

MORASHAH
 THE RABBINIC FELLOWSHIP OF THE UTJ
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Parashat HaShavuah Series

PARASHAT SHOFTIM

This week's parashah opens with some incredible instructions: Appoint judges and officers (v.18), justices may never take a bribe (v.19), and, finally in verse 20 the very famous command "*Tzedek, tzedek tirdof* – justice, justice shalt thou pursue." The Torah wants us to create a society that can come as close to perfect as can any human endeavor.

Our notion that there are no superfluous words (nor even superfluous jots and tittles) in the Torah teaches us that the repetition of the word *tzedek* – justice – is most important. It is not enough, say the rabbis, to want justice, but we must actively pursue justice. It is not enough to have a sense of *tzedek* in life, but we must go out of our way to find *tzedek* in the world around us.

Charity is something that people give because they are moved to do so. We Jews are commanded to live a life of *tzedek* in all its meanings and ideations.

The Prophets, Psalmists and Sages of Israel demanded in the most passionate way they knew how that we stand for social righteousness. The prophet Amos said, "let justice roll down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream."

To live a life of justice is to realize that within each of us is a little spark of the Divine and to remember always that each of us is created in the image of the Divine. As God is a God of *tzedek*, so, too, must we live our lives filled with *tzedek*. As Isaiah said "*(Ha-el haqadosh nikdash bitzdakah)* The holy God is sanctified in justice."

Our liturgy teaches that where there is no justice, there is no religion. The oppressor is traditionally seen as the **enemy** of God and mankind. In the Rosh Hashanah *amidah*, we learn "*(V'chol harisha ch'ashan tichleh, ki ta'avir memshelet zadon min ha'aretz)* that evil needs to disappear from the earth.

In the light of all of recent events in the world-wide Jewish community, it is clear that we have transgressed in a huge way. We have turned our backs on the Torah and its clarion call to live a life of *tzedek*.

Jews spitting on Jews, Jews throwing rocks and dirty diapers at Jews, Jews calling police officers Nazis, Jews stealing from the world, Jews laundering

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money, Jews selling organs, rabbis doing dastardly and illegal things – it all adds up to one inescapable fact: we are suffering from a terrible disease in the Jewish community. It is a disease that comes from within and was not transmitted from outside.

There is good news, however. There is a cure. It is called living a life the *tzedek* way.

Shabbat Shalom!

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