

LAMPLIGHTER

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Parshas
Shoftim
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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

"At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he who is worthy of death be put to death, but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death," we read in this week's Torah portion, Shoftim.

But what happens if someone confesses to a capital crime? Is the Jewish court allowed to carry out a death sentence, according to the rule that "the admission of the plaintiff is worth 100 witnesses"?

Maimonides explains that this legal ruling applies only in monetary cases; when it comes to capital crimes, two witnesses are necessary to determine guilt.

Our Sages explain the difference thus:

A person's soul is not his property; it does not belong to him at all, but is only entrusted to him by G-d for safekeeping. For this reason it is not only forbidden to kill (oneself or others) but it is forbidden to cause harm or injury to the body, as well. An admission of guilt is therefore meaningless because it involves something which is not subject to ownership.

Wealth, on the other hand, is actually "owned" by the individual (as much as anything created by G-d, the Master of the world, can said to be "owned" by a human being). The testimony of the person involved may therefore be accepted as the determining factor.

This distinction is also reflected in the various blessings established by our Sages, appropriately called "benedictions of enjoyment."

We recite a blessing before eating or drinking, but not before enjoying our money. That is because the soul, which derives its pleasure and sustenance from the divine sparks in the food or drink we ingest, is not our own; we must therefore recite a blessing before we partake of G-d's goodness. However, we do not need to obtain G-d's permission before we spend our money. (Of course, G-d wants us to utilize our wealth for doing mitzvot (commandments), giving charity, etc.)

In truth, every single Jew is a "witness," for his observance of Torah and mitzvot attests to the existence of the Creator. The function of a witness, in both the limited and broader sense, is to uncover something which is hidden. G-d has placed the Jewish people in a physical world ("olam," from the word meaning hidden or concealed) to testify to His absolute sovereignty, and show through their actions how "everything came into being with His word."

When this will take place, the above type of testimony will not be necessary, for we will have entered the Messianic era and G-dliness will be self-evident: "The glory of G-d will be revealed, and all flesh will see that the mouth of G-d has spoken." May it happen immediately.

Are You Objective?

By Mendy Wolf

There was once a king who was very fond of target shooting. He practiced daily and arranged competitions. With time he felt that he had gotten pretty good at the sport, yet he continued trying to improve.

One day, as he was traveling through the countryside, the king noticed several target boards near a small peasant hut. Looking closely, he was astonished to see that every one of the many darts on the boards was precisely in the center! This simple peasant was apparently an expert; he had hit a bull's-eye with every try!

Curious to learn how the man had done it, the king knocked on the door of the hut. The peasant who answered laughed heartily at the the king's question. "Why, it's very simple," he replied naively. "Instead of drawing the target and aiming towards it, I throw the darts, and then draw the circles around them. It works every time . . ."

The Torah portion of Shoftim (Deuteronomy 16:18–21:9) includes a prohibition for judges to take bribes. The Torah then explains the reason for this commandment: "For bribery blinds the eyes of the wise."

Now, you're probably thinking, "No kidding, that's the definition of a bribe! What kind of reason is that?"

Good point. But, actually, the Torah is not trying to explain what's wrong with paying off a judge; it's obvious that corrupting fair judgment is immoral. Rather, the Torah seeks to clarify a fact. Often, people say, "I can be objective in this case, despite my connection to it." Recognizing the difficulty of proper judgment when personal concerns are involved, we may nonetheless convince ourselves that we are immune to bribery, intellectually and emotionally capable of separating fact from feeling.

Yet the Torah cautions us that the danger of bribery is not merely a possibility, nor even a probability. It is an automatic effect. Bribery—monetary or otherwise—skews one's perception, literally "blinding" him to reality. No one is immune.

We are all judges, all of the time. There are important decisions to be made constantly, and these require clear thinking and examination of facts. But often, we may be swayed by bribes—personal concerns, interests and feelings. We may have the best of intentions, yet the possibility of a purely objective decision is technically out of our reach, "for bribery blinds the eyes of the wise."

For this reason, it is crucial that every one of us have a mentor, an objective individual upon whom we rely to help us make decisions. Before signing on the dotted line, run it by someone out of the picture. It's a sort of reality check, a way to make sure that we are aiming towards the target, rather than adjusting the goal to suit us.

Slice of LIFE

SUBBOTA

Excerpted from Subbota: My Twenty Years in Soviet Prisons by Avraham Netzach (Eliezer Nanas)

One Wednesday, the doctor sent for me and in strict confidence told me news that stunned me.

In our camp there were a great many German war criminals who were sentenced in 1945-1946 for what they had done in the occupied territories. A special commission had examined the records of the Germans and compiled a list of over 1,000 men who would be sent to a very severe labor camp.

"Imagine how I felt when I looked over the list of names and found yours among them! How could they send you with these Nazi killers that murdered your people? The oper slipped your folder in with the Germans. The only one who can help is the Director of the camp. He can explain to the commission that a Jew does not belong among these anti-Semites! You must work fast."

My only thought was how to escape this fate. I told the Jewish artist, a fellow prisoner, about my deadly situation. He had access to the homes of the officials. His work had become a real camp industry that enriched the officials considerably. He happened to be painting a portrait in the home of the camp director, a Jew. He offered to ask the wife to intercede with her husband on my behalf.

One evening several days later, a juvenile prisoner, an errand boy, told me breathlessly that I was to meet someone at the office of the doll factory director. As I opened the door, an elegantly dressed young girl, 18 or 19 years old, greeted me.

"I know all about you, even that your name is on the list of the transport with the Germans. I want to help you. Rabbi, give me your blessing for success. I am determined to do

everything to save you even at the highest cost. But swear to me that no one will learn that I was here."

I blessed her and promised secrecy. It made no sense to ask who she was, not in this situation. Even here there were people who wanted to help!

Exactly eight days later I was summoned again. I hardly recognized the girl. Her face had lost its freshness, and her cheeks were sunken and pale, but her smile was triumphant. "Congratulations! You won't go with those Nazis.

"Let me introduce myself. I am the daughter of the camp director. The Jewish painter was at our home, creating a magnificent fresco on our wall. My mother spoke with him in Yiddish, and I could not follow their conversation. Both of them wept.

"Later my mother had a long argument with Father, and he kept answering, 'No. No. I cannot.'

"I was intrigued and rather upset. I understood that the argument was a continuation of the conversation with the painter. The following day when Mother was out, I asked the painter whether he was in a financial predicament, and offered to lend him my savings.

"The painter explained that it was not a money problem. At first he refused to tell me anything, but finally he told me about you. He said that you had spent over twelve years in the camps and were guilty only of being a religious Jew. Now you were being sent to a camp for Nazi war-criminals.

"Weeping, he told me, 'If you are a Jewish daughter with a Jewish heart, you must persuade your father to save this Jew, because sending him to that camp is a death sentence. Only your father can countermand the order.'

"That evening, I told Father, 'You are a Jew too, even if not religious. Withdraw your signature and let him stay in this camp or you will lose your only daughter. I shall declare a hunger strike. I shall not taste food until you cancel the order.'

"My father explained that he might risk his own life if he started up with the oper. I told him, 'What right do you have to secure your life at the cost of this innocent Jew? Besides, if the oper is that kind of anti-Semite and bandit, he won't spare you anyway. The sooner you defy him the more respect he will have for you. In any case, you have not convinced me. Today I'm starting to fast and I will continue until you arrange for that man to stay here in camp. I don't care if I die trying.'

"On the first day of my hunger-strike, Mother cried all day and tried to dissuade me. By the third day I couldn't get out of bed. My head seemed to swing in circles. On the fourth day of my fast my father's doctor examined me and tried to persuade me at least to drink some milk, or I might die. I was too weak to answer, but I motioned 'No'.

"I had never before seen my father cry. He begged me to taste some milk at least, and he promised that he would talk to the oper that very day and he might succeed in cancelling the order.

"I was alert enough to realize that victory was at hand. Father tried to force some milk into my mouth but I clenched my teeth.

"That night Father walked into my room. 'Daughter, you've won! Now you can quit this crazy business. I struck that Jew's name from the list. In his place we assigned a German engineer.'

I did not realize that all this time tears were pouring down my cheeks. Now that she finished I could not utter a word. How was it possible that such a child, raised in a home devoid of Judaism, could have the capacity for such self-sacrifice to save a Jew, especially one she had never seen. For me this was truly a miracle.

I expressed my hope that G-d would reward her for her deed and always keep her from harm.

"I have a question to ask. What is Gan Eden? When my parents were arguing about you, Mother repeated this word, several times. I understand that it is Yiddish but I don't know what it means."

I described the obligation of every Jew to keep the Torah and that Gan Eden awaited those who performed good deeds.

"Oh, Rabbi, I am sure that Gan Eden awaits you, because you have the power to keep the Commandments here in camp like not working on Shabbat, not eating non-kosher food. I'm probably going to have Gehinnom."

Here I interrupted her. "Our holy Torah teaches that whoever saves the life of a Jew is like saving a world. My child, you have performed the greatest mitzva; one I have not been privileged to perform. Your Gan Eden is infinitely greater than mine."

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Editors: Shlomo Chaim Kesselman and Mendel Bacher

P.O. Box 67, Balaclava Vic. 3183 AUSTRALIA

Email: lamplighter@rabbinicalcollege.edu.au

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INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

To the Boys and to the Girls, Participants in the Tzedoko [charity] Campaign

I was pleased to be informed that you fulfilled my request to act as my agents in the Mitzvah [commandment] of Tzedoko [charity] connecting it with a word of Torah, and adding to it your own Tzedoko.

Needless to say, in every case of doing a Mitzvah there is no place for a "Thank you" from a human being, since doing the Mitzvah in fulfillment of G-d's will is itself the greatest reward and truest happiness, and as our Sages of blessed memory declared: "The Reward of a Mitzvah is the Mitzvah itself."

However, it is in order to express thanks for acting as my agents in this joint effort and for this I say: Thank you very much to each and every one of you.

I also take this opportunity, as we have entered the month of Elul, to remind you of the special significance of the month, the Month of Divine Grace in preparation for Rosh Hashonoh and for the entire coming year, may it be a good one for all of us.

The Alter Rebbe [Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of Chabad Chasidism] explains the special significance of this month by means of the well-known parable of a "King in the field;"

"When a King approaches the city of his royal residence the people of the city go out to welcome the king in the field. Then everyone who wishes is permitted to come and greet the king and he receives everybody graciously and with a smiling face. But after he enters his Royal Palace special permission is required to see the king and this also is the privilege of a chosen few."

This, then, is the significance of the whole month of Elul, when the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed be He, makes known that He is "in the field" and everyone - man, woman, boy and girl can come to Him without difficulties, or special introductions.

But - one may ask - what is the meaning of approaching the King in the field, since G-d has no likeness of a body, nor a body and as the Torah warns, "You have not seen any image (of G-d)?"

Therefore the Alter Rebbe goes on to explain that this approach has to do with prayer, for prayer in general and in the days of Elul in particular is an occasion concerning which is written, "May G-d cause His face to shine upon thee" - face to face - the person praying standing directly in the presence of the King, as in the parable above.

And the Alter Rebbe adds, that in order that such closeness be truly meaningful in a lasting and tangible way, it must be followed by actual study of Torah, by Tzedoko and Good Deeds.

May G-d grant that each and every one of you should go from strength to strength in all matters of Goodness and Holiness, Torah and Mitzvos, and be a source of pride and true Nachas [pride] to your parents and teachers, and may you make fullest use of the auspicious days of this month and be inscribed for a good and sweet year materially and spiritually.

With the blessing of kesivo vechasima tova [may you be written and sealed for good],

QUESTIONS FOR THE RABBI

Can I use my grandmother's parking-permit?

Question: My grandmother no longer drives, so I use her car. It has a disability parking permit, which allows me to park anywhere I want without paying. I feel a little guilty about it and thought maybe I should give it up. On the other hand, am I doing anything wrong by just leaving it there?

Answer: I can come up with several arguments in favor of keeping the permit, and only one argument in favor of giving it up.

Let's look at the arguments in favor of keeping the permit:

- You already pay taxes, so why pay for parking?
- You never claimed to be disabled. If the parking cops get the wrong idea, that's their problem.
- Parking costs are highway robbery. It's a way for municipalities to get rich.
- You often do errands for your grandmother with her car, so she is the one benefiting.
- People use disability parking permits that don't belong to them all the time. The city knows this and allows for it in their budgeting.
- The car still belongs to your grandmother, who rightfully had the disability permit. So why get rid of it? Do you need to purge the car of any trace of her? What if her music is still in the CD player, must you throw that away too?

But after all those arguments for keeping it, I can think of a single argument in favor of giving it up:

- It is dishonest and probably illegal.

The human mind has an amazing talent. We take something that is clearly wrong, and come up with creative explanations as to why it is right. We call this talent "justification." Almost everyone has a dishonest side, an inner voice that attempts to whitewash wrongdoing and justify immorality.

But we have another side to us that is honest and upright, the voice of integrity that wants to do what's right. After all the justifications, we know the truth.

The Torah (Deut. 6:18) tells us, "And you shall do what is proper and good..." You know what you need to do. Give up the permit. And thank G-d that you don't need it.

A WORD

from the Director

In this week's Torah portion, Shoftim, we read, "You shall appoint judges and officers at all your gates." The Jews followed this commandment and, upon entering the Holy Land, appointed judges and officers. When Moshiach comes, we will return to this justice system, as the prophet Isaiah, prophet of the Redemption, prophesied, "And I will return your judges as in former times, and your advisers as at the beginning."

On a practical level, the injunction of "You shall appoint judges at all your gates," must be applied on several different levels. First, the "gates" can be interpreted as referring to the seven gates of a person: the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and mouth. They should act according to the dictates of the Torah. On this level, the "judges" refer to the intellectual capacity of the soul and the "advisers," the emotional attributes. Thus, every element of the life of a Jew has to be permeated and led by the G-dly power of his soul.

This concept does not have to apply to oneself alone, however. It should be extended and every man and woman should serve as a "judge" and an "adviser" in his family, ensuring that it runs according to the teachings and advice of the Torah.

To extend this concept even further, the whole world should follow the directives of the "judge" and the "adviser" of the generation, the "prophet I will set up for them, like you (Moses)," the leader of the generation.

And certainly, by allowing our G-dly soul to advise us, and by advising our families to follow the dictates of the Torah, and lastly, by following the advice of the Moses of our generation, we will merit the realization of the promise of Isaiah, that of a return to the glory and Divine favor of previous times, with the coming of Moshiach

J. I. Gutnick

Here's my Story

Personal Encounters
With The Rebbe. Culled From JEM's
'My Encounter' Project

The Vanishing Loan

When I was thirteen years of age, I was doubly orphaned. My mother had passed away when I was a child, and then, when I was almost fourteen years old, I lost my father as well. I had to move into yeshiva full-time, as I had no other place to go.

I spent the next part of my life – from age fourteen until age seventeen – living at the Manchester yeshiva, and then I spent nine months at the yeshiva in Gateshead, until I turned eighteen.

As far as I'm concerned, the big day came when, in September of 1958, I was granted permission by the Rebbe to come to America on a student visa and start studying at the Chabad-Lubavitch headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn. So it was with great excitement that I arrived in New York, where I learned for the next four years.

During the time I was there, I had several opportunities to have an audience with the Rebbe – usually on my birthday. These visits were short. I wasn't a businessman; I wasn't a married man; I was a boy in yeshiva. What problems can a boy in yeshiva have? Still, the Rebbe always imparted words of encouragement to me.

The next major milestone in my life occurred four years after my arrival in New York, in the summer of 1962, when I got engaged to my future wife, thank G-d.

I went in to see the Rebbe to ask for the Rebbe's advice on what I should do now – where should I settle down, how should I support my future family. The Rebbe said that he would like me to look for jobs in four places – Manchester, London, Montreal and New York. I should explore job opportunities in each of these places, and then he would help me choose whichever was most appropriate for me.

I did that, and it was ultimately settled that London would be the best place for me. And, by the way, I found out later that there was no job for me in London but when they heard that the Rebbe had said that I should seek a job opportunity in London, they created one for me. I've been here for the past 45 years, so it was the right move.

As I was discussing my future with the Rebbe, he suddenly asked me, "Are you buying your bride a present for the wedding?"

The thought had entered my mind, to be honest. But there was a certain problem associated with this – namely, lack of money. Because of my situation, not having parents to fall back upon, and because I had not been working while studying in yeshiva, I didn't really have any resources.

But I said, "Of course, yes. I'm buying her a present."

"Do you have the money to do that?"

"Actually, I don't..."

"So what do you plan to do?"

"I hope to borrow. And I hope to be in a position to repay."

"Do you have who to borrow from?"

"Not yet..."

"What about other expenses? You'll have other expenses in preparing for the wedding..."

I had no satisfactory answer.

He said, "Tomorrow, go into my secretaries' office and present a list of items for which you need to borrow money, and I'll arrange the loan."

I did that. The next day, I walked in with a list of things which included my bride's present, the other costs required in preparing for the wedding, and tickets to England for the two of us. It came out to \$1,200. That might not sound like a lot today, but it was a lot of money back then – so much that the secretaries tried to bargain me down. Still, I got the \$1,200. I was to repay it at the rate of \$50 a month for 24 months, so that within two years the debt would be cleared.

Okay, I was a youngster, full of hope, and I was sure everything was going to

be fine – no doubt, I would get a fortune in wedding gifts...

I bought my bride a beautiful present – so nice that she still tells people about it, and encourages newly-engaged fellows to do the same for their brides-to-be. She tells them, "My husband was told by the Rebbe to buy his wife a present."

We arrived in England, I started working, and from my wages I faithfully repaid \$50 a month for the first two months. But my salary was just about enough to cover my rent and some basic necessities, but it did not leave sufficient funds to pay back \$50 a month. Somehow or other, a few months later, I managed to make a third payment.

Then it dried up. I just did not have the ability to repay that loan. And I started to get reminders from the office. When you get reminders, you eventually pay some more, so I made a fourth payment and brought my debt down to \$1,000.

I got further reminders, but my financial situation did not improve and I was unable to repay the debt at that time. So I wrote a letter to the Rebbe, asking for a blessing for sustenance and livelihood, and saying that I was finding life a bit difficult in that respect.

I'm sure he gave me his blessing – I have no doubt about it. But the strongest point, which was the clearest indication of his care, was that from that point on, I never got another reminder from his office to repay my debt. In no way, shape or form whatsoever. I heard nothing at all.

Thank G-d, with time, things improved, and there was a moment when I was able to actually amass the amount I still owed. I came to New York, feeling very happy with myself. I went into the office and I said, "I have a debt I wish to repay."

They asked me my name, the details, the year the loan was made, to look it up in the files. But there was no record whatsoever of any debt in my name – nothing outstanding. Nothing could be found at all in the records that such a loan ever even existed. They couldn't find anything!

I said, "The fact is I owe \$1,000, and I want to repay it."

They said, "Well, you don't owe anything!"

I said, "I'm sorry, the Rebbe made the loan; he took the initiative and he arranged it for me. I do not wish to remain in debt. Here is the money – enter it in your books however you wish, and let's end this story."

It was then that I realized then how great was the Rebbe's sensitivity. He knew I had no family, that I was dependent on others, that my resources were highly restricted. And he felt for me like a father. After first offering me that loan, he later took care of it for me. I will always be grateful for this.

Rabbi Yitzchok Tzvi Sufirin, a Shliach in London since 1963. Rabbi of the Enfield and Winchmore Hill United Synagogue, he was interviewed in January, 2009.

PARSHAH IN A NUTSHELL

Moses instructs the people of Israel to appoint judges and law enforcement officers in every city. "Justice, justice shall you pursue," he commands them, and you must administer it without corruption or favoritism. Crimes must be meticulously investigated and evidence thoroughly examined—a minimum of two credible witnesses is required for conviction and punishment.

In every generation, says Moses, there will be those entrusted with the task of interpreting and applying the laws of the Torah. "According to the law that they will teach you, and the judgment they will instruct you, you shall do; you shall not turn away from the thing that they say to you, to the right nor to the left."

Shoftim also includes the prohibitions against idolatry and sorcery; laws governing the appointment and behavior of a king; and guidelines for the creation of "cities of refuge" for the inadvertent murderer. Also set forth are many of the rules of war: the exemption from battle for one who has just built a home, planted a vineyard, married, or is "afraid and soft-hearted"; the requirement to offer terms of peace before attacking a city; and the prohibition against wanton destruction of something of value, exemplified by the law that forbids to cut down a fruit tree when laying siege (in this context the Torah makes the famous statement, "For man is a tree of the field").

The Parshah concludes with the law of the eglah arufah—the special procedure to be followed when a person is killed by an unknown murderer and his body is found in a field—which underscores the responsibility of the community and its leaders not only for what they do, but also for what they might have prevented from being done.

CANDLE LIGHTING

	Shabbos 25 - 26 August	
	Begins	Ends
Melbourne	5:35	6:33
Adelaide	5:34	6:30
Brisbane	5:13	6:07
Darwin	6:25	7:15
Gold Coast	5:11	6:05
Perth	5:38	6:33
Sydney	5:14	6:10
Canberra	5:21	6:18
Launceston	5:22	6:22
Auckland	5:37	6:35
Wellington	5:31	6:32
Hobart	5:19	6:21
Byron Bay	5:10	6:04



CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH

439 INKERMAN STREET, CAULFIELD

PARSHAS SHOFTIM • 3 ELUL • 25 AUGUST

FRIDAY NIGHT:	CANDLE LIGHTING:	5.35 PM
	MINCHA:	5.40 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS:	6.10 PM
SHABBOS DAY:	LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA:	9.34 AM
	SHACHARIS:	10.00 AM
	MINCHA:	5.30 PM
	SHABBOS ENDS:	6.33 PM
WEEKDAYS:	SHACHARIS:	8.00/9.15/10.00 AM
	MINCHA:	5.45 PM
	MAARIV:	6.30 PM