Points to Ponder

Shoftim 5778

**צדק צדק תרדוףPursue justice (16:20) — Rashi** adds that one has the obligation to run after the best Beis Din. The **Sifrei** adds that one needs to select a Beis Din like that of Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai or Rabbi Eliezer. From the Sifrei’s comment it sounds like one does not need to trust the local Beis Din and in fact should spend money to get to the best one. At the same time, later (17:9) it sounds like one needs to rely on the local authorities and to place one’s trust in the leaders of his own time and place. How to reconcile these opposing ideas? **Rav Henoch Leibowitz ztl.** explained that there is no contradiction and in fact one needs both talents. On the one hand, one needs to always be challenging his own thinking lest he get too haughty and seek out the best opinions out there. At the same time, one needs to know that there is a limit on how much checking one can do, and one needs to learn to accept the opinions of the great minds of his day once those people are identified.

**ולא תקים לך מצבה Do not establish a Matzeiva which Hashem finds abhorrent (16:22) - Rashi** reminds us that although establishing a Matzeivah was ok and even desired in the time of the Avos, today Hashem does not want the Matzeivos since they became symbols to Avoda Zara. Why are Matzeivos different from a mizbeiach which the Umos use for Avodah Zara. Why are we allowed to build Mizbachos? **Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl.** explained that a Mizbeiach is made from many stones and a Matzeiva from one. Before Matan Torah Hashem was ok with those who did one significant action even if not followed up upon. But after Matan Torah Hashem is not satisfied with single stoic gestures but rather ones that keep growing in quantity and quality.

**ולא ירבה לו נשים He should not have too many wives (17:17)** - The midrash notes that when Shlomo decided to show that he could withstand the command not to have too many wives and took additional ones, the letter Yud came to complain in front of Hashem. The midrash explains that the yud from Yarbeh asked why Shlomo was allowed to violate it. Why did the letter Yud come and not the other letters in the word? **Rav Hunter ztl.** explained that the letter Yud has the power to focus on the future. This is especially the case based on the Gemara (Shabbos 104a) that Hashem gives the Torah as a Yerusha to us. (After all, we are given the Torah in order to transmit it to the future generations.) Thus, the letter argued that although Shlomo might have been ok logically but the Torah rests on super logical principles and needs to be observed even when it looks   logic at the time does not support the need for the rules.

**ונס אל אחת הערים האל וחי And he shall run to one of the aforementioned cities and live(19:8**)- The Gemara (makos 10b) explains that when a student is sent to the Ir Miklat, his Rebbe is sent with him in order to continue to educate him and give him life. **Rav Steinman ztl** highlighted that Rav Simcha Zelig Reguer would often quote Rav Chaim of Volozhin who explained that when the Gra was on his deathbed, one of the townspeople was complaining that he could not handle the pressure of the kedusha since the tannaim and amoraim were around to greet the Gra as a teacher would the students. This, Rav Steinman explained, is part of the unbeatable connection between Rebbe and student. Even as the student transitions from one world to the next, the teachers come to accompany him.

**כי יהיה איש שונא לרעהוWhen a person hates his friend (19:11)** - The Torah goes to great lengths to explain the accidental nature of the death that led to the exile to the Ir Miklat, so why the introduction about hating one’s neighbor? **Rav Chaim Pinchas Sheinberg ztl.** explained that when one is lax in a simple issue, he will come to do a greater one. If you violate V’ahavta, you will come to violate Lo Tisna and once hate is acceptable, ultimately you will come to spill blood. Rav Sheinberg added that we see why this is a klal gadol in the Torah. If you miss the message, the error can change the trajectory of one’s whole life.

**אל ירא לבבכםDo not fear (20:3)** – Hashem tells us that there will be no need to be afraid because Hashem will be with the Jewish army, saving them and fighting on their behalf. This theme is repeated again in Parshas Ki Teitze (23:14-15), where the soldiers are commanded to be careful to have a clean camp, and to dress properly out of respect for the shechinah. **Rav Schachter Shlita** reminded us that the Gemara also applied these laws (of cleanliness and proper dress) to one who is davening or learning Torah. The source for those rules comes from here with soldiers who are fighting "Hashem’s battles." The Yirushalmi learns that 10 soldiers constitutes an army camp. Similarly, it takes 10 to make a minyan to recite kaddish, kedushah, or barchu. The minyan, fighting "G-d's battles" constitute a Davar Shebikedusha, and the Torah promises that the Shechinah will be with them.

**ואתה תבער הדם הנקי מקרבך And you shall destroy the innocent blood from your midst (21:9) - Ibn Ezra** comments that if one does that which is Yashar in the eyes of Hashem, then there will be no blood spilled. This is simply a result of Schar Mitzva in this world. In other words, the greatest Kiruv we can do, is the Kiruv of ourselves. **Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel ztl.** Would often point out that the world gets a lot of inspiration from the Yashrus of the individual. Why? When the person realizes that s/he impacts the world through the individual actions, it gives us the rest of the energy to us to keep doing them.

**Haftorah: וָֽאָשִׂ֚ים דְּבָרַי֙ בְּפִ֔יךָ וּבְצֵ֥ל יָדִ֖י כִּסִּיתִ֑יךָ לִנְטֹ֚עַ שָׁמַ֙יִם֙ וְלִיסֹ֣ד אָ֔רֶץ I have placed My words in your mouth, and with the shade of My hand I have covered you – to implant the heavens and to set a foundation for the earth – and to say unto Zion, 'You are My people.'" (Yeshaya 51:16)** – To whom is the Novi speaking in this Possuk**? Rav Avrohom Rivlin Shlita** explained in the name of Rav Chaim of Volohzin that the intent here is to every Jew who is to remember his enormous potential level and the great abilities that are inherent in him, that are able "to implant the heavens and to set a foundation for the earth." In this regard, Yeshaya wants to contrast the lowliness of the oppressor, who is a "mortal human" and "men who will be made as grass," with the Jewish person, who has the ability "to implant the heavens and to set a foundation for the earth," a quality that is mentioned in our verses in relation to G-d Himself. If so, why the fear!