

In memory of all those brutally murdered in the war on Israel,
including the fallen soldiers of the IDF

בס"ד

30 AUGUST 2025 | 6 ELUL 5785

VOLUME 38 | #51

DAF HASHAVUA

שִׁפְטִים | SHOFETIM

SHABBAT ENDS:

London: 8.41pm
Birmingham: 8.50pm
Bournemouth: 8.49pm
Cardiff: 8.56pm
Dublin: 9.10pm
Edinburgh: 9.08pm
Glasgow: 9.12pm
Hull: 8.53pm
Leeds: 8.53pm
Liverpool: 9.00pm
Manchester: 8.55pm
Nottingham: 8.52pm
Sheffield: 8.55pm
Southend: 8.37pm
Southport: 9.02pm
Jerusalem: 7.43pm



*"Righteousness,
righteousness shall you
pursue, so that you will
live and possess the Land
that Hashem, your God,
is giving you"*
(Devarim 16:20)

SIDRA BREAKDOWN

שְׁפִטִים SHOFETIM

5th Sidra in: דְּבָרִים DEVARIM

By Numbers:
97 VERSES
1,523 WORDS
5,590 LETTERS

Headlines: JEWISH PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENTAL LAW

SHOFETIM:
Artscroll p.1024
Hertz p.820
Soncino p.1078

HAFTARAH:
Artscroll p.1199
Hertz p.835
Soncino p.1094

Sidra Summary

1ST ALIYA (KOHEN) – DEVARIM 16:18-17:13

Judges and officers must be appointed in all cities (Rashi). Judges must endeavour to avoid showing favour to any litigant. One may not erect (even) a single stone for worship, even to worship God. It is forbidden to bring a blemished animal as an offering. Idol worship is subject to capital punishment. If a halachic question or dispute cannot be resolved by local courts, the case should be taken to the Kohanim in the Temple.

2ND ALIYA (LEVI) – 17:14-20

When the nation comes into the Land, they have the right to request a king. That king has to be appointed by God (through a prophet) and must be Jewish. The king must not take the people to Egypt in order for him to acquire horses (where many were available and a symbol of prestige). He must also avoid having multiple wives and amassing too much wealth. He is obligated to have his own Sefer Torah, from which he must read daily.

3RD ALIYA (SHLISHI) – 18:1-5

The tribe of Levi does not get a portion in the Land, unlike the other tribes. However, the Kohanim are to be given parts of certain Temple offerings to eat. They are also to receive the first tithe of the produce of fruits grown in the Land (*terumah gedolah*), as well as the first shearing of the flock (*reishit ha'gez*).

4TH ALIYA (REVI') – 18:6-13

The Kohanim are to be split into different groups, who will rotate performing duties in the Temple. The right to eat designated parts of regular offerings is reserved for whichever group of Kohanim is serving in the Temple that week (see Rashi). After coming into the Land, the nation must avoid the ways of the Canaanite nations, especially their various forms of witchcraft, divinations and sorcery.

5TH ALIYA (CHAMISHI) – 18:14-19:13

Moshe (Moses) tells the people that they will have prophets who will guide them and convey God's messages. A prophet's legitimacy will be tested by whether his prophecies materialise or not. Moshe gives instructions regarding the establishment of three cities of refuge (in addition to the three on

the east bank of the Jordan River – see Devarim 4:41-43). These cities are to provide refuge for a person who has killed accidentally and is fleeing from the relatives of the deceased. Instructions are given about what constitutes 'accidental' and how the community must endeavour to protect the accidental killer from those who are pursuing him. In Messianic times, another three cities will be added (Rashi).

6TH ALIYA (SHISHI) – 19:14-20:9

One must not tamper with someone else's land boundary. Court cases are determined by the testimony of a minimum of two witnesses. The laws of conspiring witnesses (*edim zomemim*) are detailed, in which a second set of witnesses accuses the first set of having been unqualified to give their testimony, since they could not have been at the scene of the incident, due to their being elsewhere (Rashi). When the nation goes out to war, they must not fear the enemy, however mighty they may seem. Before battle commences, a Kohen is to encourage the people, reminding them that God is protecting them. Certain people are sent home from the battlefield before war commences.

7TH ALIYA (SHEVI') – 20:10-21:9

Before the nation goes to war, it must offer its enemy the opportunity to make peace. However, in the initial conquest of the Land from the Canaanite nations, their cities and inhabitants must be destroyed (Rashi). If a corpse is found between two cities and it is unclear who is responsible for the death, the elders of the city nearest to the location of the corpse must take a heifer and behead it in a valley, after which the Kohanim shall ask God for atonement on behalf of the elders (Rashi).

Point to Consider: *Why were the elders of the nearest city considered responsible for the death?* (see Rashi to 21:7)

HAFTARAH (YESHAYA 51:12-52:12)

Taken from the book of Yeshaya, this is the fourth of the seven 'haftarat of consolation' read after Tisha B'Av. Yeshaya tells the people that they may have suffered punishment, but they can 'awaken' themselves and emerge from their captivity. God is constantly ready to redeem the nation if they turn to Him.



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Whodunnit?



**SHIRA
JACKSON**

US Education

At the end of *Parashat Shofetim*, we are faced with a murder mystery. A man is found dead in the middle of a field, approximately halfway between two towns, and nobody saw who killed him.

Interestingly, the Torah does not seem focused on 'whodunnit' but rather on what the protocol is for the leaders of the nearest town to the corpse. The *Sanhedrin* (Jewish supreme court) in Jerusalem sends a delegation to the spot and they measure which town is the nearest. The elders of that town must then take a calf to an overflowing stream and break its neck, a ritual known as the *Eglah Arufah*. They wash their hands over it and say: "our hands did not shed this blood and our eyes did not see this" (*Devarim* 21:7). They ask God to regard their actions as an atonement for what has

happened. This portion concludes with, "Thus you will remove [the guilt] of the innocent blood from your midst and you will be doing what is right in the eyes of God" (ibid v.9).

What is the point of this ritual? Why aren't we trying to catch the murderer, and why do the elders have to say this statement to absolve themselves of guilt? Rashi (1040-1105) asks incredulously, "But would it enter anyone's mind that the elders of the court are suspected of bloodshed?!" Rashi explains that "the meaning of the declaration is: We never saw him (the victim) and knowingly let him depart without food or escort."

So is the declaration of the elders a plea of innocence or an admission of guilt? Why the need for the *Eglah Arufah* if they have done nothing wrong?

The elders bring an *Eglah Arufah* because they are complicit to a certain degree. If poverty or a sense of abandonment was the cause of this murder, then the whole community bears a certain responsibility for this death

because it was preventable. In addition, it was hoped that the shock of a murder, causing this bizarre public ceremony, might lead to discovering the murderer.

This ceremony was abolished around the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, in the first century CE. The reason was sad indeed – the ceremony was losing its effectiveness, due to the large number of murders taking place (*Mishnah Sotah* 9:9).

The underlying principle, however, "*Kol Yisrael areivim zeh l'zeh*, all of the Jewish people are responsible for one another" is still very much at the core of our values. It means we are responsible even for things that are seemingly "not our responsibility."

If someone is struggling financially, or they are lonely because they feel they do not belong, we bear collective responsibility. We must ensure that nobody feels like they are "alone in the middle of an empty field," not feeling that they belong in one town or another, metaphorically or otherwise.

We are responsible even for things that are seemingly 'not our responsibility.' We must ensure that nobody feels like they are 'alone in the middle of an empty field,' not feeling that they belong in one town or another, metaphorically or otherwise.

In loving memory of Chaim ben Moshe Bentzion z"l

Tehillim (Psalm) 27: Our only request



LAURIE MAURER

US Education

In this series, we focus on the meanings and relevance of our prayers and how they offer us opportunities to connect with God at any time, not just during formal services.

Sapir Cohen was a Hamas captive for 55 days. A few weeks before October 7th, she had the feeling that something was wrong.

She turned to Psalm 27 and began saying it every day, taking particular comfort from the verse, *“the Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”*

Sapir’s uneasy feeling became a reality several weeks later – she was dragged to Gaza and held there. She was released but had to endure a further 443 days without knowing the fate of her boyfriend, Sasha Troufanov. Later, he was also released and the couple got engaged in July 2025.

From the beginning of the month of Elul, which began a few days ago, until Shemini Atzeret, 14th October, we recite Psalm 27 at morning and evening prayer services. The first verse contains allusions to our High Holy Days;

‘the Lord is my light’, refers to Rosh Hashanah, *‘and my salvation’* refers to Yom Kippur (*Midrash Vayikra Rabba* 21:4).

This beautiful psalm can, of course, be said at any time of the year. However, it is especially pertinent to this time of year, as we can see from some of the verses:

“Should an army besiege me, my heart would not fear. Should war break out against me, still I would be confident. One thing I ask of the Lord, only this do I seek: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.”

“Do not hide Your face from me. Do not turn Your servant away in anger. You have been my help. Do not reject or forsake me.”

King David, author of the psalm, begins with a triumphant statement of trust in God and a desire to be close to Him. But then, a few lines later, he is full of fear, asking God not to abandon him.

As we approach the High Holy Days, we may be afraid that we have lost some of our relationship with God, that we do not deserve His shelter or His love. David’s wavering conviction here might seem familiar to us. However, the psalm ends with David fortifying himself, *“Hope in the Lord, be strong and of good courage and hope in the Lord”*.

Elul is the month where we are meant to particularly seek



**The Lord is my light
and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the
strength of my life;
of whom shall I be
afraid?**

out God’s presence in our lives; this is the one thing King David asks for here, *“to sit in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life”*. The ultimate theme of this psalm is trust in God, in our ability to be close to and have a relationship with Him.

Sapir used this psalm as an anchor to cling to during her captivity, relinquishing control of the situation to God and encouraging her fellow hostages to retain hope too. At the time of writing this article, Israel is being hit day and night by ballistic missiles from Iran. It is at times like these, and in times of challenge and insecurity in our own lives, where this psalm becomes a practical tool, as we place our trust in God and look to Him for protection and blessing.

The Emancipation of the Jews of France - Why the delay?



**DAVID
FREI**

US Director of External
and Legal Services
and Registrar of the
London Beth Din

'Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité' was the motto of the French Revolution in 1789. The Declaration of the Rights of Man issued in August of that year by France's National Assembly was a groundbreaking proclamation of civil rights and equality, which had a major impact on the development of democracy worldwide.

So where did the Jews of France fit into this picture?

Ultimately, the Jews of France did achieve full emancipation but (with the exception of Sephardic Jews, who were granted full rights as French citizens in January 1790) it took a bitter two-year struggle culminating on 27 September 1791 for the remaining Jews to receive the same rights as other Frenchmen.

The Jewish population of France was geographically split.

The Revolution could not risk its ambition to create 'the best human community in all of history' by adding 'the vilest people in the world' to its body politic.

There was a group known as the 'Portuguese, Spanish and Avignonnais Jews', who lived in the southwestern corner of France, chiefly in Bordeaux and Bayonne. This group (between 3,000 and 4,000 strong) considered themselves culturally superior and more moderate in religious practice than the 30,000 Ashkenazi Jews of Alsace-Lorraine, based in the northeast of France. The latter were generally less affluent and less integrated into French culture, and they had a very poor relationship with their gentile neighbours. Acts of antisemitic violence were not uncommon in this region.

Thus, when the National Assembly, after a series of heated and acrimonious debates in late 1789, failed to extend rights to all Jews, the Sephardim successfully lobbied to be treated differently, as set out above.

Why did the Ashkenazim have to wait over two years for emancipation?

There was fierce opposition from various factions to Jews being treated as equal citizens including from the Catholic Church (although it was a Catholic priest, Abbé Grégoire, who was the most prominent supporter of the Jews) and from traditional antisemites, who saw the Jews as an alien nation in France who were incapable of full integration.

The clerical opponents of the Jews cited their adherence to their religion, specifically their observance of Shabbat and dietary

laws, as preventing them from assimilation into the French nation.

However, even factions among the extreme left opposed Jewish emancipation on blatantly racial grounds, maintaining, in the words of one pamphleteer, that the Revolution could not risk its ambition to create 'the best human community in all of history' by adding 'the vilest people in the world' to its body politic.

One of the most vociferous antisemitic agitators was Jean-Francois Rewbell of Colmar, who opposed the rights of Jews at every opportunity, referring to his 'unfortunate compatriots' in Alsace as being 'oppressed and ground down by these cruel hordes of Africans (sic) who have infested my region.'

These racist views deeming the Jewish nation as incapable of civilised behaviour echoed sentiments expressed by Voltaire, whose philosophical views during the French Enlightenment are regarded as being heavily influential on the Revolutionary cause which brought down the ancien regime. Despite his passion for human rights, Voltaire had little sympathy for the Jews.

Ultimately, despite incessant delays caused by this opposition, the Assembly did extend emancipation to the Jews, but the split left deep-seated antisemitic feelings in French society which reappeared during the Dreyfus Affair in the late 19th century and in French collaboration with the Nazis in WW2.



Same time, same place

BY: **REBBETZEN SHULI LISS**

Highgate Synagogue

The world around me has definitely changed. But now, just a month before Rosh Hashanah, I find myself wondering: have I changed? Am I any better than I was last year? Can I even remember my New Year's resolution from last year and all the grand plans I had? I often feel a little embarrassed and disheartened as the month of Elul rolls around again.

There is a phrase that resonates with me. "Nothing changes if nothing changes."

Real, lasting change does not happen just because we want it. Meaningful growth happens slowly, with hard work, commitment, perseverance and incremental small steps. Without planning, daily effort and time, even strong motivation can slowly fade.

In the next few weeks, we will be exploring some tools that can help us approach the High Holidays in a different way – so that the change we desire becomes embedded into our lives, rather than just in the short term.

I work in a school, and one of the regulations is to create a SIP – a Self-Improvement Plan. Without something detailed and manageable, the goal to "improve pupil outcomes" remains too vague. We need a real plan.

Many years ago, I joined a *mussar* (character development) group in Jerusalem led by Rabbi

Lawrence Kelemen. We met monthly, but the real work was daily. We would focus on one trait at a time, and slowly – very slowly – I started to notice small changes in the way I thought and behaved.

When a plane is attempting to enter enemy territory, it needs to fly under the radar in order to avoid being detected. In the same way, small changes can 'fly under the radar' of our *yetzer hara* – our inner resistance. Big resolutions get noticed. But small ones? They often go undetected, and that makes them quietly powerful. We might think: what difference does this small commitment make? But that is exactly why it works: it is gentle, consistent and sustainable.

And when we start to feel overwhelmed or discouraged, I think of the verse that we read at this time of year: "For the matter is very near to you – in your mouth and in your heart to do it." (*Devarim* 30:14)

Change is not far away. It is not impossible. It is close. It just takes a small beginning. We do not need to have fixed our shortcomings by Rosh Hashanah.

We just need to have started.

Here is one small, practical idea from Rabbi Kelemen: choose a single area to work on. Pick a daily action so small it almost seems trivial – like 15 minutes without gossip, or 15 minutes of holding back from anger. Choose a time when success is likely, not when you are most stressed. Then build from there. Because our small success creates new neural pathways in our brain.

Our goal is not to become someone completely different. It is just about becoming someone better than before. By making this small commitment, we will hopefully stand before God this year on Rosh Hashanah holding something real in our hands.

A plan. A beginning. A quiet sign that we have started the journey.



Big resolutions get noticed. But small ones? They often go undetected, and that makes them quietly powerful.

THE TRIBE WEEKLY

PARASHAT SHOFETIM

29-30 AUGUST | 6 ELUL

Defining a king



MIRA FINN

Youth Director,
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In *Parashat Shofetim*, we learn about many different types of leaders: judges, officers, prophets – and even kings.

The Torah tells us:

"When you come to the land that Hashem, your God, is giving you... and you say, 'I will set a king over myself, like all the nations around me,' you shall surely set a king over yourself..." (Devarim 17:14–15)

This might sound like a command to appoint a king. Spanish biblical commentator Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1167) points out that the verse begins with, "when you say,

'I will set a king over myself...' In other words, the Jewish people are not commanded to appoint a king – rather, they are given permission to have one if they feel they need it. Why would the Torah do that?

In addition, doesn't the Torah usually encourage us not to copy other nations? Why would it allow a king just because "everyone else has one"?

The Torah understands that people often feel more secure with a human leader they can see – someone with a palace, an army and a crown – who can guide the nation, protect it and set an example. But at the same time, the Torah is warning us: don't make the mistake of thinking that a king is the solution to all your problems. That's why it doesn't just allow a king – it defines what

kind of king he must be.

This king can't collect too much gold or silver. He can't have too many horses or wives. And he must write his own *Sefer Torah* and carry it with him at all times – reading it and learning from it constantly.

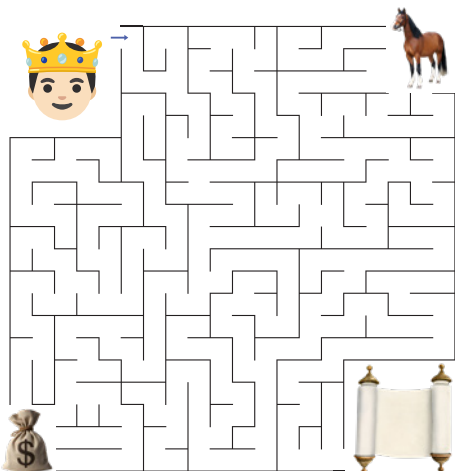
Why all these rules?

Because real leadership in Judaism isn't about power or fame. It's about humility, responsibility and Torah values. The king isn't above the people – he is meant to be **for** the people. And most importantly, he has to remember that he, too, has a King – God.

This teaches us something very powerful: you don't need a crown to be a leader. True leaders are people who live with values, who care about others, and who always try to do what's right – even when no one's watching.

The maze of the *melech* (king)!

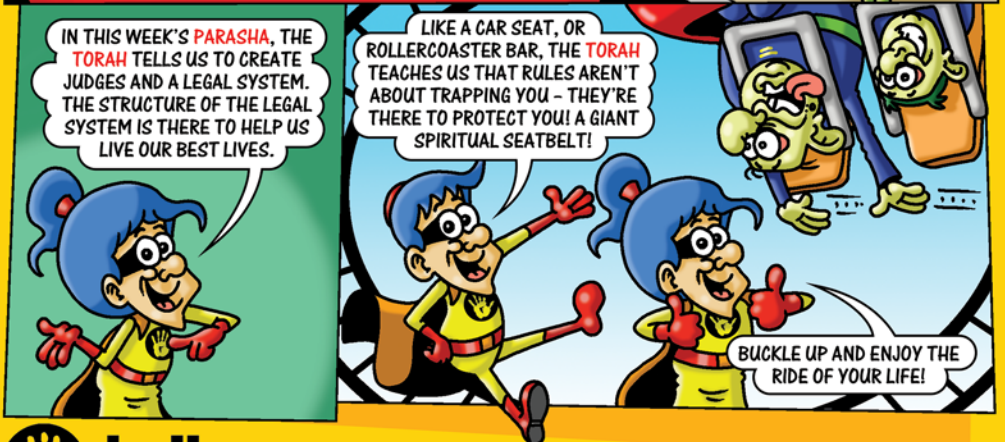
Can you help the king stay on the right path and remember where true leadership comes from?





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SHOFETIM: BUCKLE UP!



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