
Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

REDEMPTION—WITH CALM AND STABILITY: This is how Isaiah (52:12) portrays the restoration of Zion and the return of her exiles: "For not in haste will you depart, nor in fearful flight will you leave; for in front of you the Lord proceeds, and your rearguard is the God of Israel." Girded with firm conviction and abiding faith, the people—in moments of high exaltation as well as of deep agony—will maintain a sense of balance and evenmindedness, acting assuredly, patiently, watchfully, and quietly. The prophet cautions against both euphoria and panic in times of victories and trials. Redemption will come in sobriety and serenity. While retaining a sense of urgency, the people must not act hurriedly. Although imbued with lofty visions of a grander future, the people must not lose sight of the gradual, day to day, process of redemption in the present.

Thought of the Week

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..“BE ‘TAMIM’ with the Lord your God,” teaches Torah (Deut. 18:13). What does it mean? The King James Version (1611) renders: “Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God.” Similarly the New American Standard Bible (1970): “You shall be blameless before the Lord your God.” These are vain, false terms: how can one be “perfect with” or “blameless before” God? The Jewish translations (JPS 1917 and 1962), however, render “tamim” as “whole-hearted.” This is in line with the Aramaic Targumim (Unkelos and Yonatan; 2nd c.) which interpret the verse as a call for “completeness” in revering God: to worship Him with earnestness and sincerity, with the “wholeness” of one’s being. Rashi (11th c.) and his followers broaden the scope of “tamim” to encompass one’s existential outlook on life in general: to be “tamim” is to be in peace with oneself, content with one’s lot, unassumin- gly enjoying and improving the present rather than prying by through the occult into the veiled future. Confident in God, the “tamim” thrives on his inner harmony, his accord with himself and God. Contrary to common view, the “tamim” is not naive, simple, unquestioning or unsophisticated; rather he lives with a sense of assurance and purpose. Rashi thus projects the verse: “Be ‘tamim’” – accept what comes in peace and with complete faith; then you will truly be “with the Lord your God” – placing yourself under His Providence.

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“HASAGAT GEVUL” (lit. “confusing the border-line”) means intrusion into someone else’s territory (Deut. 19:14): “Do not distort the boundary lines between you and your neighbor.” Tampering with property line demarcations, their removal or misplacement, is mostly done in secret and often left undetected. Torah, therefore, enforces this admonition with a solemn warning (27:17): Cursed be the “masig gevul” – the deceitful trespasser; the human authorities may not be aware, but God is. In Jewish law, “hasagat gevul” encompasses the whole range of unfair business competition and any encroachment upon another person’s livelihood, interest and privilege – done overtly or covertly. Torah teaches us to respect the property, privacy and dignity of others as their territorial stake and imperative; we must not infringe or invade. This rule of “hasagat gevul” has a noble exception: the field of education. It is permitted, and even encouraged, to establish one school near another, although enrollment may shift. The purpose of a school, in Torah’s view, is not self enhancement (“territorial”) but the enhancement of knowledge: “Scholarly competition increases knowledge.” (Talmud).

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE AIM OF LAW in Judaism is basically to save the oppressed from the hand of his oppressor, not just to protect property or punish the guilty. The law of Torah is not impersonal or blindfolded, as in the Western outlook, but rather saturated with concern and love. "Mishpat" means more than plain dry justice; it involves deliberation, compassion and zeal to shield and rescue the afflicted and helpless from distress and iniquity. A "shofet" therefore, in the biblical sense, is not merely a judge – the typical cold, objective, unemotional jurist; "shofet" is a compassionate savior. The Book of Judges ("Shofetim") is the story of devoted, courageous, heroic redeemers of their people in trouble – loving and involved leaders, not legalistic and aloof "judges." "Zedek" (also rendered justice) means more than rigid righteousness; it encompasses the idea of benevolence, graciousness and helpfulness. "Zedaka" embraces both justness and charity. Law and justice in Judaism are not antithetical to but rather compatible with love and salvation.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

WHAT IF THE RABBIS ARE WRONG? Rabbinic authority in Jewish life is rooted in the verse in Deuteronomy (17:11) which defines the role and status of Torah teachers in each generation: "In accordance with the Torah they teach you, and based on the ruling they tell you, you must act; you must not turn aside from the sentence they declare to you, neither to the right nor to the left." The Midrash (Sifrei 154) insists: "Even if you deem their left to be the right and their right to be the left, still you must obey them." This statement upholds the validity of any rabbinic decision, even if it appears in one's eyes to be wrong. But what if it is wrong? What if it has been clearly disproved? The Midrash, as quoted in the Jerusalem Talmud (Horayot 1:1), is specific: "Lest you surmise that if the rabbis tell you on right it is left or on left it is right, that you are required to obey them, Scripture therefore states that you obey them only when they tell you right and left; namely, on right that it is right and on left that it is left, only then obey them." Judaism recognizes neither the claim of rabbis' infallibility nor the duty of blind adherence to them; it rather demands that we critically examine any ruling and reject all the wrong ones, even those issued by revered rabbis. Total surrender to any human master—even to a rabbi—is disastrously foolish, not Jewish.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

CONCERN WITH THE FUTURE is a positive human trait. "Who is wise? He who contemplates the future;" (Tamid 32a.) i.e., who weighs the consequences of his immediate situation and acts accordingly carefully and wisely (Rashi). This human quality can be misused. The earnest desire to "know" the future may lead people to consult with the occult, to seek answers from some augurs and diviners. Torah warns against it: The future is not pre-determined but shaped by human deed in the present. Man must not escape his duty to contend and cope with the present, with reliance and trust in God. This approach to reality is called "temimut" (whole-heartedness; Deut. 18:13): "Be 'tamim' with the Lord your God." Be engaged in improving your present with the completeness of your being; do not enquire about the future, but shape and make the future.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

PEACE MUST BE PURSUED BEFORE WAR is Torah's principle (Deut. 20:10-12): "When you approach a city in war, you must first propose a peaceful settlement. If they refuse to make peace with you and declare war against you, then you shall lay siege to the city." You may have recourse to war only as a last resort. Before entering the Promised Land, Joshua sent three letters to the seven nations that were then occupying it, in an effort to prevent war. The first letter said: "He who wishes to flee, may flee!" Some did. The second letter said: "He who wishes to make peace, may make peace!" None did. The third and final letter said: "He who wishes to engage in war, may engage in war!" Only after the enemy had rejected peace, the war started. (Maimonides, Code, Kings and Wars 6:5)

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

JUSTICE - ENDS AND MEANS: Torah instructs: "Justice, justice shall you pursue!" (Deuteronomy 16:20). Why is the word justice repeated? To teach us that even the pursuit of justice must be done with justice. In Judaism, a noble end does not justify evil means!

This rule is imperative whenever society is engaged in implementing justice, either externally by wars or internally by the penal system. Torah insists that true pursuit of justice includes not only what is pursued, but also how it is pursued. Both the ends and the means must be just.

Nor may justice be abdicated or compromised for the alleged sake of peace. Peace constructed over the ruins of justice is illusionary and feeble; it will lead to further strife and conflict. Rabbi Bahya ben Asher (13th century, Spain): "Where there is no justice, there is no peace" (Kad Ha-Kemah).

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

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JUSTICE -- ENDS AND MEANS: Torah instructs (Dt. 16:20): "Justice, justice shall you pursue!" Why is the word justice repeated? To teach us that even the pursuit of justice must be done with justice. In Judaism, a noble end does not justify evil means! This rule is imperative whenever society is engaged in implementing justice -- either externally by wars or internally by the penal system.

Torah insists that true pursuit of justice includes not only *what* is pursued, but also *how* it is pursued. Both the ends and the means must be just. The end does not justify the means!

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

JUSTICE—ITS ENDS AND MEANS (Deut. 16:20):
“Justice, justice shall you pursue!” The word justice is repeated twice; this conveys a sense of urgency and importance. Also, the verse indicates: “With justice, pursue justice!” The goal of a just society must be obtained by just means. The idea of justice, as expressed in the Hebrew “tzedek” (or, “tzdaka”), is not a rigid conformity to law and order. It means concern, compassion, care, and involvement in human and social relationships. Torah views justice as a Divine attribute as well as a human virtue. Through actions which are just both in their ends and means, society is redeemed and God sanctified.

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Friday, September 4, 1992

THOUGHT OF WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

JUSTICE AND WARFARE are two interrelated themes of this week's Torah reading. The first part (Dt. 16:18-19:21) deals with the administration of justice within the state; the second (20:1-20), with the conduct of war against the enemies of the state – thus insuring the people's internal, as well as external, security. Whereas the first theme is presented in absolute, categorical terms – “Justice, justice shall you pursue!” – the second is phrased with reservations and conditions (“*Ki-tetze*”), “If (or when) you must go to war against your enemy ...”

Justice remains forever an ultimate ideal; warfare never! Justice we must pursue; war we must avoid. Hence (20:10): “When you approach the enemy's territory to wage war against them, first appeal to them for peace!”

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

THE COURTS' ACCOUNTABILITY is the theme of King Jehoshaphat's charge to his judges (II Ch. 19:6): "Consider what you do; for your judgment concerns not only people but God! He is with you when you pass judgment!" Rashi explains: "Do not think: 'What does it matter if we bend the law, acquit our friends, wrong the poor, favor the rich? Our verdict, after all, does not relate to God!' Therefore, know that your judgment does concern God! Justice is His! If you convict the innocent, it is as if you have wronged and robbed your Creator. When you pass a twisted verdict, you wrest the law of Heaven! Therefore: 'Consider what you do' – put your heart in each and every case, and behave as if the Holy One, blessed be He, is standing before you. He is with you when you pass judgment!" Wronging people is offending God!

Thought of the Week

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

SHOFETIM

August 24, 1990

ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE COURTS OF LAW is the theme of King Jehoshaphat's charge to his judges (II Ch. 19:6): "Consider what you do: Your judgment concerns not only people but God! He is with you when you pass judgment!" Rashi elaborates:

Do not think: What does it matter if we bend the law, acquit our friends, wrong the poor, favor the rich? Our verdict, after all, does not relate to God! Therefore know that your judgment does concern God! Justice is His! If you convict the innocent, it is as if you have wronged and robbed your Creator. When you pass a twisted verdict, you wrest the law of Heaven! Therefore: "Consider what you do" -- put your heart in each and every case, and behave as if the Holy One blessed be He is standing before you -- "He is with you when you pass judgment!"

Interestingly the King's name *Yeho-shafat* means that God is the Judge, and his message is that wronging people is offending God!

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / SEPTEMBER 1, 2000

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

“JUSTICE, JUSTICE SHALL YOU PURSUE!” (Deuteronomy 16:20). The word justice is repeated to teach us that even the pursuit of justice must be done with justice. In Judaism, a noble end does not justify evil means! This rule is imperative whenever society is engaged in implementing justice – either externally by wars or internally by the penal system.

The leadership's declaration of innocence was required to be solemnly made after a murder had been committed near their city (Deuteronomy 21:7): “Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done!” Even if the leaders themselves did not personally commit the murder or witness it, they are still not fully exonerated from all guilt and responsibility. Did they do enough to prevent the crime? Or to protect the victim?

Only when they can assert with a clear conscience that they did everything in their power to avoid the killing; that they provided safety and protection, hospitality and escort, to all residents and visitors alike – can they declare their innocence. Otherwise, they are implicated in the crime of murder!

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

JUSTICE — ENDS AND MEANS: Torah instructs: "Justice, justice shall you pursue!" (Deuteronomy 16:20). Why is the word justice repeated? To teach us that even the pursuit of justice must be done with justice. In Judaism, a noble end does not justify evil means!

Nor may justice be abdicated or compromised for the alleged sake of peace. Peace constructed over the ruins of justice is illusionary and feeble, leading to further strife and conflict. Rabbi Bahya ben Asher (13th century, Spain): "Where there is no justice, there is no peace" (*Kad Ha-Kemah*).

13 CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / AUGUST 24, 2001

Justice and warfare are two interrelated themes of this week's Torah reading. The first part (Deuteronomy 16:18-19:21) deals with the administration of justice within the state; the second (20:1-20) with the conduct of war against the enemies of the state – thus ensuring the people's internal as well as external security. Whereas the first theme is presented as absolutely and incontrovertibly true – namely, "justice, justice shall you pursue!" – the second is phrased with reservations and conditions ("*ki-tetze*"). Justice we must pursue; war we must avoid. Hence (20:10): "when you approach the enemy's territory to wage war against them, first appeal to them for peace!"

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

JUSTICE AND WARFARE are the two interrelated themes of this week's Torah reading. The first part (Dt. 16:18-19:21) deals with the administration of justice within the state; the second (20:1-20) with the conduct of war against the enemies of the state -- thus insuring the people's internal as well as external security. Whereas the first theme is presented in clearly demonstrable terms -- "Justice, justice shall you pursue!" -- the second is phrased reservedly and conditionally ("ki-tetze"): "If (or when) you must go to war against your enemy . . ."

Justice remains forever an ideal; warfare never! Justice we must pursue; war we must avoid. Hence (20:10): "When you approach the enemy's territory to wage war against them, first appeal to them for peace!"

"It is no challenge to die like a Jew; the real challenge is to live like a Jew."

-- "The Chofetz Chaim"

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

LAND JEWISH NEWS / AUGUST 13, 1999

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE COURTS OF LAW is the theme of King Jehoshaphat's charge to his judges (II Chronicles 19:6): "Consider what you do: Your judgment concerns not only people but God! He is with you when you pass judgment!"

Rashi elaborates: Do not think: What does it matter if we bend the law, acquit our friends, wrong the poor, favor the rich? Our verdict, after all, does not relate to God! Therefore, know that your judgment does concern God! Justice belongs to God! If you convict the innocent, it is as if you have wronged and robbed your Creator.

The King's name, *Yeho-shafat*, means that God is the Judge. The message for the judge is that

wrongdoing people is offending God!

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Justice remains forever an ideal; warfare never! Hence (20:10): "When you approach the enemy's territory to wage war against them, first appeal to them for peace!"

.. The law of "egla arufa" (Deut. 21:1-9) deals with unsolved homicide — a corpse found and the murderer unknown. The city nearest the victim is held accountable. In a public ceremony, expressing and impressing the gravity of the incident, the city's officials are to declare openly their innocence. But only if they have done everything in their power to avoid the tragedy, then and only then, may they proclaim: "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done." (Deut. 21:7) A city, Torah maintains, must provide ample safety and protection, in its streets as well as in its outskirts, not only to its residents but also to its visitors and transients. In fact, any traveler, when entering a city, must be given hospitality and care, and when leaving it, an escort to guard him from danger. If the officials are unable to make their city and its environs a safe place for everyone, dwellers as well as strangers, to live and walk there free of fear, then their hands are not clean. One case of unsolved homicide should not be glossed over or dealt with lightly, but should stir up the conscience of the community, challenging its leadership, until genuine concern for human life is restored.

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda ,

Thought of the Week

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CITY SAFETY: "Egla arufa" (Deut. 21:1-9) deals with unsolved homicide--a corpse found and the murderer unknown. The city nearest the victim is held accountable. In a public ceremony, illustrating the gravity of the incident, the city's officials are to declare openly their innocence, but only if they have done everything in their power to avoid the tragedy. Then and only then, may they proclaim: "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done." (Deut. 21:7). Torah maintains that a city must provide ample safety and protection in its streets as well as in its outskirts, not only for its residents but also for its visitors and transients. In fact, any traveler, when entering a city, must be given hospitality and care, and when leaving it, an escort to guard him from danger. If the officials are unable to make their city and its environs a safe place for everyone, their hands are not clean. A case of unsolved homicide should stir up the conscience of the community, challenging its leadership, until genuine concern for human life is restored.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE KING IN ISRAEL, like any other political or spiritual leader, is not above the law (Deut. 17:14-20). His power is clearly restricted and his moral stature strictly watched. He is warned against indulgence in luxury, self-glory and the amassing of wealth: "When he is seated on his royal throne, he must have a scroll of the Torah written for him." (In two copies, says the rabbis (Sanh. 21b), one kept in his treasury and the other carried with him wherever he goes.) "It shall always be with him and he shall read from it all his life, so that he learns to revere the Lord his God, to cherish and practice all the words of the Torah and its laws. Thus he will not be filled with arrogance to look down on his brothers, and he will swerve neither right nor left from this legacy." Imbued with this spirit, the king is qualified to rule. He is entrusted to implement the law only when he puts himself under the law. The king may be summoned to, testify before, and is judged – convicted or acquitted – by the court. A king who refuses to be subject to the law, abdicates his right to be officer of the law. He who cannot be judged, cannot be a judge; he who cannot be accused, cannot be an accuser. So is R. Simeon b. Lakish's maxim (Sanh. 19a; cf. BM 107b): "Demand truth first from yourself, then from others."

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE LEADERSHIP'S DECLARATION OF INNOCENCE, solemnly made after a murder has been committed near their city (Deuteronomy 21:7), "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done!"—must not be taken literally. So what if the leaders themselves did not commit or witness the murder? Are they then innocent of all guilt in the crime? According to rabbinic tradition, they cannot make this declaration of innocence. Only when they can assert, in clear conscience, that they did everything in their power to avoid the murder; and that they provided safety and protection, hospitality and escort, to all residents and visitors alike—only then can they declare their innocence. The responsibility for wrongdoing lies not only with the perpetrator and the accessory, but also with the leaders who neglect to provide proper care and security for the potential victims.

August 31, 1984

THE DECLARATION OF INNOCENCE (Deuteronomy 21:7) -- "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done!" -- solemnly pronounced by the leaders of the city after a murder has been nearby committed, is not to be taken literally. So what if they themselves did neither commit nor witness the crime, are they then exonerated from all guilt? Ironically, according to Rabbinic tradition, even so, that their hands did not shed the blood and their eyes did not see the shedding, they cannot make this declaration of innocence, unless -- and only when -- they can assert in clear conscience that they did everything in their power to avoid the murder; that they provided safety and protection, hospitality and escort, to all residents and visitors alike. If not, they are not considered innocent of the crime of murder!

The responsibility for wrongdoing lies not only with the perpetrator and the accessory, but also with the leader who neglect to provide proper care and attention to guard the potential victims. In Judaism, any leader who keeps to his own quiet corner and removes himself from this "evil world" -- who does not protest oppression and violence -- has no right to proclaim: "My hands did not shed this blood!"...