

Parshas Shoftim

This week's Parsha is Shoftim, where Moshe Rabbeinu instructs the Jews on the process and laws of the land, as well as how to enforce them. Continuing from last week's Parsha, Reeh, where we understand the Bracha (mentioned right in the beginning of the Parsha) to be the fact that we are gifted to listen to Hashem, whereas the curse is that we don't, and ultimately end up in a place that is foreign to us. Although the posuk refers to our connection to Hashem, there is also a physical manifestation of this. As we see in this week's Parsha, Hashem expects us to act in the way of the natural world and appoint law enforcers. Furthermore, regarding the laws of involuntary manslaughter and the cities of refuge, the Torah explicitly explains (and is taken apart and discussed in many Talmudic tracts), the concepts of intentionality. These laws still apply today and are the basis of many legal systems.

Interestingly, certain abominations are not allowed in the Jewish community, around sorcerers and soothsayers. Rashi explains, based on a Gemara in Sanhedrin (65b), these are superstitions that we don't follow (the Gemara explains that you make a sign to do something based on some event taking place, like food falling out of your mouth). The point of these ideas is that if the Torah is telling us to rely on Hashem, and follow in His ways, and the laws that we have are all based on His guidance (which, as we said in the last Parsha, is a blessing if we listen, but the blessing is that we are gifted with the ability to listen), then making a decision based on some superstition, would be contrary to this. Meaning we must put our faith in Hashem and do what we are supposed to as servants of Hashem in all aspects of our lives, free of the confines that some event taking place somehow will influence a future event. The concept of attributing causality to an occurrence (as the gemara said, food falling out of your mouth), and some future outcome means you deny divine providence. Hashem controls the outcomes of everything, and our destiny is determined by our actions in accordance with the Torah, not some attribution of causality to a mundane superstition. If you attribute causality to a superstition, you deny divine providence, and it is connected to the concept of the curse mentioned in last week's Parsha, that you will be in the company of a god whom you don't know, that is, you will be in a place not fit for a Jew, which will be a curse. The world of superstition, and the resulting inadvertent denial of or diminishing of divine providence will make you uncomfortable and lost.

As mentioned in the previous weeks, Moshe's final speech is connected to us in our time, and especially now in the month of Elul. As it says, Hashem is in the field; most often, this means that we can approach the King, so we should ask for blessings and forgiveness. But the truth is, Hashem is coming to the field to take stock of His people and take pride in His people. As it says Ki Adam Eitz Hasadeh, (man is a tree in the field), therefore if Hashem is going to the field, He naturally is checking on his 'trees', i.e., his people, about whom He is so proud. Even now, when there is advanced science, and reason to attribute explanations to the mundane, we choose to

attribute causality to Divine Providence, and through that, we are blessed. May then, this month be filled with blessings, in all ways materially and spiritually until the year renews, but most importantly, may the physical war in Israel stop, so that we can realize the spiritual battle we've been fighting concludes, and that we welcome Mashiach. Good Shabbos.