

Parshas Shoftim

The opening to the Parsha we are told to have judges and officers in all our cities, as Rashi points out, to ensure that we adhere to the laws set out by the Rabbinic courts.

The consensus amongst the Mefarshim explains the meaning of the first few pesukim, and the application to a just and righteous society, that is one that upholds the law, and isn't swayed by "outside forces".

What if a Jewish person lives on their own, remotely, do these pesukim not apply? The answer is, they do, but not in the sense as they are read. B'chol Sh'arecha, (in all your places) can also mean in all your gates, even in your own house, one should seek justice, and listen to the rule of the judges.

The Rebbe in Parshas Re'eh talks about Tzedaka, (as the mitzvah is alluded to and commanded in the Parsha). The Rebbe explained the power of Tzedaka, but furthermore how the act of charity, not just in the transaction, but "being charitable" seems to have an extreme power to draw Godliness in every one of our interactions. (i.e., how you engage with the world. If it is God's world, and that is how you see it, then every interaction is a Godly interaction, it is incumbent on us to achieve this level). The parallels in language are not happenstance, they are intentional. The fact that righteousness, judgement, and pursuing justice is defined by the word Tzedek, (root of Tzedaka, and Tzaddik) is not without reason.

We know that Tzedaka Tatzil mimoves (as explained by Rabbi Akiva on the event of his daughter being saved from a poisonous

snake for feeding a poor person on her wedding day- Shabbos 156b). Hence the posuk telling us to pursue justice "tzedek tzedek tirdof, limaan tichyeh" is a connection to the righteousness we need to pursue, the act of being charitable and it being the antidote for "life".

One other interesting observation is that in posuk 19, where Hashem warns us not to take bribes, and our judgment could be clouded, the posuk concludes, "visalef divrei tzadikim". The word Tzadikim here excludes a second Yud, which is normally found when describing righteous people. An explanation for this could be, that without walking in the ways of Hashem- we can be influenced on our path to righteousness. If we are in the zone of being crooked by bribes, we have difficulty being righteous in its purest form. (Yehoshua Bin Nun was called Hoshea before Moshe asked for Hashem to be added to his name in the form of Yud to protect him from the external, seemingly tempting influence of the other miraglim, and so he was called Yehoshua. The Alter Rebbe in Ikkutai Torah in parshas Re'eh in the sub mamer Ani Ledoi Vdodi Li, explains the Yu and Sar Kel- which comprise the world Yisrael- the Yud influence is deep, and when taken away represents something significant).

This means, colloquially, that we need to seek the path to Avodas Hashem that is free of societal, social, and external influences- like bribes are an influence on a path of pure judgement. This also means that in our comings and goings in our life, we must seek out righteousness in other people (much like R' LY of Berdichev did) as we don't know what influence we are under, other than our own. We must be cognizant of all outside influences and how our

judgement is possibly influenced, so that we seek righteousness.

R'LY of Berdichev once beseeched Hashem to reverse having the worldly temptations before our eyes, versus the path to justice that is found in books. The posuk is telling us this, with Eyney Tzadikim.

One other interesting point to note, which I thought of later is as follows:

לֹא־תִטָּה מִשְׁפָּט לֹא תִכִּיר פְּגִים וְלֹא־תִקַּח שָׂחַד כִּי הַשֵּׁחַד
יַעֲוֶר עֵינֵי חֲכָמִים וְיִסְלֹף דְּבַרִּי צַדִּיקִים:

There is a reversal of what should be thought of as a characteristic associated with the type of person. The Chacham should be influenced in speech- as we know Syag Lechachma Shtika, and the Tzaddik should not be influenced by their eyes which is a level to attain as it says in shema lo sasuru achrei livavchem v'achrei eyneychem. Yet here, the eyes of the wise are potentially influenced, and the words of the Tzadikim are.

The difference could be attributed to the fact that outside [subconscious] influences (bribes etc.) could seem justified by the people delivering it. The wise person would always say the right thing, and the tzaddik would always see the right thing. Yet the Torah is telling us the strength of the influence could be so profound that even the wise, and the righteous (who seemingly conquered that attribute) could still be negatively influenced, and furthermore, if we recognize as such, we need to know that an influence took place.

At a chavrusa with my father and Rabbi Baruch Zaltzman, on Lekutai Torah, I spoke up that the Melech Basadeh adage is a reminder to us, that seeking Hashem is more attainable than we might think. Even

if we scoffed off during the other 11 months, Elul is a reminder, to seek Hashem's divine grace and seek improvement and forgiveness for the coming year. As the Alter Rebbe explains, Elul is the beginning of the awareness from below...the work is on us now in case it was destitute from our lives for the other months of the year. We must seek righteousness, and serve hashem v'es darf tzu zein, so that this Elul zman is our last in Golus, and the first with Mashiach!

Good Shabbos