

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The parsha of Shoftim is the classic source of the three types of leadership in Judaism, called by the sages the "three crowns": of priesthood, kingship and Torah. (Mishnah Avot 4:13. Maimonides, Talmud Torah, 3:1) This is the first statement in history of the principle, set out in the eighteenth century by Montesquieu in L'Esprit des Lois, and later made fundamental to the American constitution, of "the separation of powers."

(Montesquieu's division, followed in most Western democracies, is between legislature, executive and judiciary. In Judaism, primary legislation comes from God. Kings and the sages had the power to introduce only secondary legislation, to secure order and "make a fence around the law." Hence in Judaism the king was the executive; the priesthood in biblical times was the judiciary. The "crown of Torah" worn by the prophets was a unique institution: a Divinely sanctioned form of social criticism -- a task assumed in the modern age, not always successfully, by public intellectuals. There is today a shortage of prophets. Perhaps there always was.)

Power, in the human arena, is to be divided and distributed, not concentrated in a single person or office. So, in biblical Israel, there were kings, priests and prophets. Kings had secular or governmental power. Priests were the leaders in the religious domain, presiding over the service in the Temple and other rites, and giving rulings on matters to do with holiness and purity. Prophets were mandated by God to be critical of the corruptions of power and to recall the people to their religious vocation whenever they drifted from it.

Our parsha deals with all three roles. Undoubtedly, though, the most attention-catching is the section on kings, for many reasons. First, this is the only command in the Torah to carry with it the explanation that this is what other people do: "When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, 'Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us...'" (Deut. 17:14). Normally, in the Torah, the Israelites are commanded to be different. The fact that this command is an exception was enough to signal to commentators throughout the ages that there is a certain ambivalence about the idea of monarchy

altogether.

Second, the passage is strikingly negative. It tells us what a king must not do, rather than what he should do. He should not "acquire great numbers of horses," or "take many wives" or "accumulate large amounts of silver and gold" (17:16-17). These are the temptations of power, and as we know from the rest of Tanakh, even the greatest -- King Solomon himself -- was vulnerable to them.

Third, consistent with the fundamental Judaic idea that leadership is service, not dominion or power or status or superiority, the king is commanded to be humble: he must constantly read the Torah "so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God... and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites" (17:19-20). It is not easy to be humble when everyone is bowing down before you and when you have the power of life and death over your subjects.

Hence the extreme variation among the commentators as to whether monarchy is a good institution or a dangerous one. Maimonides holds that the appointment of a king is an obligation, Ibn Ezra that it is a permission, Abarbanel that it is a concession, and Rabbenu Bachya that it is a punishment -- an interpretation known, as it happens, to John Milton at one of the most volatile (and anti-monarchical) periods of English history. (See Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic*, Harvard University Press, 2010, 41-42.)

There is, though, one positive and exceptionally important dimension of royalty. The king is commanded to study constantly: "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel." (Deut. 17:18-20)

Later, in the book that bears his name, Moses' successor Joshua is commanded in very similar terms: "Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." (Josh. 1:8)

Leaders learn. That is the principle at stake here. Yes, they have advisors, elders, counsellors, an

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inner court of sages and literati. And yes, biblical kings had prophets -- Samuel to Saul, Nathan to David, Isaiah to Hezekiah and so on -- to bring them the word of the Lord. But those on whom the destiny of the nation turns may not delegate away the task of thinking, reading, studying and remembering. They are not entitled to say: I have affairs of state to worry about. I have no time for books. Leaders must be scholars, bnei Torah, "children of the Book," if they are to direct and lead the people of the Book.

The great statesmen of modern times understood this, at least in secular terms. Gladstone, four times Prime Minister of Britain, had a library of 32,000 books. We know -- because he made a note in his diary every time he finished reading a book -- that he read 22,000 of them. Assuming he did so over the course of eighty years (he lived to be 88), this meant that he read on average 275 books a year, or more than five each week for a lifetime. He also wrote many books on a wide variety of topics from politics to religion to Greek literature, and his scholarship was often impressive. For example he was, according to Guy Deutscher in *Through the Language Glass*, the first person to realise that the ancient Greeks did not have a sense of colour and that Homer's famous phrase, "the wine-dark sea" referred to texture rather than colour.

Visit David Ben Gurion's house in Tel Aviv and you will see that, while the ground floor is spartan to the point of austerity, the first floor is a single vast library of papers, periodicals and 20,000 books. He had another 4,000 or so in Sde Boker. Like Gladstone, Ben Gurion was a voracious reader as well as a prolific author. Disraeli was a best-selling novelist before he entered politics. Winston Churchill wrote almost fifty books and won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Reading and writing are what separate the statesman from the mere politician.

The two greatest kings of early Israel, David and Solomon, were both authors, David of Psalms, Solomon (according to tradition) of *The Song of Songs*, *Proverbs* and *Kohelet/Ecclesiastes*. The key biblical word associated with kings is *chokhmah*, "wisdom." Solomon in particular was known for his wisdom: "When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he

had wisdom from God to administer justice." (1 Kings 3:12)

Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt... From all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom. (1 Kings 5:10-14)

When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon... she was overwhelmed. She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard"... The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. (1 Kings 10:4-24)

We should note that *chokhmah*, wisdom, means something slightly different from Torah, which is more commonly associated with priests and prophets than kings. *Chokhmah* includes worldly wisdom, which is a human universal rather a special heritage of Jews and Judaism. A midrash states "If someone says to you, 'There is wisdom among the nations of the world,' believe it. If they say, 'There is Torah among the nations of the world,' do not believe it." (Eichah Rabbati 2:13) Broadly speaking, in contemporary terms *chokhmah* refers to the sciences and humanities -- to whatever allows us to see the universe as the work of God and the human person as the image of God. Torah is the specific moral and spiritual heritage of Israel.

The case of Solomon is particularly poignant because, for all his wisdom, he was not able to avoid the three temptations set out in our parsha: he did acquire great numbers of horses, he did take many wives and he did accumulate great wealth. Wisdom without Torah is not enough to save a leader from the corruptions of power.

Though few of us are destined to be kings, presidents or prime ministers, there is a general principle at stake. Leaders learn. They read. They study. They take time to familiarise themselves with the world of ideas. Only thus do they gain the perspective to be able to see further and clearer than others. To be a Jewish leader means spending time to study both Torah and *chokhmah*: *chokhmah* to understand the world as it is, Torah to understand the world as it ought to be.

Leaders should never stop learning. That is how they grow and teach others to grow with them.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"When you draw near to a city to wage war against it you shall [first] call out to it for peace." (Deuteronomy 20:10)

Despite the bad press we constantly receive at the hands of the media, I do not believe there is an army in the history of world warfare which operates with the degree of ethical sensitivity that is adhered to by the Israeli Defense Forces; we never target civilians despite the fact that our enemy only targets Jewish civilians. We have always subscribed to a policy known as "purity of arms," the foundation for which harks back to the Bible, and particularly to this week's Torah portion of Shoftim.

Both Maimonides, as well as Nahmanides, maintain that this principle of initially requesting peace before waging war - and for Maimonides, that includes the enemies' willingness to accept the seven Noahide laws of morality, most notably "Thou shalt not murder" (Maimonides, Laws of Kings 6:1; Nahmanides, ad loc.) - applies even when waging a battle in self-defense, even when warring against Amalek or the seven indigenous inhabitants of the land of Canaan.

But then, as we read further, the picture seems to get a bit complex, even murky. The Bible continues to prescribe that if the enemy refuses to make peace, then "from those of the cities which the Lord your God has given you as an inheritance, you shall not leave any living being alive; you must utterly destroy them" (Deut. 20:16-17), and this would seem to include innocent women and children as well. How are we to understand our compassionate Bible, which teaches that every human being is created in the divine image and is therefore inviolate, sanctioning the destruction of innocent residents?

In order to compound our question, only two verses after the command to "utterly destroy" appears the following curious - and exquisitely sensitive - divine charge (Deut. 20:19): "When you lay siege to a city... to wage war against it and capture it, you may not destroy a fruit tree to lift an ax against it; after all, it is from it that you eat, so you may not destroy it because the human being is [derives his sustenance from] the tree of the field;" (or as alternatively rendered, "Is the tree of the field a human being who is capable of escaping a siege?")

Can it be that our Torah cares more about a fruit tree than about innocent human beings?

First of all, one might argue that a fruit tree, which gives human beings nutrition, the wherewithal to live, is of greater benefit than an individual born to an environment which preaches death to all who reject Jihadi fundamentalism or who do not pass the test of Aryan elitism. Such individuals are sub-apples, because they are out to destroy free society.

Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (end of the nineteenth century), dean of Yeshivat Volozhin, in his masterful commentary on the Bible known as Ha'amek Davar, provides the beginning of a second answer. He insists that when the Bible ordains that we "utterly destroy" even the women and children (as it also

commands in Deut. 7:1-2), this is limited "to those who gather against us in battle." (Ha'amek Davar, ad loc.)

It is almost as though the Bible took into account our present war against our present Operation Protective Edge against Hamas, who cynically use the population of Gaza as human shields from which they send out missiles against the innocent Israeli population. If we did not strike back at the Gazan apartments and the UNWRA schools and hospitals which are being used as launching pads against the innocent Israelis, we would be granting a victory to the terrorists and we would be teaching all terrorists to use civilians in such a way. Indeed, war stinks; to paraphrase Golda Meir, I don't hate Hamas for attempting to drive us out of Israel - but I do hate Hamas for making us take the lives of innocent Gazans.

Michael Walzer, in his classic "Just and Unjust Wars," maintains that a soldier's life is not worth more than an innocent victim's life. But we must add to this that if the "innocent victim" has bought into the evil of the enemy, or if the enemy is a terrorist purposely waging war from the thick of residential areas because they know our ethical standards, we dare not allow them to gain the edge and enable evil to triumph.

Yes, we must try as much as possible to wage a moral war but morally we must never allow immorality to triumph. Our sages correctly teach: "Those who are compassionate to the cruel will end up being cruel to the compassionate!" But short of allowing immorality to triumph, the IDF governs its actions on the side of compassion for innocents, even in battle. ©2014 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Law and order are the hallmarks of a functioning democratic society. The concept that one can receive fair redress for damages and hurts through an equitable system of established justice is central to the concept of a free society that provides individual rights to its citizens. However, dictatorships also provide law and order for those who live under their rule - a little too much law and order. And therein lay the eternal contest between an ordered and properly functioning society and an individual's inherent freedoms and rights.

There is a great deal of space and latitude between anarchy and dictatorial rule. The Torah speaks to this issue but allows for a great deal of human and national choice in the matter. The general tenor of Jewish tradition is to be wary of big and powerful government. Avot teaches us not to be known to government and that the nature of government is to demand, albeit apparently lovingly, much from the individual when it is for its own benefit but to be unavailable to help the individual when one is hard

pressed and in need of outside help.

Yet Avot also stresses the necessity for government and the requirement to pray for its success and welfare, for otherwise society would be unlivable. As in all matters of human existence, the Torah here demands from us a good sense of proportion, wisdom and sophistication in dealing with government and society. The Torah does not deal with us in absolute specific terms but rather establishes general parameters of righteous judicial systems and equitable standards of law enforcement.

The Torah is clear in its condemnation of corruption and bias, especially in judicial and legal matters. The poor and the wealthy, the scholar and the unlettered, the well-connected and the unknown, all are to be equal before the eyes of judges and the law. The Torah defines true justice as being the pursuit of righteousness and fairness by just and righteous means. No unjust means can be condoned even in the pursuit of apparently just and righteous causes.

The Torah abhors corruption and all of its forms and methods. The premise of the Torah is that corruption is a natural state of being for humans. We are all somehow corrupted by our past experiences and our preset worldviews. It is interesting to note that, for example, the results of many cases and issues brought before the United States Supreme Court are almost always predictable because of the previous strongly held views of the individual justices.

They are certainly not corrupt in the criminal sense of the word, but in the world of the Torah they are certainly not freed from the taint of corruption. The Torah demands an open mind, a listening ear, flexibility of thought and an understanding of human nature and of the ways of the world from those who would serve as judges of other humans.

These qualities are not found in abundance but they are to be searched for and treasured and respected in Jewish life and law. True and absolute justice may be unattainable in this world. But the concept itself of true justice must always be present in all matters of Jewish law and society. ©2014 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Torah's sympathetic attitude toward ecology surfaces in a law legislating conduct during war.

This week's portion states: "When you besiege a city for many days to wage war against it, to seize it, do not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them, for from it you will eat and you shall not cut it down." The Torah then offers a rationale explaining why the

tree should not be cut down: "Ki ha-Adam etz ha-sadeh lavoh mi-panekha be-matzor." (Deuteronomy 20:19) What do these words mean?

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra offers a simple answer. Human beings depend upon trees to live. We eat their produce. Cutting down a tree is, therefore, forbidden, as it would deny the human being food which is essential for life. For Ibn Ezra, the explanation should be read as a declarative statement. Don't cut down the fruit tree for a person is the fruit tree, depending upon it for sustenance.

Rashi understands the rationale differently. For Rashi, "Ki ha-Adam" should be read as a rhetorical question. "Is a tree a person with the ability to protect itself?" In other words, is the tree of the field a person that it should enter the siege before you?

A fundamental difference emerges between Ibn Ezra and Rashi. For Ibn Ezra, the tree is saved because of the human being, i.e., without fruit trees it would be more difficult for people to find food. Rashi takes a different perspective. For him, the tree is saved for the tree's sake alone, without an ulterior motive. Human beings can protect themselves; trees cannot. The Torah, therefore, comes forth offering a law that protects the tree.

The Torah's tremendous concern for trees expresses itself powerfully in numerous parables. One of the most famous is the story of a traveler in the desert. Walking for days, he's weary and tired, when suddenly he comes upon a tree. He eats from its fruit, rests in the shade and drinks from the small brook at its roots.

When rising the next day, the traveler turns to the tree to offer thanks. "Ilan, ilan, bameh avarkheka, Tree oh Tree, how can I bless you? With fruit that gives sustenance? With branches that give shade? With water that quenches thirst? You have all of this!"

In a tender moment, the traveler looks to the tree and states, "I have only one blessing. May that which comes from you be as beautiful as you are." (Ta'anit 5b, 6a)

This story has become a classic in blessing others with all that is good. Our liturgy includes the classic Talmudic phrase, "These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world." (Shabbat 127a) Trees and human beings interface as trees provide us with metaphors that teach us so much about life.

To those who disparage the environment, our Torah sends a counter message. Trees must be protected, not only for our sake, but for theirs-and for the message they teach about life. One Shabbat, as I walked with my eldest granddaughter Ariella, greeting everyone with Shabbat Shalom, she saw a tree, embraced it, and said, "Shabbat Shalom tree." Ariella certainly has internalized the message of the importance of the tree, may we all be blessed with this

lesson as well. ©2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And do not erect for yourself a monument, which Hashem your G-d despises" (D'varim 16:22). "And even though it was beloved to Him in the days of the Patriarchs, now it is hated, being that [the Canaanites] made it into a standard for idol worship" (Rashi, *ibid*). Because things had changed over time, a form of worship that G-d had previously appreciated was now abhorred (as it were). Because this change occurred before the Torah was given, the result of this change could be incorporated within the Torah's laws. [Why this form of worship was made off limits because it was used for idol worship, whereas others, such as altars and animal sacrifices, were not, is discussed by the commentators (see Ramban; see also <http://tinyurl.com/ov3euzz>).] What about changes that occurred after the Torah was given? If something changed that affects how we relate to G-d, is there a way to adjust our mode of observance to facilitate strengthening our relationship with Him under these new and different circumstances?

This question is a bit misleading, as the same way changes that occurred before the laws were codified in the Torah could be accounted for, G-d -- who is not limited by time and therefore knows the future with as much clarity as He knows the past -- could account for any future changes as well. But what about the next level, rabbinic law? How are societal changes that occurred after the closing of the Talmud, or after the Talmudic discussions were codified into law (i.e. the Shulchan Aruch), taken into account? It can similarly be suggested that because of the impact of such codification, divine providence would ensure that nothing was codified that could not stand the test of time. Nevertheless, it is clear that some changes which occurred over time have impacted religious life, in various ways. And I don't just mean prohibiting things that had been permitted (such as polygamy) or finding legitimate legal loop holes to maintain the spirit of the law (such as *pruzbal*). One such example is the transition from a very limited education for girls to the educational revolution widely attributed to Sara Schenirer, a change that was deemed necessary because it would bring about a wider and stronger level of religious observance in the women being educated and the families and generations they would build.

Recently, some have proposed/advocated for changes in the way synagogue services are conducted, citing similar reasons. I will leave a discussion about whether such changes are halachically permissible to those more qualified, or those even less humble, than I

am. Nevertheless, there are certain seemingly simple points that some may have overlooked.

Although generalizations often lead to misconceptions, they can also be helpful when dealing with large groups (as opposed to individuals). And it should be quite obvious that there are differences between the genders. Having differences doesn't make one better than the other, just different. Each has certain strengths, and, more specifically, are better equipped to deal with certain situations. As a team, the strength of one in a specific area helps both, as does the strength of the other in another area. There can be only one first baseman on the field at a time, and a team will be stronger with a strong first baseman and a strong second baseman than with two strong first basemen or two strong second basemen (since one will have to play out of position). Even though some women exceed in areas where men are usually stronger (and vice versa), a system designed for an entire population will use the "normal" template to maximize potential. And while some latitude for individuality is necessary, the advantages of consistency far outweigh the advantages of an individually-tailored "free-for all."

Since the goal and purpose of religion is to maximize spiritual growth and be a vehicle to foster an ever-improving relationship with our Creator, the differences between men and women often mandate different "game-plans" for achieving this goal. What should "work" for most men may not work for most women (and vice versa), and insisting on both genders using the same formula can be counter-productive. (Of course if the goal is sameness, not spiritual growth, the latter will be sacrificed at the altar of the former; I am assuming, perhaps optimistically, that those who propose changing the way services are conducted are trying to increase spirituality, not promoting social reform for the sake of social reform.) An objective look at our religious requirements, including those that are non-negotiable without crossing clearly established borders, will show that the requirements for men and for women are not the same. Changing things in areas that might be negotiable will not necessarily yield better results. The goal is to be (or become) holy, not just "feel holy" based on a misguided conception of what holiness is.

Another factor to consider is the changing role of the synagogue. In many (if not most) communities, the synagogue has become the primary location/setting within which to express one's "Jewishness." In that context, it becomes patently unfair to allow only half of our population to fully express themselves. But this is not how it was meant to be, nor is it the way it should be or has to be. Ideally, we can "express our Jewishness" wherever we are, whatever we are doing, in the way we act, how we react to and with others, and how we go about doing things. From a strictly ritualistic perspective, the three most prominent identifiers of

religious observance are keeping Shabbos, keeping kosher, and keeping the laws of family purity, none of which apply more in a synagogue or during services than anywhere else. Blessings acknowledging G-d as the source of all things before and after we eat are made wherever we eat, although they may have become so routine (which, on one level, is a good thing) that we don't think about them enough to consider them "expressions of our Jewishness." The main function of the synagogue -- prayer -- need not be done in a synagogue (although it is ideal), and for the most important part of the prayer, the silent Amidah, there is absolutely no gender difference. The one "advantage" the synagogue has is that one must consciously decide to go there (as opposed to doing "Jewish" things wherever you happen to be), which makes us more aware that we are expressing our "Jewishness" when we are there than when we are elsewhere. Nevertheless, this false sense of the synagogue being the primary place where "Jewishness" is expressed is not enough of a reason to adjust how things are done during services.

To be sure, non-egalitarian services are clearly a turn-off for many, as without "taking a closer look" it smacks of misogyny. However, it would be no less fair to accuse proponents of maintaining traditional services as being misogynistic than it would be to accuse proponents of change as having ulterior motives. Are there accusations of reverse misogyny based on women being the caretakers of family purity, challah separation and candle-lighting? Are women less involved in child-rearing than men are, arguably the most important task of a Jewish home? What about hospitality in the home? By reconsidering the role the synagogue really plays in Jewish life, any gender differences that occur during services become far less consequential. And being that the point of the services is to get closer to G-d, and gender differences may preclude mimicking how the other gender conducts services from being beneficial in this regard, it seems highly inadvisable to change our traditional mode of service. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

This week we read the Parsha of Shoftim, which charges us to "Appoint for you judges and officers at all of your gates" (16:18). Rav Moshe Feinstein points out that the word "lecha" (for you) seems superfluous. This commandment could have simply stated, "appoint judges and officers", why did the Torah add the word lecha? The question is even stronger if you consider that the commandment is a society-based commandment, and the extra word is singular. It seems almost contradictory to address an individual while describing a community-based law.

Rav Moshe explains that the Torah is teaching

us a very fundamental concept. In addition to the need for society at large to have these judges and officers, individuals must be both a judge and officer over themselves. The Shlah continues this thought when he explains the continuation of the Passuk (verse), explaining that a person has seven "gates": two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and a mouth. The way that these gates are used will either build or destroy the person. A person must control the flow through these gates. But the Torah also tells us that to accomplish our goal of controlling what comes out of our 'gates', we need both judges AND officers. Judges make the rules, and officers enforce the rules. Not only do we have to make an extra effort to know the rules by which to live, but we also need to build safeguards to help us stick to those rules. (I.e. if the rule is not to speak negatively about others, maybe we should try not to hang around people that do.) If we study the Torah's guidelines, we'll realize their value and understand our need to protect them. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "You shall (trust) wholeheartedly in the Almighty, your God" (Deuteronomy 18:13). We are enjoined to trust in God, but to what degree do we have an obligation to make a normal human effort and what is considered a lack of trust in God?

The question arises regarding testing people before marriage for being carriers of Tay-Sachs disease. Some people wonder whether such testing is not contrary to the trust we are required to have in Divine Providence -- why search for problems when in all probability none exist?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, of blessed memory, (who was one of the foremost authorities on Jewish law) clarified this point: "Although the percentage of infants born with this disease is small and one might be apt to apply the verse: 'You shall trust wholeheartedly in the Almighty,' (which Rashi interprets as meaning that one should not delve into the future) in light of the fact that a simple test has been developed for this, one who does not make use of it is like one who shuts his eyes to what can clearly be seen... and since the birth of such a child, God forbid, causes great anguish... it is prudent for all who are considering marriage to undergo this test." (cited in The Jewish Observer, May, 1986)

Having trust in the Almighty will give a person peace of mind and serenity. However, one should never use a claim of trust in the Almighty to condone laziness or rash behavior. There is a thin line between the virtue of trusting in God and the fault of carelessness and lack of taking responsibility.

The story is told of a man who lived by a river. A policeman warns him to evacuate because of a flood warning. The man rejects the offer and says, "I have

perfect trust in the Almighty to save me." As the water rises, a person in a boat offers to take him to safety. The man again replies with his proclamation of trust and refuses the ride. Finally, as the man is sitting on his roof, a helicopter comes to rescue him; again the man proclaims his trust and refuses the rescue. The water rises, the man drowns and is finally standing in judgment before the Almighty. "God, I had perfect trust in you -- how could you let me down?" The Almighty replies, "But, my son, I sent the policeman, the boat and the helicopter!" *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org*

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Be'eros

"You should be tamim with Hashem your G-d." Be'er Mayim Chaim: "What is the sense of the word tamim? It has been translated at times as 'perfect' and 'blameless.' Surely, though, the Torah is not simply telling us that we should always be completely free of all sin. That is simply unattainable for most people. For the small number who can comply, the instruction would be gratuitous, because the Torah's prohibition of each aveirah would suffice without any further exhortation."

Chazal (Pesachim 113B) apply the pasuk to probing the future through various means like astrology. According to them, we should probably translate tamim as "wholehearted." Temimus would imply that a person not concern himself with what the future might have in store for him. His wholehearted devotion to Hashem assures him that he is in good hands, and whatever the future will bring is supervised by Hashem's providence.

We can try something different. Chazal (Berachos 54A) tell us to serve Hashem with both of our inclinations, both the good and the bad. Just how are we to serve Hashem with the yetzer hora?

We recognize that the yetzer hora is bound up with the lower animal soul. This nefesh is the source of all unseemly personality traits, and of desires of ephemeral delights. Within it are the tendencies to pride, haughtiness, and anger; to lust and gluttony and theft; to improper forms of speech; to sloth, laziness, and depressed spirit. The yetzer tov, on the other hand, is related to the higher, rational soul. Through it we long to serve Hashem, and to observe all His mitzvos. This higher soul, however, stands upon the animal soul. So long as that animal soul is not purged of evil traits, the higher soul cannot lead a person to effective avodah.

"When Hashem favors a man's ways, even his foes will make peace with him." (Mishlei 16:7) Chazal (Bereishis Rabbah 54:1) teach that the foe of this pasuk is none other than the yetzer hora itself, which at times can be utilized to accomplish much good. This must be so. Nothing exists only so that it can be banished. A spark of kedushah empowers everything in existence -- even what we call "evil." Without this kedushah, it could

not exist. This spark means that the evil can be used to our advantage. (We are reluctant to write too much about this, for fear that students whose learning is not fully leshem Shomayim will draw the wrong conclusions.)

The Zohar (Shemos 93B) offers a source for this, and some examples. It observes that between the "Do not" and what follows in a few of the dibros is a trop-mark that puts a break between words, rather than unites them. It is as if the Torah said, "No! Do steal!" (Shemos 20:13) At times, theft becomes not only permissible but desirable to "steal a person's presumption." In other words, a sitting judge must sometimes use deception in order to ascertain the true facts in a case. The sparks of kedushah within theft animate its use for a constructive purpose.

Because these sparks are scattered in places quite distant from Hashem, one who succeeds in utilizing them and restoring them to their Heavenly source of kedushah brings great joy, kivayachol, to Hashem. Mishlei (3:6) says, "In all your ways you must know Him." The gemara (Berachos 63A) applies this even to aveirah! The gemara's point is that otherwise evil traits (there is no greater aveirah than harboring them!) can be used for good purpose.

Of all midos, the worst is pride. Yet, sometimes a person must attribute great importance to himself! We are supposed to tell ourselves, "The world was created for me." Attributing such importance to oneself would seem to run counter to our pursuit of humility, but it is important that at times we make this assertion to ourselves, if only to counter the guile of the yetzer hora. Our implacable enemy will sometimes offer us high-minded mussar, not for the right reason, but to demoralize us. When we realize how far off the mark we are, we devalue our avodah. We treat it as insignificant and worthless. We then balk at advancing in learning; even the mitzvos whose performance we are committed to we begin to perform mechanically, without feeling. We feel hypocritical when we insist on preparing ourselves properly for davening. Who are we to act with greater punctiliousness than those who came before us?

The antidote to all this negativity is for us to understand how important we really are, to feel confident in our self-worth. To do this we employ a sanitized version of the yetzer hora of gaavah. We remind ourselves of the worth of every mitzvah, even those performed by the least significant person. How could it be otherwise? If HKBH desired only the avodah of tzadikim, He would not have had to wait as long as He did to give Man the Torah. Great tzadikim were available before Klal Yisrael grew to 600,000 souls. Apparently, Man's avodah cannot be accomplished by the great tzadikim acting alone. Rather, it depends on the small contributions of many ordinary people, all taken together. The contribution of each individual is

crucial to the effort. In that sense, it is fully appropriate for a person to tell himself that the world was created for him!

And the chutzpah to tell ourselves this gets a boost from our new friend, the yetzer hora! (Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Devarim 18:13) ©2014 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

The Gates of Justice

Parshas Shoftim begins with the command to appoint judges in all the cities of Israel. The Torah states: Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities -- which Hashem, your God, gives you -- for your tribes; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment (Deuteronomy 17:18). The issue is that actually the Torah does not say to appoint judges and officers in all the cities rather it uses a different Hebrew term all your gates. It is a strange expression. After all, the Torah is not referring to appointing officers to serve as border guards. Therefore the verse is translated as the gates of the cities, meaning, of course, all your cities. But why say the word gates instead of the word cities? Actually, the use of the word gates is analyzed by many commentaries, some that interpret the word gates as a reference to the personal gates of the human body the seven orifices which are a conduit to four of the five the senses i.e. two ears, two eyes, two nostrils and a mouth. The Shalah (Shnei Luchos HaBris) explains that those bodily gates of entry need both officers and judges who are constantly on guard to ensure that only the right matter is absorbed. However, I'd like to present a simpler approach.

Often the readers of Faxhomily and Drasha send in stories from anthologies or personal reminiscences that I might be able to use in future faxes. Here is one that I received not long ago, though, unfortunately, I do not have the name of the author. He related the following revealing story:

I remember my wife's grandfather of blessed memory. He was a shochet (butcher), a Litvishe Yid

(Lithuanian Jew). He was a very sincere and honest Jew. He lived in Kentucky, and later in life he moved to Cincinnati. In his old age he came to New York, and that is where he saw Chassidim for the first time. There were not too many Chasidim in Kentucky and Cincinnati.

Once he went to a heart doctor in New York. While he was waiting, the door opened and a distinguished Chasidic Rebbe walked in accompanied by his gabbai (personal assistant). It seems that the Rebbe had a very urgent matter to discuss with the doctor, who probably told him to come straight into the office. The gabbai walked straight to the door and ushered the Rebbe in to see the doctor. Before going in, the Rebbe saw my grandfather waiting there.

The Rebbe went over to my grandfather and said, "I want to ask you a favor. I am going to be with the doctor just one minute, if it's okay with you. If it's not okay with you, I won't go in. One minute is all I need."

My wife's grandfather said okay, and the Rebbe went inside. He was in there for a minute or so, and then he came back out. The gabbai was ready to march straight out the door, but the Rebbe walked over to him again, and said, "Was it okay with you? I tried hard to make it short. I think it was just a minute or two that I was there. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it." Later my wife's grandfather said to me, "I don't know much about Chassidim and Rebbes, but there's one Rebbe that I could tell you is okay."

Perhaps the Torah is telling us that those who adjudicate and lead are not only responsible to the people while they are in the court of justice. They are responsible even in their entries and exits as well. By telling us that judges must be appointed at the gates, the Torah may be telling us that the demeanor of the court officers and judges does not merely begin when the judges are performing official judicious acts in courts. Our leaders have a tremendous impact wherever they may be even at an entrance into the gates of justice. ©2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

Parsha Puns!

Sounds like an old WIVES tale, but living in an OBAMA NATION has led me 2 have A SHARE A weird CRAVIMngs lately! Have AROOFAreshing Shabbos!

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