

## ***Parashat Shoftim***

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YOUR PARASHAH: <https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.16.18-21.9?lang=bi&aliyot=1>

### **Summary**

The Torah portion this week is *Shoftim*--which means “judges” or legal authorities. It begins with verse 18 of the 16th chapter of *Sefer Devarim*, the Book of Deuteronomy.

In this week’s *parasha*, Moshe continues his final speech to the Israelites. He speaks to the Israelites about legal, political, religious, and military leadership, telling the Israelites to establish courts of law in every city and to uphold high ethical standards. Moshe informs them that they should appoint judges to judge the people according to the facts of the cases presented. Judges must not twist their judgments to favor or not to favor someone whom they recognize. Further, judges must not accept money to decide cases in favor of one side or the other.

*Parashat Shoftim* also includes the *mitzvah* of *bal tashcheet*--the law against senseless waste or destruction. We are directed to not cut down the fruit trees of the people we fight in a war. In this week’s *parasha*, Moshe once again sets very clear and high expectations for the Israelites’ behavior when they enter the Promised Land.

The final verse I will read today translates to, “Justice, justice shall you pursue, so that you may live and take possession of the land which G!d, your G!d, is giving you.” The word *tzedek* or “justice” appears 4 times in the 3 verses I read. The root *shafat*--connected with the words “law” and “ruling” appears in the name of this week’s *Parasha*--“*Shofetim*” and 3 more times in the first 2 verses I will read. My *parasha* talks a lot about how we can make and enforce laws that help ensure that everyone gets what they need to live. Listen for the Hebrew word *tzedek*, translated as “justice.” It shares a *shoresh* or “root” with the word “*tzedakah*,” the money we collect and give to try to create more justice in the world.

## Questions

**1) In many cities the police station and the court are close to the center of town. In the first verse I read today, the Torah tells us that when we build cities in the Promised Land we should put judges and officers at our gates--the openings to our neighborhoods and cities. What might be the advantage to putting judges and officers at the gates to our neighborhoods and towns rather than in the centers of our towns? <<pick three>>**

People pass through the gates on their way in and out of a city. If the police officers and judges are stationed at the gates, they can be some of the first people to see and get to know new people when they arrive in town, and make sure that they won't do any harm to the city or other people. Police and judges would be some of the first people to really get to know people, to help them when they are in trouble, and to do justice and make good decisions when people need help solving a disagreement.

**2) Why do you think the Torah teaches us to put both judges and officers at our gates, wouldn't one or the other have been enough? How are the jobs of police officers and judges different from each other? <<pick three>>**

Officers can increase *tzedek* (justice) by getting to know people, spending time with them every day, and protecting people when others want to hurt them.

When there's a big argument, judges use the power of listening and words to help make sure that people feel heard and get the protection they need. That is what it means to do *tzedek* or justice.

**3) At the end of the first verse I read, the Torah told us that judges should always judge a court case with  $\text{קִדְשׁ־טוֹפֵשׁ־מִ}$  (a ruling of justice). What do you think makes something a good ruling, a ruling of justice, and what does a judge need in order to be able to give a  $\text{קִדְשׁ־טוֹפֵשׁ־מִ}$  (a ruling of justice)? <<pick three>>**

Giving a ruling of justice is almost like being a superhero. It takes good listening, deep thinking, empathy for people, and bravery to do the right thing. We know that a judge's ruling is a  $\text{קִדְשׁ־טוֹפֵשׁ־מִ}$  if the ruling encourages everyone to do what's right and makes people more safe.