

Shoftim 5777

CAN WE JUDGE OURSELVES?**IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE OBJECTIVE IN EVALUATING ANYONE????**

**יְהִי שֻׁפְטִים וּשְׂטָרִים, תַּתֵּן לְךָ
בְּכָל-שָׁעֲרֵיךְ, אֲשֶׁר יִהְוֶה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ, לְשָׁבְטֵיךְ;
וְשִׁפְטוּ אֶת-הָעָם, מִשְׁפָט-צְדָקָה.**

16:18 Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, tribe by tribe; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.

The eighteenth century Hasidic commentary Toldot Yaakov Yosef (a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov): “Lecha” is intended to say: for you, for yourself. As if to say, you should appoint judges **within yourself**. First judge yourself, and, using the same yardstick, judge others. Do not be lenient with your faults while judging harshly the same faults in others; do not overlook sin in yourself while demanding perfection of others.”

Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 105b

R. Papa said: A man should not act as judge either for one whom he loves or for one whom he hates;

For no man can see the guilt of one whom he loves or the merit of one whom he hates.

Abaye said: If a scholar¹⁵ is loved by the townspeople [their love] is not due to his superiority but [to the fact] that he does not rebuke them for [neglecting] spiritual¹⁶ matters.

Raba remarked: At first I thought that all the people of Mahuza¹⁷ loved me. When I was appointed judge¹⁸ I thought that some¹⁹ would hate me and others²⁰ would love me. Having observed, however, that the man who loses²¹ to-day²² wins tomorrow I came to the conclusion that if I am loved they all love me and if I am hated they must all hate me.

Our Rabbis taught: And thou shalt take no gift;²³ there was no need to speak of [the prohibition of] a gift of money, but [this was meant:] Even a bribe of words²⁴ is also forbidden, for Scripture does not write, And thou shalt take no gain.²⁵ What is to be understood by 'a bribe of words'?²⁴ — As the bribe offered to Samuel.²⁶ He was once crossing [a river] on a board²⁷ when a man came up and offered him his hand.²⁸ 'What', [Samuel] asked him, 'is your business here?' — 'I have a lawsuit', the other replied. 'I', came the reply, 'am disqualified from acting for you in the suit'.

Amemar was once engaged in the trial of an action,²⁹ when a bird flew down upon his head and a man approached and removed it. 'What is your business here?' [Amemar] asked him. 'I have a lawsuit', the other replied. 'I', came the reply, 'am disqualified from acting as your judge'.

Mar 'Ukba once ejected some saliva³⁰ and a man approached and covered it. 'What is your business here?' [Mar 'Ukba] asked him. 'I have a lawsuit', the man replied. 'T, came the reply, 'am disqualified from acting as your judge'.

R. Ishmael son of R. Jose, whose *aris*³¹ was wont to bring him a basket full of fruit³² every Friday³³ but on one occasion³⁴ brought it to him on a Thursday, asked the latter, 'Why the present change? I have a lawsuit', the other replied, 'and thought that at the same time³⁵ I might bring [the fruit] to the Master'. He did not accept it from him [and] said, 'I am disqualified to act as your judge'. He thereupon appointed a couple of Rabbis to try the case for him. As he was arranging the affair³⁶ he [found himself] thinking, 'If he³⁷ wished he could plead thus, or if he preferred he might plead thus'.³⁸ 'Oh', he exclaimed, 'the despair that waits for those who take bribes'³⁹ If I, who have not taken [the fruit at all], and even if I had taken I would only have taken what is my own, am I in such [a state of mind], show much more [Would that⁴⁰ be the state of] those who accept bribes'.



"Know thyself." - Socrates

*Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom.
Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power. — Tao Te Ching*

One of the secrets of life is to be honestly who you are. Who others want you to be, who you used to be, and who you may some day become ... these are fantasies. To be honestly who you are is to give up your illusions and face today with courage. -- Bill Purdin

The thing that is really hard, and really amazing, is giving up on being perfect and beginning to work on becoming yourself. -- Anna Quindlen

Search others for their virtues, thyself for thy vices. -- Benjamin Franklin

We know what we are, but know not what we may become. -- William Shakespeare

Some say that my teaching is nonsense.
Others call it lofty but impractical.
But to those who have looked inside themselves,
this nonsense makes perfect sense.
And to those who put it into practice,
this loftiness has roots that go deep.

I have just three things to teach:
simplicity, patience, compassion.

These three are your greatest treasures.
Simple in actions and in thoughts,
you return to the source of being.
Patient with both friends and enemies,
you accord with the way things are.
Compassionate toward yourself,
you reconcile all beings in the world.

-- Tao Te Ching

The most common sort of lie is the one uttered to one's self. — Nietzsche

The remarkable thing is that we really do love our neighbors as ourselves; we do unto others as we do unto ourselves. We hate others when we hate ourselves. We are tolerant toward others when we tolerate ourselves. We forgive others when we forgive ourselves. It is not love of self but hatred of self which is at the root of the troubles that afflict our world. -- *Eric Hoffer: U.S. Writer*

HOW TO BE PERFECTLY MISERABLE.

1. Think about yourself.
2. Talk about yourself.
3. Use "I" as often as possible.
4. Mirror yourself continually in the opinion of others.
5. Listen greedily to what people say about you.
6. Expect to be appreciated.
7. Be suspicious.
8. Be jealous and envious.
9. Be sensitive to slights.
10. Never forgive a criticism
11. Trust no one but yourself.
12. Insist on consideration and respect.
13. Demand agreement with your own views on everything.
14. Sulk if people are not grateful to you for favors shown them.
15. Never forget a service you may have rendered.
16. Be on the lookout for a good time for yourself.
17. Shirk your duties if you can.
18. Do as little as possible for others.
19. Love yourself supremely.
20. Be selfish.

This recipe is guaranteed to be infallible.

— *Gospel Herald.*

Self-evaluation in Hasidic Thought - <http://www.breslev.co.il/>

Rebbe Nachman cites the many blessings of self evaluation, when a person judges himself and resolves to improve his ways. By judging himself, he attains the true fear of G-d and therefore fears no one else (*Likutei Moharan* I:15). Also, by virtue of self-evaluation and introspection, what we call in Hebrew *cheshbon nefesh*, he acquires a deeper insight of the way Hashem runs the world and understands how everything in his life is for the very best. As such, this life becomes heavenly, as sweet as life in the next world (*ibid.* I:4).

The Zohar teaches that there is no double jeopardy in Heavenly jurisprudence: if a person judges himself, then the Heavenly court is not allowed to touch the case. Not only that, but Hashem casts away the accusing angels that come to report the said person's misdeeds, for the person has already confessed to Hashem.

Rebbe Nachman explains (*Likutei Moharan* I:52) that in order to overcome a bad habit or a certain lust one must devote extensive personal prayer, at least 30 minutes per day. The more serious the habit and the more difficult it is to overcome, the more daily personal prayer is required. In this manner, a person should pray daily until he rids himself of the habit altogether; this is the road to self improvement.

Once a person overcomes one particular negative trait or habit, he can then move forward to work on the next bad habit or negative characteristic on his self-improvement priority list. For example, suppose a person suffers from a bad temper and easily succumbs to anger. He should devote a substantial portion of his daily personal prayer session in begging Hashem to help him overcome his anger until he uproots anger altogether from his life. Other problems that arise from time to time necessitate core treatment, such as debts, marital strife, and health problems, all of which indicate a deeper root cause that must be reckoned with. Our problems in life are normally wake-up calls designed to trigger our self-evaluation and self-improvement.

An important element of self-improvement is praying to implement and internalize what we learn. This is what Rebbe Nachman referred to when he said that we should convert our Torah learning into prayers (see Rebbe Nachman's Discourses, 145; *Likutei Halachot, Rosh Chodesh*, 5; Outpouring of the Soul, 11). For example, when we read a tzaddik's essay on the importance of guarding our eyes, we should then pray that Hashem will help us to implement and internalize all the points that were mentioned in the essay.

In summary, our daily personal prayer sessions are not only a time for us to give thanks to Hashem, to take stock in ourselves and to do daily *teshuva*, but also a time for self improvement. In addition to overcoming bad habits and negative character traits, we must ask incessantly for the positive attributes in the service of Hashem such as *emuna*, joy, humility, and diligence.

Four Steps of Repentance

Teshuva is actually a process of self-evaluation and self-improvement. The Rambam enumerates four primary steps to the *teshuva* process:

1. Recognize and discontinue the improper action.
2. Verbally confess the action, thus giving the action a concrete form in your own mind.
3. Regret the action. Evaluate the negative impact this action may have had on yourself or others.
4. Determine never to repeat the action. Picture a better way to handle it

SELF-ESTEEM EVALUATION

Score as follows: "0" If not true "1" If somewhat true "2" If largely true "3" If true

1. I usually feel inferior to others.
2. I normally feel warm and happy toward myself.
3. I often feel inadequate to handle new situations.
4. I usually feel warm and friendly toward all I contact.
5. I habitually condemn myself for my mistakes and shortcomings.
6. I am free of shame, blame, guilt and remorse.
7. I have a driving need to prove my worth and excellence.

8. I have great enjoyment and zest for living.
9. I am much concerned about what others think and say of me.
10. I can let others be "wrong" without attempting to correct them.
11. I have an intense need for recognition and approval.
12. I am usually free of emotional turmoil, conflict and frustration.
13. Losing normally causes me to feel resentful and "less than".
14. I usually anticipate new endeavors with quiet confidence.
15. I am prone to condemn others and often wish them punished.
16. I normally do my own thinking and make my own decisions.
17. I often defer to others on account of their ability, wealth or prestige.
18. I willingly take responsibility for the consequences of my actions.
19. I am inclined to exaggerate and lie to maintain a desired image.
20. I am free to give precedence to my own needs and desires.
21. I tend to belittle my own talents, possessions and achievements.
22. I normally speak up for my own opinions and convictions.
23. I habitually demy, alibi, justify or rationalize my mistakes and defeats.
24. I am usually poised and comfortable among strangers.
25. I am very often critical and belittling of others.
26. I am free to express love, anger, hostility, resentment, joy, etc.
27. I feel very vulnerable to others opinions, comments and attitudes.
28. I rarely experience jealously, envy or suspicion.
29. I am a "professional people pleaser".
30. I am not prejudiced toward racial, ethnic or religious groups.
31. I am fearful of exposing my "real self."
32. I am normally friendly, considerate and generous with others.
33. I often blame others for my handicaps, problems and mistakes.
34. I rarely feel uncomfortable, lonely and isolated when alone.
35. I am a compulsive perfectionist."
36. I accept compliments and gifts without embarrassment or obligation.
37. I am often compulsive about eating, smoking, talking or drinking.
38. I am appreciative of others' achievements and ideas.
39. I often shun new endeavors because of fear of mistakes or failure.
40. I make and keep friends without exerting myself.
41. I am often embarrassed by the actions of my family or friends.
42. I readily admit my mistakes, shortcomings and defeats.
43. I experience a strong need to defend my acts, opinions and beliefs.
44. I take disagreement and refusal without feeling "put down," or rejected.
45. I have an intense need for confirmations and agreement.
46. I am eagerly open to new ideas and proposals.
47. I customarily judge my self-worth by personal comparison with others.
48. I am free to think any thoughts that come into my mind.
49. I frequently boast about possessions, my achievements and myself.
50. I accept my own authority and do as I, myself, see fit.

BUXBAUM

Knowing Ourselves... SetKul 60D

39

Individual Practices

39:1 SET TIMES— A DAILY SCHEDULE

39:1:1 The Peasetzna Rebbe:

Set a time limit for all your actions. If you are about to eat, set a time limit beforehand: "I will spend half an 'hour' or fifteen minutes eating." If you are going to your friend's home to engage in conversation for a little while (if you cannot then study Torah), set a time limit beforehand: "I will spend this amount of time there and no more." This is excepting the case where you are going to have a discussion about religious things and Hasidism. In general, you should feel yourself to be like a soldier in the army, whose time is not his own—where each set time is followed by another, and where each activity is followed by another. (*B'nai Makhshavah Tovah, Seder Hadracha v'Klalim*, #13)

39:1:1:1 The Peasetzna Rebbe:

If you care for your own life, set time limits for the whole day; every hour for its own worship. Even when you enter into a conversation,

at the beginning set yourself a given amount of time that you will talk. Let no hour be neglected, but rather engaged in its own appointed worship. Write for yourself on a piece of paper a daily schedule and do not budge from it the least bit. (*Hovat ha-Talmidim*, p. 95)

Note that the use of a daily schedule does not necessarily imply exact adherence to it to the minute as the Peasetzner suggests. One may compose this written daily schedule in the morning, before or after davenning *Shaharit*, or it could be done the previous night during the time of the account-taking before sleep.

39:1:2 We are told about Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav:

He would plan out an order of devotion for each day, and often at the beginning of the day make a vow to fulfill it. (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom*, p. 15, *Shevachay HaRan*, #15)

(For more about Rabbi Nachman's way in this, see "Vows," 12:6:1-2.)

39:1:3 In his youth Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh [of Ziditchov] divided up the twenty-four hours of the day and put on a piece of paper when he would do each thing. For example, he set aside a specific amount of time for learning each Torah subject; similarly, he specified when he would not converse, and so too for other *hanhagot* for each and every part of the day. And when he came to the Seer of Lublin [who became his *rebbe*] he highly praised this practice of his. (*Ha-Hozeh mi-Lublin*, p. 138)

39:2 CARRY A LIST OF YOUR HANHAGOT

You should write the main *hanhagot* that are necessary for you at the time, for the particular character trait you are laboring to fix, on a small piece of paper . . . for example, for anger, you might write: "Silence and speak in a low voice." If you want to write them so that others will not be able to read it, then write in signs and hints. This little notepaper should be before you or in your hand at all times. Continually look at it and read it with renewed feeling and determination to be careful about everything there. (*Erech Apayim*, 3:8, p. 68)

It is suggested that this note include only the bare minimum, because if you try to concentrate on remembering too much you remember nothing (*Erech Apayim*, 3:16, p. 72).

Though the suggestion here is about *hanhagot* relating to one particular character trait a person is working to improve, such a list is also valuable for *hanhagot* you are following in your general spiritual practice and daily order. You can then also have a fuller list of all your *hanhagot*, which you read over at set times.

Sometimes lists of *hanhagot* are arranged more or less randomly, but others are in the form of a daily order (*Seder ha-Yom*). You can construct your own *Seder ha-Yom* from waking to sleep, with various general principles and ethical matters you want to keep before you included (as is fairly typical in such lists).

Frequently in lists of *hanhagot* by hasidic rebbes instructions are given at the end to read it regularly at certain times. At the end of his list of *hanhagot*, Rabbi Abraham Kalisker says:

And the right thing to do is to read these things over once a week.
(*Hanhagot Tzaddikim*, p. 40)

Rabbi Yissra'el Dov of Vilednik (a disciple of Rabbi Mordechai of Tcher-nobil):

Read over this note every Monday and Thursday after *Shaharit*.
(*Hanhagot Tzaddikim* [II], 4:20)

At the end of his list, Rabbi Yehiel Michal of Zlotchov wrote:

You should read this over every day. (*Hanhagot Tzaddikim*, p. 53, #26)

Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum:

Go over this list every night before sleep. (*Hanhagot Tzaddikim*, p. 51, #56)

At the end of his list, Rabbi Mordechai of Lechovitz says:

You should read this note three or four times [a day] so that every word of it is thoroughly familiar to you, so that you have it in your heart to do what it says fully. (*Hanhagot Tzaddikim*, p. 42, #13)

Rabbi Shmuelke of Nikolsburg has at the end of his list of *hanhagot*:

Read these things over three times every day. Make it a fixed rule for yourself, to be done always, without exceptions. And it is best if you read it once as soon as you wake up, once after the Morning Prayers and before you go out to work, and once after the Evening Prayers before sleep. (*Shemen ha-Tov*, p. 52, #54)

Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk in his *Tzel Katan* (Little Note [of *hanhagot*]]:

Every time before you study Torah, look first at this list of my *hanhagot*. (#16)

Each day before the Morning Prayers the author of *Tosafot Yom-Tov hanhagot* (good practices of all sorts, ethical and otherwise). The booklet he used, *Orchot Hayim*, by Rabbi Asher (the author of the *Turim*) is organized according to the days of the week, with ten to twenty short, one-line instructions and reminders for each of the seven days (*Orchot Hayim*, p. 1 note; printed together with *Mai Ber Yeshayahu*). This is an excellent custom if for no other reason than because it adds a valuable practical and ethical dimension to the prayer service. You can easily create such a booklet for your own use.

39:3 CARRY A NOTEBOOK TO RECORD YOUR FAILINGS AND YOUR SOUL-ACCOUNTS

You should become accustomed many times throughout the day to give a backward look over the time past to consider how you have behaved. . . . And if you have failed somehow, see that you immediately jot down what you have done in a little notebook that you carry with you for just this purpose, so when it is your set time to consider your conduct and faults and how to fix them [traditionally before sleep], you will remember what transpired.

Do not be involved in any consideration of the thing on the spot, for that will only lead to your being depressed all the time, and the main thing in our service of God is that it be altogether full of joy. So on the spot, if you realize that you did something wrong, just jot it down, and also make a confession before God, committing yourself to reversing your course. . . . Then, trusting that God

accepts your repentance, return immediately to a happy frame of mind.

Later, during your fixed time for this, consider well what you have done and devise practices, fences, etc. to rectify your failings. (*Erech Apayim*, 3:8, p. 69)

The son of the Hafetz Hayim writes about his father as a young man:

I remember . . . how he would often go by himself into the fields outside the town to make a soul-accounting of all his actions of the day. . . . He had a little notebook in which he wrote his "accounts" and the fences [rules of extra self-restraint] which he had made for things in which he had stumbled.

I heard from him a number of times, many years later, how he wondered that people having even the smallest store keep a notebook to record their accounts . . . but as for the accounts of their soul, they make no effort to be aware of their situation [by having a notebook and making soul-accounts]. (*Michtivei ha-Hafetz Hayim ha-Hadash*, vol. 2, I, p. 7)

39:4 CARRY A LIST OF YOUR VOWS

If you have made vows to perform certain religious practices or good deeds, it is important to write them down so they are not forgotten. Such a list can be joined with the other list of *hankagot* mentioned in 39:2, or with the booklet of your failings and soul-accounts mentioned in 39:3.

So that you will not forget from one day to the next to fulfill any vows you have made, it is good . . . to make a little booklet to note down what you have accepted on yourself, and that it be with you always so that you remember everything. This path is the right one for everyone who wants to accomplish something in practice and deed. (*Reshit Hochmah*, Sh'ar ha-Kedushah, chap. 14, #22)

39:5 STUDY MUSAR

Many of the lists of *hankagot* state that you should learn from a book of *musar* (inspirational literature dealing with ethics and character development) every day.

39:5.1 The Baal Shem Tov:

It is a most important thing to learn *musar* every day, whether much or little, so that you are always developing in yourself good qualities and taking on new spiritual practices. (*Tzavaat ha-Ribash*, beginning)

39:5:2 Learn from a *musar* book regularly and in order [not skipping around] each day. (Rabbi Aaron of Karlin, *Hanhagot Tzaddikim*, p. 5, #10)

39:5:3 See to it that you learn from a *musar* book every day, and repeat what you learn two or three times [this could be on the same or successive days], and be sure that you get the lesson into your heart. (Rabbi Nahum of Tchernobil, *Hanhagot Tzaddikim*, p. 34, #5)

For some thoughts about how to study *musar* see "Torah," 15:23:2 and "Repetition of a Holy Sentence," 21:14.

39:6 STUDY HALACHA

Each of the different branches of the Torah has its own character and virtue and we should try to study them all. For example, *Aggadah* is heart-learning, and according to the rabbis, *Aggadah* draws the heart, giving a man insight into God's ways and letting him know how to cleave to those ways. Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav explained one important aspect of the virtue of studying *Halacha*, religious law:

The Rebbe constantly stressed for us the importance of studying the codes of religious law. He emphasized this more than any other study.

It is best to study all four sections of the *Shulchan Aruch* in order, from beginning to end. If you can also study its major commentaries, all the better. But you should at least cover the main work.

This study is a great spiritual remedy. When a man sins, good and evil are intermingled. A legal opinion is a clean separation between the permitted and the forbidden, the clean and the unclean. When you study religious law, good is once again separated from evil and the sin is rectified.

The Rebbe said that everyone must study the codes each day without fail.

If you are under duress and have no time, you may study any law in the *Shulchan Aruch*, even if it does not follow your regular course of study. You must go through at least one law every day of your life. Under normal circumstances you should have a fixed practice of studying the *Shulchan Aruch* in order, a given amount each day. Continue until all four sections are completed and then start again at the beginning. Continue this way all the days of your life. (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom*, p. 130, *Sichos HaRan*, #29)

39:7. **FORTY DAYS TO CHANGE A TRAIT**

39:7:1 If you have some bad character trait, God forbid, you should determine to overcome it for a period of forty days . . . and then you will attain a second and new nature, and it will be removed for good. (*Or ha-Ner*, #40)

39:7:2 A man was not created except to change the nature he was born with, so you should make every effort to improve yourself as soon as you can. . . . For example, if you were born with a stubborn streak—go against your nature for a period of forty days, so that you act just the opposite of what your normal inclination is. Or if you are naturally lazy, see that for forty consecutive days you do everything quickly and energetically—in going to lie down on your bed to sleep, in getting up from your bed in the morning when you wake up, in dressing quickly, doing the ritual washing of your hands quickly, and cleaning yourself [in the bathroom], in going quickly to the synagogue after getting up from your early session of Torah study, and so on.

If you are naturally shy, meaning the bad kind of shyness (not the religious kind), force yourself for forty days to pray in a *loud* voice, with vigorous movement of all your limbs, to fulfill “All my bones shall say—O Lord, who is like unto Thee?” and to make the blessing over Torah study in a loud voice, until help comes to you from heaven and they remove the bad shyness from you . . . for in everything habit is king. If by nature you are not inclined to be constant in Torah study, you should accustom yourself for forty days to study more than usual . . . and from then on you will receive help from heaven to have more and more success in breaking your born nature until you reach perfection. (Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk, *Tzel Katan*, #16)

See also “Humility and Pride,” 38:6.)

39:8 **IF YOU HEAR OR SEE SOMETHING GOOD FOR THE SERVICE OF GOD, DO NOT LET IT ESCAPE YOU**

If we hear any word of Torah, we will guard it in our hearts and go over it with our lips so that it will not be forgotten, especially something that relates to the service of God, blessed be He. If possible, we will write it down on the spot. Also, if we see something in a book that relates to His service, blessed be He, we will bind it in our memories and write it on the tablets on our hearts. (*Hanhagot Adam*, #14, the commitments of the *havurah* of Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov)

(See also “Torah,” 15:30:4 about Rabbi Uri of Strelisk.)

39:9 **REPEAT, HOLY SAYINGS**

Accustom your lips to be always repeating religious sayings relating to piety, such as, “Be bold as a leopard, swift as an eagle, fleet as a deer, and strong as a lion, to do the will of your Father in Heaven” (*Avot* 5:23); “The end of the thing, all said, is: Fear God and keep His commandments—for this is the whole purpose of man” (*Kohelet* 12:13); “And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord which I command you this day for your good?” (*Deuteronomy* 10:12); “Be very, very lowly of spirit.” (*Avot* 4:4) You should accustom your tongue to repeating these and other sayings of this sort, and then you will not stumble. (*Sefer ha-Yirah* of Rabbeinu Yonah, p. 202)

A person can select favorite sayings like these, memorize them, and repeat them over and over during the day.

39:10 **MAKE SIGNS FOR YOURSELF TO REMEMBER**

In the book, *Pitgamim Kadishin*, it is written in the name of the holy rabbi, Rabbi Aaron of Zhitomir, of blessed memory, that:

The main thing is that you not forget the service of God for even a minute. To this end you should make signs for yourself within your house to remind you to fear God—let each person do this according to his own intelligence—so that you remember to avoid pride, anger, falsehood and other sins. You should not rely on yourself to remember without this aid . . . for even great *rabbim* did not trust themselves, and there was a *rabbik* in our generation who hired someone to be with him continually and remind him that he should fear God. This is an important principle in the service of God. (*Erech Apayim*, Hakdama u'Peticha, p. 12; Commentary Va-yosai Avraham, note 3)

39:11 EXERCISE

If your custom is to take walks, you should intend it for the sake of heaven—in order to be healthy for the service of God, blessed be He. Your thought should be that you are exercising so that your mind will be relaxed and vigorous, so that you will see how to act in all your affairs as is proper [that is, psychological health]. (*Avodat ha-Kodesh*, Moreh b'Etzba, 3-123)

Something of this nature can be expressed as a stated intention before and during exercise.

39:12 NULLIFYING BAD THOUGHTS

You should make it a regular practice to continually nullify your bad thoughts, that is, to say continually: "I hereby declare that I nullify all thoughts that come to my mind that are forbidden and low and vile, whether during Torah study or prayer, and whether during the day or the night. Let all of them be nullified and void completely, because I do not want them at all, God forbid."

This practice has a wondrous efficacy. And you should also say the verse "*Sh'ma Yisrael*," together with "*Baruch Shem Kavod Malchuto l'Olam Vaed* [Blessed is His glorious kingdom forever and ever]." (Rabbi Aharon Roth, *Shomer Emunim*, Maamar ha-Enunah, p. 75b)

(For a particular application of this practice, see "The Synagogue and the Synagogue Service," 6:24 and "Prayer," 5:1:23.)

39:13 MEDITATION AND PRAYER IN BED

The Baal Shem Tov said that though others were in the house, you could pretend to sleep and yet be in *d'velut* with God.

You can lie down on your bed, and though it appears to others in the house that you are sleeping, you can be spending this time in communion [*Hitbodedut*] with your Creator, blessed be He. (*Tzavaat ha-Ribash*, p. 23)

(See what Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav says about secluding yourself with God under the covers in bed in "Talking to God and Being Alone with God—*Hitbodedut*," 33:2.)

39:14 TO OVERCOME TEMPTATION, NULLIFY YOUR WILL BEFORE GOD'S WILL

A comment of Rabbi Israel, the Maggid of Koznitz, about nullifying your will before the will of God:

God, blessed be He, gave free will to a man to do as he wants, whether good or the opposite, in order to be able (as is well known) to give him a good reward when he fights off the various temptations and inclinations of his own self. In that case then, when something against God's will presents itself before you, and your evil inclination is pushing you that way, and your own will is leaning that way, then nullify your own will and say before God, blessed be He: "Master of the World, I nullify my own will completely. I do not want free will at all—neither it nor its reward. I just want Your will." Then God will answer and nullify the powers of the evil inclination pushing you to do wrong. (*Avodat Yisrael*, Likkutim p. 9, on *Avot* 2:4)

39:15 KNOW WHAT COULD GO WRONG BEFOREHAND AND PREPARE

Make it a practice many times each day, for example, as soon as you wake up in the morning, and every time you leave your house

39:33 INVEST YOUR INSPIRATION

39:33:1 When some good thought or inspiration comes to you, use it to do a *mitzvah* or to learn Torah, and so clothe it in holiness. (The Ramban, as quoted by the Peasetzna Rebbe in *Hachsharat ha-Abrechim*, p. 45a)

39:33:2 If you have a moment of spiritual arousal during the day, do not just let it pass and dissipate, but immediately make use of it by investing it in some Torah study or prayer or in other *mitzvot*. (*Seder ha-Yom ha-Katzar*, p. 5)

39:34 THE USE OF INTOXICATING BEVERAGES

The Peasetzna Rebbe:

The hasidim have always tried to take their emotions and subdue them and put them to the service of God. They also sometimes use external means to arouse their emotions and then turn them to His service.

The custom among the hasidim of drinking liquor is an important matter, and it is like what we are told in Genesis 27:25 about Jacob going to Isaac for a blessing, that "he brought him wine and he drank"; for the wine helped to draw down the *Shechinah* to rest on our father Isaac when he blessed Jacob.

Liquor arouses the heart of a man and his emotions. A low person, even if he does not get drunk, will become more active in doing bad things and sinning. He will clothe his soul, his inner self that has been brought into revelation somewhat, with even more evil. God save us from such.

But the hasid, who is a spiritual person, one who searches with candles for his soul, which is hidden within, says, "Yes, it is true that it was only through liquor that I have been aroused, and part of my soul revealed. Regardless, my inner being has been revealed somehow, and I will hold on to that part that has come into the open and will not let go, and with it I will serve God with a revealed soul. And I will not just do so with what the liquor brought out, but through my Divine service I will bring my soul out even more with emotion and arousal and even with fiery enthusiasm."

So should you do too; drink with your comrades and friends who are hasidim and who are spiritual people, with this purpose

and in this way—to bring about the arousal of your soul and a more alive service of God with a revealed soul.

Since it is for this purpose and with this preparation that you drink liquor and arouse your emotions, and do so in a gathering of friends who are also hasidim, from the very beginning you will feel, as your emotions become revealed, that they are enclothed in holiness. It will be an emotional arousal for the service of God, for faith, and for the fear and love of God. (*Hachsharat ha-Abrechim*, p. 46b)

Of course, such drinking is not to be engaged in alone, without the association of religious friends. And in our time, with all the abuse of alcohol and drugs, care should be taken in every regard.

39:35 THE SERVICE OF SELF-EXAMINATION

Various hasidic *rebbe*s taught intense self-examination as a way to purity. On his first trip to Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk (then living in Tomashov), Rabbi Hanoch Henich HaCohen (the future *rebbe* of Alexander) was given this teaching by the *rebbe*:

"A hasid of Tomashov searches and questions himself not only once, but a second and a third time, about everything he does." "From then on," said the Rebbe of Alexander, "I spent much time examining and considering all my actions, everything I did. When I returned home from my trip to the *rebbe*, for example, and went to have something to eat, I picked up the vessel for the hand washing and began to question myself: What will be if I do not wash my hands? And if I do wash, am I then prepared for eating? Let us say I wash my hands and make a blessing over the bread—what kind of blessing will it be? How will I let it out of my mouth, and to Whom will I utter it?"

"So there I stood, examining and considering my actions, for about two hours. Now my father-in-law [in whose house he was living], seeing me standing there was amazed, and asked me why I did not begin my meal—but I was silent and did not answer. I went deeper and deeper in self-examination until I had plumbed the depths completely, and then I washed my hands, and roared in a thunderous voice that was not mine, '[Blessed art Thou, etc. who hast commanded us] on the washing of the hands [*al netilat yadim*]!' And I tell you, since then I have never merited to give forth

a blessing like that." (*Ha-Admor Rabbi Hanoch Henich mi-Alexander*, p. 34)

39:36 REMEMBERING JERUSALEM

We are always to remember Jerusalem, the Holy City (may it soon be fully rebuilt, with our Holy Temple), and the tradition gives us a number of ways to do this: for example, by saying Psalm 137 before the Grace after Meals (see *Shulchan Aruch*, chapter 126 for others).

It is told of the hasidic *rebbe*, Rabbi Hayim Sternfeld of Chenshtyn, that he wore a wristwatch that showed the time in the Land of Israel (*P'ri Kodesh Hillelim*, p. 107). A *itzaddik* I know has for years kept his wristwatch on Jerusalem time. Though this particular practice may not suit everyone, it is a good example of how *hanhagot* can be created in the service of God.

39:38 BINDING TOGETHER DAY AND NIGHT IN HOLY SERVICE

It is a traditional hasidic practice to bind together the two aspects of the day, day and night, in Divine service. What this means is that you are to be up before dawn and engaged in spiritual activity at sunrise; so too are you to be involved in spiritual practice at dusk and sunset.

Bind together day and night with Torah or prayer. (Hanhagot of Rabbi Yehiel Michal of Zlotchov, #8, *Zichron l'Rishonim*, p. 82)

Traditionally, when *Minha* is said in the late afternoon shortly before *Maariv* and at the onset of evening, the time between the two services as the sun sets is spent in the synagogue studying Torah.

This practice of binding together day and night has various meanings and purposes. On the one hand, it connects God with these two daily events of great natural power—sunrise and sunset. It also joins God-consciousness to the regular mood change that accompanies these times. (For more about this subject, see "*Tikkun Hatzot*," 31:19.)

39:39 FOR ONE HOUR

Fix one hour during the day when you will behave completely according to the Torah. (*Hayei ha-Musar*, III, p. 89)

39:37 SEEING GOD—AN ADDED NOTE

Regarding fulfillment of the verse, "I have placed the Lord [YHVH] before me always," it is fitting to strive always to picture the four-letter Name before your eyes. But you can also fulfill the essence of the teaching through another verse, "The Lord [YHVH] of hosts is both sun and shield," which means that you are to always picture the great light mentioned here [the light of the *Shechinah* symbolized by the light of the sun] as flooding at you. . . . When you see any person, you are to imagine the being of God and His effulgent light flooding through the person to you. So too when you see a holy book or the holy letters and words within, or when you see the skies—imagine that they are the "shields" [of the verse] or "screens" through which God's light is flooding. They are the "hosts" [of the verse], the "armies" of material things through which "the Lord" [of the verse] is manifest. (*Or ha-Ganuz l'Tzadikim*, p. 62)

In practicing seeing God (see Chapter 1, "In the Presence of God," p. 17; "Prayer," 5:1:18:3:1; "Torah," 15:18) there are different ways to begin. What is suggested in this quote is one way, where we start with those things that have a greater manifestation of God's presence (holy objects, holy letters, people [note this—for man is made in the image of

Today's Torah Portion: *SHOFTIM*

Summary:

This portion contains numerous ethical and administrative guidelines. "*Shoftim*," which means "judges," opens with instructions to judges to be fair and impartial, Never take bribes and pursue justice. Then, Moses warns the people against idolatrous worship and provides a framework on how a king's powers would be tempered: he is not to amass great wealth, he should not have numerous wives, he is to be an Israelite, and the teachings of the Torah are to guide him at all times.

Moses instructs the people to avoid involvement in soothsaying and sorcery, and not to heed false prophets. He reviews the laws on the cities of refuge – three cities on each side of the Jordan set aside for individuals who accidentally kill someone, then instructs the people to increase the number of these cities as their territory increases. As the portion concludes, Moses discusses the rules by which Israel is to conduct its wars and deal with unsolved murders.

Issues:

- 1) 16:20 contains the famous phrase: "Justice, Justice, you shall pursue." The word for justice is "*tzedek*." The word for charity is "*tzedakkah*." How do you explain the connection between the two? Why is the word repeated twice? Bachya Ben Asher: "Do not use unjust means to secure justice." Do the ends *ever* justify the means?
- 2) 17:7 contains an interesting law: Not only are two witnesses required in order to convict a person of capital crimes, but these witnesses are also obligated to carry out the actual death penalty (e.g., by throwing the first stones). This forces the witnesses to take very seriously the ramifications of their testimony.

A Talmudic injunction says that judges should instruct the witnesses before they testify that they could not only be responsible for the death of a single innocent man, but of untold thousands of innocent generations to follow, generations cut off by that person's death. That is why the rabbis taught that to kill one person is to destroy an entire universe.

How, then do we justify the Torah's command to wipe out the entire people of Amalek (will be read next week) because of the evil they did to Israel in the wilderness?

- 3) Regarding the choice of a king (17:14-20), the Torah is very skeptical about political leaders and the tendency to become corrupt. Does "Absolute power corrupt absolutely?" Do our Presidents possess too much power? Is it inherently bad that most of our leaders are wealthy? Does it cause them to lose touch with the "common folk"? Is it necessarily dangerous if they are well-armed?
- 4) Chapter 18 discusses soothsayers and black magic. Interestingly, these practices are recognized as legitimate means of ascertaining truth. They were used quite often by Israelite priests, in fact. But the priests always worked under the authority and guidance of God, the Bible points out, and not through their own magical methods.

Throughout Jewish history, there has been a tension between magic as practiced by popular religion and the official religious practices of the established and “authorized” leaders. While Judaism has officially frowned on the occult, Jews have often been tantalized by it. This continues into the present age.

- 5) 20:5-9 includes a list of those exempt from military service:
 - a. One who has built a new house and hasn't yet dedicated it.
 - b. One who has just planted a vineyard but hasn't harvested.
 - c. One who is engaged but not yet married.
 - d. A “conscientious objector,” someone afraid and disheartened.

These were exempt from normal military service and minor border skirmishes, but not from “obligatory wars,” or “holy wars,” wars of survival. What is the difference between a “*milchemet mitzvah*” (obligatory war) and “*milchemet reshut*,” (a “voluntary” war)?

The next section details the procedure for laying siege on an enemy city. War itself became ritualized. Does the ritualization of war serve to mask war's raw brutality? Is war's brutality more apparent in a war that is “holy,” (say, World War II) as opposed to one fought for no great cause (say, Vietnam)?

- 6) Cutting down trees was a common practice of ancient warfare, but here it is forbidden. Verse 19: “Are trees of the field human that they can withdraw before you into the besieged city?” This verse gives a clear indication of the Torah's views regarding ecology. The rabbis took this verse and Genesis 1:28 as the basis for a whole category of laws known as “*ba'al tashchit*,” (do not destroy; do not waste). Maimonides extends these laws to include a ban on the wanton destruction of garments, buildings, food and the stopping up of a well. The commandment requires an individual to have self-control, to work at being a builder rather than a destroyer, and to respect all creation.

In light of recent discoveries, would the banning of substances that destroy the ozone layer be in line with the Torah's thinking? What about leaded gasoline? Cigarette smoke? Acid rain? What of nuclear power?

Compare this verse to previous verses which seem to take a less conservationist attitude when it comes to human life. How can we explain this?

- 7) The portion ends with an unusual ritual whereby elders from a village would absolve their town from guilt after discovering an unidentified murder victim on their outskirts.

When people are murdered in our town, how do we react? What do we do about it? What are we responsible to do? How do we attempt to right the wrong?

Haftarah Isaiah 51:12 - 52:12

Chapters 40-66 of Isaiah are the work of an unknown author - often called Deutero-Isaiah (Second Isaiah) – who lived in Babylon during the exile (6th century BCE). He is a prophet of hope and unwavering trust that Israel will rouse itself, regain its splendor, and return to its homeland.