

**Wembley Synagogue**

שפטים

Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Shoftim

שפטים ושטרם תתן להם - Judges and officers you shall give (appoint) to you (16:18)

The usage in this verse is unusual. In standard usage in Hebrew the verse would state "Judges and officers you shall give (appoint) them". Why then, does the verse state "you shall give to you?" In this verse the pronoun "you" is referring to the people who are responsible to appoint judges in the proper manner - as prescribed by the Torah. They are described as giving the judges to themselves. This indicates that they are the prime beneficiaries of the judges' appointment. When worthy judges and officers are appointed it is the public who stands to gain the most. (Source: Darash Moshe)

שפטים ושטרם תתן להם - Judges and officers you shall appoint for you in all your cities (16:18) The word "*lecha*" — "for you" — is superfluous.

In a person's face there are seven openings: two ears, two eyes, two nostrils and a mouth. The Torah is indicating that besides judges for all cities, you should also appoint judges "*lecha*" — "for yourself" — i.e. you should judge carefully and police whatever you see with your eyes, hear with your ears, smell with your nostrils, and speak with your mouth. Since *Parshat Shoftim* is always read around the beginning of the month of *Elul*, when *teshuvah* is primary, the Torah calls to our attention with the word "*lecha*," that every person should carefully judge and police his own body especially during this month, and rectify any wrongdoing committed through these senses. (Source: Ma'ayana shel Torah)

ולא תקח שחד - You shall not take a bribe, for the bribe will blind the eyes of the wise. (16:19) Why is the Hebrew word for bribery "*shochad*"? According to the *Gemara* (*Ketubot* 105b), the etymology of the word "*shochad*" is "*chad*" — "one." Rashi explains that when a judge accepts a bribe from a litigant he becomes "one" with him and therefore can no longer judge objectively the argument of the other litigant. Alternatively, according to the *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 10a), when a judge rules a case honestly he becomes a partner with Hashem in the creation of heaven and earth. Since the judge who accepts bribery cannot offer a just decision, G-d now remains alone, without a partner. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

כי תבא אל הארץ - When you come to the land... and you will say, 'I will set a king over myself, like all the nations that are around me.' (17:14) Since the Torah permits the Jews to have a king, why was the prophet Shmuel angry when the Jews asked him to appoint one? The Torah is not opposed to the institution of monarchy in Israel, providing a Jewish king rules in accordance with the Torah and inspires the people to be totally dedicated to Hashem. However, Shmuel was upset with the people's saying "Appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations" (I Samuel 8:5). He realized that they wanted to be ruled by secular and not Torah law. Their desire to give up the uniqueness of the Jewish people and emulate the nations of the world provoked Shmuel's anger.

Alternatively, the Torah says "*som tasim alecha melech*" — "you shall surely set over yourselves a king" — i.e., you should place yourselves *under* the yoke of the king and be permeated with awe of him. Shmuel was displeased when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." He understood that they wanted a king who would be subject to *their* control and rule according to *their* directions.

Another explanation offered is that when the Jews approached Shmuel to appoint a king, they preceded their request saying, "You are old" (I Samuel 8:5). Since Shmuel was only fifty-two at the time of his death, he definitely could not be considered an old man by any means. He was therefore upset that they did not ask *him* to become their king. Shmuel sensed in their words that they considered the ideas and ideals for which he stood "old and antiquated," and this angered him very much.

To comfort him Hashem said, "It is not only you whom they have rejected, but it is Me whom they have rejected from reigning over them (ibid. 8:7)." With this Hashem meant, "You are indeed justified for being upset when they rejected you as their potential king, but do not feel bad because they did the same thing to Me. Shortly after My taking them out of Egypt they made a golden calf which they accepted as their god instead of Me."

מִקְרֵב אֶחָיִךְ תִּשֶׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ - From among your brothers shall you set a king upon yourselves. (17:15) A king must be from "among your brothers" and not from a family of converts. If so, how was it permissible for Rechavam to succeed Shlomo when his mother was Na'amah, an Amonite convert? The Rambam (*Melachim* 1:4) rules, "one whose ancestors were converts cannot be appointed king unless his mother was born Jewish." The *Kesef Mishnah* explains that the Rambam's statement, "Unless his mother is Jewish," implies that he is qualified 'all the more so' if his father was born Jewish, even if his mother is a convert. Thus, although Rechavam's mother was a convert, he was eligible to be appointed king by virtue of the fact that his father, King Shlomo, was born Jewish. *Tosafot* in the *Gemara* (*Sotah* 41b) asserts that if one parent is born Jewish, the person is considered "*mikerev achecha*" — "from among your brothers" — and may hold a position of authority. The office of king, however, is an exception, and to qualify, both parents must be born Jewish. If so, how was Rechavam permitted to succeed King Shlomo? Since the instruction, "From among your brethren shall you set a king upon yourself" is preceded by the words, "*Som tasim alecha melech*" — "You shall surely set over yourselves a king," the rule of being "from among your brethren" only applies to the *first* member of a family who is being set upon the people as a king but does not apply to his descendants who inherit the throne after him. Their kingdom is not considered a rulership from anew. Proof to this is the fact that the son of the deceased king, needs no anointing (Rambam, *Melachim* 1:11). Therefore, although Rechavam's mother was a convert, he inherited the throne from his father King Shlomo, whose both parents were born Jewish. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

וְקָרָא בוֹ כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּו - And he (the king) should read in it (the Torah) all the days of his life(17:19)The king of the Jews had a special Torah scroll which he kept with him at all times in order to read from it constantly. The verse also has another meaning. The king should read "all the days of his life" in the Torah - meaning he should consult the Torah for every aspect of his life, so that indeed "all the days of his life" can be read in the Torah" (Source: Itturei Torah)

וְעָנוּ וְאָמְרוּ קִדְנוּ לֹא שָׁפְכוּ אֶת הַדָּם הַזֶּה וְעֵינֵינוּ לֹא רָאוּ - And they (the elders) shall answer and say "Our hands did not spill this blood, and our eyes did not see (21:7) If a body is found and the murderer cannot be located, then the elders (Torah leaders) of the nearest town must perform the rite called Eglah Arufah. A calf is slaughtered in a special way. Afterwards the town elders wash their hands and recite "Our hands did not spill this blood and our eyes did not see."

Rashi notes that it is unfathomable to suspect the elders of the murder. Hence Rashi interprets the statement "Our hands did not spill this blood" to mean: "We did not see this man off without an escort." A question arises. Why does the Torah imply that one who allows a traveller to leave without an escort is a participant in the murder?

The answer is that a traveller may feel demeaned if no one bothers to escort him when he leaves. If his self-esteem suffers then he may have less courage to ward off an attacker. Hence, if one does not accord his fellow man the proper recognition by providing him with an escort then he is not just an innocent bystander. Rather, he may have actually contributed to the circumstances surrounding his fellow man's death. Thus the elders must proclaim "Our hands did not spill this blood" - "We did not see him off without an escort." (Source: P'ninim Mishulchan Govoha)

Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 8.00pm



Shabbat ends: 9.09pm

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is produced by Chazan Anthony Wolfson
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