



# Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

## BE WHOLEHEARTED WITH GOD

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ETAN WINOGRAD ('18)

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If one is asked to list the most important or meaningful pesukim in the Chumash, one might pick examples such as “In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth”, “Hear O Israel, Hashem is our

God, Hashem is One”, “I am the Lord, your God, who took you out of the land of Egypt”, “Love your fellow as yourself”, etc.

However, one of the most important -- yet often overlooked -- pesukim in the entire Chumash occurs in this week's parsha (Devarim 18:13): תמים תהיה עם ה' (Be tamim with Hashem your G-d). In addition, within our own parsha we have mitzvot covering a wide range of situations which all make for great sermons and divrei Torah. It is no surprise then how easy it is to

have such an “aidel” and fundamental directive be overlooked (Ramban includes this as a positive mitzvah and he critiques the Rambam for not including it in his Sefer HaMitzvot).

The Torah is often described as an instruction manual for how to live life. Do not cook meat and milk. Check. Wear tefillin. Check. Eat matzah. Check. Wave the lulav and esrog. Check. Do not light a fire on Shabbos. Check. Be tamim with Hashem your God...Check?

The Frierdiker Rebbe translates tamim in multiple ways: being whole, sincere, and simple, while Google Translate is happy to provide even more translations. Meanwhile, Rashi's commentary on this pasuk provides one of the most challenging life messages that can be truly absorbed in our personal avodat Hashem: “Conduct yourself with [God] with simplicity and depend on Him, and do not inquire of the future; rather, accept whatever happens to you with [unadulterated] simplicity.” While many of the commandments can be checked off (at least superficially), this overarching message supersedes most mitzvot. A fundamental pillar of Judaism

is not just to have faith in God, but to really trust in God. The Lubavitcher Rebbe expounds (Likkutei Sichos, v.26, p.95) that emunah (faith) is a constant factor in one's life, where one accepts the axioms of his emunah with absolute certainty. Bitachon (trust), on the other hand, is often invoked when one is in need. Even when a person finds himself in a situation with no possible natural solution, when one has refined his trust in God, he trusts with certainty that the Creator can alter nature and assuredly help him. Deeper still, his trust in God is itself a medium that draws down influence from Above.

In Sha'ar HaBitachon in Chovot HaLevavot, bitachon is defined as menuchat nefesh (peace of mind/ tranquility of the soul) of the one who trusts. The converse of this is particularly illuminating: one who is calm in response to a situation where most would justify feeling stressed demonstrates that he has obtained a high level of trust in God. He has become tamim with Hashem. Atheists say that faith in God is a crutch – an easy way out of dealing with life's problems. Faith is easy...what they really mean is that trust in God is a crutch. And they could not be more wrong. Trusting in God when things do not seem to be going well is one of the hardest tasks to master. Bitachon is at the core of our Jewish identity.

Shabbat, kashrut, and intermarriage are often touted as some of the most important issues facing assimilation today. But truth be told, they are all symptoms of a larger problem: a lack of trust in God. The businessman is anxious about his bottom line, so he keeps his doors open on Shabbat. His neighbor is worried about paying his bills, so he buys non-kosher food for half the price. His child doesn't understand what all the fuss is about marrying a beautiful, intelligent, pleasant non-Jew whose spiritual structure is completely incompatible with his.

When we let our anxiety control our decisions, instead of addressing our lack of bitachon, we are demonstrating that we do not trust that God, the source of all good, is in control of His creation. Yes we believe in God, but we do not trust that He has a plan and that He knows what He is doing. Extending this even further, it is my contention that it is not possible to fulfill mitzvot in a meaningful way without first addressing whether we are tamim with Hashem. Without this focus, checking-off mitzvot from a list

fundamentally serves only one purpose: to further strengthen one's ego.

Elul provides a special time for us to improve ourselves. However, merely focusing on improving individual middot to the exclusion of our relationship with Hashem is like trying to build a house without a foundation. If we spend the majority of our time this season focused on strengthening our bitachon and becoming tamim with Hashem, it will become apparent how much easier it is to work on the rest of our middot. If you can achieve menuchat hanefesh no matter the situation, you will view reality in a whole new way. And then you will not only realize the true potential of your Godly soul, but also the importance that God places on His relationship with you.

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## IT'S ALL FROM HASHEM

ETAN WINOGRAD ('18)

PARSHAT SHOFTIM DISCUSSES ISSUES REGARDING the leadership of the Jewish people.

The parsha focuses on the concept of judges, kings, prophets, and kohanim. In addition to the discussion of Jewish leadership, many new commandments are introduced including: the obligation to listen to rabbinic law and prophets, the obligations of a king, what to do with a person who lies under oath, laws of war, how to deal with unsolved murders, and many more.

One commandment discussed in Parshat Shoftim states that every Jewish king must own two Sifrei Torah, one that will stay in his treasury and one that he keeps with him at all times. The first Sefer Torah that stays in the king's treasury is there to fulfill the commandment of owning a Sefer Torah, a commandment that applies to all Jews. But what is the purpose of the second Torah that the king must have with him at all times? The Malbim explains that due to the king's position and authority, he might come to believe that his power comes from his own greatness and success. Therefore, the king must carry a Torah wherever he goes to remind him that his power and position is all from Hashem.

We can learn a valuable lesson from this commandment. Many times in life when something great happens to us, we think that it is due to our own success. We must always remember that everything we have is all from Hashem.

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## THE PROPER APPROACH

NETANYA MEYEROWITZ ('17)

IN THE LAST ALIYAH OF PARSHAT SHOFTIM, the Jews are taught about the proper way to wage war against an enemy. Instead of waging war without warning the enemy, we are commanded to make a non-violent proposal with the enemy; if the enemy does not accept this proposal, the Jews are then allowed to attack the enemy with Hashem helping to deliver the city into the Jewish people's hands.

Rashi comments on the pasuk:

וְנָתַנָּה ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּיָדְךָ וְהָכִיתָ אֶת-כָּל-  
זְכוֹרָהּ לְפָנֶי-חָרֹב

*"Hashem will deliver it into your hands..."*  
(Devarim 20:13)

Rashi explains that only if the Jews followed Hashem's rules about how to wage war against an enemy correctly, would He help the Jews succeed.

Even today, the Israeli Defense Force drops thousands of pamphlets on a specific area of an enemy's land to warn the people in the vicinity of a possible war. Not only does the IDF send pamphlets, but the IDF also sends text messages and calls civilians, stating that they need to quickly and peacefully leave the city. The Jewish state has made it clear that we will try to save any innocent civilian life and approach every situation as peacefully as possible, no matter the situation.

This lesson can also be applied to our everyday lives. Rather than forcefully going into a situation, one should approach the situation in a peaceful and calm way if possible, no matter the circumstances, in order to hopefully achieve a better outcome. Rather than acting out because of one's temper, one

should first take a step back and think about a better way to approach the situation. Approaching a situation peacefully can help one see a situation in a clear, holistic way. It can also lead to a more successful outcome as Hashem helps the Jews succeed when they approach situations carefully and peacefully.

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## APPOINTING A JUDGE

ADINA HIRSCH ('19)

This week's parsha, Shoftim, is always read on the first Shabbat of the month of Elul. Because nothing is coincidental, this parsha must contain important lessons for us to put into practice during this auspicious month.

Shoftim means "judges". The Torah commands us to appoint righteous judges in every city and province. On a literal level, this commandment refers to judges who discuss and dispute civil, criminal, and religious issues. On a deeper level, this commandment, and its details, has great significance for every one of us in our personal lives. One of this law's details state:

*"You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show favoritism, and you shall not take a bribe."*  
(Devarim 16:19)

A person is "bribed" by a sense of self-love and is incapable of providing a genuinely fair self-evaluation. Once the Torah prohibits the perversion of justice, why does the Torah need to prohibit bribery? Is there a greater breach of justice than bribery?

Rashi explains that the Torah forbids bribery even in a case where the giver specifies that the money is being given on condition that the judge will issue a fair verdict. Since the judge is "bribed," he will be biased in favor of that particular party, and will be unable to rule objectively. As the pasuk continues:

*"For bribery blinds the eyes of the wise."*  
(Devarim 16:19)

As soon as a bond exists between a judge and one of the litigants, that judge is unfit to be in a position of authority over that case.

During the month of Elul, we are all expected to judge and reflect on our actions and accomplishments of the previous year. However, every person is “bribed” by a sense of self-love, and is incapable of a fair evaluation. For this reason, every person must appoint a “judge,” to be a fair and objective spiritual mentor. Furthermore, the knowledge that at the end of every week or month one will have to discuss one’s spiritual accomplishments with another is enough to inspire an individual to improve.

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## HOW TO BE A HOST

TOVA BRANDWEIN ('18)

THE LAST NINE PESUKIM OF Parshat Shoftim discuss a peculiar halacha known as the eglarufa, literally translated to, “decapitated calf”. The law states that if there is a corpse found between two cities and the murderer is unknown, then a calf is offered with a confession by the zekeinim of the nearest city.

### What is going on here? What does all this mean?

The Ibn Ezra suggests that this is an atonement for the sins of the city closest to where the body was found. Had that city have been free of sin, then such a terrible thing would have never occurred near it.

He further posits that if the murderer sees his intended victim being escorted by the community, he will be fearful to attack somebody who has such a great number of friends who would take revenge against him.

The Darkei Mussar questions this explanation of the Ibn Ezra, as the mitzvah of escorting a guest applies only to the first four amot of his journey, and perhaps the murderer only caught a glimpse of his victim after this time. Instead, he answers that if the hosts properly performed the mitzvah of hosting and escorting their guest, a Malach would have been created as a result of the mitzvah which would protect the traveler on his journey.



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