

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT SHOFTIM · FOR THE WEEK ENDING 2 ELUL 5759 · AUGUST 14, 1999 · VOL. 6 NO. 44

PARSHA INSIGHTS

SEEING AND SEEMING

*“Righteousness, righteousness, shall you pursue.” (16:20)*

Things seen are not always the way things seem. Oliver Cromwell had a large wart on his face. Lucky for him there was no television in the seventeenth century or he probably never would have become the first non-royal ruler of England. Nowadays he would have required extensive plastic surgery to even think about competing in the primaries.

They say that the two basic requirements of a good television newscaster are “teeth and hair.” Politics has become a soap opera, and the actors in this real life sitcom have to look like movie stars. Television has reduced real life to soap opera. How people look is at least as important as who and what they are.

The Torah cautions us in this week’s parsha that the sole qualification for choosing a judge is his righteousness: *“Righteousness, righteousness, shall you pursue.”* Even if he doesn’t have wealth and presence — attributes befitting a judge — yet, if he is the most righteous person you can find, choose him despite what he lacks in those other areas.

It is for this reason that the Torah juxtaposes the command to appoint righteous judges with a seemingly non-sequitur: *“You shall not plant for yourself...any tree near the altar of Hashem... And you shall not erect for yourselves a pillar, which Hashem, your G-d, hates. You shall not slaughter for Hashem, your G-d, an ox or a lamb or a kid-goat in which there is a blemish...”* What do these three things have in common with the appointment of righteous judges?

Using mere physical eyes, one would think that a beautiful tree growing near the altar would lend a sense of grace and majesty to the service of G-d. Seeing is not always the way things seem. The Torah with its spiritual “eyes” tells us that a tree planted near the altar is revolting to G-d. Why? A tree symbolizes growth. A fatal idolatrous misconception is that G-d “grows” by Man’s service of Him. Judaism says that the actions of Man can neither add to nor subtract from the Infinite One.

We see this idea expressed in the engraving of the Ten Commandments. Why were they engraved on stone? Why not on wood? Stone doesn’t change. It doesn’t grow. The Holy Ark, on the other hand, had a wooden core. The Ark symbolizes Man. The tablets of the Torah, the unchanging Will of G-d, find their home in the Ark — the heart of Man. When Man places the Torah in his heart, he grows. His spiritual core expands and develops like a tree. G-d, however, is, was, and will be. He is existence. We cannot add to Him in any way.

What is despicable about a pillar? Drive along the main boulevard of any capital and you’ll see any number of statues. Soldiers on massive stone horses, foreleg raised, forever about to canter. Frozen in a remembrance of things past. A pillar, a monument, always relates to things that were. A Jew relates to G-d not just as He who created everything, but as the G-d who continues to create existence every nano-second. The Jew’s relationship with G-d is not just to build Him monuments for the past, as if to say “G-d — You did a great job. See ya.” The Jew recognizes that since G-d created us, He created us with and for a purpose. Therefore we are obliged to fulfill that

purpose. It’s an ongoing relationship.

The third abomination is an offering with a blemish.

Most of us believe there’s a G-d. But when it comes to serving Him wholeheartedly, with all our heart and soul, we would rather think like the ancient Greeks — that He made the world and went off to play golf; that He’s not interested in what we do. A blemish in an offering symbolizes that our service of G-d is lacking total commitment. It means we want a junior partnership with the Boss. It’s like saying “Look G-d, I know you rule the world and everything, but let me have a little space to run my own show over here.” A Jew serves G-d on a full-time twenty-four-hour-a-day basis. We never close.

Sources:

*Sforno, Meshech Chochma, Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch, Rabbi Mordechai Perlman*

HAFTARAH

This Haftarah is the fourth in the series of the “Seven Haftarahs of Consolation.” In this prophetic view, Yeshaya alternates between visions of the future redemption and the dark past, warning the Jewish nation against repeating past mistakes.

Why, says G-d, must you fear your mortal oppressors who are destined to die and become dust? Where now are those great nations which sought to oppress you? If you will only keep my Torah then I will protect you and declare you to be My people.

## THE THREE KEYS

**T**he keys to three of Hashem's treasure houses were not placed in the hands of any agent, states Rabbi Yochanan. The keys to rain, childbirth and resurrection of the dead are held by Hashem alone.

Tosefot poses the challenge that the key to rain was given to the Prophet Eliyahu (*Masechta Sanhedrin 113a*) which enabled him to declare (*Melachim I 17:1*) "during these years there shall be no dew or rain save upon my word." Tosefot's resolution is that this was only a temporary transfer of power.

Rashi seems to have anticipated this challenge by explaining that all three keys have never been placed in the hands of an agent at one time. This is a subtle reference to what the aforementioned *gemara* describes as the aftermath of Eliyahu's withholding rain to punish an idol-worshipping country and king. Immediately after a passage describing the drying up of the nation's water supply, another passage relates that Hashem commanded Eliyahu to go to the home of a widow in the city of Tzorfat where he was soon faced with the challenge of resurrecting her dead child (*Melachim I 17:7-22*). There is a connection, our Sages say, between these two events. When Hashem decided that the people had suffered enough from Eliyahu's withholding of rain, He arranged for Eliyahu to be

placed in a situation of attempting resurrection. Eliyahu prayed that Hashem give him the key to resurrection so he could restore life to the child of the widow who had shown him so much hospitality. Hashem's response was that He alone had control of the three aforementioned keys, and the one to rain had already been given to the prophet. If Eliyahu were to receive the key to resurrection as well, it would result in the absurd situation of two keys being in the hand of the servant and only one in the hand of the Master. Eliyahu was thus

compelled to return the key to rain, and the next chapter (*Melachim I 18:1*) begins with Hashem restoring rain to the land.

• *Ta'anit 2a*

## THE HUMAN SERPENT

**I**n the hereafter, says Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, all the animals will assemble to thus challenge the serpent: "The lion eats its victim on the spot and the wolf drags it away to its lair for consumption. All animals that kill man enjoy the fruits of their slaying. But you only inject your venom to kill him. What benefit do you have from this to motivate you?"

The serpent's response will be to direct them to the gossip whose evil tongue slays his victim. "What benefit," he will ask, "does he have from the damage he does?"

This dialogue of the future may be understood as more than trading one question for another. Until the original serpent committed the crime of persuading the first man and woman to eat from the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, he walked about on two feet like man. As punishment, he was condemned to crawl upon his belly and to be in eternal mortal conflict with man. This conflict is described in the Torah (*Bereishet 3:15*) as man's efforts to trample upon the serpent's head and the serpent's efforts to strike at man's heel.

Ever since his fall, the serpent envies the upright position of man which he once enjoyed. Aware that he can never regain that position because of the Divine curse upon him, the serpent tries to do the next best thing — to bring man down to his level by injecting his venom into his body.

When the serpent of the future — expressing the frustration of all serpents back to the beginning of time — directs his challengers to the evil-tongued gossip, he is offering them an example of his own conduct on a human level. What motivates a man to assassinate the character of one whom he envies through his evil tongue is the desire to bring his victim down to his own level in the eyes of his listeners. This, concludes the serpent, explains his motivation as well.

• *Ta'anit 8a*

## I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

**T**he Jewish king is commanded not to marry many wives, not to have many horses, and not to hoard silver and gold. If he obeys, the Torah promises that he and his offspring will sit firmly on the "kiseh" (throne).

The three letters of the word *kiseh* hint to these three commandments. *Kiseh* is spelled *kaf samech alef*. *Kaf* stands for *kesev* (silver), *samech* stands for *soos* (horse) and *aleph* stands for *isha* (wife).

• *Deuteronomy 16-18, Rashi, Kli Yakar*

**OHRNET**

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

---

Published by  
**OHR SOMAYACH**  
 TANENBAUM COLLEGE  
 POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • 02-581-0315

---

General Editor:  
**Rabbi Moshe Newman**  
 Editorial & Web Advisor:  
**Rabbi Reuven Lauffer**  
 Associate Editors:  
**Rabbi Mordechai Becher,**  
**Rabbi Reuven Subar**  
 Contributing Writers:  
*Weekly Daf, Love of the Land:*  
**Rav Mendel Weinbach**  
*Insights, Overview:*  
**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair**

---

Web Production: **Eli Ballon, Michael Treblow**

---

Produced and Designed by the Office of Communications  
**Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro, Director**

---

© 1999 OHR SOMAYACH INSTITUTIONS - ALL RIGHTS RESERVED  
• THIS PUBLICATION CONTAINS WORDS OF TORAH. PLEASE TREAT IT WITH DUE RESPECT.

---

The OHR SOMAYACH WEB SITE is Hosted by VIRTUAL JERUSALEM  
**www.virtualjerusalem.com**

---

OHRNET is available from the following sources:  
 • E-MAIL VIA INTERNET: Write to [info@ohr.org.il](mailto:info@ohr.org.il) for information.  
 • WORLD WIDE WEB: Our address is: [www.ohr.org.il](http://www.ohr.org.il)

---

• Submit your questions to ASK THE RABBI at [www.asktherabbi.org](http://www.asktherabbi.org)  
 or E-Mail [info@ohr.org.il](mailto:info@ohr.org.il) — set subject to "ASK THE RABBI."

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What is the role of *shoftim*? What is the role of *shotrim*?
2. What qualifications should one look for when appointing a judge?
3. May a judge accept a bribe if only for the purpose of judging fairly?
4. What is the source for the concept “seek out a good *beit din*”?
5. Although the *avot* built *matzevot*, the Torah later forbade doing so. Why?
6. “You will come to...the judge who will be in those days.” It’s impossible to visit a judge living at a different time, so why must the Torah add these apparently extra words?
7. What does Hashem promise a king who doesn’t amass much gold, doesn’t raise many horses and doesn’t marry many wives?
8. How many Torah scrolls must the king have?
9. How was King Shaul punished for disobeying a minor command of the Prophet Shmuel?
10. Certain kosher animals are not included in the law of “*chazeh, shok, and keiva*.” Which ones?
11. Families of *kohanim* served in the *Beit Hamikdash* on a rotational basis. When was this rotation system implemented?
12. Which three categories of false prophets are executed?
13. What does it mean to “prepare the way” to the cities of refuge?
14. How many witnesses are meant when the Torah writes the word *eid* (witness)?
15. “Through the mouth of two witnesses....” What types of testimony does this verse invalidate?
16. If witnesses in a capital case are proven to be *zomemim* (false-conspirators) *before* their intended victim is executed, how are they punished?
17. Why does the section about going to war follow the laws governing witnesses?
18. The Jewish army is warned of four “scare-tactics” the enemy might employ. What are they?
19. When a murder victim is found in a field, who determines which city is closest?
20. What happens if the murderer is found after the calf’s neck was broken?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week’s Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 16:18 - *Shoftim* are judges who pronounce judgment. *Shotrim* are officers who enforce it.
2. 16:18 - That he is expert in the law and that he is righteous.
3. 16:19 - No, because it will sway his judgment.
4. 16:20 - “*Tzedek tzedek tirdof...*”
5. 16:22 - Because the Canaanites used them for idolatry.
6. 17:9 - To teach that although a judge may not be as eminent as judges of previous generations, we must obey him nevertheless.
7. 17:18 - That his kingdom will endure.
8. 17:18 - Two. One stays in his treasury and one he keeps with him.
9. 17:20 - He lost his kingship.
10. 18:3 - *Chayot* (non-domestic-type animals).
11. 18:8 - During the time of David and Shmuel.
12. 18:20 - One who prophesies something he didn’t hear, something told to another prophet, or prophecies in the name of an idol.
13. 19:3 - To post direction signs saying “refuge” at the crossroads.
14. 19:15 - Two, unless otherwise specified.
15. 19:15 - Written testimony and testimony translated from a language which the judges don’t understand.
16. 19:19 - They are put to death.
17. 20:1 - To teach that if the Jewish People execute fair judgment they will be victorious in war.
18. 20:3 - 1) Clanging their shields; 2) Making their horses stomp and whinny; 3) Shouting; 4) Blowing horns.
19. 21:2 - The *Sanhedrin*.
20. 21:9 - He is tried and, if guilty, executed.

## KASHA! (KASHA MEANS “QUESTION”)

### KASHA

**“Do not take a bribe, because bribery blinds the eyes of the wise...” (19:19).**

In this week’s Parsha the Torah says that bribery blinds the “*chachamim*” — “wise people.” Earlier (*Exodus 23:8*) the Torah says bribery blinds the “*pikchim*” — “open-eyed people.” Why does the Torah use these two different expressions, *chachamim* and *pikchim*, to describe judges?

### ANSWER

A judge in a Torah court must be wise in two areas. First, he must be expert in all areas of Torah law. Such people are “*chachamim*” — “wise.” Second, he must be well-versed in worldly matters so he can properly interrogate the litigants and see if they are trying to fool him. To do this, he has to know “every trick in the book.” Such people are “*pikchim*” — “open-eyed.”

• Vilna Gaon in *Aderet Eliyahu*

Do you have a KASHA? Write to [kasha@ohr.org.il](mailto:kasha@ohr.org.il) with your questions on any Parsha!

## IN THE FLESH AGAIN

**Hadassah <amreapp@bellsouth.net> wrote:**

Dear Rabbi,  
 Shalom. In "STANDING UP FOR DOWNS" you wrote that a person with Downs syndrome "may be a reincarnation of a great tzaddik or tzaddeket (righteous person) who achieved near perfection the first time around, but needs to come back to this world just to 'tie up some loose ends'." Are you saying that there is reincarnation? Are we not given only one life to live? Are we to come back from the dead in another body and correct any mistakes we made in this life? This was very confusing to me. I have never read about reincarnation in the Torah.

**David N. Sunderland <lildave@tamu.edu> wrote:**

Dear Rabbi,  
 You recently remarked regarding reincarnation. I wasn't aware that Orthodox Jews believed in reincarnation. Can you give a scriptural basis for this belief? Thank you so much for your time and effort. I read your "Ask the Rabbi" series religiously (pun intended).

Dear Hadassah and David N. Sunderland,

Reincarnation is one of the teachings of the Oral Torah. In the Written Torah there are no explicit references to reincarnation, but there are hints.

Perhaps the closest scriptural hint to this idea is Deuteronomy 25:5-10 which says that "when brothers are

on the earth at the same time, and one of them dies childless, the wife of the dead brother must not marry a man outside the family. [Rather] her brother-in-law shall come to her and perform levirate marriage with her. And he shall be the first-born whom she bears; he shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, and so the name of the dead brother shall not be erased from the people of Israel... But if he refuses to marry his sister-in-law... she shall remove his shoe... His name shall be called in Israel: 'The house of him whose shoe was removed'."

The main reason for reincarnation is for the soul to fulfill its role in the creation and achieve the spiritual level for which it is destined. If a soul does not manage this in its first life, it may be given another chance, and another. If the soul did not succeed in three times, it will have to settle for whatever it has gained in the everlasting afterlife. Another reason for reincarnation is to repay a soul for its deeds in a way parallel to its sins; for example, a rich miser might be reincarnated as a poor beggar and be disregarded by a rich man, who was himself one of the paupers disregarded by the rich miser in his previous life.

Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, (the Arizal) writes that Moshe was a reincarnation of Adam's third son, Sheit (Seth), and that Sheit was a reincarnation of Hevel (Abel). (The "mem" of Moshe's name stands for "Moshe," the "shin" stands for Sheit, and the "heh" for Hevel. The great mishnaic Sage Shamai was a reincarnation of Moshe, and Hillel was a reincarnation of Aharon.

Sources:

- Zohar, Mishpatim, Exodus 1:1
- Sha'ar Hagilgulim, Hakdama 36

## PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

**Re: Chicago Shootings (Ohrnet Devarim):**

There were several letters to the editor in the Chicago Tribune attesting to what you wrote, i.e., that the Orthodox Jews did indeed talk to the police on Shabbat, and cooperate fully. The press reports to the contrary were caused by the reporters confusing the fact that people didn't want to talk to the reporters (for various reasons).

- Rabbi Yehuda Albin, Chicago

**Hurrah for Rabbis!**

I want to express my sincere appreciation and heartfelt thanks to all the Rabbis for their intellect and wisdom. Since my father died last year, the collection of Ohr Somayach's articles,

and the classes that I've attended, have given me a new meaning on life and what it means to be Jewish. How do Rabbis become so learned? They have the right answers, and know so much. They know about psychology and the inner soul of the human being. Thank you again and shalom.

- Harold Bernstein, Wallingford, CT  
 <habernstein@msn.com>

**Ohrnet Eye-Opener:**

I can't express the joy you bring to me every day. I look for you as soon as the eyelids go up. I'm learning much and praise G-d for it!

- Irene Allen <heluvsu2@sprynet.com>