

Parshas Shoftim Q&A

Twenty questions, every answer from Rashi

1. The parsha opens with appointing shoftim and shotrim. What is the difference between them?

The shoftim are the judges who decide the ruling. The shotrim are the ones who make sure it is carried out — with a rod and a strap, until the person accepts the judge's ruling.

(Rashi 16:18, שפטים ושטרים)

2. A judge may not “recognize faces.” What must he watch even while the two sides are still speaking?

He may not be soft with one and hard with the other, letting one stand while the other sits. Once a person sees the judge honoring his opponent, he can no longer say his case.

(Rashi 16:19, לא תכיר פנים)

3. “Tzedek tzedek tirdof” — chase after justice. What are we being told to chase after?

A fine beis din. Go after a good court.

(Rashi 16:20, צדק צדק תרדף)

4. The pasuk says Hashem hates a matzeivah, a pillar of one stone. Was it always hated?

No. In the days of the Avos it was beloved to Him. Once the Canaanim made it a practice for avodah zarah, He came to hate it.

(Rashi 16:22, אשר שנא)

5. When a case is too hard for the local court, the pasuk says you get up and go up. What do we learn from that?

That the Beis Hamikdash stood higher than every other place.

(Rashi 17:8, וקמת ועלית)

6. We may not turn from the words of beis din “right or left.” How far does that go?

Even if they tell you that right is left and left is right — and how much more so when they tell you that right is right and left is left.

(Rashi 17:11, ימין ושמאל)

7. Why is a king not allowed to gather many horses?

He may keep only what he needs for his chariot. More than that would send people back down to Mitzrayim, where horses came from.

(Rashi 17:16, לא ירבה לו סוסים)

8. The king writes “mishneh haTorah.” How many sifrei Torah is that, and where do they go?

Two. One stays in his treasure house, and one goes in and out with him wherever he goes.

(Rashi 17:18, את משנה התורה)

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9. We may not learn to do the terrible things the nations do. Is there any way we are allowed to learn about them?

Yes — you may learn in order to understand and to teach: to see how ruined their ways are, and to tell your children, do not do this, because this is what the nations do.

(Rashi 18:9, לא תלמד לעשות)

10. What does a kosem — one of the forbidden fortune-tellers — actually do?

He takes his stick in his hand and asks it, “Should I go, or should I not go?”

(Rashi 18:10, קסם קסמים)

11. “Tamim tihyeh” — be wholehearted with Hashem. What is being asked of us?

Walk with Him simply and look to Him. Do not dig to find out what the future holds; accept whatever comes simply, and then you will be with Him and part of His portion.

(Rashi 18:13, תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך)

12. The pasuk says to “prepare the road” to the arei miklat. What did that look like?

At every crossroads a sign was written: “Miklat! Miklat!” — pointing the way to the city of refuge.

(Rashi 19:3, תכין לך הדרך)

13. How many arei miklat will there be in the end?

Nine — three on the other side of the Yarden, three in Eretz Canaan, and three more in the time to come.

(Rashi 19:9, ויספת לך עוד שלש)

14. Why does the pasuk say the killer hated his fellow before it says he lay in wait for him?

Because the hatred brought him to it. Once a person breaks an easy mitzvah he ends up breaking a serious one: he broke “do not hate your brother in your heart,” and ended up spilling blood.

(Rashi 19:11, וכי יהיה איש שנא לרעהו)

15. The kohen speaks to the soldiers going out to war and begins, “Shema Yisrael.” Why those words?

Even if you have no other merit than saying Krias Shema, you are worthy that Hashem should save you.

(Rashi 20:3, שמע ישראל)

16. The kohen gives the soldiers four warnings not to be afraid. Why four?

Against four things the kings of the nations do to frighten them: clashing their shields together, making their horses stamp and neigh, screaming out loud, and blowing horns and other noisemakers.

(Rashi 20:3, אל ירך לבבכם אל תיראו ואל תחפזו ואל תערצו)

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17. Who is the soldier the pasuk calls “afraid and fainthearted”?

Two views. Rabbi Akiva says it means what it sounds like: he cannot stand in the ranks of battle and look at a drawn sword. Rabbi Yosi HaGlili says he is afraid of the sins in his hands — which is why the Torah first sends home the man with a new house, a vineyard, or a kallah: whoever sees him leaving assumes it is one of those, and never knows the real reason.

(Rashi 20:8, הירא ורך הלבב)

18. “Ki ha’adam eitz hasadeh” sounds like the pasuk is calling a man a tree. What is it really saying?

Here “ki” means “perhaps.” Is the tree of the field perhaps a person, who runs inside the besieged city away from you, to suffer hunger and thirst like the people of the city? Then why destroy it?

(Rashi 20:19, כי האדם עץ השדה)

19. Why is a calf in its first year brought down to a valley that was never worked, to atone for a body found in the field?

Hashem says: let a calf that has not yet produced fruits be killed in a place that does not produce fruits, to atone for this man, whom they did not let produce his fruits.

(Rashi 21:4, וערפו)

20. The elders say, “Our hands did not spill this blood.” Would anyone have suspected them?

Of course not — nobody suspects the elders of beis din of murder. They mean: we did not see him and let him leave without food or an escort.

(Rashi 21:7, ידינו לא שפכה)