

LAMPLIGHTER

3 Elul
Shoftim
1099
9 August
5773/2013

PUBLISHED BY THE CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD

LIVING WITH THE TIMES

This week's Torah portion, Shoftim, speaks about the cities of refuge whence a person would flee if he accidentally killed someone. There, the unintentional killer would dwell, protected from the wrath of the victim's relatives, until the High Priest who served in the Holy Temple passed away.

But not only unintentional killers sought refuge in these cities; even someone who committed murder intentionally was expected to flee there as well. The court would then convene and issue its ruling on the death. The cities of refuge offered protection, if only temporarily in some cases, to anyone who had caused a loss of life.

After the destruction of the Holy Temple and the dispersion of the Jewish people, the cities of refuge ceased to exist in the physical sense. Yet the Torah is eternal, and its lessons apply in every generation. In our times, therefore, the concept of cities of refuge finds expression in the spiritual dimension.

Our Sages taught that "the words of Torah absorb." In other words, the Torah itself is the refuge in which all may seek asylum. In the spiritual sense, "killing" symbolizes the act of committing a sin, causing a spiritual death to the G-dly soul, for the Torah's 613 mitzvot are the "ropes" that bind the soul to G-d. Transgressing the Torah's commandments damages those ties, and threatens to cut the soul off from its G-dly source.

We learn from this week's Torah portion that it is never too late to do teshuva, to repent, no matter how grave a transgression has been committed. Even the person who deliberately sinned can do teshuva and seek protection in the refuge of Torah.

In one sense, nowadays we have a distinct advantage over our forefathers who lived during the times of the Holy Temple. In those days, repentance alone was not enough to atone for a sin. The unintentional killer had to remain exiled in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest, and the intentional murderer (as defined by the Torah) received capital punishment. Yet after the destruction of the Temple, teshuva alone can atone for even the gravest sin.

Years ago, when Jewish courts had ultimate authority, a judge could only rule on what he himself had seen. G-d, however, can look into the heart of man and judge whether or not his repentance is sincere.

In the same way, the month of Elul, during which we take account of our actions of the previous year, is a "city of refuge" in time, offering us the same opportunity to clear the slate and merit a good and sweet year to come.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Guarding the Gates

By Mordechai Wollenberg

The story is told that when the modern State of Israel was set up in 1948, there was a proposal to try to create a *Sanhedrin*, the court of Sages which decided Jewish law in ancient times. There was concern as to where they would find 70 individuals who were not susceptible to bribery and corruption.

"Don't worry", somebody noted, "for money you can find anything!"

Unfortunately, bribery and corruption are rife. The Torah warns us how bribery "blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous."

We do not need to look so far to find bribery within our own lives. The human intellect is a fine thing which can come up with very rational and logical deductions, based on sound reasoning. The problem is that the data for the intellectual process is fed through a very subjective filter, namely our senses and emotions. As such, we are very susceptible to temptation and to misleading impressions. The "evil inclination" (*Yetzer Hora*) is well aware of this and will attempt to bribe us into thinking a particular idea or course of action is good for us when in reality this may well not be the case.

All very well, you may ask, but how do we avoid such bribery? The Torah tells us, in the very first words of this week's Torah portion to "place judges and officers over your gates." A gate is something which allows us to control who or what passes through it. Our senses are also "gates" to ourselves -- we have to be discerning in what passes through our eyes, ears, nose etc. to avoid being blinded by false impressions and ideas. By safeguarding our "gates" and controlling what we allow to enter through them, we are far less vulnerable to the false claims of the evil inclination.

As anyone who ever had an unwanted guest will attest, it is a lot harder to get rid of somebody once they have their foot in the door, let alone their entire being, than to shut them out before they have a chance to enter.

The story is told of a disciple who came to his Rabbi asking for advice on how to conquer his temptations. The Rabbi told him to go visit a certain student in a certain place.

Having reached the student's house, on the edge of the town, the disciple knocked on the door. He waited until late into the night yet there was still no answer. He ended up spending the night, freezing cold, on the doorstep. When morning came, the student finally let the person in.

The disciple explained that he had come to find out how to control his temptations. The student explained to him "you see how I kept you waiting all night? This is my house -- I decide when you come in, not you..."

"This is how to control your animal nature -- make sure that whatever comes in, it does so because you wanted to let it, rather than sneaking in on its terms."

The story may be a little harsh but the message is clear. Yes, Ethics of our Fathers tells us "Who is wise? One who learns from every person" but we still need to be discerning about what we will and will not take "on board." Something which accepts from everyone and anyone all around is called a trash can -- not something we particularly want to emulate!

Slice of LIFE

A PARKING LOT FILLED WITH BAR MITZVA'S

By Tzvi Jacobs

This true story happened during the Jewish month of Elul (September 1989). I was driving home from a bris in Elizabeth, New Jersey. On the way I stopped at a branch of the bank that I use to make a deposit. I parked in the lot behind the bank. I got out, locked the door and then remembered that the check was in the car. I opened the door, found the check, turned to close the door, and gasped.

Three men surrounded me. They wore tattered jeans and filthy t-shirts. Though it was before noon, they reeked of alcohol. The guy on the left was clutching a whiskey bottle like a hammer. He had a desperate, mean look in his eyes. The guy on my right almost looked friendly, but a little scared and hungry. He was about my size. But the one in the middle--he was big, bad and ugly. He loomed above. He had tattoos up the entire length of his bare arms.

"Got some change?" he said, extending his huge hand towards my neck. Three teeth were missing from his grin. A deep scar ran from his chin to his cheek.

Thoughts raced through my head. Think fast, stay calm. Everything happens for a reason. All is for the good. Only fear G-d. All the Chasidic dictums about life were running through my mind. They made sense in yeshiva.

But now? Now it was Elul, when G-d is supposed to be very accessible, like the King who leaves his palace and is in the fields and streets listening to the requests of the ordinary folks.

"Yes, I have some change for you," I

said, while dropping the check back in the car, locking and closing the car door behind me.

Everything happens for a reason.

"Any of you Jewish?" I asked. I knew it was next to impossible.

"Yeh, I'm Jewish," the big guy said.

"You're Jewish?" I said in disbelief.

It must be a ploy. "You have a Jewish name?"

"Shmuel Yankel ben Moshe," he said with pride, like a boot soldier responding to his officer. In his eyes I probably looked like a rabbi.

"Did you have a Bar Mitzva?" I asked.

"Yuh. Baruch ata..." The big guy, nee Shmuel Yankel, began singing the Haftarah blessings.

"Why are you asking for a few cents? You should be asking for millions. It's right before Rosh Hashana and you can ask G-d for anything. He's here in the streets with you and me and we can ask Him for anything now. On Rosh Hashana, G-d goes back into His palace and it's not so easy for us to get in, but now He's taking requests. I might have some change, but G-d has millions.

"You know what tefilin are? Put them on, Shmuel Yankel. I'm sure G-d will hear you."

As I spoke I slipped the car key out of my pocket and got my tefilin out. "Put out your arm."

The sleeve was torn off his shirt. That made it easy to slide the tefilin over his arm, past the chorus line of tattoos and rows of little holes.

Those must be needle tracks, I thought.

"Here," I said, as I took off my yarmulka from beneath my hat. "Let me put this on you so you can say the blessing with me." He lowered his head so I could reach it. "Baruch ata..." We said the blessing and then I reached up and put the tefilin on his head. Shmuel Yankel said the Shema and his eyes became wet.

"G-d's right here with you, Shmuel Yankel. Ask Him whatever your heart desires." He was quiet. A tear rolled into the scar groove.

One of his partners was pacing back and forth on the asphalt, like a shark swimming in front of his prey. "Let's go already," the Shark snapped.

"You just wait. I'm praying," Shmuel Yankel said. The Shark backed off like a guppy. The third guy looked with amazement at the whole ceremony. Why was he so interested?

I asked him his name. "Michel," he said with a slurred French accent.

"Are you Jewish, Michel?"

"No, I'm Catholic. My mother was Jewish but she became Catholic. The Nazis killed her parents and a Catholic monastery raised her."

"You're Jewish," I told him. "If your mother was born Jewish, then nothing can take that away. Once a Jew, always a Jew," I said. "Today is like your Bar Mitzva. Put on these tefilin and we'll make a Bar Mitzva celebration."

Michel repeated the blessings for tefilin as best he could. The tefilin sat on his greasy, long, black hair. His eyes sparkled with life, and Michel began to look like a scraggly Jewish boy, like the lost prince who had been dragged through the mucky alleys of medieval Europe, beaten and abused, and now has finally stumbled across his royal home. The King met him in the streets, and Michel recognized his Father.

"We can take them off now," I said. Michel held out his arm and let me unwrap them as if he were a gentle baby.

I had some cake with me from the bris. The four of us split the two slices of cake. "L'Chaim. To life," I said, raising my cake.

My two Jewish friends thanked me. We shook hands and hugged.

"Wait," I said, running after them, "here's some change."

"No, that's all right," Shmuel Yankel said as he waved good-bye.

Published by **The Chabad House of Caulfield** in conjunction with the **Rabbinical College of Australia and N.Z.**

Editor: Moshe Backman
P.O. Box 67, Balaclava Vic. 3183 AUSTRALIA
Phone 0433 026 117
Email: lamplighter@rabbinicalcollege.edu.au

The Lamplighter contains words from sacred writings. Please do not deface or discard.

ISSUE 1099

MOSHIACH MATTERS

The Torah attests to the coming of Moshiach... Also, regarding the "Cities of Refuge" it is written: "And when G-d expands your boundaries... you shall add three more cities..." This never yet came to pass, and G-d did not command it in vain. (*Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 11:1-2*)



INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

By the Grace of G-d
16 Sivan, 5719 [1959]
Brooklyn

Blessings and Greetings!

You write of your state of mind, in which you find it difficult to make decisions on any matter and remain in doubt as to whether you are doing as you ought, and so on.

In view of your upbringing, of which you write, there is certainly no need for me to emphasize the subject of Divine Providence, a fundamental principle in our faith and in our Torah, the Torah of Life. The meaning of this concept, *hashgachah peratis*, is straightforward - that G-d, Who created and directs the world, watches over every man and woman, not only in public matters, but also in his private affairs. This concept enables us to understand the principle of trusting in the One Who conducts the world and Who is the essence of good, for accordingly, everything is also for the good, plainly and simply.

Every believer's mind, too, understands that the first direct result of this trust is that there is no worry and no confusion. For when a person is weighing in his mind what he should decide and how he should act, at that time, too, G-d is watching over him and helping him, helping all those who desire what is good and upright. And when one conducts himself according to the directives of the Torah, this is the good path, and such conduct in itself helps a person to go ahead with all his affairs in a way that is good for him.

As in all matters of faith, the above-mentioned principle likewise requires neither intellectual argumentation nor profound and complex philosophical proofs. For every individual of the Children of Israel, man or woman, senses in his soul that he truly has faith - even when he is not thinking about whether this principle is correct or whether it is a rational imperative. As the Sages affirm, all Jews are "believers, the descendants of believers." This means that the faith that is within them, both in their own right and as a heritage from their forebears who were believers, and all the spiritual properties that became theirs in their own right and also as a heritage, - this faith and these spiritual properties are utterly strong within them all. This is self-explanatory.

I hope that these lines of mine, limited as they are in quantity, will suffice to rouse your thoughts and to guide you toward the truest and innermost point within your own self - that in your innermost soul you most definitely trust that G-d watches over you. All you need to do is to bring forth this thought from within your soul to your day-to-day life. After all, "there is nothing that stands in the way of the will."

As was said above, the way to accomplish this is not by profound intellectual debate, but by relying on your inner feeling that you place your trust in G-d - not by seeking out doubts, nor by creating problematic queries that are not at all problematic and in fact do not trouble you. Averting your attention from all of this will no doubt help you to rid yourself easily of all the confusing factors that have been spoken of.

It would be advisable that before the morning prayers on weekdays, a few times a week, you set aside a few cents to be donated for *tzedakah* - preferably on Mondays and Thursdays and on the eve of *Shabbos*. And it goes without saying that such an undertaking should be made without a formal vow.

With blessings for a strengthening of your *bitachon* and for good news regarding all the above,

CUSTOMS CORNER

The Torah contains laws and rules governing every aspect of our lives. It deals not only with how we pray in the synagogue, but how we should grow our crops, run our businesses and set up laws for our people. But who will enforce Torah law? Who will make sure that it is followed?

This job is left to the courts and police. They are put in charge of assuring that law and order be kept. Every city has its own district police stations and courts. It is their job to supervise the public and enforce the law. This system was designed by Torah. We are commanded to appoint police and judges in all settlements.

This is a positive command found in this week's Parsha, Deuteronomy 16:18 "Appoint judges and officers in all your gates"

It is actually also one of the seven Noahide laws to set up courts of justice. That should enforce humane conduct and keep integrity and peace between people.

A WORD

from the Director

Being the first week of Elul, the month preparing for the coming year, we should ensure all our deeds are up to par in preparation for a year "signed and sealed for good and blessing." We can take a lesson for this from the Parsha.

Parshas Shoftim begins with the command to appoint judges and enforcement officers. This reflects the essence of Torah morality on the world. The judges, to quote the Rambam, are "the essence of the Oral Law, the pillars of instruction, from whom statutes and judgment emerge for all of Israel."

The Torah emphasizes that judges must be positioned, "at all your gates." A gate represents the transition between the city and the lands beyond it. The judges' presence at the gate ensures that, besides everyone's compliance to the law inside the city, additionally, anything brought in or out of the city will be in accordance with the laws of the government.

Metaphorically, the gate represents the openings of the body; the mouth, the eyes, the nose, the ears. Just like the Judges in the literal sense are meant to oversee everything going in or out of the city gates, so too the "gates" of the body must be overseen to ensure that anything a person eats, sees, smells, or hears will be in accordance with Torah.

Protecting one's body from harmful things is as, if not more important than, border control. Just as great care is taken by those officers to make sure the country is safe, one must keep his body safe physically as well as spiritually. As much as eating healthy, looking at and hearing pleasant things is a necessity, such is the obligation to eat kosher, to only speak, hear, and see things the Torah allows. By striving to improve in these areas we will most definitely be granted a happy, healthy, and sweet new year.

J. I. Gutnick

IT HAPPENED

Once...

TAILOR TO THE RESCUE

Rabbi Hillel of Paritsh was renowned for his punctilious observance of the *mitzvot*, being prepared to risk his life even for the merest detail ordained by the Sages. The Czarist regime of his day decreed that all Jews were to shave off their *peyos*, and some unscrupulous informer told the local authorities that Reb Hillel's ear locks were still intact. They decided to shear them off by force, but Reb Hillel covered them tightly with his hands to protect them. The soldiers withdrew their swords and forcefully began hitting his hands and head, causing him to scream. His neighbour, a Jewish tailor who had a good relationship with the officers in charge, heard him and came running, and after promising them gifts, he convinced them to leave. Grateful for his help, Reb Hillel blessed the man, and promised him that "after a hundred and twenty years" he would be rewarded by being buried next to him.

Many years passed. Reb Hillel in the meantime became rabbi of Bobruisk, and every year would travel around the provinces and to the cities of Kherson and Yekatrinoslav, teaching Torah as well to the farmers of the Jewish agricultural colonies, by whom he was greatly admired. In the summer of 1864, at age 69, he suddenly fell ill while staying in Kherson - which is very far from Bobruisk and Paritsh in White Russia - and passed away there.

On the following day, amidst widespread mourning, he was brought to burial, and his disciples and admirers flocked there for many years thereafter to pray at the graveside of this *Tzadik*.

Sometime later, on a bitterly cold and stormy day, an unknown elderly traveller died in the town's communal hostelry. The Chevra Kadisha [Jewish Burial Society] prepared his body and took him to be buried, intending to place him in the section for unknown people. However, due to the fierce winter snow, they unknowingly buried him near Reb Hillel. A day or two later it was noticed that the new grave had been dug right next to the resting place of the illustrious Reb Hillel. When the facts came to light a great hubbub arose in town: was it proper that an unknown traveller whom no respectable citizen even knew, a nobody who had died in the communal poorhouse - that such a one should be buried next to the *Tzadik*?

It was too late, though, to change things: the Torah would never allow it. At least let them find out just who this individual was. His identification papers disclosed his name and that of his father, and the fact that he came from Paritsh. The communal worthies of Kherson therefore wrote to their counterparts in Paritsh, asking to be told at least whatever they knew about this man.

The answer from Paritsh identified him clearly: he was a retired tailor, who had been traveling in order to live with one of his children. They added that this same tailor had many long years earlier been promised by Reb Hillel that "after a hundred and twenty years" he would be brought to rest next to his own resting place.

And so, the decades-old promise of Rabbi Hillel of Paritsh came to fruition.

Biographical note:

Rabbi Hillel of Paritsh (1795-13 Av/*Shabbat Nachamu* 1864) was a Chassid of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the *Tzemach Tzedek*, and as the Chassidim used to say, "half a Rebbe" in his own right. He served as the Rabbi of Bobruisk for many years, and authored *Pelach HaRimon*, a work of deep Chassidic thought.

Thoughts THAT COUNT

Justice, justice shall you pursue (16:20)

Why does the verse repeat itself? Is there a just justice and an unjust justice? Indeed there is. The Torah is telling us to be just also in pursuit of justice -- both the end and the means by which it is obtained must be just. (*Rabbi Bunim of Peshischa*)

By virtue of three things the world endures: law, truth and peace. (Ethics of the Fathers 1:18)

The three are one and the same: if the law is upheld, there is truth and there is peace. (Jerusalem Talmud, Taanit 4:2)

A judge who judges with absolute truth, becomes a partner with G-d in creation. (Talmud, Shabbat 10a)

Be wholehearted with G-d (18:13)

Conduct yourself with Him with simplicity and depend on Him, and do not seek to manipulate the future; rather, accept whatever happens to you with simplicity and then, you will be with Him and to His portion. (*Sifri; Rashi*)

CANDLE LIGHTING: 9 AUGUST 2013

BEGINS	ENDS
5:21MELBOURNE	6:20
5:21ADELAIDE	6:19
5:05BRISBANE	5:59
6:23DARWIN	7:14
5:02GOLD COAST	5:57
5:27PERTH	6:23
5:02SYDNEY	6:00
5:08CANBERRA	6:06
5:05LAUNCESTON	6:07
5:23AUCKLAND	6:22
5:15WELLINGTON	6:16
5:01HOBART	6:04
5:01BYRON BAY	5:56
6:57SINGAPORE	7:47



CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH

439 INKERMAN STREET, CAULFIELD

PARSHAS SHOFTIM
3 ELUL • 9 AUGUST

FRIDAY NIGHT:	CANDLE LIGHTING:	5:21 PM
	MINCHA:	5:30 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS:	6:05 PM
SHABBOS MORNING:	SHACHARIS:	10:00 AM
	LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA:	9:48 AM
	MINCHA:	5:25 PM
	SHABBOS ENDS:	6:20 PM
WEEKDAYS:	SHACHARIS SUN-FRI:	9:15 AM
	MINCHA:	5:30 PM
	MAARIV:	6:15 PM