

# **AUTHORITY FROM ABOVE**

## **Parshas Shoftim**

**By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach**

The study of Avoth (Ethics of the Fathers) every summer, Pesach to Rosh Hashana, is never, can never, be exhausted. Four times each year, summer after summer, we study these chapters, and find therein boundless sources of wisdom and inspiration. The first six weeks (Shabosim) between Pesach and Shavuot only wets the appetite, to be continued three more times, beginning on Parshas Nono "N", six weeks later on Parshas Pinchas "Ph", and finally this week Parshas Shoftim "Sh". The initials spell "Nephesh". The soul, Nefesh, Neshomo, needs this spiritual sustenance, clamors for its depth, each time delving deeper and deeper.

The very first Mishna (Avoth 1:1) is a guideline of MESORAH, authority, divine authority, whose word is to be accepted. Moshe received the Torah from Hashem at Sinai and bequeathed it (the authority) to Joshua... to Neviim prophets...

The authority of the prophet is spelled out in our parsha. This is in addition to the prophecy of Joshua, about whom Hashem said to Moshe "Take to yourself Joshua" (Bamidbar 27:18) and confer authority upon him. Our parsha begins with the appointment of honest judges and teachers, whom the laity must respect and accept their decisions and interpretations.

The seven Rabbinical laws require a bracha before its fulfillment. One of these seven laws is the law to kindle lights on Chanukah. The Talmud (Shabos 21) inquires where did the Torah command to fulfill this mitzvah, so that it is correct to pronounce the Bracha V'Tzivonu (and He, Hashem commanded us...). The Talmud answers "it is in our Parsha: 'you shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you...' (17:4). This elevates the rabbinical word to Torah authority. The same applies to the other of seven rabbinical laws, requiring to recite the blessing.

About the true prophet, which is applicable to rabbinical authorities as well, Hashem says “I will establish a prophet for them from among their brethren, like you, and I will place My words in his mouth; he shall speak to them everything that I will command him” (Parshas Shoftim 18:18).

An interesting discussion is found in commentaries about the choice of Haftorah for this Parsha. It would have been more logical to choose continuation of Isaiah chapter 54 in connection with the passages already quoted in last week’s Haftorah. One may suggest the reason: the paramount relevance in the Haftorah for Parshas Shoftim, emphasizing the divine authority of the true prophetic pronouncements: “And I have placed My words in your mouth...” (Isaiah 51:16).

A most striking phenomenon is found in the strength of the word of the Prophet, exceeding even the word of Hashem Yisborach Himself. It is in regard to a prophetic pronouncement of a good event coming to a person, which could be denied if that person commits a sin rendering him unworthy of the promised good. It is for this reason that “Jacob became very frightened...” of Esau, though Hashem promised him “I am with you... I will not forsake you...” (Beraishis 28:15). Rashi explains Jacob’s fear, perhaps I have sinned which may cause Hashem’s promise to be unfulfilled.

However, when a promise of a blessing is pronounced by a prophet (in Hashem’s name) it must be fulfilled, even when the recipient proves unworthy. The Torah is emphatic on this (Shoftim 18:22).

Reb Meir Simcha in Meshech Chochmoh (Pinchas 25:12) expounds the reason it was Moshe the Prophet who was to make the promise of everlasting Kehuna to Pinchas, instead of Hashem Himself pronouncing that promise. The reason, he says, is that coming through a prophet it must be fulfilled.

