

Torah sweets

SHOFTIM 5786 – VOLUME 16, ISSUE 31

3RD OF ELUL, 5786/AUGUST 15TH, 2026

THIS WEEK'S EDITION IS DEDICATED BY THE FOGEL
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SHOFTIM – BEING THE BEST JUDGE AND OFFICER OVER OURSELVES

Mrs. Goldberg, a schoolteacher, got a red-light ticket and came to court to fight it. Judge Rosenbaum recognized his teacher and asked: "Mrs. Goldberg, do you remember me?" Mrs. Goldberg squinted and said, "Little Heshy Rosenbaum?"

"It's Harry," the judge said. "Your Honor, actually."

"Look at you, all grown up," Mrs. Goldberg smiled sweetly, hoping that her former student would help her with her ticket. "I've been waiting so many years to see you in court," Judge Rosenbaum said. "I am so glad to hear it," replied Mrs. Goldberg. "So, the good news is that we're going to waive your ticket. The bad news is that you now must sit at the table and write 'I will not run through a red light' five hundred times!"

Oftentimes, our internal judgment system can get out of whack. We tend to cut ourselves all the slack in the world while holding others to high standards, when we are meant to do the opposite, judging others favorably while looking at ourselves with a discerning eye, as our Parsha teaches us.

Parshas Shoftim (Devarim 16:18) opens with the following command: "You must place judges and officers on all of your gates." Many commentators pick up on the fact that the Pasuk is expressed in the singular. As such, they learn from here that the Torah is talking to not just the Halachic bodies. Both **Rav Chaim Vital** and the **Shelah** teach that we all have gates that serve as portals from our inner world to our outer world, and vice versa. The Torah is speaking to each person, instructing them to be a judge and an officer.

Rabbi Yonasan Roodyn explains that this is obviously a very tall order because it means that we need to become discerning individuals. We need to use our *seichel* (logical thinking) to decide what does Hashem want us to see or not to see, say or refrain from saying? The **Rambam** defines *kedusha* (holiness) as the process and state when our soul/intellect drives us instead our body or emotions, and spiritual goals overcomes our physicality. This is far easier on a day like Yom Kippur, when we can be in shul, locked away from the rest of the world. However, it's not so simple during the other 364 days of the year. We live in a world where we're being stimulated and bombarded from all sides. The constant question on tap is, are we going to be in control of how we express ourselves, or will we give into our base feelings? The **Nesivos Shalom** writes that the task of a judge entails looking at things in a cold, dispassionate, and intellectual way. Once the judge rules, the Shotrim (officers) are the ones who set up boundaries. It's upon us to find ways to enforce our values and penalize ourselves for crossing our red line.

In the - to Rosh Hashana, we read this Parsha to ensure that we practice the "judge-and-officer" system before Hashem visits it upon us. We try to traverse through the incredible month of Elul as perceptive individuals and intelligent human beings, deciding again and enforcing what's good for us, and then eliminating those elements that are harmful to us. We would be surprised how often secular values creep into our lives.

Society believes in venting our frustrations and getting our feelings off our chests, come what may. The concept of a filter exists solely to purify water and clean the air. The Torah values positive speech, not shaming others but building them through words. Perhaps, this is a good area to start for many of us. Let's examine how we speak and set up the proper inner judges and officers to make sure we live up to the Torah expectations for our conduct.



HAFTARAH HONEYCOMBS BY RAV MOSHE KLEIN SHOFTIM – THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR FLAWS

This week's Haftarah opens (Yeshayahu 53:16): "And I placed My words into your mouth, and with the shadow of My hand I covered you." The **Metzudas Dovid** offers a simple explanation that Hashem puts words of Torah into our mouths, which protects us from danger. Hashem shelters us with the *zechus* (merit) of Torah. However, the **Mei Hashiloach** adds a deeper idea. When Hashem puts Torah into a heart of a person, He covers it with a *levush* (cloak) that's the exact opposite of the Torah that's found inside of him.

The Mei Hashiloach gives an example by quoting the Gemara (Shabbos 89b) that describes how in the future, Hashem will be upset with the Jewish people to the point of wanting to destroy them. The Holy One will then... "approach Avraham, saying that His children have sinned. Yet instead of defending them, Avraham will respond, "Master of the Universe, let them be destroyed for the sanctification of Your Name."

Apparently "startled" by this response, Hashem will then approach Yaakov Avinu, as "he knows the difficulty of raising children; perhaps, he will ask for mercy for you." Yaakov's response will be: "Master of the Universe, let them be destroyed for the sanctification of Your Name."

Clearly dissatisfied, Hashem will exclaim, "There's no reason in old men, and no counsel in children!" and goes to Yitzchak. Immediately, Yitzchak will challenge Hashem's premise: 'My children, and not Your children? When the Jewish people said *na'aseh* before *nishmah*, You called them, 'My children, My eldest,' and now, they are my children, but not yours?' Yitzchak then will go into a whole calculation that Jews doesn't really have that much time to sin. Of all the Avos, Yitzchak is the one who davens for the Jewish nation and is the defender of the people. Why? →

HAFTARAH HONEYCOMBS BY RABBI MOSHE KLEIN
(CONCLUSION FROM PAGE 1)

Of all the Avos, Yitzchak is the one who davens for the Jewish nation and is the defender of the people. Why is that? The Mei Hashiloach quotes the **Zohar Hakodesh** (Parshas Shelach) that Avraham represents Middas Hachessed while Yitzchak is the Middah of Gevurah, which means Din (judgment). We don't know much about Yitzchak's mindset since he precisely followed the mindset of his saintly father, but we know he represented the idea of exactitude. Yet, Yitzchak advocates on behalf of the Jewish people, and we see from here that the essence of Yitzchak is a defender even if there is a cloak of Gevurah.

Let's take an even simpler example. Yaakov is called an Ish Tam - simple man, not making great calculations. The wicked Eisav is the one tricking his father. Yet, we find that the Ish Tam is the one whom Eisav accuses of tricking him twice! So, which one is it: simple or cunning? Also, we are taught (Bamidbar 12:3) that Moshe Rabbeinu was the humblest man who ever lived. At the same time, Dasan and Aviram accused Moshe of lording over the masses (ibid. 17:13), and Korach (along with 250 people) didn't like that Moshe was displaying authority. We see how Hashem makes the inside the essence of a person, but one must work on themselves since on the outside they have an opposite manifestation. This gives them a mission to execute in the world.

Now, we must be very careful with how we speak about the Avos - we can't understand who they were or fathom their essence. On their level, they had their own Avodas Hashem, a Divine task to complete in this world. Yaakov - unlike Eisav - did not have a Yeitzer Hara to trick people. Rather, it was an outer Middah that balanced his simplicity and allowed him to work on himself so that he was not naturally an Ish Tam. The same goes for Moshe, who had to lead, and Yitzchak, who had to appear strict. This is the contrast, as per the Mei Hashiloach; yet we see Hashem puts an outward layer on a person that looks like the exact opposite of one's true core. As such, he writes that if one wants to discover who he truly is, he should observe his external characteristics and realize that he is the opposite in reality. Those who are tough on the outside are soft on the inside.

This is an amazing and powerful idea. If one is struggling in a certain area of Avodas Hashem, understanding the challenge is the key to resolving it. For example, if one has a hard time with davening, he should know that his identity is very much connected to Tefillah. One of the main reasons why a person is here is that he must work on the outer layer, and after some time, they will arrive at their essence - the power of prayer and connecting to Hashem. If one struggles with stinginess, they are really a very giving person; they just need to have an outward layer that they must handle. If one thinks this way, he will not lose hope over their issues. We should remember not to give up and continue working on it, because who we really are is the opposite of our struggles.

SUGARY SAYING BY RABBI MENACHEM LOMNER

"Don't get blown away by those who seem mighty."

We all know that Hashem runs the world. He is capable of anything and everything. The strongest beings in the universe are all minuscule because they are but His creations. Yet, when it comes down to dealing with threats against our families and us, we have a hard time keeping this reality in mind. The Pasuk (Devarim 20:1) says that when you go to war, and you see a nation bigger than you, *"not to fear them, because I, Hashem, am with you - the One who took you out of Mitzrayim."*

The soldiers in the Jewish army were tasked with the immense expectation to fully trust in Hashem during the most terrifying moments of their lives. In these times, we must work on our Middah of trust in Hashem so that we can truly feel that we are taken care of, and that He watches over us to protect us at all times.

DELICIOUS DVAR BY RABBI DOVID ORLOFSKY
SHOFTIM - LET ME WALK YOU OUT



The end of the Parsha tells us the story of the Eglah Arufa. A person was found dead in the middle of nowhere - somebody killed him. To address this, we measure the distance from all the nearest cities, and whichever was the nearest city, the elders came out and declared, "we did not kill this guy." The elders wash their hands, and then they take a young calf, hit it in the back of the neck, kill it, and bury it in that place. Did anyone really think that the elders might have killed this person? The elders commented that "if we had walked him out of the city, he would have been safe." How far do they have to walk him? Four Amos (six feet).

When you have guests, you're supposed to walk them out of the house (some people are strict about this while others are not). The Torah says that Avraham planted an eishel (roshei teivos for achila, shesia, and lina), which was an inn, where he gave visitors food, drink, and a place to sleep. Some say that the lamed in eishel stands for leviya, escorting guests.

In Vilna, there was a fellow who used to have a lot of guests, but then his house burnt down. He went to the **Vilna Gaon**, ZT"L, to ask why this happened. The Gaon asked, "You gave people to eat, drink, and walk them out?" The man replied that he fed them and quenched their thirst but didn't escort them from his home." The Gaon replied, "Well, if you take off the lamed, you're left with *aish* (fire). So, walking guests out is important. However, they only must walk the guest four amos. They didn't send them with armed guards to protect them on the road." How was the guest assured safe travels? There are two approaches here.

One approach is that the host is sending a message to all the ruffians out there: "This person is under our protection, and if anything happens to him, you're going to deal with us, because we care about the people who are traveling the roads, and we feel a sense of responsibility to them."

The second approach is that this is a spiritual protection. When I walk you out, that means I walk with you. That's why after Shabbos, we have another meal called Melevah Malkah. We're escorting the Shabbos queen to show that we are attached to this holy guest that is leaving us after Havdalah and we want to keep the connection to it long after it has left us. We must understand that it might just be a few steps, but those few steps show that we have a *shaychus* (relationship). May we all be connected to the right things.

Summary: We have learned how it's critical not to be humble only in one's heart, but to be aware of how we come off and are perceived by others. The Ramchal writes that this means we need to learn how to talk, walk, sit, and act with humility. So far, we have discussed the first two areas of talking and walking, with the Ramchal pointing out that a humble person speaks softly and doesn't walk around like he owns the place. Now, the Ramchal will discuss how humble people are meant to sit.

The Ramchal writes: "In one's sitting - one's place should be among the lowly, not among the prominent. This is likewise stated explicitly in scripture: 'Do not glorify yourself before a king, and do not stand in the place of great men: for it's better that he says to you, 'Come up here', than to humble you before a prince...' (Mishlei 25:6-7). Also, Chazal said: 'distance two or three places from your [proper] place and sit until you are told 'come forward!'" rather than to go up until they tell you 'move back!' (Vayikra Raba 1:5)." (Mesilas Yesharim. Ch. 22)

Dovid Hamelech opens his magnum opus, Sefer Tehillim, by explaining how he didn't associate with evildoers and namely did not sit with *leitzim* (scoffers). We already discussed way back in Chapter 5 about how bad company can drag a person down from all levels of spirituality. In this case, the Ramchal is telling us not to seek to sit with the prominent people in the hopes that through hobnobbing with them one will add to his own sense of importance. These people might be wealthy, politically connected, or machers in some area and not sinners per se.

However, this exercise is glory-seeking at its finest and rarely ends up with the big shot being impressed with the "*kavod-shmecker*", the person who is there to boost his stature. We all know people who cannot sit at a table with (what they deem as) social losers. When making complex seating charts for a simchos, there is always at least one relative or friend who can't sit at the "plain-folk table". They yearn to be placed in the front row, the dais, or at the table with all the "*hock*" (exciting chatter).

We learn from the Ramchal's words that it's best to sit in a place where one simply blends in and is not looking for an ostentatious crowd/setting. The Ramchal points out that sometimes, if one's presence is sought after, the dignitaries will find him and bring him up front, which beats trying to get a prestigious spot and then being told to hit the road. More to come next week, with the help of Hashem.

MILK'N'HONEY FROM JERUSALEM, BY RABBI JONATHAN TAUB
SHOFTIM – WHEN IS IT HARD TO LISTEN TO A JUDGE?

Parshas Shoftim, which means the section of Judges, commands us to listen to our judges and rabbis. We learn (Devarim 17:10-11): "*And you shall do according to the word they tell you... and you shall observe to do according to all they instruct you. According to the law they instruct you, and according to the judgment they say to you, you shall do.*" After we have been told '*you shall do according to the word they tell you*,' why is there a need to further tell us, '*you shall do according to the word they tell you*'? It seems to be superfluous. Rabbi Yonasan Eibenschutz, ZT"L, in his classic work *Yearos Dvash*, explains: When someone goes to a Rav with a question as to whether an animal which has been shechted is kosher or not and the Rav delivers a verdict that the animal is treif, a G-d-fearing person will accept the decision as G-d's Will. He will not complain, nor call into question the ruling.

If, however, there is a monetary dispute and the Rav judges that one of the litigants must pay the other, the losing party will often accuse the rabbi of bias, berate him, and often harbor enmity against him for years. This is so even if the sum of money involved is not large - and even considerably smaller than the cost of an animal. Why in the first case is the verdict accepted with equanimity, whereas in the second it is not? The answer is that in the first case, although money is lost, the matter is between the party involved and the Al-mighty. In the second case, however, it is between man and his fellow. "My money is going to him!" That is considerably harder to swallow. We now understand the Pesukim quoted above: "And you shall do according to the word they tell you... and you shall observe to do according to all they instruct you. This refers to matters of "Is it permissible or forbidden?"

However, the next Pasuk is dealing with a different area: "According to the law they instruct you and according to the judgment they say to you, you shall do." This refers to judgments between man and his fellow. We need an additional admonition to listen to these cases as well. May we accept Hashem's Will in all aspects of our life!

Rav Eliyahu Mizrachi, the author of the famous commentary on **Rashi**, once told a story which he heard firsthand. Many years ago, when Turkey was under Islamic rule, he was in the Turkish town of Izmir and came across a businessman who had what he described as "a crown of light" on his head. He asked this man what his story was, and he replied with the following:

"I wasn't always Jewish and used to be a coldhearted businessman. In Izmir there is a well-known widow who goes around all day limping on her cane to collect for the poor. She was sweet and very trusted by the townspeople. One day, as I was with my friends, I thought it would be funny to hand her some pebbles instead of money. Well, when I did so, she said, 'I bless you that when you need the Jews, they will not close their hand on you.' I got very upset and began cursing her in public.

Well, in the years after that, my business went south, and I lost everything - to the point where I couldn't afford a meal. My old friends didn't help me, even though they were as wealthy as I used to be. When I was walking around Izmir one day, I saw that someone from the shul was giving out food to the poor townspeople for Shabbos, so I waited in line. When my turn came, the gabbai responded, 'I'm sorry, but this isn't my food to give out freely. It's only for Jews. However, I can give you from my own money.'

As I sat there eating, I cried bitterly, remembering the words of that sweet old woman. I decided that I wanted to convert and mend my crooked ways. However, the rabbi of the town didn't trust me. As he was about to turn me down, that holy woman walked in and testified that I was sincere. Since then, I've seen my business succeed once more, and I've been working very hard to give as much tzedakah as I can and always be honest in business. I also opened a food pantry for those who struggle."

Comment: In this week's parsha, Shoftim, we read (Devarim 16:20): "tzedek, tzedek tir'dof - justice, justice, shall you pursue." In Lashon Hakodesh, the word for charity, "tzedaka," comes from the same root as the word for justice, "tzedek." Part of building a just society is instilling in people the desire to freely help those in need. For us, charity and kindness aren't merely something nice that we can do, but something that we must do. Those who don't give feel impoverished of satisfaction and meaning, while those who give enrich others and are enriched.

AVARECHECHA B'CHAYAI BY R'MICHAEL SPZILZINGER
SHOFTIM – PERFECT HARMONY

This weekly column draws from Rabbeinu Bachye's introduction to each Parsha, linking it to a verse in Mishlei, and offering practical insights and takeaways.

“Diracheha Darchei Noam, V'Chul Nesivoseha Shalom - her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Mishlei 3:17) This week we take a look at one of the most famous Psukim of Mishlei and describe a fundamental principle of life - Shalom.

Foundation of Creation

From the very beginning of creation, Shalom was used as the cornerstone. To really understand what Shalom means we must move beyond the concept of peace. It really speaks to an integration of different parts which when combined produce a completeness (Shleimus). Every created item and being was created with “Kul Tzeva'am”. To achieve this there needs to be a coexistence which binds items with different characteristics together (making peace). “Oseh Shalom Bimromav” is ascribed to Hashem who enables the coexistence between forces of fire and water in the amalgam we call Shamayim (Eish/Mayim).

Wealth of Health

This Pasuk is said as we serenade the Torah back to the Aron after use. The Torah provides us both with health on a physical and a spiritual level. This is evidenced in the Pesukim of: “If you will heed ... what He says...giving ear to His commandments and keeping all His laws, then I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians, for I, Hashem, am your Healer” (Shemos 15:26)

“Hashem's Torah is perfect, restores the soul” (Tehillim 19:8) Adherence to the Torah will show us the paths and roads that will bring Shalom and Sheleimus into our existence.

The Final Word

Rabbeinu Bachye points out that Shalom is the seal on the most prominent series in Yahadus. Most notably we see this in Tefillah as Shalom is the 18th Bracha of the Shemoneh Esrei (recited even on Shabbos). At the end of the Parshas HaKarbanos, we end with the Shelamim (Vayikra 7:18). In Koheles, when Shlomo lists the different times and purposes, he finishes “Eis Milchama, V'Eis Shalom – there is a time for war, and a time for peace.”

Connecting to the Parsha

In order to have real Shalom in society, it requires the underpinning of justice. Without justice, it's every man for himself. Our Parsha comes along and gives us the guidelines of how to establish proper judges and authorities to ensure law and order and a peaceful society.

Takeaway: Shalom is more than the absence of conflict - it is the harmony that emerges when every part of life is aligned with Hashem's design.

Self-reflective questions: What parts of my life feel disconnected, and how can I better align them with my values? How can I contribute to greater Shalom in my family and community this week?

SUGAR RUSH ON THE 613 MITZVOS BY RABBI ELI REIT
MITZVAH # 224 -ADMINISTERING MAKKOS

In the time of the Sanhedrin, we were commanded to administer lashes to Jews who violate certain *aveiros* (sins), as the Pasuk (Devarim 25:2) says, “*the judge should lean the violator over and hit him*”. This punishment is for someone who transgressed a negative commandment. The sin must also involve an action. There are also other exceptions to the rule.

This punishment helps cleanse the sinner and prepare him for repentance. He will then be worthy of great rewards in Heaven. This punishment was only administered when there were two valid witnesses who testified against him, and he must have been warned before he sinned.

SHALOM BAYIS AND THE PARSHA
BY RABBI YITZ GREENFIELD

SHOFTIM – MARRIAGE: HANDLE WITH CARE

With Eretz Yisrael constantly under attack by our enemies, it is reassuring to read this week's parsha. The Pasuk (Devarim 20:4) “*For Hashem your G-d, is the one who goes with you to fight for you, with your enemies, to save you.*” The Pesukim then instruct the chief officers of the Jewish army to announce who is exempt from going to war. One who has built a new house but has not inaugurated it yet, planted a vineyard and did not redeem it yet, or got engaged but is not yet married, all are instructed to go home.

Then, the Pasuk tells us (ibid. 20:8) “*The officers should add in speaking to the people and say ‘Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house and let him not melt the heart of his brothers, like his heart.’”* **Rashi** quotes R'Yose HaGelili, who explains that this Pasuk is referring to someone who is fearful because of his sins. He informs us that the Torah is giving the Jewish soldier a pretext to leave. When he leaves, he will not be embarrassed because people will say, he built a house, planted a vineyard, or betrothed a wife. Why are we so concerned not to embarrass a sinner?

The answer is because being part of Klal Yisroel is not about what we DO; rather, it is about WHO WE ARE. If we keep this in mind, then it makes perfect sense why Hashem would make sure someone who has committed sins is not embarrassed. The opposite, we make sure to go out of our way for him!

This is a lesson we can bring into our marriages. Our spouse has sensitivities, and it behooves us to be extra careful not to embarrass our spouse - even as a “joke.” If we know our spouse is sensitive to the way his/her food tastes, if the kugel tastes too salty, saying so at the Shabbos table (in front of guests) is going to embarrass them. If our spouse is a Ba'al Teshuva or a Ba'alas Teshuva, bringing up sensitive topics in front of others is going to embarrass them. If our spouse had a difficult relationship with a parent during their childhood, this is not a topic that we should focus on.

If our spouse wants to speak about it, we can listen empathetically, but we should not be the ones who initiate that conversation. If we make the effort and we take a few minutes to compile a list of things we know we should be careful about it, it will help us to remember our spouses' sensitivities. If we are unsure, we can privately ask our spouse directly. The dividends are worth the effort. May Hashem bless us to never inadvertently embarrass our spouse, and may He shine the light of Shalom Bayis into our homes.