

MISHPATIM Exodus 21:1-24:18, Numbers 28:9-15

HAFTARAH Isaiah 66:1-24

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK: Mishpatim, the Torah's social code, is found in the Scripture after the Sinaitic revelation. But the Scriptural order is not always chronological. At Mara, the first stop of the Israelites in the wilderness, law and justice "hok u'mishpat," were implemented (Ex. 15:25). There, insists a rabbinic view, the Mishpatim Code was introduced (Mekhilta). The underlying idea of this opinion is that orderly and human conduct, "derech eretz," is a prerequisite for attaining Torah. In approaching God and His will, man must start with cultivating his humanity. Only as a process of maintaining civilized and peaceful social behavior is Torah merited. Mishpatim is both, a way to, and a part of, Torah. Its concern is the protection of the weak, its effect is the refinement of human relations, and its vision — the enhancement of the divine in man.

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MISHPATIM: Exodus 21:1-24:18; Numbers 28:9-15

HAFTARAH: Isaiah 66:1-24

Rosh Hodesh Adar I

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MISHPATIM, Torah's social code, is presented in Scripture after the Sinaitic revelation. But biblical order is not always chronological. At Mara, the first stop of the Israelites in the wilderness, law and justice ("hok u'mishpat") were implemented (EX. 15:25). There, insists a Rabbinic view, the Mishpatim Code was introduced (Mekhilta). Orderly and humane conduct ("derech eretz") is a prerequisite for attaining Torah. In approaching God and fulfilling His will, man must start with cultivating his own humanity. Only as a process of maintaining civilized and peaceful social behavior is Torah merited. Mishpatim is both a way to, and a part of, Torah. Its concern is the protection of the weak; its effect, the refinement of human relations; and its vision, the enhancement of the Divine in man.

Thought of the Week
Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MISHPATIM

February 6, 1997

THE "*MISHPATIM*" (THE LAWS) outlined in Exodus (21-22), deal with mundane affairs of social interaction, human relation, torts, contracts, monetary claims. They are an integral part of Torah's Divine Wisdom, and fundamental to Jewish religion. These civil laws are no less sacred than the laws pertaining to worship, ritual (so-called "religious") laws. In Judaism, equitable human relations between one another is the very core of religion. Hurting a human being is offending God (22:21-26).

Settling legal disputes properly is a Jewish religious experience. Jews, even in the Diaspora, are to first seek justice from a Jewish court of law, *Bet-Din*, rather than bring lawsuits against each other before a civil ("secular") court of the land. Torah's *Mishpatim*, reflecting universal justice, are uniquely Jewish.

Respect for law and order is in the core of Torah's prohibition (Exodus 22:27): "Do not curse *elohim*, nor damn a *nasi* among your people!" Positively it instructs, "Be Reverent!" While the term *nasi* clearly applies to a human leader, its parallel term "*elohim*" in this verse connotes, according to Rabbinic traditions, three related meanings, human judges, God, and gods.

Applying to judges, the verse teaches that even when you think the judges (or other leaders) are wrong, do not insult them, but rather curb your indignation and retain your dignity. Referring to God, the verse forbids blasphemy. In a broader sense, however, "*elohim*" refers to gods in general. So says Josephus: "Our Legislator expressly forbids us to deride or blaspheme the gods recognized by others." This "politically correct" statement, apparently aiming (at the time) to placate the ruling Romans, is in essence also theologically profoundly correct. Repugnant as paganism is, we nonetheless must show respect for the religious feelings of others. Whether in regard to God, human leaders, or gods, Torah teaches: "Be Reverent!"

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

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Settling legal disputes properly is a Jewish religious experience. Jews, even in the Diaspora, are to first seek justice from a *bet-din* (Jewish court of law), rather than bring lawsuits against each other before a civil ("secular") court of the land. Torah's *mishpatim*, reflecting universal justice, are uniquely Jewish.

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elohim, nor damn a *nasi* among your people!" While the term *nasi* clearly applies to a human leader, its parallel term, *elohim*, in this verse connotes, according to rabbinic traditions, three related meanings: Human judges, God and gods.

The verse teaches that even when you think the judges (or other leaders) are wrong, do not insult them, but rather curb your indignation and retain your dignity. Referring to God, the verse forbids blasphemy. In a broader sense, however, *elohim* refers to gods in general. So says Josephus: "Our Legislator expressly forbids us to deride or blaspheme the gods recognized by others." This "politically correct" statement, seemingly aiming (at the time) to placate the ruling Romans, conveys a profound ethical-theological concept. Repugnant as paganism may be, we must, nonetheless, show respect for the religious feelings of others. Whether in regard to God, human leaders or gods, Torah teaches, "Be reverent!"

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

MISHPATIM: THE LAWS outlined in Exodus (21-22), deal with mundane affairs of social interaction, human relations, torts, contracts, monetary claims. They are an integral part of Torah's Divine Wisdom, of Jewish religion, and are no less sacred than the laws pertaining to worship and ritual, the so-called "religious" laws. In Judaism, equitable human relations between one another is the very core of religion. Hurting a human being is offending God (22:21-26).

Settling legal disputes in a proper manner is a Jewish religious experience. Jews, even in the Diaspora, are instructed to first seek justice from a Jewish court of law, *Bet-Din*, rather than bring law suits against each other before a regular, "secular" court of the land. Torah's *mishpatim*, reflecting universal justice, are uniquely Jewish.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

WHAT DOES "GER" MEAN? Commonly but imprecisely translated "stranger," the term "ger" in Scripture means both a non-native resident and a newcomer to Judaism. But, to be exact, "ger" is neither "alien" nor "convert" but rather "one who comes from another place or religion to live within a new place or religion." We use the English "stranger" for "ger" because we lack a better term; but while "stranger" bespeaks alienation and segregation, the Hebrew "ger" extends respect and welcome to the newly arrived person. The historical experience of the Jewish people has a consciousness-raising effect: "Do not wrong or oppress a stranger, for you well know how it feels to be a stranger, for you were strangers yourselves in the land of Egypt." (Ex. 22:20; 23:9).

Candlelight time 5:21 Sabbath ends 6:16

Scriptural reading for Saturday, Jan. 31:

MISHPATIM: Exodus 21:1-24:18

HAFTARAH: Jeremiah 34:8-22; 33:25-26

MISHPATIM: Exodus 21:1-24:18

HAFTARAH: I Samuel 20:18-42

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

TREATING A STRANGER (Ex. 22:20): "You must not oppress the stranger; you know how a stranger feels, for you lived as strangers in the land of Egypt." From your bitter experience you should learn not to do to others what was done to you. The precept of fair treatment to strangers – not to wrong them or be hard upon them (22:20); to treat them with love (Lev. 19:34) – is repeated 36 times in the Torah. It is fundamental in Judaism that teaches that every human being is born in the image of God. Every one – citizen or alien – must be treated and respected as a human being.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

HOW TO TREAT A STRANGER? Exodus (32:9): "Do not oppress the stranger; you know how a stranger feels, for you lived as strangers in the land of Egypt." From your own bitter experience you should learn how not to do to others what was done to you (20:22): Do not wrong nor be harsh to others. Positively (Lev. 19:18) treat them with love. This mitzva of fairness and kindness to strangers is so fundamental in Judaism that it is repeated in Torah no less than 36 times. Torah insists that each and every person is born in the image of God; thus, every one—citizen or alien—must be fully respected as a human being. For, ultimately, are we not all strangers?

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MAJORITY RULE in Judaism comprises two counterpoints, both in the same verse (Ex. 23:2): one rejects its tyranny; the other upholds its validity. First: "Do not follow the majority to do wrong" ("loraot"). Second: "Follow the majority to reach decision" ("lehatot"). The first, "loraot," also implies "to condemn as wrong." Thus, by the ingenuity of midrash-halacha, a simple majority of one in a capital case can only decide the acquittal, but not the conviction of the accused. Our resolve to defend and save life transcends the blind authority of the majority. The second, "lehatot," essentially conveys a negative sense, bending or distorting; in context, however, it conveys the notion of compromising. By majority rule, we "reach decision" by concession, by relying on "the many". "Lehatot" underscores the arbitrary and expedient nature of a majority. Even as we must abide by it, a majority does not inherently guarantee truth or correctness. Although a fair and useful method for settling a dispute or doubt, majority rule must not be applied despotically or destructively. When it flagrantly disregards the minority, wrongs the individual, or offends our moral convictions ("loraot") – any majority must be defied!

MISHPATIM: Exodus 21:1-24:18; 30:11-6

HAFTARAH: II Kings 12:1-17

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE MEMORY OF SLAVERY in Egypt, preceding the emergence of Moses, is acknowledged and commemorated in Jewish life. Slavery – imposed on the people, not chosen by them – although a tragedy and depravity, is neither an indelible mark of disgrace nor a reason for inherent shame and guilt. This crucible, forging the people's fortitude and its memory, is a source of gratification and edification: a symbol and lesson. The celebration of freedom is not taken for granted, and the joy of attaining it is augmented by the burning desire never to lose it. "Remember that slaves you were in the land of Egypt," says the Torah (Deut. 15:15); therefore, always uphold freedom, abhor enslavement, and show compassion towards all oppressed and needy. Torah's legal code (Mishpatim, Ex. 21) opens with the then existent institution of slavery; it modifies and limits it, making it economically and socially almost impossible. The Talmud says, "A buyer of a slave buys a master on himself." On the other hand, one who declines his freedom and prefers to remain a slave, although his conditions of enslavement may be comfortable and profitable, is publically dishonored. A Jew each day praises his Creator for the gift of being free (TB Menahot 43b).

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE PROTECTION OF SLAVES in Jewish law is illustrated in the law of “tooth and eye” (Ex. 21:26-27):

If a person strikes his male or female slave in the eye and destroys it, he shall set the slave free in compensation for his eye. Similarly, if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female slave, he must set the slave free in compensation for his tooth.” Slaves are thus protected from physical abuse by their masters. The masters will learn to be careful in treating their slaves, fearing that any bodily injury—severe as losing an eye, or as minor as losing a tooth—will result in their slaves’ emancipation. Torah teaches that slaves, even as they are regarded as property, are to be fully respected persons, whose mental and physical integrity must be protected.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA.

“AN EYE FOR AN EYE!” (Ex. 21:24) has never been taken in Judaism literally, as physical retribution, but rather as proper monetary restitution. It does not demand retaliation *against* the offender, but equitable compensation *from* him to the injured party. In contrast to Hammurabi’s Code, Torah objects to scaling the entitlement to full compensation according to social rank, or to any form of punishment by mutilation.

Contrary to the prevalent misconception, “an eye for an eye” is not a crude slogan justifying vengeful and punitive measures against wrongdoers. It is a profound rule, poetically expressed, insisting on just restoration by the injurer, based on human responsibility and human equality before the law.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

“BA’AL DEVARIM” is Torah’s term for the rightful plaintiff in a civil suit. Literally “owner of words,” it refers to one who is legally entitled to demand and expect from his opponent a response to his complaint. In order to be considered in Jewish law a legitimate complainant, with power to charge and bring the other party to court, he must have a personal stake in the matter; only then is he recognized as “ba’al devarim,” to compel the other party to answer in words. Without first establishing his “possessive” title to the other’s “words,” he is not entitled to ask for a response, nor is the other party required to give one. Moreover, he may rightly be snubbed with an eloquent refusal: “You are no owner of my words!”—You have no right to bother me with your questions, nor do I owe you any answers, apology or explanation concerning my own affairs! This Rabbinic rule is according to Sheiltot of Rav Aha Gaon from Pumbedita (680-752 C.E.), Biblical in origin (Exodus 24:14). It demonstrates Judaism’s respect for human privacy: Sacred is a person’s private domain; none may barge in, even for just an oral statement, without a rightful cause. Protecting people from undue annoyance, Jewish law allows no one to trespass the legal fence which guards a person’s dignity.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

BE KIND TO YOUR ENEMY, teaches Torah (Ex. 23:4-5): “If you come upon your enemy’s ox or donkey straying around, you must endeavor to return it to him; if you notice your adversary’s donkey fallen under his load, do not desert him, rather go and help him **unload.**” Also (Deut. 22:4): “Do not watch your brother’s donkey or ox foundering on the road and just ignore it; rather go and help him **reload.**” Unloading also involves kindness and mercy to the animal; but the overriding principle in both unloading and reloading, for both enemy and friend, is the sense of responsibility and care for any human being in trouble. The Talmud (BM 32b) rules, it is more meritorious to help an enemy (even to reload) than a friend (even to unload). Why? For by actually helping an enemy we learn to curb and refine our base impulses. Hatred of enemy is a natural human emotion; it is futile to teach “love your enemy” as it is superfluous to teach “hate your enemy.” Torah teaches neither; only to treat all others — and in particular an enemy — with human compassion and consideration. This is the advice of Jewish Wisdom (Proverbs 25:21): “If your enemy is hungry, provide him food to eat; if thirsty, water to drink.” The New Testament’s claim (Matt. 5:43), that the “old” Torah of Judaism teaches hatred of enemy, is a despicable, hateful lie, violating Torah’s plea to be fair and kind, even to an enemy.

MISHPATIM: Exodus 21:1-24:18; Numbers 28:9-15:
Exodus 30:11-16

HAFTARAH: II Kings 12:1-17

Rosh Chodesh Adar, Friday, Feb. 18

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

WITCHCRAFT – in its various forms, demonic, cultic, mystic, or pseudo-scientific – thrives and nourishes on its followers, those who, allured by its charms, eagerly seek and pay for its dubious services. Torah, therefore, teaches (Ex. 22:17): “For witchcraft provide no livelihood.” Witchcraft is like prostitution or pornography: none can survive without a clientele. To eradicate them, there is no need to burn witches or imprison prostitutes and pornographers, only to stop patronizing them. The moment their businesses are no more lucrative and supported, they will disappear. The Talmud has a saying (Gitin 45a): When mice steal your corn because of the holes in the wall, “It is not the mouse which is the thief, but the hole.” Instead of blaming the mice, better repair your wall.

MISHPATIM: Exodus 21:1-24:18; 30:11

HAFTARAH — II Kings 12:1-17

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

DOING AND UNDERSTANDING: *"Na'aseh v'nishma (Ex. 24:7)," the people's acceptance of the Divine covenant, means: "We will do with understanding". An earnest pledge, it reflects the human quest for meaning. A true human deed involves one's totality: emotions, convictions, action and knowledge. Doing requires understanding. Man's progressive enlightenment, rather than blind obedience, is the virtue and aim of adherence to Torah. At first the Israelites only said "We will do (V. 3)." Moses, according to the Midrash, then reacted: "Is it possible, doing without understanding? It is understanding that leads to doing." Then they responded, "Na'aseh v'nishma," which implies doing based on understanding.*

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

DOING AND UNDERSTANDING: The affirmative response of the people to the Divine covenant was (Exodus 24:7): "*na'aseh ve-nishmah!*"—"We will do and we will hear!" The Hebrew *nishmah* indicates more than hearing or obeying; it means understanding. The Shemah, "Hear O Israel!"—is a call for understanding. The true meaning of "*na'aseh ve-nishmah!*" is: "We will do *with* understanding!" More than a pious pledge of complete compliance, it expresses a human quest for meaning. A true religious deed requires understanding; it involves not only the performance of the act, but also the appreciation of its significance and purpose. Midrash: At first the Israelites said "*na'aseh!*"—"We will do!" This pledge of blind obedience was refused by God: "To do without understanding is pointless! It is understanding that leads to doing!" Thereupon the Israelites added "*ve-nishmah,*" implying enlightened obedience: Doing *with* understanding.

Friday, February 4, 1994

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RABBI ZV

DOING AND UNDERSTANDING: The affirmative response of the people to the Divine covenant was (Exodus 24:7): "*na'aseh ve-nishmah!*" – "We will do and we will hear!" The Hebrew *nishmah* indicates more than hearing or obeying; it means understanding. The *Shemah* ("Hear O Israel!") is a call for understanding. The true meaning of "*na'aseh ve' nishmah!*" is "We will do with understanding!" More than a pious pledge of complete compliance, it expresses a human quest for meaning. A truly religious deed involves not only the performance of the act, but also the appreciation of its significance and purpose.

Midrash: At first the Israelites said "*na'aseh!*" – "We will do!" This pledge of plain and blind obedience was refused by God: "To do without understanding is pointless! It is understanding that leads to doing!" Thereupon the Israelites added "*ve-nishmah,*" implying enlightened obedience: Doing with understanding!

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / FEBRUARY 4, 2000

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

The Israelites responded to the Divine words at Sinai with a laconic phrase, "*Na'aseh ve-Nishma*" (Exodus 24:7): "We will do and we will listen." This response is commonly understood to imply submissive obedience: First comply and then comprehend. First we act, and only afterward probe and understand.

This common interpretation misses the mark. Doing before or without listening and understanding is pointless. To "do" means more than perform and to "hear" more than heed. To "do" entails purposeful and creative conduct and to "hear" attentive learning and understanding.

The "*Shema*" ("Hear O Israel!") calls for insightful perception, not blind submission. Our sages have praised Israel for mentioning "doing" (*na'aseh*) before "hearing" (*nishma*), not to applaud the people's (alleged) blind obedience, but

their (manifest) eagerness. Only "angels" do God's will promptly and irresistibly. Humans have choice and moral responsibility. Their "yes" has value only because they can also say "no!" Our sages clearly understood that this binary phrase, "*Na'aseh ve-Nishma*," expresses one complete idea of intelligent readiness.

This idea is clearly expressed in an ancient rabbinic source preserved in Midrash ha-Gadol, which points to the evolutionary nature of the people's reply. At first, the Israelites uttered one word only, "Na'aseh, We will do!" (Exodus 24:3). God, however, rebuffed this impetuous pledge of thoughtless compliance: "To do without understanding is wrong! You must desire to understand what you are doing!" Then, the Israelites said, "*Na'aseh ve-Nishma* (25:7): "We will do with understanding!" Thus, the people expressed their aspiration for enlightened adherence to God's will.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

ACTING WITH UNDERSTANDING (Exodus 24:7):
In the people's affirmative response to the Divine covenant -- "We will do and we will hear!" (*na-eseh ve-nishma*) -- to "do" means more than to comply and to "hear" more than to obey. The two-verb phrase asserts one idea (*hendiadys*): "We will act with understanding!"

More than a pledge of obedience, this classic phrase expresses a quest for meaning. A true religious act involves more than performance but also appreciation and understanding of its significance and purpose. At first the Israelites said, "We will do!" This pledge of unqualified compliance was refused by God: "To act without understanding is wrong: understanding must lead to acting!" Then they added, "and we will understand," implying enlightened obedience. (Midrash).

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

ACTING WITH UNDERSTANDING is the core idea of "*Na'aseh ve-Nishma!*" (Exodus 24:7), Israel's affirmative response to the Sinai covenant. It asserts, "We will do and we will listen!" But to "do" means more than to comply and to "listen" means more than heed. To "do" means creative acting and to "listen," attentive learning. The *Shema* ("Hear O Israel!") calls for insightful comprehension, not blind submission. The binary phrase "*Na'aseh ve-Nishma!*" points to one idea (hendiadys): "We will act with understanding!"

More than a pledge of pious obedience, this

classic phrase expresses a yearning to understand the meaning of God's requirements. More than performance, religious observance **must** involve appreciation of the significance and purpose of the prescribed act.

According to Midrash ha-Gadol (compiled by Yemenite David Adani; 13th c.): At first the Israelites said, "We will do!" This pledge of blind compliance was rebuffed by God: "To act without (a quest for) understanding is wrong; acting must be enriched by understanding!" Then the Israelites added, "and we will understand!" – aspiring for enlightened adherence to God's will.

JEWISH NEWS / FEBRUARY 16, 1996

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

DOING WITH UNDERSTANDING is the idea conveyed by the people's affirmative response to the Divine covenant (Exodus 24:7): "*na'aseh ve-nishmah!*" (lit., "We will do and we will hear!"). More than just listening, adhering, or obeying, "*nishmah*" indicates appreciation, understanding. The people said: "We will do *with* understanding!" More than a pious pledge of complete compliance, they expressed a human quest for meaning. A religious deed requires understanding, involving not only the performance of the act, but also an appreciation of its significance and purpose.

At first the people said, "We will do!" – pledging simple obedience. This was rejected by God: "To do without understanding is pointless! It is understanding that leads to doing!" Then they added "with understanding" – implying enlightened obedience (*Midrash Hagadol*).

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

BE NOT IRREVERENT, even in your opposition, is the lesson of Exodus 22:27: "Do not curse the judges, nor damn a leader among your people." Even when you think they are wrong, do not insult them; curb your indignation, retain your dignity. Always remain respectful. The term used for judges in this verse is *elohim*, which may also mean God, or gods in general. Even in your fury and protest against God, do not blaspheme. A broader meaning, however, is suggested by Josephus: "Our Legislator expressly forbids us to deride or blaspheme the gods recognized by others." Even as pagan gods are considered repugnant and worthless within the Jewish religion, we are nonetheless instructed by Torah to respect the religious feelings of other people. We must never speak disrespectfully of their traditions and beliefs, never deprecate what they hold dear. The universal religious expression, in its richness and variety, reveals a genuine human quest for One God.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

"BE NOT IRREVERENT!" (Exodus 22:27): "Do not curse *elohim*, nor damn a *nasi* among your people!" The term *nasi* applies to a human leader. But what does "*elohim*" mean? According to Rabbinic traditions, the term *elohim* in this verse connotes God, human judges and "gods" in general.

Referring to God, the verse forbids blasphemy. Applying to judges, the verse teaches that even when you think the judges or leaders are wrong, do not insult them; curb your indignation, retain your dignity. In a broader meaning, *elohim* refers to gods in general (Josephus): "Our Legislator expressly forbids us to deride or blaspheme the gods recognized by others." Repugnant as paganism is, we must nonetheless show respect for the religious feelings of others. Whether in regard to God, human leaders, or gods, Torah teaches: "Be Reverent!"

Friday, February 1993

THOUGHT OF WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

BE NOT IRREVERENT! (Exodus 22:27): "*Elohim* – do not curse; and a *nasi* (leader) among your people – do not damn!" The word *elohim*, which usually refers to God, encompasses, in this context, human authorities as well as gods of other religions.

Referring to God, the verse teaches that we retain reverence, even in moments of fury and protest against God, and do not blaspheme Him. Applied to judges and leaders, it means that we show respect and do not insult them, even when we deem them wrong. Related to gods revered by others, it means we display courtesy and do not deride them, even as we may disapprove (Josephus). We are to respect the religious feelings of others and not detract from their traditions and beliefs. In all cases, we must contain our indignation and maintain our dignity.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

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RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

"BE NOT IRREVERENT!" is the lesson of Exodus 22:27: "Do not curse *elohim* or damn a *nasi* among your people!" The term "*nasi*" applies to a high leader. But what does "*elohim*" mean? Although the term usually refers to God, in this verse, according to rabbinic and ancient traditions, it also connotes human judges and gods in general.

The verse teaches that even in moments of fury and protest against God, the Heavenly Judge, do not blaspheme. Even in your legitimate opposition to higher authority, Divine or human, be reverent. The verse which mentions "*nasi*" (leader) as parallel to "*elohim*" (judges) teaches that even when you think the judges or leaders are wrong, do not insult them.

A broader meaning is given to this verse by Josephus Flavius, the Jewish general and historian who took part in the Jewish revolt against the Romans. Using *elohim* to refer to gods in general, he writes, "Our Legislator expressly forbids us to deride or blaspheme the gods recognized by others."

On all three levels - with regard to either the One God, or human judges and leaders, or other gods revered by others - Torah teaches: Be reverent!

Even as pagan gods are treated in Hebrew Scriptures as repugnant, we are nonetheless instructed by Torah to respect the religious feelings of other people. We must never speak disrespectfully of their traditions and beliefs, never deprecate what they hold dear.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

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