

SHOFTEEM 1981
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Many times people tell me, "Why should I attend a simcha? I am not the one getting married. I am not the one directly involved. Why should I come for a Bar Mitzvah? As long as they have a minyon it is enough." This is not true, though, because you really cannot feel joy if you have nobody to share it with. Life becomes almost unbearable. We become alienated and lonely if we have nobody to share moments with. In America today we have become the "me" generation. Whatever I want to do I do. Whatever I do not want to do I do not do. It's like the story they tell about the man who was talking to his friend and saying, "I just went bankrupt and I owe everyone, almost all my friends" and the friend says, "It could be worse". He said, "How?" and the friend said, "You could owe me". So many people are caught up in me, me, me that they cannot realize themselves. The paradox is the more you are concerned with yourself, the more you become alienated and the more you are concerned with others, the more you find yourself. A study was once headed by Margaret Mead which investigated Jewish culture and they found that one phrase could describe it better than any other. What was this phrase? Life is with people. In order to really enjoy life you must be with people. In this Torah portion we learn Tameem, you should be with the L-rd your G-d. Tameem means perfect or wholehearted, wholesome. You should be with the L-rd your G-d. None of us will ever be perfect but we are supposed to have a wholesomeness of character and an integrated personality. When you ask somebody how they are in Hebrew you say, Ma Shlomcha, which means literally how is your wholeness, how is your harmony? We are all composed of conflicting desires and it is our job to integrate them into a wholesome whole. We are all to achieve Shleimus, or wholeness, wholeheartedness. In the Torah we learn about Moshe and Aaron. The Rabbis teach that Moshe and Aaron were equal because sometimes G-d speaks to Moshe first and sometimes to Aaron first. One was equal to the other. However, if we look at the text we will see that this is not so. Moshe went and received the Ten Commandments. Moshe was

the leader of the Jewish people. True, Aaron was the High Priest but he even made the Golden Calf. How could you say that Moshe and Aaron were equal? The Rabbis explain that it is true that they were not equal in achievements but they were equal because they achieved each one his own Shleimus , his own wholeness. They were not born with equal abilities but they were each one able to integrate within their personalities almost all of their potentiality. This is what we mean when we say that a person should be wholehearted with G-d. How do you achieve this wholeness? In the very next Torah portion it tells us how. It says, "because these nations which you are inheriting them to soothsayers and diviners they would listen but you not so did G-d permit you". In Hebrew the words Lo Kain also mean yes and no so this sentence tells us how we achieve an integrated personality, not through tricks or fads or magic but by realizing that there is a yes and a no in the world, that there are certain things we can do and we cannot do. It is our job to become a mentsch and we cannot do it unless we realize that there are limits to what we can and cannot do, moral lines. Morality is not just subjective. Morality transcends time. It is always wrong to murder. It is wrong to murder. It is very difficult many times to tell what is right and wrong therefore we must study. How do we achieve wholeness? How do we integrate our personality, to be Tameem with Hashem? We do this by knowing what we can and cannot do.

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In Judaism family is the basis of everything. Today we frown on family. Family is thought to be a hindrance, something to get in the way. So many children now hate their parents. They do it because children are conceived of as only takers and not givers. Children stop a person from having a career, from taking vacations. Many people send their children to camps and fancy schools just to be rid of them. In Judaism the family is conceived of as the greatest source of fulfillment. A family is not meant to squelch individuals. In the Jewish concept of family everyone contributes. The child contributes. His achievements give parents prestige. A child is meant to go out and bring achievements back to the family. The family which does not allow the child to achieve is not a good family. In Judaism we believe in reciprocity. The child contributes to a family. They are not just takers. They are givers. The greatest opportunity that G-d has given us is to have the opportunity to shape and mold children. The family is the basis of everything in Judaism. A father who prevents children from going out and developing their talents is a bad father. Judaism believes in Tzedek which is a combination of law and mercy. Family is meant to be a paradigm of Tzedek. A family should never disown any of its members, and it should be there for everyone in the family. It should also set standards for people to meet. The Jewish family has always been a family where everyone participated. We do not believe in submissive wives or submissive children. We believe everyone has to have a say. In Judaism everyone has a part a role to play that is important. The woman makes sure the house is kosher. She makes sure that religious celebrations are kept.

SHOFTIM 1986
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In the Torah portion Shoftim we learn about the Jewish conception of justice. We learn "V'Shoftos Omneeshpatzedek - And they shall judge the people a judgement of righteousness." It doesn't just say Mishpat, it also says Tzedek. Justice is a very complicated subject. It does not just mean righting a wrong but how you right the wrong. It means to right the wrong in a correct way. It also means there should be Sholem, peace, after you have righted the wrong, and there should also be Emes, there should also be truth. We have just heard about the terrible tragedy in Turkey where several P.L.O. terrorists entered a synagogue and killed 24 people, 7 of them rabbis, as they were davening on Shabbos morning. There is no excuse for this kind of action. They may have a cause. They may feel they are being persecuted and that their cause is so great they must have a hearing on the world scene, but they cannot do these kind of acts. These acts are completely outside the purview of civilized behavior. The Torah would condemn these acts. We are looking now only at Din, at Mishpat, at trying to right a wrong, but using terrible means to right a wrong. This act that took place in Turkey tells the world that the problem is not Israel or Zionism. The problem is Jews. The world hates the Jews. The rabbis say that since the time of Mount Sinai we Jews have been the object of the hatred of the world. They learn that from the word "Sinai", itself. The word "Sinai" not only means the mountain upon which we received the Torah, but it also means hatred. Ever since we gave the world the ideals of morality, the ideals of living in this world according to the principles of compassion and justice, we have been subject to the hatred of the world. The world does not want to live according to these rules and regulations. The world wants to do its own thing.

It is very clear what the Jewish mission in the world is. We learn it in the Haphtorah where we are told, "Leento Shemayim V'Leeso Oretz", where we learn that the job of the Jewish is to plant heaven and lay the foundations of the earth. What we are to do is to make this world a heaven. Not everyone believes this. Not everyone wants to accept this type of view. In Judaism we are called upon to be G-d's partner in

creation. We are called upon to perfect the world, and we are supposed to start with ourselves. That is, of course, what the symbolism of circumcision is, and, of course, when a woman gets married that is what we have when we talk about the hymen. We are called upon to perfect this world, to make it a better place. This is not true of all religions. They do not make these demands of their followers. In fact, many religions try to create a special place of worship in which people who go to that place of worship almost literally go to heaven. They are supposed to get a glimpse of heaven when they go to their places of worship. They are supposed to feel that from then on they have hope because they have seen the beauty of a future world, not this world, because this world cannot be perfected, but they have hope and solace because they know that such a place does exist. They can then face the terrors of the world in which we live. Their religious experience is basically an esthetic response to the world. They look at the world and they say, "This world cannot be fixed, but I have a vision of a better world." The esthetic response is actually, when you get right down to it, a response of helplessness. When we see a Rembrandt painting or a great sculpture or an athlete perform we marvel at the feat. We admire it, but we know we cannot do it. We know we cannot produce such beauty, and, therefore, all we are capable of doing is to look at it and stand on the sidelines helpless. This is the attitude that many religions of the world inculcate in their followers.

This is not Judaism's idea. Therefore, it really is not important whether synagogues are esthetically pleasing. It is nice to have to have a beautiful synagogue, but that is not the essence of the Jewish religion. When a Jew goes to the synagogue he goes in order to feel that G-d is with him, that G-d will give him the courage and the strength to perfect this world. We are called upon to fix this world, to make it a better place. We are not called upon to glimpse heaven and, therefore, get solace and hope, and then return to the world the way it is and just learn to put up with its miseries. What we are to do is change its miseries and make it a better place.

In the Pir Kiovos we learn that Shimon Hatzadek, who was one of the survivors of the Keneset Hagadol, used to say that on three things does the world stand: on Torah, on worship, and on the doing of deeds of kindness. At the end of this same chapter we learn that Rabbi Shimon Ben Genail says that on three things does the world exist: on truth, on judgement, and on peace. As it says, "Truth and the judgement of peace, you shall judge in your gates." There seems to be a contradiction here. In the beginning of the chapter we learn the world stands on three things (on Torah, on worship, and on doing deeds of kindness), and at the end we learn that the world exists on truth, on justice, and on peace. How is this possible? The rabbis answer that if you look at the word "Omaid - stand" you see that it refers to potentiality. In Hebrew when you say, "I am about to go on a trip", you say, "Omaid Linsoa". Omaid does not just mean stand, it means potentiality. You are about to do it.

In this first chapter of the Pir Kiovos we are learning about how we can have culture, we can have Torah, how we can have proper worship, how we can have deeds of loving kindness. How are these things possible? How can we bring them about? The answer is found in the last sentence of that chapter: by having truth, justice, and peace. Unless you stand for truth, justice, and peace you will never be able to come to a situation where you have true worship, true culture, and the doing of deeds of kindness. Without a combination of peace and righting of grievances and truth we will not be able to ever arrive at a situation in which humanity will want to live together harmoniously studying Torah, expanding their mind, worshipping G-d, and helping one another. It is imperative that truth, that righting of grievances, and peace must all exist, and they all must exist simultaneously. Those people who have grievances and have been subjected to great injustices, have to realize that they must also serve truth and serve peace. We know that any conflict, when resolved, must be resolved in peace. If it is not, you have continual warfare. What do you do when you defeat a foe? are you going to kill every man, woman, and child? If you are not ready to do that, then you have to learn how to make peace with them. The trouble with many people

when they get into an argument is that they fail that when the argument is solved, they have to live with these people. They have to live with these people after the war is over, after the argument is over, after the battle is over. In order to do this you have to remember that they have something to say on their side as well, and they probably have some grievances as well. You cannot just do anything you want to further your own cause. There are limits to what you can do, and unless you are willing to limit yourself you will never have peace. A person must realize, as well as nations and groups, that truth must be served. So many people are willing to pervert truth to get what they want. I would dare say today in the Middle East that the P.L.O. is not a great threat to Israel. It is a nuisance. It harms Jews throughout the world now. It is villainous and murderous, but it is not going to destroy Israel. The P.L.O. is probably a greater threat to Arab regimes than it is to Israel, mainly because it perverts truth so much. It undermines the foundations of all society. It postulates the violence is the way to achieve everything. It creates situations such as Lebanon where peace is impossible. No one can win in that given situation, and without peace you cannot have Torah, culture, learning, worship, or one human being helping another because you are divided in so many lines: religiously, classes, nationalities, races, etc. We must always have not just Mishpat but, as we say in our Torah portion, Mishpat Tzedek, the law of righteousness. We Jews have become the symbol of this in the world, and the world holds it against us. They do not want to change. They do not want to perfect the world. They want to stay the way they are. They do not want to according to morality. They do not want to make the effort to live according to truth, to righting grievances, and truth. They want to continue their games. Therefore, we are their natural enemy. Hitler knew what he was doing when he singled us out. He said the Jews are sentimental people. The Jews have given the world a conscience. Why shouldn't the strong take what they want? This is echoed here in the economic sphere where people say, "Let the poor suffer. They don't deserve to get anything. They are not talented or ambitious. They are lazy. Let them suffer

in their poverty." This is a position which we Jews abhor. We cannot accept this position. We Jews have always been attacked and probably always will be attacked, because we are symbol of a message the world does not want to hear. Not all Jews are worthy. There are some bad Jews, but Jews, per se, no matter whether they speak Hebrew, whether they are pro-Israel, are a symbol to the people's of the world of G-d's message in Sinai to perfect the world. Many people do not want to change or do what is necessary in order to make sure that peace, justice, and truth prevail in the world. We should never lose hope, though, because eventually the world will accept this message.

I am reminded of the story they tell in the time of Hitler. I just saw a television show about Henry Kaufman, the great American economist, who when he says something, Wall Street goes up and down. He was born in Germany and went to school in Hitler's time. This story did not happen to him but it could have. They tell the story that it was Hitler's birthday and the teacher asked the class what they would like to do if they were Hitler's son. One boy said, "I would like to be a stormtrooper and attack the enemies of the State for Hitler." Another said, "I would like to be an aviator and fly in the Luftwaffe and punish the enemies of the state." The third boy, Abie Cohen, said, "I would like to be an orphan." Let us hope and pray that soon there will be no more Hitlers, no more people who want to destroy us because they will have accepted the basis message of Sinai, which is that we must perfect this world, make a world in which peace, justice, and truth prevail. Amen.

SHOFTEEN 1987
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In the Torah portion Shoteem we learn about justice. Justice is very important in Judaism, not just because of economic loss, but it is very important that it is only in this way that a person can preserve his own self-respect and dignity. It is only in this way that he cannot have that little piece of G-d within him diminished. When a person is taken advantage of, then the person feels he is no longer equal to everyone else about him. We destroy that feeling of self-respect and dignity which is important for every individual. We Jews believe that everyone is equal in the sight of G-d, that each of us has a little piece of G-d within us. That is, of course, is what our Neshoma, our soul, is. We cannot trample on this. When we trample on a person's Neshoma and make him out to be a nothing, we, in effect, diminish him. We make him lose his self-respect and dignity.

This concept has been taken over by America. That is the very basis, of course, of one man one vote. If we look at the whole system of one man one vote we will be impressed with this illogicalness. It is impossible to say that one man's opinion is as good as another. You mean to tell me that a university professor who is an expert in political science and studies all the issues and knows all the candidates inside and out is not more qualified than a fellow who gets drunk three times a week? Yet, that is the way the American system works. The man who gets three times a week

and can hardly hold down a job and never reads a book has as much voting power as the professor who understands all the issues involved. This, of course, is based on faith, the faith that each of us in our society has a right to have equal importance, to have an equal voice, that everyone's opinions must be taken into account. That is why everyone must be treated with dignity and respect.

That is basically what this Torah portion is all about, maintaining justice in society, making sure everyone has an equal say, that people are not taken advantage of, even people whose talents and even people who even have moral qualities are not so great. We cannot say, "Oh, we don't care about him. Let them suffer. Let's take away their property. Let's take away their assets and use them for more deserving people." We cannot do that. That is, of course, what the upper class used to do in Europe. They used to say, "Oh, our type of people are better, and if our people get into a dispute with those type of people it really doesn't make any difference for these lower type of people that they have one or two less things. Our people need them. We are the fine people. We are the people upon whom civilization depends." This, of course, is false. Many times people are put into a predicament where they have to choose between their own dignity and their economic livelihood. That is a terrible situation to put people in. That is why employers and people in power have to be very careful that they preserve the dignity of the people beneath them, that they

give them the right to have an opinion, that they give them the right to disagree, although, ultimately, they have to follow the authority of the boss. The boss has the authority but he can make out of his employee a toady. We have seen how this happens where people sacrifice their own self-respect and dignity for economic security, and they hate themselves for it. Sometimes they take out their anger on other people. We have to make sure people are not called upon to sacrifice their dignity in order to maintain economic security. Of course, many people do it because they are afraid. They are afraid to go out into the world. They are afraid they cannot make a living, afraid they cannot assert themselves in the world and support their family if they do not give in on their principles and become yes men to whoever is around them.

That is why it is very important that justice be maintained because without justice in a society you will have a lot of hidden anger and violence which will eventually surface and explode. That is why we learn in this Torah portion about "Tzedek Tzedek Turdofos - Justice justice you should pursue." The rabbis say the reason this is stated twice is that you should pursue justice with righteous means. You cannot pursue justice with unrighteous means. Every issue has two sides. That's why Tzedek is repeated twice. We have to look at both sides. Not both sides are equally valid, but there is another side, an opposite side. We have to give a person

the opportunity to express the opposite side.

Unfortunately, there are many people who only see their own self-interest and do not see another side at all. On the other hand, there are other people, especially older people, who see the other side and think they do not have a side at all. They completely deprecate their own interest and think their interest does not count, that you only have to take into account the other side and not your side, too. This is wrong. You should pursue justice.

That is why here, too, we learn about a king, that when a king is placed upon the Jewish people it says, "V'Chosavlo Es Mishnah HaTorah HaZos - And you should right for him a copy of this Torah." The rabbis explain that the word Mishnah means that there were two copies of the Torah. One copy of the Torah he was to keep with him in his home and the other copy he was to take with him. The rabbis explain that the second copy of the Torah he actually bound around his hand. They say it would be impossible for him to carry a whole Torah on his hand so, therefore, they say what he took with him instead was the Ten Commandments. There are 613 words in that portion of the Torah which deals with the Ten Commandments which is reminiscent of the 613 commandments, that the king in his home would have the complete Torah. When he went out among the people he would have the 613 commandments. What was the reason for this? That the king should always remember he is subservient to the law, not like the Queen of England and when the British flag passes the

Queen in review it is dipped to symbolize that the queen, in certain instances, is above the law. In Jewish law the kings of the House of David were never above the law. They were always subject to the law, as is the President of the United States. Otherwise we would have had a dictatorship here a long time ago. The king, when he deals with everyone, must deal with the people with respect and dignity and allow them their say. He is also not to force upon them certain religious views, even if he knows they are right. You have to meet the people where they are. Their laws never change. The Torah never changes, the rabbis tell us, but circumstances do, and you have to meet the people and understand their circumstances.

What do I mean by this? For example, the Torah says we must preserve our health. That means that in the summer we do the exact opposite of what we do in the winter. We take off our coat instead of putting on our coat. I remember once a man came to me and said, "Rabbi, can I stick a baby with pins?" I almost threw him out of the office. I said, "What's the matter with you? What kind of a sadist are you? Do you know the trauma you will do to the baby? Do you know what you will do to your own soul. Get out of here. I do not want to talk to you." The man said, "But, Rabbi, I am a doctor. I want to know if I can give a baby a shot?" I said, "Oh, give a baby a shot? Of course, that is okay." The king, too, has to understand the circumstances of the people. The law does

