

Parashat Shofetim

פרשת שופטים **Book of Deuteronomy**

Once a year, when the Earth crosses paths with a comet, a meteor shower rains down upon us. We can compare the comet to a truck filled with cotton making its way along a closed road, the cotton flying this way and that, until the road itself fills with fallen cotton. As we cross the road that the truck passed through, we will run into all the cotton that has fallen from the truck (Yigal Pat-EI).

Whenever I come to the Book of Deuteronomy (ספר דברים), I always struggle with a subject for my sermon. Every year, we cross the path of the “comet” known as the *Mishnah Torah* that the Biblical authors stuffed full with seemingly unconnected laws and commandments. Yet even as this collection of laws “flies” at us, we cannot help but be impressed by their intensity on the one hand and by their repeated delving into issues raised in the Books of Leviticus (ספר ויקרא) and Numbers (ספר במדבר) on the other – and often by the apparent contradictions that arise. As one would expect, the laws in this week’s portion echo those from previous Torah portions, even from portions from the Book of Deuteronomy itself.

I tried to avail myself of various commentators - Chaim Sabato, Nechama Leibowitz, P’nina Galpaz-Peller and Yeshayahu Leibowitz – in order to understand not just the meaning of the chapters and units in the series before us (example: Deuteronomy 17:15):

שׁוֹם תְּשִׂים עָלָיִךְ מֶלֶךְ

thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee

-- which is clear enough, especially after reading the enlightening words of the Rambam (Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon), HaRan (Rabbi Nissim Ben Rav Reuven Gironi) and Don Itzhak Abarbanel-- but also in order to understand and appreciate at which stage a person / organization / nation should revise its rules, sharpening and repackaging them under a new manifesto.

The many complicated and varied transitions that a person undergoes from his/her birth and throughout his/her life play an integral part in the formation of his/her personality, writes psychotherapist and bio-feedback expert Dr. Yigal Glicksman.

Research by noted psychologists such as Else Frenkel, Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson and others proves time and again that a person’s development, like that of a

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community or even a nation, is filled with, and even dependent upon, his/her ability to successfully cope with changes at every stage of development.

At every transition in one's life, regardless of whether the changes were natural, forced or initiated, one experiences significant changes in one's thinking in four main areas:

1. Internal sense of self in relation to others
2. Sense of one's strength in dealing with change as well as one's coping strategies for handling stressful, and even dangerous, life changes to which one is exposed
3. Internal sense of time, often with a greater emphasis on the present.
4. Sense of having exhausted all options and coming to terms with the decisions made and the actions taken.

What is interesting is that as the person / organization / nation approaches a new stage in development, the resulting changes begin to significantly affect their outlook regarding themselves and those around them.

Psychological studies show that one of the most significant stages in a person's life occurs between the ages of 18-22.

I think of the Jewish people, poised on the brink of coming into the Land of Israel and receiving the list of laws with which it must cross the "river" – both actually and metaphorically – to be about this age. In my humble opinion, *Kehillat YOZMA* is also at this stage.

I am speaking of a stage of development that requires one to deftly maneuver between the fickle changes that life has to offer – between moments of stability, joy, creativity and happiness and moments of instability, pain and frustration.

For it is in this age group, that we experience the transition where one begins the process of separation and detachment from the family nest (which for the most part has been safe, stable, warm and loving) to the next age group (23 – 27) which is characterized by the attempt to shape one's own independent identity. It is at this age that one struggles to establish one's unique, personal self (or that of the

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community or nation) while not ignoring one's larger commitments and mutual dependence (or that of the people of Israel towards the neighboring peoples).

There is no better time than this for the parent (or the community or nation's leader) as he/she takes leave of his child (or flock), to review the day to day rules and check emergency procedures.

The Earth's atmosphere (which I mentioned at the beginning), like *Parashat Shofetim*, provides protection from those objects that are trapped by the Earth's gravity (or from the changes and reversals that a nation experiences). These mechanisms are effective in trapping and ejecting invading objects before they become too large (or in coping with the reality facing the people of Israel, poised in transition, thus enabling them to cross the "river".)

Shabbat Shalom!

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Kehillat YOZMA, Modi'in

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