



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

TORAH WEEKLY

T"01

20 - 26 August, 2017
28 Av - 4 Elul, 5777

Torah:

Deuteronomy 16:18 - 21:9

Haftorah:

Isaiah 51:12 - 52:12

■ **GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH**

Aleph offers free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll, it is available to all prisons.

■ **ROSH HASHANAH, YOM KIPPUR SUKKOT**

The high holidays are weeks away! Make the necessary arrangements with your Rabbi and institutional chaplain, to ensure you are able to celebrate.

■ **TORAH STUDIES**

Aleph offers many Judaic topics for study. Aleph Institute will provide the material and courses. Please write for more information.

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HERE COMES THE JUDGE

Don't be judgmental. Unless, of course, you happen to be a judge. Then it's your job.

This week's Parshah, Shoftim (Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9), begins with the biblical command for judges to be appointed in every city and town to adjudicate and maintain a just, ordered, civil society. Interestingly, it occurs in the first week of Elul, the month in which we are to prepare in earnest for the Days of Judgment ahead, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

There are, however, some significant differences between earthly judges of flesh and blood and the heavenly judge. In the earthly court, if after a fair trial a defendant is found guilty, then there's really not much room for clemency on the part of the judge. The law is the law and must take its course. The accused may shed rivers of tears, but no human judge can be certain if his remorse is genuine. His feelings of regret are touching, but of limited legal consequence. After all, a human judge may only make a decision based on "what the eye can see." The misdeed was seen to have been committed. The remorse, who knows? Perhaps he's a good actor and is only acting contrite. The Supreme Judge, however, does know whether the accused genuinely regrets

his actions or is merely putting on an act. Therefore, He alone is able to forgive. That is why in heavenly judgments, teshuvah (repentance) is effective.



The Maharal of Prague gave another reason. Only G-d is able to judge the whole person. Every one of us has good and bad to some extent. Even those who have sinned may have many other good deeds that outweigh the bad ones. Perhaps even one good deed was of such major significance that it alone could serve as a weighty counterbalance. The point is, only G-d knows. Only He can judge the individual in the context of his whole life and all his deeds, good and bad.

Our goal is to emulate the heavenly court. We should try to look at the totality of the person. You think he is bad, but is he all bad? Does he have no redeeming virtues? Surely, he must have some good in him as well. Look at the whole person.

A teacher once conducted an experiment. He held up a white plate and showed it to the class. In the center of the plate was a small black spot. He then asked the class to

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describe what they saw. One student said he saw a black spot. Another said it must be a target for shooting practice. A third suggested that the plate was dirty or damaged. Whereupon the teacher asked, "Doesn't anyone see a white plate?"

There may have been a small black spot, but essentially it was a white plate. Why do we only see the dirt? Let us learn to find the good in others. Nobody is perfect, not even ourselves. Let's not be so judgmental and critical. Let's try to see the good in others.

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

IS JUSTICE FOR ALL?

This week's Torah portion begins with Moses' eloquent cry to the Jewish people to establish courts and to pursue justice:

You shall set up judges and law-enforcement officials for yourself in all your cities that the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you for your tribes, and they shall judge the people [with] righteous judgment.

You shall not pervert justice, you shall not show favoritism, and you shall not take a bribe, for bribery blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts just words.

Justice, justice shall you

pursue, that you may live and possess the land that the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you (*Deuteronomy 16:18–20*).

All agree that justice is important, but justice is elusive. Even in this great country, in the 21st century, there are serious questions whether our criminal justice system has a long way to go to ensure that every individual can expect equal access to justice.

One scholar recently made this argument in an op-ed piece:

Our justice system has become inaccessible to millions of poor people and so every day, we violate the “equal justice under law” motto engraved on the front of the grand United States Supreme Court. Americans who cannot afford legal help routinely forfeit basic rights as a result. Because the law does not enforce itself, veterans seeking benefits the nation has guaranteed, victims of domestic violence needing legal protection, and tenants and homeowners pursuing their rights since the financial disaster all need advisors and guides through the law and its agencies and courts (*Martha Minow, “We Must Ensure Everyone Has Access to Equal Justice.” The Boston Globe, 23 October 2014*).

Writers often save the most powerful point for last. The last sentence is your chance to emphasize your point and to shape the impression your reader will take away.

The last section of this week’s Torah portion highlights the true test of justice. That final section describes the law of an unidentified murder victim lying in the field. The victim is not a prominent member of society who travels with an entourage. He is not a celebrity who is well known. The true test of justice is whether society will care about this crime. Whether society values the most vulnerable, lonely, least respected, unknown members of society.

How do we respond when an unknown victim is found slain? Do we ignore the case because there is no one to lobby for justice? On the contrary, the Torah demands that the most prominent members of society come down to the crime scene to investigate, to declare that they did not ignore the plight of this person, and to force the story into the headlines:

If a slain person be found in the land which the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you to possess, lying in the field, [and] it is not known who slew him . . . (*Deuteronomy 21:1*)

The Torah commands the members of the supreme court of Israel to drop everything they are doing, and that they—their assistants or surrogates—should show up at the crime scene:

Then your elders and judges shall go forth, and they shall

measure to the cities around the corpse (*Deuteronomy 21:2*). In the pre–mass media world, the surest way to create news, which in turn may encourage a possible witness to the crime to come forward, is for the members of the court to come and draw attention to the crime. They then proceed to perform an unusual ritual. Its purpose is to turn people’s attention to the terrible crime committed against someone they never heard of:

And it will be [that from] the city closest to the corpse, the elders of that city shall take a calf with which work has never been done, [and] that has never drawn a yoke. And the elders of that city shall bring the calf down to a rugged valley, which cannot be worked and cannot be sown, and there in the valley, they shall decapitate the calf (*Deuteronomy 21:3–5*).

The valley “cannot be worked and cannot be sown,” which means that there is a valuable piece of real estate that cannot be used until the case is solved. That serves two purposes: the fallow valley does not allow the murder to be forgotten, and the owner of the valley has a financial incentive to keep the pressure on the authorities to investigate the case (*See Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed 3:40*).

The Torah understands that the test of justice is not “at your gates”; it’s not how we treat the prominent members of society. Rather, the test of justice is whether the “elders and judges” will leave their ivory tower, leave the city, and search for justice for the unknown stranger.

By Rabbi Yossif Goldman

ALEPH HANDBOOK

The Aleph Institute, 101 pages “Facts and Fundamentals” on Judaism (a Judaism 101 booklet), has arrived at Aleph Institute after a long wait.

If you do not have a copy, please send a request to our office and we will send one to you.

In Jewish History

Monday, 29 Av, 5777 - August 21, 2017

Flight from Liadi (1812)

On this date, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, who supported and aided the Czar’s army during the Napoleonic wars, was forced to flee his hometown from Napoleon’s forces which were advancing through White Russia in their push toward Moscow. After five months of wanderings he arrived in the town of Pyena. There he fell ill and, weakened by the tribulations of his flight and the harsh Russian winter, passed away on the 24th of Tevet, 5773 (1812).