerical equivalent of lev, heart. The Ben Yehoyadah explains that the prayer rendered by a tzadik, righteous person,

which emanates from his "lev," heart, has the power to transform rogez, anger, to racheim, compassion. It adds the "32" and changes not only the numerical value, but also the very essence of the attitude. This is the interpretation of the pasuk as rendered by the Ben Yehoyadah: V'samta shemo Avraham, "And You made his name Avraham," The Patriarch was called this name, because it has the numerical equivalent of racheim, 248. Hashem did this because, "You found his heart, levavo, faithful before You." Avraham imbued his entreaty with levavo, heart, thereby transforming anger to compassion. Hence, the name Avraham reflects this quality.

Sponsored by Rabbi and Mrs. Sroy Levitansky in memory of Mr. Sol Rosenfeld Shlomo ben Tzvi a"h Peninim mailing list  
Peninim@shemayisrael.com  
[http://shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/peninim\\_shemayisrael.com](http://shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/peninim_shemayisrael.com)