



כ"ו אב - ב' אלול תשפ"ו

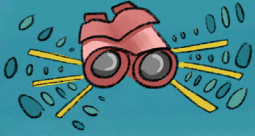
August 9–15, 2026



קה בַּפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- ◆ The parashah focuses on leadership and justice. Benei Yisrael must appoint שְׁפָטִים (shoftim, judges) and שְׁטָרִים (shotrim, officers). We are told: צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדּוּ (tzedek tzedek tirdof), which means to work so hard to create justice that it's like we're chasing after it.
- ◆ There is a mitzvah to listen to the judgments and Torah teachings of the kohanim and shoftim.
- ◆ Whoever becomes a king of Benei Yisrael may not own too much gold or silver, own too many horses, or marry too many wives. A king needs to fear God, follow the Torah, and not "raise his heart" above everyone else.
- ◆ Benei Yisrael must not listen to sorcerers or false prophets.
- ◆ If a person kills someone by accident, they have to move to an עִיר מִקְלָט (ir miklat, city of refuge).
- ◆ Judges need to rule based on honest testimony from more than one witness.
- ◆ When it's time for war, not everyone has to fight. Before battle, Benei Yisrael should propose peace. They must make every effort not to harm people who were not soldiers or natural resources.
- ◆ If someone is mysteriously killed in the middle of nowhere, the leaders of the nearest town perform a special ritual called עֲגֻלַּת עֲרוּפָה (eglah arufah).





פִּנְסֵט הַפְּסוּקִים • Understanding the Verses

Devarim 16:18-20

You shall appoint judges and officers for yourselves, in all the settlements that God your Lord is giving to your tribes, and they shall govern the people with justice.

You shall not judge unfairly.
Do not pick favorites.
Do not take a bribe.
Because bribes blind the eyes of wise people and twist the words of just people.

Justice, justice you shall pursue, so that you may live and inherit the land that God your Lord is giving you.

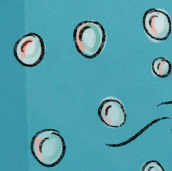
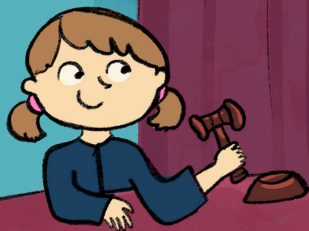
דברים טז:יח-כ

שִׁפְטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים תִּתֶּן לָךְ
בְּכָל שְׁעָרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ
נָתַן לָךְ לְשִׁבְטֶיךָ
וְשִׁפְטוּ אֶת הָעָם מִשְׁפָּט צֶדֶק:

לֹא תִטָּה מִשְׁפָּט
לֹא תִכִּיר פָּנִים
וְלֹא תִקַּח שֹׁחַד
כִּי הַשֹּׁחַד יַעֲוֶר עֵינֵי חֲכָמִים
וְיִסְלֹף דְּבַר יֹדְבֵי צִדִּיקִים:

צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדֹּף
לְמַעַן תַּחֲיָה
וְיִרְשֶׁתָּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ
נָתַן לָךְ:

- ♦ What do you notice? What's the big message?
- ♦ Who is this addressed to: the judges and officers themselves, or everyone in Benei Yisrael? How can you tell?
- ♦ How might a bribe blind someone who accepts it? Can you think of an example of a time when you might have taken someone's side in an argument because of something nice they did for you?
- ♦ What exactly is justice, and how can you pursue it? How do individuals pursue justice, and how does society pursue justice?
- ♦ Why is justice connected to inheriting and living in Eretz Yisrael?





מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash

Our parashah begins with the commandment to appoint judges and a system of courts. The Torah explains that the judges must be fair and pursue justice. Then, only three pesukim later, the Torah jumps to a totally new topic:

Devarim 16:21

You shall not set up an asheirah—
any kind of tree for idolatry...

דברים טז:כא

לֹא תִטֵּעַ לְךָ אֲשֵׁרָה כָּל עֵץ...

This pasuk says that you're not allowed to plant a tree that is an asheirah—an idol that some of the nations in Eretz Yisrael used to worship. What could an asheirah possibly have to do with justice?

Bzzzz
A lot of midrashim are
bugged by something
unusual in the Torah text

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף ז עמוד ב

אָמַר רִישׁ לָקִישׁ כָּל הַמַּעֲמִיד דִּינִין עַל הַצִּיבוֹר
שְׂאִינֵוּ הַגּוֹן כְּאִילוֹ נוֹטֵעַ אֲשֵׁרָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל שְׂנֵאָמַר
"שִׁפְטִים וְשִׁטְרִים תִּתֵּן לָךְ" וְסָמִיד לִיה "לֹא תִטֵּעַ
לְךָ אֲשֵׁרָה כָּל עֵץ."

Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 7b

Reish Lakish says: If you appoint a judge over the community who is not appropriate, it's as if you planted an asheirah in Israel. As it is stated: "You shall appoint judges and officers for yourselves" (Devarim 16:18), and next to it, it is written: "You shall not set up an asheirah—any kind of tree for idolatry..." (Devarim 16:21).

Reish Lakish explains that the Torah brings these two mitzvot together to teach that we must be very, very careful about who we choose to be judges. If we choose someone who isn't worthy or isn't dedicated to the task, that's as bad as the horrible sin of worshiping idols.

- ♦ What's the connection between an unworthy judge and idol worship? Why is worshiping idols wrong, and what does that have to do with what an unworthy judge might do wrong?
- ♦ What kinds of judges and leaders should we look for to make sure this doesn't happen?



פִּרְשְׁנוֹת • Commentary

Devarim 20:19

When you make a siege around a city for a long time to wage war and conquer it, do not destroy its trees by using an ax on them, because you will eat from them. Do not cut them down.

דברים כ:יט

כִּי תָצוּר אֶל עִיר זָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם
עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְסָּהּ
לֹא תִשְׁחִית אֶת עֵצָהּ לְנִדְחַת עָלֶיהָ גִּרְזֹן
כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאִתּוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת

This pasuk tells us not to cut down trees in war. And why is that? See the second half of the pasuk:

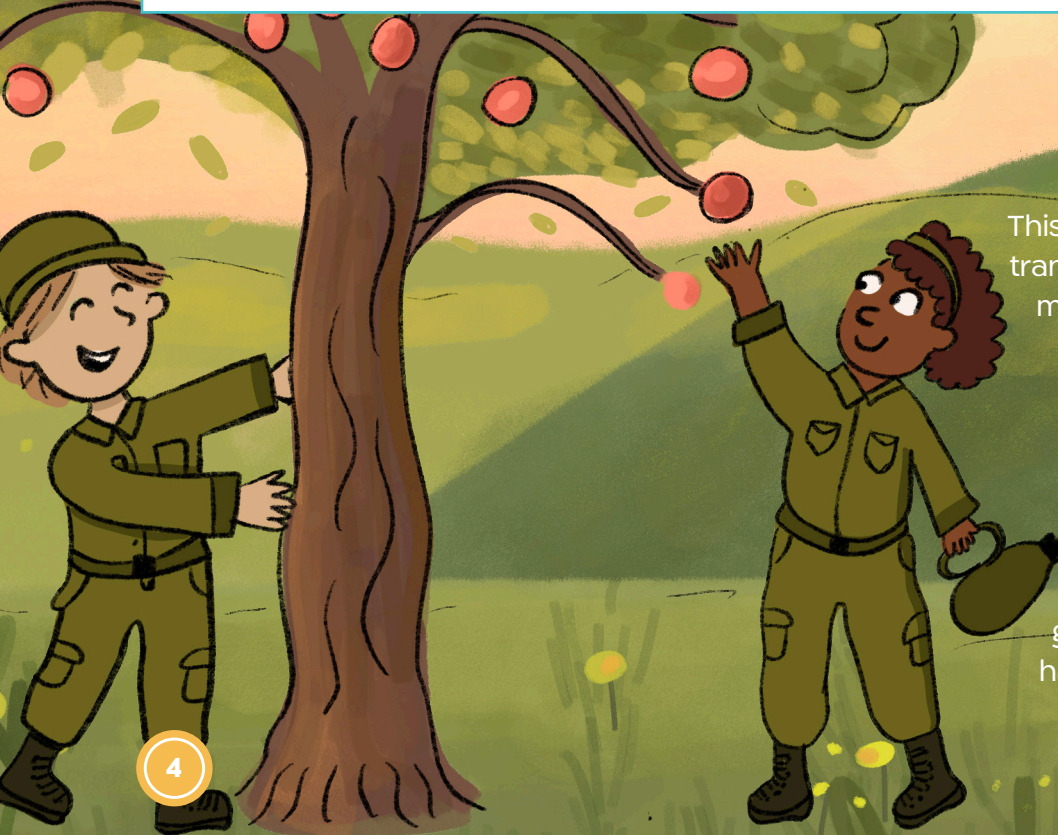
Ki a person is a tree of the field
to come from before you in a siege.

כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה
לְבֹא מִפְּנֵידָךְ בְּמָצוֹר:

This part isn't so easy to translate! The word "ki" can mean different things.

Rashi thinks it's a question: "For is a tree really like a person who might make a siege against you?"

And the answer is: No! The tree isn't a soldier. It isn't going to attack you. So you have no reason to cut it down.



Rashi (France, 1,000 years ago)

This "ki" is used to mean "perhaps," meaning:
"Perhaps the tree of the field is a person to enter
the besieged city from before you, to suffer
hunger and thirst like the people of the city?!

רש"י

הרי כי משמש לשון דלמא, שמא האדם
עץ השדה להכנס בתוך המצור מפניו
– להתיסר בסיורי רעב וצמא כאנשי
העיר, למה תשחיתנו.

Ibn Ezra thinks that "ki" means "because." So the meaning of the phrase
is: "Because people's lives depend on trees."

Ibn Ezra is telling us that people's lives and trees go together. Trees
make human life better by providing fruit to eat.

Ibn Ezra (Spain, 900 years ago)

For lives of people depend on the tree of the field.

אבן עזרא

כי חיי אדם הוא עץ השדה.

- ♦ What evidence can you find in the pasuk for Rashi, and what evidence for Ibn Ezra?
- ♦ Why would the Torah tell us to care about trees in wartime? Shouldn't we be thinking about people's lives? What might this be trying to tell us?





שאלות השבוע • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. **The answers to questions 8 and 9 are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah. The answer to question 10 is in this week's haftarah.**

aliyot:

- 1) Devarim 16:18 to 17:13
- 2) 17:14 to 17:20
- 3) 18:1 to 18:5
- 4) 18:6 to 18:13
- 5) 18:14 to 19:13
- 6) 19:14 to 20:9
- 7) 20:10 to 21:9

haftarah: Yeshayahu
51:12 to 52:12

Good luck!

1 What could be blinding?



2 What positive actions are kings supposed to do?

3 Who or what is described as the נַחֲלָה (nahalah, inheritance) of the כֹּהֲנִים (kohanim, priests)?

4 Where are there sorcerers that Benei Yisrael must not be like?

5 What field accident leads to major trouble?

6 What punishment do false witnesses get?



7 What types of trees can be cut down during war?



8 What five cities are mentioned in the parashah?

9 Who should we **not** have compassion for?

10 **From the haftarah:** Can you find all four places in the haftarah where a word is repeated twice in a row?



GET DEVASH IN THE MAIL!



*
Look for the answers on page 11!



בואו נדבר על זה • Tell Me More About This!



Parashat Shoftim has a clear message about magic: Don't do it. The parashah tells us that we're not allowed to try divination, sorcery, casting spells, or asking advice from ghosts and spirits (Devarim 18:10-11).

Does this mean that these magical practices actually work?
Does the Torah believe in magic?

Rambam (Spain and Egypt, 850 years ago) says that magic is NOT real. He thinks that it's all a trick, and anyone who says they'll do real magic for you as long as you pay them is just trying to steal your money. This is why the Torah forbids these things.

Even more so, Rambam believes that people who claim they're doing real magic can distract you from God because their tricks can lead to idol worship! (Mishneh Torah Avodah Zarah 11:16)

Ramban (Spain, 800 years ago) says that magic is real. He believes that there are negative spiritual forces in the world, and the Torah is here to help us to stay away from these things, so that they don't distract us from worshipping God. (Ramban on Devarim 18:9)

Rambam and Ramban share the view that magic is a problem because it interferes with our relationship with God. Their disagreement boils down to whether it works or whether it's a big scam!



What about a magician you might hire for a birthday party? We know that they're



not doing real magic. They're really good at making illusions - things that look like magic. That's why they're sometimes called "illusionists." When you hire them, you know about all this, and you're paying them because of how much fun they are to watch, not because they're lying to you or making you think their magic is real. For those reasons, it's ok! Just stay away from the ones who claim they can see the future, talk to the dead, or do magic for real. (Igrot Moshe, YD 4, ch. 13)



רְגֵעַ שֶׁל עִבְרִית • A Moment of Hebrew

Devarim 20:11

If the city responds in peace and **lets you in**,
all the people there shall serve you.

דברים כ:יא

וְהָיָה אִם שָׁלוֹם תַּעֲנֶה וּפִתְחָהּ לָךְ וְהָיָה כָּל
הָעָם הַנִּמְצָא בָּהּ יִהְיוּ לְךָ לְמַסַּ וְעֲבָדֶיךָ:

פְּתִיחָהּ

Petihah; the honor
given to the person
in shul who opens
the aron kodesh (ark)

לְפָתַח (שָׁרֵשׁ פ.ת.ח.)

◆ To open
(lifto'ah)

פְּתוּחַ
(patu'ah)

= פֶּתַח דְּבָר
Introduction
or prologue
(petah davar)

Find the Word!

In Sefer Bereishit, someone sits at the entrance to their tent and then jumps
up and runs to welcome guests. Who is this person at the entrance? Can you
find our שָׁרֵשׁ (shoresh, root) in Bereishit 18?

= פֶּתַח
Opening (petah)

= מַפְתֵּיחַ
Key (maftei'ah)



בואו נדבר על זה • Tell Me More About This!

The עֵגְלָה אֲרוּפָּה (eglah arufah) ritual was a ceremony for when a person was
found dead in the middle of nowhere (Devarim 21:1-9). Elders and judges would
measure from the dead body to find the closest town. Then leaders from that
place would kill a calf and wash their hands over it. They would say: "Our hands
did not shed this blood (of the person), nor did our eyes see it done."

Why do the leaders need to make this declaration? Does anyone really suspect
them of being the murderers?



דְּבַשׁ שֶׁל דִּינִי • One-Minute Debate

How to play:

Here are some arguments to get you started, but try to come up with your own. Then debate someone!

For a true one-minute debate, give each side 30 seconds to make its best case.

Debate: Having a king sounds great!



Agree!

- ◆ When too many people share power, nothing ever gets done.
- ◆ As long as the king is a righteous person, there's nothing to be worried about.
- ◆ Kings are so cool! They have crowns and capes and scepters and thrones. Who doesn't want that?



Disagree!

- ◆ Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.
- ◆ God is the only true King.
- ◆ Having kings never seems to turn out well in history books.
- ◆ No one is above the law.



Actually, this ceremony shows us that they **are** responsible! It's everyone's job - especially the leaders - to make sure that no one is overlooked, unsafe, or alone.

A related halakhah that applies today is something we can do for our guests: לְוָיָה (levaya, escorting). When guests leave your home, it's a mitzvah to walk with them a little. The idea is to help them get to their destination safely. It's also a good practice to make sure they have enough food and water with them for the road. (Rambam Mishneh Torah Laws of Mourning 14:2)

- ◆ We are all responsible for each other. Can you think of actions you can take to make sure that people you don't even know are safe and cared for?





הַלָּכָה • Halakhah

In our פְּרָשְׁנוֹת / Commentary section (p. 4), we looked at a pasuk about not destroying trees during wartime. Based on this pasuk, Hazal teach that we are not allowed to destroy all useful things in our world, whether it be food, clothing, utensils, or natural resources.

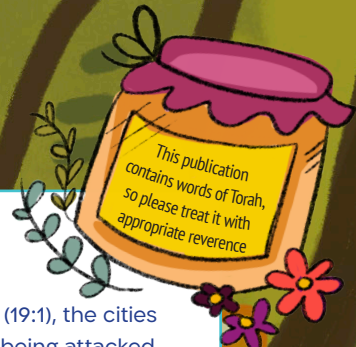
The verb in our parashah for destroying trees is תִּשְׁחִית (tash'hit). **The general rule forbidding destructiveness is called בַּל תִּשְׁחִית (bal tash'hit, don't destroy).**

- ♦ We are not permitted to do anything to food that might make it inedible, like sitting on a backpack and squishing the food inside so that no one wants to eat it anymore (Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayyim 171:1-2).
- ♦ It's **not** a mitzvah to finish all the food on your plate. You definitely shouldn't overeat or force yourself to eat just because you are afraid that food will go to waste. But you also can't waste food for no reason. Sefer Hahinukh speaks highly of people who go to great lengths to not



In last year's Devash for Vayishlah we saw a midrash, quoted by Rashi, about Yaakov going back across a river to collect some small jars he had accidentally left behind. This is a great example of being careful not to waste even the smallest things!





Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. A bribe (16:19)
2. Write down the words of the Torah and read from it (17:18-19)
3. The first grain, wine, oil, and wool (17:4)
4. In the land that will be given to Benei Yisrael (18:9-11)
5. Accidentally killing someone while chopping wood (19:5)
6. What they tried to do to other people by lying about them in court (19:19)
7. Trees that don't grow fruit (20:20)
8. An intentional murderer's hometown (18:12), the cities Benei Yisrael inherit and get to live in (19:1), the cities of refuge (19:2, 5, 7, 9, 11), a city that is being attacked (20:10, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20), and the cities that are close to a body found in the middle of nowhere (21:2, 3, 4, 6).
9. A false witness (19:21)
10. אָנוּחִי אָנוּחִי (anohi anohi, I I); הִתְעוֹרְרִי הִתְעוֹרְרִי (hitoreri hitoreri, be awakened be awakened); עוֹרִי עוֹרִי (uri uri, awake awake); סוּרוּ סוּרוּ (suru suru, turn turn) (Yeshayahu 51:12, 51:17, 52:1, 52:11)

waste even a single grain of mustard (Sefer Hahinukh 529)! It's probably best to take only the food you think you'll actually eat, and then save the rest for later when you're done.

- ♦ We are careful not to destroy any property: public property or our own. However, there are a few exceptions. It's customary to smash a glass at a wedding ceremony (Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayyim 560:2), and mourners tear their clothing (Shulhan Arukh Yoreh Deah 340).

Here's a midrash about אָדָם הָרִשּׁוֹן (Adam Ha-Rishon, the first human) learning the message of bal tash'hit.

Kohelet Rabbah 7:13

When the Holy Blessed One created Adam Ha-Rishon, God took him and showed him all the trees in the Garden of Eden. God said to him: "See My creations, how beautiful and special they are. Everything I created, I created for you. Pay attention so that you do not ruin and destroy My world. For if you destroy it, there will be no one to fix it after you."

קהלת רבה ז:יג

בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁבָּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת אָדָם הָרִשּׁוֹן, נִטְלוּ וְהִחְזִירוּ עַל כָּל אֵילָנֵי גֶן עֵדֶן, וְאָמַר לוֹ, רְאֵה מַעֲשֵׂי כְמָה נָאִים וּמִשְׁבָּחֵיו הֵן, וְכָל מֶה שֶׁבָּרָאתִי בְּשִׁבְלֶךָ בָּרָאתִי, תּוֹדְעָתְךָ שֶׁלֹּא תִקְלַקֵּל וְתַחְרִיב אֶת עוֹלָמִי, שָׁאֵם קִלְקַלְתָּ אִין מִי שִׁיתַּקֵּן אַחֲרֶיךָ.

- Why might God have given this warning to Adam Ha-Rishon right away? What does that teach us about the mitzvah of bal tash'hit?
- What are some ways you could be more careful with property or the environment?



תפילה • Prayer in the Parashah

Here's how כהנים (kohanim, priests) get described in Parashat Shoftim:

Devarim 21:5

For God chose them to serve God and to bless in the name of God...

דברים כא:ה

כִּי בָם בָּחַר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ
לְשִׁרְתּוֹ וּלְבָרֵךְ בְּשֵׁם ה'...

A midrash on this verse explains:

Sifrei Devarim Parashat Shoftim 208

Compare the blessing to the service: Just as the service is done standing, so too the blessing is done standing.

ספרי דברים פרשת שופטים פיסקא רח

מְקִיֵּשׁ בְּרָכָה לְשִׁרְתּוֹ: מָה שִׁרְתּוֹ בְּעִמּוּדָה אִף
בְּרָכָה בְּעִמּוּדָה.

This midrash is teaching something about בְּרִכַּת כֹּהֲנִים (Birkat Kohanim, the priestly blessing). This three-part blessing is part of our tefillah, sometimes said by kohanim themselves, and sometimes by the prayer leader.

The midrash notices that our pasuk connects the way kohanim serve in the Beit Ha-Mikdash and the way they bless the people: Both are done standing up!

- Besides standing, is there another connection between service and giving a blessing? How could giving a blessing be a kind of service to God or to other people?
- What's the difference between sitting and standing when saying a blessing? Do you feel differently when you are standing to pray vs. when you sit?
- When you imagine people going to a king to ask for something, do you imagine them standing or sitting? Why?

