



Parashat Shoftim
7th Ellul 5775

Shabbat Begins 19:57
Shabbat Ends 21:00

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COMMUNITY PARASHA SHEET



Rabbi Jonathan Tawil
Director TAL

WHAT ARE YOU CHASING?

A banker was vacationing in a small coastal village. While walking near a pier, he observed a small boat with just one fisherman. Inside the boat with the fisherman were several yellow-fin tuna. The businessman complimented the fisherman on the quality of his catch and asked how long it took to catch them. "Only two hours," he replied.

The businessman then asked why he didn't stay out longer and catch more fish. The fisherman said he had enough to support his family's immediate needs. "But what do you do with the rest of your time?" the banker asked. The fisherman responded, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take a nap in the afternoon, and stroll into the village each evening with my wife where we relax and sing and I play guitar with our friends. I have a full and busy life."

The businessman scoffed, "You should spend more time fishing and with the proceeds, buy a bigger boat and with the proceeds buy a fleet of boats. Instead of selling your fish to a middleman, you could sell directly to a processor. You could eventually open your own cannery. You would control the product, processing and distribution. You could leave this small village and move to a big city where you could run your expanding enterprise."

The fisherman asked, "But how long will this take?" The businessman replied, "15 to 20 years!" "But then what?" asked the puzzled fisherman? The banker laughed and said,

"That's the best part. You can sell your business and retire and move to a small coastal fishing village where you could sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take afternoon naps, stroll to the village in the evenings with your wife where you could relax, sing and play guitar with your friends. You would have a full and busy life."

The fisherman smiled at the businessman, quietly gathered his catch and walked away.

What are you chasing after in life?

Some people are chasing money, others work, leisure, friends or spouses!

Yet the Torah interestingly informs us to chase something else.

The Sfat Emet explains that the only time the Torah commands us to *chase*, is in this week's Parsha.

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Tsedek Tsedek Tirdof - Chase after justice!
The Targum Unkelos translates this Pasuk to mean pursue "truth" (kushta).

We are taught to always pursue truth.

Why not simply tell us to *seek* the truth? What's the idea behind pursuing truth?

We live in a world termed by our Sages as a false world – 'Alma DeShikra.'

Rav Dessler ZT'L quotes the Zohar which explains that the original sin of Adam and Chava was due to a lie.

The snake approached Chava and said "Do you know why you can't eat from this tree?"

She had no response.

The snake continued: "It's because G-d ate from this tree and through this was able to create worlds. He does not want you to be in the same situation."

Of course this was a blatant lie aimed at enticing Chava to sin.

But it was through this lie that Adam and Chava sinned and punishment was wrought on the world.

It is for this reason that this world which is influenced by the Yester Hara is called Alma Deshikra – a world of lies.

For us to get to the truth it's a constant battle. It does not come easy and it's very difficult to achieve, hence we have to pursue it.



1. What is so bad about taking a bribe? What negative effect does it have on a person?

2. Is asking for a Jewish king something good or bad?

3. We are commanded to kill the seven nations. Is there any way they can remain alive?

4. From where do we learn the prohibition of Baal Tashchis?

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Whenever the Torah wishes to forbid something it merely tells us that it is forbidden. There is one instance in which the Torah goes out of its way to tell us that not only is it forbidden but one must also set a distance from it – “Bidvar Sheker Tirchak – distance yourself from a lie.”

Thus we must chase *truth* and run far from *lies*.

An old Midrash brings the story of Rabbi Shimon Ben Shatach (one of the earliest Tannaim) who was approached by a man in need.

He had grown up in a good home, but been badly influenced and had ended up joining a band of robbers. He led a life of sin, until one day whilst robbing, he came across a child whose fierce words penetrated his heart.

‘The wrath of the Almighty is turned to the doers of evil to erase their memory from the earth,’ shouted the child.

The man was shaken and eventually took leave of the band of robbers, resolving to find honest work and redeem himself.

However, as time passed he was tempted to return to his evil ways.

He was now approaching Rabbi Shimon to beseech him for guidance and help.

Rabbi Shimon commended him on his wish to do good and told him that his future success

lay in promising never to lie again. ‘Keep from falsehood. That is the key!’ said Rabbi Shimon. The robber was shocked: “Is this all you are going to tell me? Is there not more powerful advice and help to give?”

“You will see,” replied Rabbi Shimon. “If you but listen and keep from falsehood, you will not steal again.”

The man was still unconvinced, but he had no choice but to go to the room he rented and hope that Rabbi Shimon was correct.

That night, he grew very hungry and went to the apartment of the lady from whom he was renting his room. He knocked, hoping to get some food. Since there was no answer, he opened the door and walked in.

The apartment was empty as the family had left, but in the corner was a great wooden chest. Walking over to it and opening it, the man gasped as he saw a whole treasure of jewellery and other valuable items. Hastily pocketing a handful of valuables, he tip-toed back to his room and lay down on his bed.

He thought to himself;

“If the woman comes to me and asks if I was home during the theft, I will simply say that I was out and know nothing about it.”

Suddenly, however, the man remembered the promise that he had made to Rabbi Shimon that he would always speak the truth. How then could he lie to the woman and say that he was out during the theft? On the other hand, if he did not lie, he would become the primary suspect.

Then it dawned upon him. This was what Rabbi Shimon meant! It would be impossible for him to steal if he never lied. Jumping up from his bed, he ran back to the woman’s apartment and returned the property he had stolen.

“Bless Rabbi Shimon,” he said. “He is indeed a wise man. Now I know that if I but adhere always to tell the truth and never tell a lie, I will be saved from the sin of robbery.”

Such is the power of truth – and falsehood. It can change our lives for good or evil depending upon whether we are true or false to ourselves and to others.

When someone wants to sign an important document, their signature represents their presence.

The Gemara (Shabbat 55) tells us that the seal of the Almighty is Truth.

Hashem desires that we turn away from lies and pursue the truth.

The day that Adam and Chava sinned was none other than Rosh Hashanah. That is the day that we are all judged. We will stand in front of the Almighty and there will be nowhere to hide from our falsehood.

The original sin that caused so much sorrow to the world emanated from a lie. It is up to us to correct it via pursuing truth.

We must garner the strength and stamina to talk truth to all those around us.

We have less than a month to chase after something real - let’s get going!



Rabbi Dov Levene

TESHUVA

We now find ourselves in the month of Elul. Elul is a month of preparation before Rosh Hashana. Rosh Hashana is the day of judgement. To prepare ourselves for judgement we must do two things. We must work on repenting and undoing any sins that we have done. Additionally we must work to get merits to find favour in judgement.

Teshuva is one of the things that was created before the world. This tells us that teshuva is essential for the continued existence of the world. The word teshuva means to **return**. Return where?

To understand this better let us start at the beginning. A person is placed in this world to better himself and come close to Hashem. Hashem could have simply given everyone Olam Habo, the enjoyment of the next world,

straight away. However, Hashem doesn’t want us to feel like a poor person receiving free gifts in Olam Habo but embarrassed when he sees his benefactor. Instead, Hashem wants us to feel like we earned it and it is rightfully ours. This means that a person must put in effort and work to earn Olam Habo. To this end, we are placed in this physical world with bechira, free choice. We must fight our evil inclination and strengthen our yetzer tov, our drive to do what is good.

This means that a person is meant to battle the temptations of this world and follow all the commandments of the Torah. However, the possuk tells us that there is no tzaddik in this world who does not sin. The reality is that every person has sins. What then can he do about it? Can he undo something that has already happened in the past? The answer to this is the gift of Teshuva.

Teshuva is something that is non-existent in the framework of this world. We cannot “undo” all physical actions, yet Teshuva is a special gift which taps into the spiritual realm above this physical world, and which enables us to undo the negative spiritual effect of past bad actions.

To appreciate this, we must first understand what happens when a person sins. This can

be seen from the first sin in the Torah – that of Odom Horishon. A sin causes a person to be distanced from Hashem, as Odom was literally thrown out of Gan Eden. Distance from Hashem makes a person become more physical and less spiritual. Teshuva reverses this situation. By becoming closer to Hashem, a person will become more spiritual. This is what the word teshuva means – **returning** to a state of greater closeness with Hashem.

What are the essential stages for teshuva? The first thing is regret. Then, if he hasn’t already done so, the person must stop sinning. Then there is vidui, verbal admission of the sin, and requesting forgiveness. The final stage is to accept upon himself not to repeat the sin in the future.

After the month of Elul and preparing for teshuva, are ten special days where teshuva is more easily accepted. These are known as the *Aseres Yimei Teshuva*, the ten days of repentance from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur. Let us be successful in our teshuva and merit a good new year with only good things.



proceeded to sway softly. The lions lay and listened to his sweet voice of Torah and tefillah, while the soldiers trembled nearby.

Unable to believe the startled report of his guards, the king came to see the miracle personally. When he had recovered from the shock of the spectacle enough to speak, he ordered that Rabbeinu be taken out of the cage and respectfully asked how this wonder came to be.

"It's very simple," explained the Ohr HaChaim. "Since your decree was issued because I had taken my time to learn Torah, the Torah had to come to my defense and protect me from evil."

Apologizing profusely and duly humbled, the king set the Ohr HaChaim free, lavishing gifts on him as he sent him home.

After his petirah, the Ohr HaChaim was buried in Har Hazeisim in Yerushalayim, where it is known that tefillot recited at his grave do not go unheeded.

During World War II, the Germans invaded North Africa and advanced steadily northwards towards the Middle East. The Yidden of Eretz Yisrael were terrified that soon the Nazi hand might, chas vesholom, have them in its grip.

A yom tefillah was announced and all residents of Yerushalayim and its surroundings converged on Har Hazeisim to the tziyun of the Ohr HaChaim.

The princess was due to be married and lavish preparations were under way. The Ohr HaChaim, who worked as a goldsmith for a limited number of hours just to earn enough to continue his learning, was unconcerned with all the activity, until a contingent of messengers from the king arrived at his door. Having heard of the Ohr HaChaim's talent in the art of making jewellery, the king wanted him to create an exquisite piece to adorn his daughter the bride's neck on her wedding day. Placing other jobs aside, Rabbeinu began working. However, when the time came for his usual learning session, there was no compromise. The Ohr HaChaim's main "job" was his Torah learning and any other trade remained secondary, no matter who his customer was.

The long-awaited day arrived and the king looked forward to presenting his daughter with a magnificent piece of jewellery.

To his fury, his messengers returned from the Ohr HaChaim empty-handed. The piece was not yet ready, for the Ohr HaChaim had not had enough time to finish it.

"Not enough time!" spluttered the king. "I'll teach that Jew a lesson he will not survive to forget!"

Immediately, soldiers were dispatched to fetch the Ohr HaChaim, with a decree that he be thrown into a lion's cage.

Unruffled, the tzaddik asked for permission to take with him his tallit and tefillin and a few seforim.

"You'll have no need for those objects," sneered the king. "In a few moments the hungry lions will pounce on you as their prey and devour you. They surely have no necessity for holy books and things.

"Lower him in!"

As though a story out of the Tanach were coming alive, instead of pouncing on his saintly figure, the lions lay down at the Ohr HaChaim's side, heads upon their paws in respect for him. Their previous roaring and snarling abated and a calm, eerie stillness filled the cage, as the Ohr HaChaim



1. A bribe makes its recipient connected to the giver, so that he cannot judge objectively. A person does not see himself guilty.

2. Being a positive commandment it is good. However, asking for it in order to be like the other nations is something bad.

3. There is an argument among the Rishonim if the usual war protocol of first offering peace to the enemy can be applied even to the seven nations.

4. It is from the end of the parsha; when besieging a city Hashem commands us not to cut down trees.

Dear Rabbi,

There was a time where King David took a census of the people. One of his servants tried to talk him out of it but was unsuccessful. Then Hashem dealt severely with David and with the people of Israel. (Sorry, I'm not sure of the exact reference.) I have never understood why G-d does not like a census? What is so wrong with counting the people?

The reference is in Samuel II, Chapter 24. The reason that G-d did not approve of counting the people directly is that by counting, one is ascribing a finite value to a Jew, a number, a physical reality. In fact, the Jewish people are spiritually infinite, and should not be numbered and defined in the finite sense. Even when the Jews needed to be counted, such as the census described in the Book of Numbers, it was done indirectly, whereby each person contributed a coin and the coins were counted.

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QUICK QUOTE...

IF IT IS IMPORTANT
TO YOU, YOU WILL
FIND A WAY.

IF NOT
YOU'LL FIND
AN EXCUSE

...Hmm

Led by the Husyatiner Rebbe, zt"l, and by R' Shlomke of Zvhill, zt"l, the Yidden poured out their hearts, entreating the Ohr HaChaim to intercede in Heaven and nullify the destructive decree that was hanging over their heads.

Upon completing the fervent tefillot, the Husyatiner turned to the crowd and announced, "Boruch Hashem! Hashem Yisborach will help, for we have achieved a yeshua and our enemies' downfall."

Sure enough, after a few days, the Germans were driven back in a Heavenly ordained twist of fate and the Jews of Eretz Yisrael were spared. When Chassidim asked the Husyatiner how he had been so sure of the salvation, he revealed, "As we finished davening at the grave of the Ohr HaChaim, we saw the Name of Hashem lighting up the tziyun and I understood that Heaven was sending us a message that the yeshua was close at hand."



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