

טעמו וראו

A taste of the
Rebbe's teachings

Parshat Emor

>>

High Court on the Dock

The prophet Elijah delivers a scathing rebuke to the High Court, the group of the most respected elders of Israel. Their crime? They failed to wander through the shtetls and teach Jewish children.

Teacher's Manual



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The Kohens and Levites were more than just stewards of the Temple. They were scholars and educators. In our parsha, we see that they are commanded to teach their young (source 1). In the Haftorah, we see that they were responsible for teaching Torah to the entire nation (source 2). Maimonides extends this position to all people. Every person can be a Levite, by dedicating himself to spirituality (source 3).

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Maimonides describes the members of the High Court as the greatest minds of the generation (source 5). Yet, the Midrash states in the name of Elijah the Prophet that the members of the High Court should have wandered from town to town to teach Torah (source 4).

The Rebbe asks the obvious question: Why were the members of the High Court expected to do ‘menial jobs’?

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The key to the answer lies in the story of Pilegesh B’givah, where a horrific crime resulted in civil war and the death of seventy thousand Jews (source 6). It was in regard to this story that Elijah says his statement about the High Court (source 7).

As the Rebbe explains, the first and foremost task of a Jewish scholar and leader is to teach and raise up the people. The result of their failure is inestimable, and the blame lies squarely on them. That is why the Talmud says that a High Court that employs the death penalty is called “destructive” (source 8). They reached that point because of their own failure to educate the nation.

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Opening: The Priests & The Scholars

Our Torah portion begins with the laws of priesthood.

There is a common misconception about the main role of the priestly class. Many assume that their primary task was to serve in the Holy Temple. However, in truth, the average priest spent very little time in the Temple—two weeks a year at the maximum. If a large number of priests were present, they would serve for even less.

The Levites—the tribe from which the priests stem—were actually the elite intellectual class. They were the rabbis and the scholars, and they preserved the teachings of Judaism throughout the generations. Even during our exile in Egypt, the Levites were exempt of slavery, focusing on the teachings of the Torah.

But moreover, in addition to their own intellectual pursuits, they were tasked with being the educators of the next generation. Forty-eight scattered cities were given to the tribe of Levi, where they were to serve as centers of Torah and education for the people of Israel.

There is a fascinating passage in Tana D'vei Eliyahu, a Midrashic text, which the Rebbe often referenced when speaking about the role of Jewish leaders. This lesson revolves around that teaching.

Source 1 Leviticus 21:1

The opening verse of our Torah portion, a law regarding priesthood, has a unique double-expression; it says the word 'speak' twice. Rashi explains that it teaches the priests about their responsibility to teach their youth.

G-d said to Moses: Speak to the priests, the children of Aaron, and say to them: Do not become impure...

Rashi:

Speak to the priests: “Speak to the priests...and say”— [the double expression is] for the adults to teach the youngsters.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל-
הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם
לִנְפֹשׁ לֹא-יִטְמָא בְּעַמְיוֹ:

רש"י על הפסוק

אָמַר אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים - אָמַר...
וְאָמַרְתָּ, לְהוֹדִיר גְּדוּלִים עַל
הַקֹּטְנִים.

Source 2 This week's Haftorah – Ezekiel 44:15, 23-24

The haftorah takes it a step further: the prophet Ezekiel says that they are responsible not only to raise their own children but to also teach Torah to the entire nation and guide them in the proper behavior.

But the priests, the Levites, sons of Zadok, who kept the charge of My sanctuary when the Children of Israel strayed from Me, they shall come near Me to serve Me, and they shall stand before Me to offer Me fat and blood, says the L-rd G-d.

They shall teach My people the difference between holy and profane and inform them of the difference between the impure and the pure. They shall adjudicate disputes; they shall judge according to My ordinances, observe My teachings and My statutes in all My appointed times, and sanctify My Sabbaths.

וְהַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם בְּנֵי צְדוֹק אֲשֶׁר
שָׁמְרוּ אֶת־מִשְׁמֶרֶת מִקֹּדֶשׁ
בְּתַעֲוֹת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַלִּי הִמָּה
יִקְרְבוּ אֵלַי לְשָׁרְתַנִּי וְעָמְדוּ לְפָנַי
לְהִקְרִיב לִי חֵלֶב וְדָם נְאֻם ה'
אֱלֹהִים:

וְאֶת־עַמִּי יוֹרוּ בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֵל
וּבֵין־טָמֵא לְטָהוֹר יוֹדְעִים: וְעַל־
רִיב הִמָּה יַעֲמְדוּ לְמִשְׁפָּט,
בְּמִשְׁפָּטֵי יִשְׁפֹּטוּהוּ, וְאֶת־תּוֹרָתִי
וְאֶת־חֻקֹּתַי בְּכָל־מוֹעֲדַי יִשְׁמְרוּ,
וְאֶת־שַׁבְּתוֹתַי יִקְדְּשׁוּ:

Source 3 Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Shmita and Yovel 13:12-13

Maimonides points out that their role as teachers was a central part of how G-d divided the land between the nation. The tribe of Levi received no agricultural land at all; they were to focus on spirituality, and it was the task of the nation to feed them.

Why didn't the Levites receive a portion of the Land of Israel and its spoils like their brethren? Because they were set aside to worship G-d, to serve Him and to teach the people His upright paths and righteous judgments, as the verse states: "They will teach Your judgments to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel." Therefore,

וְלָמָּה לֹא זָכָה לְוֵי בְּנֵי־לֵוִי
אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְבוֹתָהָ עִם
אֶחָיו, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהִבְדִּיל לְעַבְדוֹ
אֶת ה' לְשָׁרְתוֹ וּלְהוֹרוֹת דְּרָכָיו
הַיֹּשָׁרִים וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו הַצְּדִיקִים
לְרַבִּים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דְּבָרִים ל ג')
"וְיָרוּ מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ לְיַעֲקֹב וְתוֹרָתְךָ
לְיִשְׂרָאֵל". לְפִיכֵךְ הִבְדִּילוּ מִדְּרָכֶיךָ

they were set apart from the ways of the world. They do not wage war like the rest of Israel, nor do they inherit or acquire assets through their physical might. Instead, they are G-d's legion, as the verse states, "G-d has blessed His legion." G-d provides for them, as the verse states: "I am your portion and your inheritance."

הָעוֹלָם. לֹא עוֹרְכִין מִלְחָמָה
כְּשָׂאֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְלֹא נוֹחָלִין וְלֹא
זוֹכִין לְעֲצָמָן בְּכַח גּוֹפָן. אֲלֵא הֵם
חֵיל הַשֵּׁם שְׁנֵאמָר (דְּבָרִים לֵג יֵא)
"בְּרַךְ ה' חֵילוֹ". וְהוּא בְּרוּךְ הוּא
זוֹכֶה לָהֶם שְׁנֵאמָר (בַּמִּדְבָר יח כ)
"אֲנִי חֵלְקֶךָ וְנַחֲלָתֶךָ":

In the next segment, Maimonides points out that this behavior is not limited to priests. Any person who chooses to focus on spirituality can be a 'priest' as well.

But not only the tribe of Levi; any person who is motivated and intellectually stimulated to set himself aside and stand before G-d to serve Him, to minister to Him and to know Him, and proceeds straightforwardly as G-d created him, and relieves himself of the yoke of the many concerns which human beings pursue, he is sanctified as holy of holies. G-d will be His portion and heritage forever and will provide what is sufficient for him in this world like He provides for the priests and the Levites. As David declared, "G-d is the lot of my portion; You are my cup, You support my lot."

וְלֹא שִׁבַּט לְוֵי בְלִבָּד, אֲלֵא כָּל
אִישׁ וְאִישׁ מְכַל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר נִדְבָה רוּחוֹ אוֹתוֹ וְהִבִּינוּ
מִדְּעוֹ לְהַבְדִּיל לְעַמֵּד לְפָנָי ה'
לְשִׁרְתוֹ וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ לְדַעַה אֶת ה',
וְהִלֵּךְ יִשָּׂר כְּמוֹ שֶׁעָשָׂהוּ הָאֱלֹהִים,
וּפְרָק מֵעַל צְנֹאָרוֹ עַל הַחֲשִׁבּוֹנוֹת
הַרְבִּים אֲשֶׁר בִּקְשׂוּ בְנֵי הָאָדָם,
הֲרִי זֶה נִתְקַדַּשׁ קִדְשׁ קִדָּשִׁים,
וַיְהִי ה' חֵלְקוֹ וְנַחֲלָתוֹ לְעוֹלָם
וְלְעוֹלָמֵי עוֹלָמִים, וַיִּזְכֶּה לוֹ
בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה דְּבַר הַמַּסְפִּיק לוֹ
כְּמוֹ שֶׁזָּכָה לַכֹּהֲנִים לְלוֹוִים. הֲרִי
דָּוִד עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם אוֹמֵר (תְּהִילִים
טז ה) "ה' מְנַת חֵלְקִי וְכוּסִי אֶתָּה
תּוֹמִיךְ גּוֹרְלִי".

With the above in mind: what is the appropriate behavior for a Levite? What is expected of someone who devotes his life to spirituality and the study of Torah?

Part 1: Wandering Judges?

Source 4 Midrash, Tana D'vei Eliyahu Rabbah, chapter 11

Tana D'vei Eliyahu is a Midrashic texts with teachings that are attributed to Elijah the Prophet. Here, he makes a very interesting statement: it would be appropriate for the members of the High Court to don durable clothes and wander from town to town, educating the young.

The members of the High Court who had received wisdom from Moses, Joshua, and Pinchas ben Elazar as well, should have girded themselves with iron belts, raised up the hems of their clothing, and traveled from town to town—one day to Lachish, one day to Beit El, one day to Chevron, one day to Jerusalem, and to all Jewish settlements—to teach the people.

שְׁהִיָּה לָהֶם לְסִנְהֶדְרֵי גְדוּלָה שֶׁהֵנִיחַ
מֹשֶׁה, וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ וּפְנַחָס בְּן אֶלְעָזָר
עִמָּהֶם, הָיָה לָהֶם לֵילֶךְ וּלְקִשּׁוֹר
חֲבָלִים שֶׁל בְּרִזָּל בְּמַתְנֵיהֶם,
וּלְהַגְבִּיחַ בְּגָדֵיהֶם לְמַעַלָּה
מֵאַרְכּוּבוֹתֵיהֶן, וַיִּחְזְרוּ בְּכָל עֵיִרוֹת
יִשְׂרָאֵל, יוֹם אֶחָד לְלָכִישׁ, יוֹם אֶחָד
לְבֵית אֵל, יוֹם אֶחָד לְחֶבְרוֹן, יוֹם
אֶחָד לִירוּשָׁלַיִם, וְכֵן בְּכָל מְקוֹמוֹת
יִשְׂרָאֵל. וַיִּלְמְדוּ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Source 5 Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of High Court, 2:1, 6

Now, Maimonides describes the exact criteria for rabbis who serve in the High Court. Wandering school teachers doesn't seem to be a suitable job for them.

High Court appointees...must be wise and insightful men, with a comprehensive knowledge of Torah and broad intellectual capacity. They should have some knowledge of other disciplines, e.g. medicine, mathematics, the fixation of the calendar, astronomy, astrology, and also the practices of fortune-telling, magic, sorcery, and the hollow teachings of idolatry, so that they will know how to judge them.

An effort should be made that they be white-bearded, tall, and dignified, men who understand subtle matters and who speak most languages, so that they will not need an interpreter.

אִין מַעֲמִידֵין בְּסִנְהֶדְרֵין... אֵלָא
אַנְשֵׁים חֲכָמִים וְנְבוֹנִים. מְפַלְגִין
בְּחֻמַּת הַתּוֹרָה בְּעַלֵּי דְעָה מְרַבָּה.
יודְעִים קִצַּת מִשְׁאָר חֲכָמוֹת, כְּגוֹן
רְפוּאוֹת וְחֻשְׁבוֹן וְתַקּוּפוֹת וּמְזֻלוֹת
וְאַצְטְגִינּוֹת וְדַרְכֵי הַמְעוּנָנִים
וְהַקּוֹסְמִים וְהַמְכַשְׁפִּים, וְהַבְּלִי
עֲבוּדָה זָרָה וְכִיּוֹצֵא בְּאֵלוֹ, כְּדִי
שְׁיִהְיוּ יודְעִים לְדוֹן אוֹתָם...

וְצָרִיךְ לְהַשְׁתַּדֵּל וּלְבַדֵּק וּלְחַפֵּשׂ
שְׁיִהְיוּ כָּלן בְּעַלֵּי שִׁיבָה. בְּעַלֵּי קוּמָה.
בְּעַלֵּי מְרָאָה. נְבוֹנֵי לַחַשׁ. וְשִׁנְדְעוּ
בְּרַב הַלְשׁוֹנוֹת כְּדִי שְׁלֹא תִהְיֶה
סִנְהֶדְרִין שׁוֹמְעֵת מִפִּי הַתְּרַגְּמוֹן:

>> The Rebbe

High Judges or Simple Teachers?

If the High Court were the greatest rabbis of the generation, why are they expected to wander throughout the country teaching children and simpletons? Why is that the role of the greatest minds of the generation?

The Midrash states in Tana D'vei Eliyahu Rabbah: "They (the members of the High Court) should have girded themselves...and traveled from town to town...to teach the people."

Now, to be appointed to the High Court, you needed to be "wise and insightful, with a comprehensive knowledge of Torah and... some knowledge of other disciplines, e.g., medicine, mathematics, the fixation of the calendar, astronomy, astrology, and also the practices of fortune-telling, magic, sorcery—and speak most languages."

If so, why must the High Court members be the ones to wander through the Jewish settlements to teach Alef Bet etc. and encourage the people to observe Shabbat and the like? How does that role utilize of all the knowledge which brought them to be appointed to the High Court?

איתא בתנא דבי אליהו רבה¹
ש"היה להם (לחברי הסנהדרין)
לילך ולקשור חבלים.. במתניהם..
ויחזרו בכל עיירות ישראל.. וילמדו
את ישראל כו":

כדי להתמנות לסנהדרין - צריכים להיות "חכמים ונבונים, מופלגין בחכמת התורה.. יודעים קצת משאר חכמות כגון רפואות וחשבון ותקופות ומזלות ואיצטגנינות ודרכי המעוננים והקוסמים והמכשפים.. ושידעו ברוב הלשונות"².

ולכאורה מה הצורך בחברי הסנהדרין דוקא בשביל להיות נע ונד בעיירות ישראל, ללמד אל"ף-בי"ת כו', ולהורות לבני ישראל על דבר שמירת שבת וכיוצא בזה - כיצד יוכל בתפקיד זה להשתמש בכל הידיעות שבזכותם נתמנה סנהדרין גדולה!?

(1) פי"א.

(2) רמב"ם הל' סנהדרין פ"ב הל' א-ו. 3.

Part 2: Full Responsibility

The above-mentioned Midrash from Tana D'vei Eliyahu is part of a larger discussion regarding the story of Pilegesh Bigiv'ah. Let us go through the basics of the story, and then we will read the words of the Midrash in full:

Source 6 Judges 19:1, 14-21, 20:1-2, 12-17, 29-33

The following story is known as “Pilegesh Bigiv'ah” (the Levite's Concubine), which took place in the early period after the Jewish people settled in the Land of Israel. At the time, there was no cohesive government. People lived with their tribes and were independent of each other.

The prophet tells us about a fellow who was traveling with his concubine from his father-in-law's home and needed a place to stay the night. After a long wait, one old man invited them in.

(In those days, it was common for a man to take a concubine, which basically meant a partner without the commitments of marriage).

In the days when Israel had no king, a Levite man from the foothills of Mount Ephraim took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem of Judah.

...They traveled until the sun set near Gibeah in Benjamin, and they entered Gibeah to spend the night. He sat down in the street, but nobody invited them home to lodge. Then, one old man returned from his work in the field for the evening. He hailed from Mount Ephraim but resided in Gibeah, although the locals were Benjaminites. He looked up and saw the traveler in the street.

The old man said, “Where are you headed? Where are you from?”

He replied, “We are traveling from Bethlehem of Judah to the foothills of Mount Ephraim, my hometown. I [previously] traveled until Bethlehem of Judah, and now

א ויהי בימים ההם, ומלך אין
בישׂראֵל; ויהי איש לוי, גר
בירכתי הר-אפרים, ויקח-לו
אשה פילגש, מבית לחם יהודה...

יד ויעברו, ויילכו; ותבא להם
השמש, אצל הגבעה אשר
לבנימון. טו ויסרו שם, לבוא ללון
בגבעה; ויבא, וישב ברחוב העיר,
ואין איש מאסף-אותם הביתה,
ללון. טז והנה איש זקן, בא מן-
מעשהו מן-השדה בערב, והאיש
מהר אפרים, והוא גר בגבעה;
ואנשי המקום, בני ימיני. יז וישא
עיניו, וירא את-האיש הארח--
ברחב העיר;

ויאמר האיש הזקן אנה תלך,
ומאין תבוא.

יח ויאמר אליו, עברים אנחנו
מבית-לחם יהודה עד-ירכתי
הר-אפרים--משם אנכי, ואלך
עד-בית לחם יהודה; ואת-בית

I am on my way to the House of G-d, but nobody invited me home. I have straw and fodder for our donkeys, bread and wine for myself, your maidservant and the lad with your servants; we lack nothing.”

יְהוָה, אָנִי הֹלֵךְ, וְאִין אִישׁ, מְאֹסֶף
אוֹתִי הַבַּיְתָה. יֵשׁ וְגַם-תָּבֹן גַּם-
מִסְפּוּא, יֵשׁ לְחֲמוֹרֵינוּ, וְגַם לֶחֶם
וַיִּזֵּן יֵשׁ-לִי וְלַאֲמָתְךָ, וְלַנְּעָר עִם-
עַבְדֶיךָ: אִין מִחֲסוֹר, כָּל-דָּבָר.

The old man said, “Peace be to you! I will provide you with everything. Please don’t lodge in the street.”

כּ וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ הַזֶּקֶן שְׁלוֹם לָךְ, רַק
כָּל-מִחֲסוֹרְךָ עָלַי; רַק בְּרַחֲב, אֶל-
תְּלוֹ.

He brought him into his house and gave fodder to the donkeys. They washed their feet, ate and drank.

כּא וַיְבִיֵאֵהוּ לְבֵיתוֹ, וַיְבֹל (וַיִּבֹל)
לְחֲמוֹרִים; וַיִּרְחֲצוּ, רַגְלֵיהֶם,
וַיֹּאכְלוּ, וַיִּשְׁתּוּ.

A terrible incident followed. A group of local ruffians attacked the house and viciously violated the concubine throughout the night, leaving her for dead in the street. The shocked husband transported his concubine’s body back home, and sent messages to all twelve tribes, informing them of the atrocity.

The people of Israel were horrified. Hundreds of thousands of people gathered from throughout the entire land and demanded justice. They ordered the tribe of Benjamin to hand over the perpetrators, but the Benjaminites refused (presumably, they preferred to put the criminals through their own justice system rather than subject them to the justice of an antagonistic tribe). The nation decided to go to war.

The entire people of Israel—from Dan to Beersheba and the land of Gilead—gathered as one to the L-rd in Mizpah. Every chief of every tribe of Israel showed up in the assembly of G-d, four hundred thousand sword-wielding foot-soldiers.

א וַיֵּצְאוּ, כָּל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַתִּקְהַל
הָעֵדָה כָּאִישׁ אֶחָד לְמִדָּן וְעַד-
בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע, וְאָרְצָה הַגִּלְעָד--אֶל-ה',
הַמְצַפָּה. ב וַיִּתְיַצְבוּ פְּנוֹת כָּל-הָעָם,
כָּל שְׁבִטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל--בְּקָהֶל, עִם
הָאֱלֹהִים; אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף אִישׁ
רַגְלִי, שְׁלֵף חֶרֶב.

The tribes of Israel sent men throughout all the clans of Benjamin saying, “What is this outrage that has occurred among you? Turn over ruffians and we will kill them, and we will eradicate this evil from Israel.”

...יב וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ שְׁבִטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲנָשִׁים,
בְּכָל-שְׁבִטֵי בְנֵימִן, לֵאמֹר: מָה
הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת, אֲשֶׁר נִהְיְתָה בְּכֶם. יג
וְעַתָּה תָּנוּ אֶת-הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּנֵי-בְלִיעֵל
אֲשֶׁר בְּגִבְעָה, וְנָמִיתֶם, וְנִבְעַרְהָ
רָעָה, מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל;

But Benjamin refused to obey their brothers, the People of Israel.

וְלֹא אָבוּ, בְּנֵי בְנֵימִן, לְשָׁמֹעַ, בְּקוֹל
אֲחֵיהֶם בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל.

The situation quickly deteriorated to war. Benjamin gathered an army of 26,700 soldiers, and the People of Israel collect gathered an army of 400,000 strong.

The Benjaminites from the cities gathered to Gibeah to wage war against the People of Israel. On that day, the Benjaminites of the cities numbered twenty-six thousand swordsmen, and the Gibeah residents numbered seven hundred choice men. Among them were seven hundred choice left-handed men who could successfully aim a slingstone at a hairbreadth. The men of Israel numbered, excluding Benjamin, four hundred thousand swordsmen, all men of war.

יד וַיֵּאָסְפוּ בְנֵי-בְנֵימִן מִן-הָעָרִים, הַגְּבֵעָה, לְצֹאת לְמִלְחָמָה, עִם-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. טו וַיִּתְּפְקְדוּ בְנֵי בְנֵימִן בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, מִהָעָרִים, עֶשְׂרִים וְשֵׁשָׁה אֲלָף אִישׁ, שְׁלֵף חֶרֶב--לְבַד מִיִּשְׁבֵי הַגְּבֵעָה, הַתְּפֹקְדוֹ, שְׁבַע מֵאוֹת, אִישׁ בְּחֹר. טז מִכָּל הָעָם הַזֶּה, שְׁבַע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ בְּחֹר, אִטְר, יָד-יְמִינוֹ: כָּל-זֶה, קָלַע בְּאֶבֶן אֶל-הַשַּׁעֲרָה--וְלֹא יָחֹטֵא. יז וְאִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל הַתְּפֹקְדוֹ, לְבַד מִבְּנֵימִן, אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אֲלָף אִישׁ, שְׁלֵף חֶרֶב: כָּל-זֶה, אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה.

Before heading to war, the Israelites came to the Tabernacle to pray for success. G-d told them—through the prophets—that they would be successful. But at first, despite the obvious disparity in numbers, Benjamin was victorious. In several successive battles, Benjamin succeeded in pushing back the Israelites and inflicting many casualties. After returning several times to the Tabernacle, they were finally told that “tomorrow will be your victory.” They carefully planned their tactics, and this time, they were successful.

Israel set up ambushes around Gibeah. On the third day, the Israelites went up against the Benjaminites, arraying themselves, once again, against Gibeah. The Benjaminites came out to the people, drawing away from the city, and once again began inflicting casualties along the highways which lead to Bethel and to Gibeah, killing thirty Israelites in the field.

כט וַיִּשֶׂם יִשְׂרָאֵל אַרְבָּיִם, אֶל-הַגְּבֵעָה סָבִיב. ל וַיַּעֲלוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-בְּנֵי בְנֵימִן, בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי; וַיַּעֲרֹכוּ אֶל-הַגְּבֵעָה, כְּפַעַם בְּפַעַם. לא וַיֵּצְאוּ בְנֵי-בְנֵימִן לְקִרְאת הָעָם, הַנִּתְּקוּ מִן-הָעִיר; וַיַּחֲלוּ לְהַכּוֹת מִהָעָם חֲלָלִים כְּפַעַם בְּפַעַם, בְּמַסְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר אַחַת עָלָה בֵּית-אֶל וְאַחַת גְּבֵעָה בַשָּׂדֶה, כְּשִׁלְשִׁים אִישׁ, בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל.

The Benjaminites said, “We are beating them once again.”

לב וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְנֵי בְנֵימִן, נִגְפִים הֵם לְפָנֵינוּ כְּבָרֵאשֶׁנָּה;

But the Israelites said, “Let us withdraw and cut them off of the city, to the highways.”

ובְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָמְרוּ, נִנוּסָה וְנִתְּקִנוּהוּ, מִן-הָעִיר, אֶל-הַמַּסְלוֹת.

All the Israelites moved and set themselves in array at Baal-Tamar. The Israelite ambushes came forth out of Maareh-Geba, ten thousand choice Israelite men approaching Gibeah and waging an intense battle. The Benjaminites did not realize that they were approaching misfortune.

G-d struck Benjamin before Israel, and the Israelites killed 25,100 Benjaminite swordsmen on that day.

לג וכל איש ישראל, קמו ממקומו, ויערכו, בבעל תמר; וארב ישראל מגיח ממקומו, ממצרה-גבע. לד ויבאו מנגד לגבעה עשרת אלפים איש בחור, מכל-ישראל, והמלחמה, כבדה; והם לא ידעו, כי-נגעת עליהם הרעה.

לה ויגף יהוה את-בנימון, לפני ישראל, וישחיתו בני ישראל בבנימון ביום ההוא, עשרים וחמשה אלף ומאה איש: כל-אלה, שלף חרב.

The tribe of Benjamin was totally defeated, and as a result, almost the entire tribe was annihilated.

Source 7 Midrash, Tana D'vei Eliyahu Rabbah, chapter 11

Now we reapproach the Midrash. Elija the Prophet places the blame for this tragic event—and the resulting death of 70,000 people—squarely on the shoulders of the Sanhedrin. Why? Because they should have wandered from town to town and dedicated themselves to educating the young. During this critical era, they should have fully invested themselves in raising the new generation and helping them adjust to the reality of being a free nation on their land. The blame for horrific deeds in Gibeah lied squarely on their shoulders, and therefore the resulting civil war was their fault as well.

Should you ask: Why were those seventy thousand people in Gibeah killed?

Because the members of the High Court who had received wisdom from Moses, Joshua, and Pinchas ben Elazar as well, should have girded themselves with iron belts, raised up the hems of their clothing,

ושמא תאמר אותן שבעים אלף שנהרגו בגבעת בנימין מפני מה נהרגו?

לפי שהיה להם לסנהדרין גדולה שהניח משה ויהושע, ופנתחם בן אלעזר עמם, היה להם לילך ולקשור חבלים של ברזל במתניהם, ולהגביהם בגדיהם

and traveled from town to town—one day to Lachish, one day to Beit El, one day to Chevron, one day to Jerusalem, and to all Jewish settlements—to teach the people proper behavior for a year, two and three, until the people were fully settled on their land, so that G-d's name would be praised and sanctified throughout His world.

But they did not do so. When they entered the land, everyone retreated to their own vineyards, orchards, and fields, seeking personal tranquility and avoiding exertion.

Therefore, as the people of Gibeah were not occupied with Torah and proper behavior, the result was a war where seventy thousand were killed.

Who killed them? The blame lies squarely on the shoulders of the High Court which was established by Moses, Joshua, and Pinchas son of Elazar.

למעלה מארכובותיהו, ויחזרו בכל
עצירות ישראל, יום אחד ללכיש,
יום אחד לבית אל, יום אחד
לחברון, יום אחד לירושלים, וכן
בכל מקומות ישראל. וילמדו את
ישראל דרך ארץ בשנה ובשתיים
ובשלוש, עד שיתישבו ישראל
בארצם. כדי שיתגדל ויתקדש
שמו של הקב"ה בעולמות כולן
שברא מסוף העולם ועד סופו.

והם לא עשו כן. אלא כשנכנסו
לארצם, כל אחד ואחד מהם נכנס
לכרמו וליינו ולשדהו, ואומרים
שלום עליך נפשי, כדי שלא
להרבות עליהן את הטרח.

...לפיכך בגבעת בנימין שלא היו
עסקו בתורה ובדרך ארץ. נתקבצו
ויצאו למלחמה ונהרגו בהם
שבעים אלף.

ומי הרג את כל אלה? הוי אומר לא
הרג אותן, אלא הסנהדרין גדולה
שהניח משה ויהושע, ופנחס בן
אלעזר.

Source 8 Talmud, Tractate Makot 7a

Despite their obligation to keep law and order, the Talmud has harsh words for any High Court that comes to a situation in which it needs to use capital punishment.

A High Court that employs capital punishment once in seven years is called “destructive.” Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah says, even once in seventy years.

סנהדרין ההורגת אחד בשבוע
נקראת חובלנית. רבי אליעזר בן
עזריה אומר אחד לשבעים שנה.

>> The Rebbe

It Is Your Responsibility!

If the High Court were the greatest rabbis of the generation, why are they expected to wander throughout the country teaching children and simpletons? Why is that the role of the greatest minds of the generation?

The Midrash states in Tana D'vei Eliyahu that when the High Court fails to wander through the countryside teaching Torah, they bear responsibility for the death of all those Jews.

Meaning, their failure to wander through the settlements and teach Torah gave rise to the possibility that a Jew would come to deserve the death penalty, and then they would be defined as a “destructive” court—not for ruling according to law but for failing to prevent a situation in which a Jew deserves the death penalty in the first place, by coming to his town and giving him a proper education. Therefore, whenever a Jew transgresses a prohibition of the Torah, the High Court deserves lashes, and if a Jew transgresses a more serious offence which carries the death penalty, the High Court is called destructive; they are to blame for the death of the Jew!

ואף על פי כן אומר בתנא דבי אליהו, שכאשר סנהדרין אינם מתנהגים באופן כזה (לחגור חבלים במתניהם ולחזור בעיירות ישראל כו'), הרי הם אשמים בהריגתם של ישראל!...

והיינו, שכתוצאה מזה שאינם מחזרים בעיירות ישראל ללמדם כו', יתכן שבמשך הזמן ימצא יהודי שהם יצטרכו לשפוט אותו משפט מות, ואז נקראים הם סנהדרין “חובלנית” (קטלנית)³ - לא בגלל שלא פסקו את הדין לאשורו, אלא בגלל שהם היו יכולים למנוע שיהודי זה לא יבוא למעמד ומצב שיתחייב משפט מות, אילו היו באים לעירו ומלמדים אותו וכו', ונמצא, שכאשר יהודי עובר עבירה שיש בה איסור לאו - מגיע לסנהדרין מלקות, ואם עובר עבירה חמורה יותר שחייבים עליה מיתה - נקראת הסנהדרין “קטלנית”: הם הרגו נפש מישראל!

Part 3: Gird Yourself

>> The Rebbe

The Lesson:

This is the lesson to every single person: There are those who think that in order that their friends, *mechutanim* or wife think highly of them, they need to position themselves at the 'head of the table' and 'bloat' themselves as well... Occasionally, they will deliver some words of inspiration about Torah study and fulfilling mitzvot.

The message is that this has a precedent: The High Court had phenomenal scholars who were proficient in the Talmudic and esoteric realms of Torah. They knew medicine and law (they were doctors and lawyers) and other fields which were necessary to issue rulings. Nonetheless, what is their primary role according to Torah? To gird themselves and to leave Jerusalem, a center of Jewish learning with four-hundred-eighty study halls, and to travel to the villages to educate Jews, protecting them from transgressions which earn the death penalty and from all other transgressions as well.

The only behavior that makes one worthy of sitting in the High Court is one that brings life to the world, not the opposite.

12 Tammuz 5714-1954

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וזוהי ההוראה לכל אחד ואחת: ישנם החושבים שכדי לישא חן בעיני החברים, בעיני המחותנים, בעיני בעלת הבית - צריכים לשבת בראש, וכשיושבים שם צריכים "להתנפח"... ומזמן לזמן לומר איזה דבר התעוררות, שצריכים ללמוד תורה ולקיים מצוות.

ועל זה באה ההוראה - כפי שכבר היה לעולמים: בסנהדרין גדולה ישבו לומדים גדולים, שידעו נגלה דתורה ונסתר דתורה, וידעו גם חכמת הרפואה ותורת המשפטים (רופאים ועורכי-דין), וכל שאר החכמות שבעולם שהיו צריכים לידע כדי לפסוק דינים, ואף על פי כן, במה התבטאה עבודתם על פי דין תורה - לחגור מתניהם בחבלים, ולחזר [לא בירושלים עליה נאמר] "מלאתי משפט". "מְלִתִּי כתיב", שהיו בה ארבע מאות ושמזונים בתי מדרשות, כמנין "מלתי", אלא] בעיירות ישראל כדי לשמור ולהציל יהודי מאיסור מיתה, איסור כרת, איסור לאו, ואפילו דקדוק קל של דברי סופרים.

הנהגה כזו היא ההנהגה הראויה לישיבה בסנהדרין באופן כזה שממשיכים ומביאים חיים בעולם, ולא להיפך חס ושלום.

A Story Shared by Rabbi Yeruslavsky

Israel has a large Chabad community dating back hundreds of years. Before the establishment of the State of Israel, they were primarily based in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, but since then, the community has ballooned in size and spread throughout the country. At some point, the need arose for a centralized Rabbinic body to tend to the needs of the community.

An organization – Beis Din Rabbanei Chabad – was established and Rabbi Yitzchak Yehudah Yeruslavsky, the Rabbi of the Chabad community in Kiryat Malachi, was appointed its secretary. He serves in that position until this very day.

In the 1980s, he had a private audience with the Rebbe, where the Rebbe spoke about the role of the rabbis in his organization.

The Rebbe was very animated, he said. The Rebbe turned around to the bookshelf, pointed at a certain book, and said:

“A Jewish court is like the Sanhedrin, the High Court in Jerusalem. In this book on the shelf—Tana D’vei Eliyahu—it says that the members of the High Court needed to wear iron belts. Why? I explained at the farbrengen that long travels could wear out leather belts, so iron belts were necessary, so that they could travel from place to place to tend to the needs of the nation.

“Until now, rabbis waited for the congregants to approach them, but you need to travel from city to city, rectifying matters among Chabad Chassidim and among the general public as well.”

A Video <https://tinyurl.com/fbk487hh>

In the following video, where the Rebbe expounds on the passage from Tana D’vei Eliyahu and shares stories and lessons from it.



מיזם של "משרד השלוחים"

נסד בימי השבעה לזכרון ולע"נ הרב גבריאל נח זוגתו רבקה הי"ד
שלוחי הרבי במומבאי, הודו

