

Parashat Shofetim

Deuteronomy 16:18–21:9

SEPTEMBER 5, 2019



SUMMARY

This week Moshe continues talking to the Israelites--about legal, political, religious, and military leadership, telling them to create courts of law in every city and to uphold high ethical standards. Moshe tells them to 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 told to not cut down the fruit trees of people we fight in a war. Moshe once again sets very clear and high expectations for the Israelites' behavior when they enter the Promised Land.

Our *parasha* talks a lot about how we can make and enforce laws to help ensure that everyone gets what they need to live when we enter the Land of Israel.

FROM OUR COMMENTATORS

SEFORNO:

צדק צדק תרדוף

כשתתן לך שופטים

אתה הממנה את

השופטים בהו את

היותר שופטי צדק

JUSTICE, JUSTICE

PURSUE When you

appoint judges, select

only judges who are

already known for

being the most just.

למען תחיה וירשת

תצטרך לזה יותר

בארץ כי חסרון זה

ימנע הירושה בה רדפו

אחרי

SO THAT YOU MAY LIVE

AND INHERIT IT: Such

qualities are of even

greater importance in

the Land of Israel, as a

failure to comply would

result in the ancestral

right to that country

being denied to you.

FOR DISCUSSION

1) The second verse of the *parasha* says:

לֹא-תִטָּה מִשְׁפָּט לֹא תִכִּיר פָּנִים

Do not lean a judgement; do not recognize faces.

If two people walked into a courtroom for a judge's help and the judge recognized one of the people why might that be a problem?

2) This verse continues. . .

וְלֹא-תִקַּח שֹׁחַד כִּי הַשְׁחָד יְעִיר עֵינֵי חֲכָמִים

Do not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise.

How might taking a bribe make it difficult for a wise person to see?

3) The next verse says,

צִדְקָה צִדְקָה תִרְדֹּף לְמַעַן תַּחְיֶה וְיָרְשֶׁת אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-ה' אֱ-לֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ

Justice, justice you are to pursue, in order that you may live in and inherit the land that A-donai your G-d gives you.

In order for the Israelites to keep the land that G-d has promised them they must set up a fair legal system and treat people appropriately. **Why might G-d tell us that treating people unfairly could lead to losing our land?**