

SHOFTIM (DEUTERONOMY 15:18 21:9)

Improve Your Vision

2009 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

THE MONTH OF ELUL

The Month of Elul is upon us once again. On the first day of the month of Elul, Moses climbed Mount Sinai to beg G-d to forgive the People of Israel for the sin of the Golden Calf. Forty days later, on the first Yom Kippur, Moses returned with a second set of Tablets, and forgiveness for the Israelites.

This final month before Rosh Hashanah is a time for introspection and preparation for the High Holidays. It is a time to ask G-d to grant us a year of peace, security, health, and prosperity. It is a time for getting our spiritual house in order. It is the time for us to make sure we are doing what's right. (See the suggestions at the end of “Advice for the Foxholes of Life”.)

-----“Improve Your Vision”

This week’s Torah Portion, “Shoftim – Judges”, always comes out in the beginning of the month of Elul. As we prepare to be judged by G-d next month on Rosh Hashanah, it is wise to look at what the Master of the World views as the criteria for good judges. After all, G-d will apply to us the same judicial attitudes that we apply to others.

Appoint judges ... in all your cities...They shall judge the people with righteous judgment. Do not pervert judgment. Do not play favorites. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe will blind the eye of the wise and make just words crooked. Righteousness, righteousness shall you pursue... (Deuteronomy, 16:18-20)

Not every “rich” man is rich, and not every “wise” man is wise. It depends upon your mode of reference.

The Chofetz Chaim (Brief biographies of the Chofetz Chaim can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Read his obituaries in the New York Times and Time magazine [here](#).)

pointed out that if person A refers to person B as being rich, all that means is that B has more money than A; it doesn’t mean that he is extremely wealthy. If, however, Bill Gates and Warren Buffet refer to someone as wealthy (the Chofetz Chaim’s example was Rothschild) you can assume that the fellow has more than a few dollars in the bank.

The same applies to wisdom. I remember that when I was approaching the end of first grade, I was a bit nervous because I saw what hard work those second graders had! The kids in second grade seemed a lot more advanced than I was. But that was only because I was a first grader!

If, however, King Solomon, the wisest of men, referred to someone as being wise, it is safe to assume that this is a truly wise person. All the more so, says the Chofetz Chaim, if G-d Himself refers to someone as wise.

...a bribe will blind the eye of the wise...

It is a mistake to think that we are impervious to the influences that dishonesty can have upon us. Even if someone is on the level that the Author of the Torah refers to him as wise, that same Author warns us that his wisdom will be blinded by corruption. Notice that the Torah says...*a bribe **will** blind the eye of the wise...* It says *WILL*, not *MIGHT*. It is a fact, not a warning. Bribery *WILL* make you blind; there is no alternative.

If I allow a favor from you to influence my actions, it will blind my judgment and obscure my abilities to discern the truth in the future.

It is a mistake to assume that we can separate intellect from integrity. If a person has a high I.Q., but he acts in a dishonorable fashion, even his intellect is tarnished.

One of my teachers was supposed to undergo a surgical procedure that was known to very few doctors. The doctor whom he consulted was a world famous expert in this procedure. He was also an arrogant, obnoxious human being. My teacher refused to go through with the surgery. If such a person could behave so poorly outside the operating room, even his surgical acumen was suspect.

There is a way to *IMPROVE* our vision. The Sfas Emes points out that whatever concept applies to the negative, applies all the more so to the positive.

The Torah tells us that when we compromise our integrity by taking a bribe, it blinds our vision. Then the Torah tells us, *Righteousness, righteousness shall you pursue...*

That is why if you are looking for advice, you should ask a Torah scholar. Clearly, he may not be well-versed in the particulars of the question. Someone who has mastered the intricacies of the Talmud may not know the exact technicalities of a medical question. But, if you are looking for some clear thinking advice from someone who knows how to discern the truth, look for someone whose life is devoted to truth.

If you work for righteousness, says the Sfas Emes, you will IMPROVE your vision. If you go out of your way to relentlessly pursue truth and honesty, you will achieve the wisdom that will help you truly know the difference between right and wrong.

Have a great Shabbos.

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