

Parshas Shoftim

In this week's Parsha-Shoftim, Moshe tells the Jews to appoint judges and policemen to keep the laws. Furthermore, he repeats the laws prohibiting serving other gods.

The first interesting thing to note is that the enforcers and the judges are appointed in each tribe, which allows each tribe to independently pursue justice and interpret the laws based on the Torah. This manifests in the fact that even though the Jewish people have been scattered all over the world, and there are some differences in the laws, they remain fundamentally true because they follow the Torah. As we see in the second Aliyah, the appointed king must write their own Torah and follow it (and there are additional restrictions they must follow to remain righteous.)

When the Torah talks about the sacrifices to bring (chapter 17), the Posuk remarks that the animal must be free from imperfection. We devised a few reasons for having a perfect animal in our Parsha shiur. 1) If there is an imperfection, it is a slippery slope to eventually not bringing a sacrifice because someone can interpret the imperfection until they don't bring an animal. 2) By bringing an imperfect animal, no work goes into finding perfection and working toward maintaining perfection. 3) Since Hashem is perfect, how can you bring anything but something perfect? 4) since a sacrifice replaces ourselves, and our Neshama is perfect, the animal representing us must also be perfect. This message aligns with Elul and a point the Alter Rebbe states in

his Mamer in Lekutei Torah of Ani Ledodi V'Dodi Li, that to serve Hashem, we must first remove all blocks, which means finding the perfection within us, to the point that we can serve Hashem completely. Anything but that causes us to be separated from Hashem, like the problem with false gods and serving other entities; when there is something else in our hearts, there is no room for Hashem.

To accomplish this, we must follow the Torah and all its mandates. In this way, even if we must fight a physical war (such as in our time), we are defended by the morality of the war, where we cannot have wanton destruction just because that seems right. The posuk says since Man is like the tree in the field, we cannot just destroy a fruit-bearing tree, even if it is of our enemy.

Further morality of the Torah is evident in the conclusion where we learn the laws of Eglar Arufa, that a town must be redeemed for having not secured food and shelter for its inhabitants because that is our nation, we are one, and we look after one another.

Our army is fighting a war of morality, and we are inching our way closer to Mashiach, where our enemies will become our taxpayers (20:11), and we will live in peace, with Mashiach now, good Shabbos!