

SHOFTEEM 1981
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Many times people tell me, "Why should I attend a simcha? I am not the one getting married. I am not the one directly involved. Why should I come for a Bar Mitzvah? As long as they have a minyon it is enough." This is not true, though, because you really cannot feel joy if you have nobody to share it with. Life becomes almost unbearable. We become alienated and lonely if we have nobody to share moments with. In America today we have become the "me" generation. Whatever I want to do I do. Whatever I do not want to do I do not do. It's like the story they tell about the man who was talking to his friend and saying, "I just went bankrupt and I owe everyone, almost all my friends" and the friend says, "It could be worse". He said, "How?" and the friend said, "You could owe me". So many people are caught up in me, me, me that they cannot realize themselves. The paradox is the more you are concerned with yourself, the more you become alienated and the more you are concerned with others, the more you find yourself. A study was once headed by Margaret Mead which investigated Jewish culture and they found that one phrase could describe it better than any other. What was this phrase? Life is with people. In order to really enjoy life you must be with people. In this Torah portion we learn Tameem, you should be with the L-rd your G-d. Tameem means perfect or wholehearted, wholesome. You should be with the L-rd your G-d. None of us will ever be perfect but we are supposed to have a wholesomeness of character and an integrated personality. When you ask somebody how they are in Hebrew you say, Ma Shlomcha, which means literally how is your wholeness, how is your harmony? We are all composed of conflicting desires and it is our job to integrate them into a wholesome whole. We are all to achieve Shleimus, or wholeness, wholeheartedness. In the Torah we learn about Moshe and Aaron. The Rabbis teach that Moshe and Aaron were equal because sometimes G-d speaks to Moshe first and sometimes to Aaron first. One was equal to the other. However, if we look at the text we will see that this is not so. Moshe went and received the Ten Commandments. Moshe was

the leader of the Jewish people. True, Aaron was the High Priest but he even made the Golden Calf. How could you say that Moshe and Aaron were equal? The Rabbis explain that it is true that they were not equal in achievements but they were equal because they achieved each one his own Shleimus , his own wholeness. They were not born with equal abilities but they were each one able to integrate within their personalities almost all of their potentiality. This is what we mean when we say that a person should be wholehearted with G-d. How do you achieve this wholeness? In the very next Torah portion it tells us how. It says, "because these nations which you are inheriting them to soothsayers and diviners they would listen but you not so did G-d permit you". In Hebrew the words Lo Kain also mean yes and no so this sentence tells us how we achieve an integrated personality, not through tricks or fads or magic but by realizing that there is a yes and a no in the world, that there are certain things we can do and we cannot do. It is our job to become a mentsch and we cannot do it unless we realize that there are limits to what we can and cannot do, moral lines. Morality is not just subjective. Morality transcends time. It is always wrong to murder. It is wrong to murder. It is very difficult many times to tell what is right and wrong therefore we must study. How do we achieve wholeness? How do we integrate our personality, to be Tameem with Hashem? We do this by knowing what we can and cannot do.

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In Judaism family is the basis of everything. Today we frown on family. Family is thought to be a hindrance, something to get in the way. So many children now hate their parents. They do it because children are conceived of as only takers and not givers. Children stop a person from having a career, from taking vacations. Many people send their children to camps and fancy schools just to be rid of them. In Judaism the family is conceived of as the greatest source of fulfillment. A family is not meant to squelch individuals. In the Jewish concept of family everyone contributes. The child contributes. His achievements give parents prestige. A child is meant to go out and bring achievements back to the family. The family which does not allow the child to achieve is not a good family. In Judaism we believe in reciprocity. The child contributes to a family. They are not just takers. They are givers. The greatest opportunity that G-d has given us is to have the opportunity to shape and mold children. The family is the basis of everything in Judaism. A father who prevents children from going out and developing their talents is a bad father. Judaism believes in Tzedek which is a combination of law and mercy. Family is meant to be a paradigm of Tzedek. A family should never disown any of its members, and it should be there for everyone in the family. It should also set standards for people to meet. The Jewish family has always been a family where everyone participated. We do not believe in submissive wives or submissive children. We believe everyone has to have a say. In Judaism everyone has a part a role to play that is important. The woman makes sure the house is kosher. She makes sure that religious celebrations are kept.

SHOFTIM 1986
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In the Torah portion Shoftim we learn about the Jewish conception of justice. We learn "V'Shoftos Omneeshpatzedek - And they shall judge the people a judgement of righteousness." It doesn't just say Mishpat, it also says Tzedek. Justice is a very complicated subject. It does not just mean righting a wrong but how you right the wrong. It means to right the wrong in a correct way. It also means there should be Sholem, peace, after you have righted the wrong, and there should also be Emes, there should also be truth. We have just heard about the terrible tragedy in Turkey where several P.L.O. terrorists entered a synagogue and killed 24 people, 7 of them rabbis, as they were davening on Shabbos morning. There is no excuse for this kind of action. They may have a cause. They may feel they are being persecuted and that their cause is so great they must have a hearing on the world scene, but they cannot do these kind of acts. These acts are completely outside the purview of civilized behavior. The Torah would condemn these acts. We are looking now only at Din, at Mishpat, at trying to right a wrong, but using terrible means to right a wrong. This act that took place in Turkey tells the world that the problem is not Israel or Zionism. The problem is Jews. The world hates the Jews. The rabbis say that since the time of Mount Sinai we Jews have been the object of the hatred of the world. They learn that from the word "Sinai", itself. The word "Sinai" not only means the mountain upon which we received the Torah, but it also means hatred. Ever since we gave the world the ideals of morality, the ideals of living in this world according to the principles of compassion and justice, we have been subject to the hatred of the world. The world does not want to live according to these rules and regulations. The world wants to do its own thing.

It is very clear what the Jewish mission in the world is. We learn it in the Haphtorah where we are told, "Leento Shemayim V'Leeso Oretz", where we learn that the job of the Jewish is to plant heaven and lay the foundations of the earth. What we are to do is to make this world a heaven. Not everyone believes this. Not everyone wants to accept this type of view. In Judaism we are called upon to be G-d's partner in

creation. We are called upon to perfect the world, and we are supposed to start with ourselves. That is, of course, what the symbolism of circumcision is, and, of course, when a woman gets married that is what we have when we talk about the hymen. We are called upon to perfect this world, to make it a better place. This is not true of all religions. They do not make these demands of their followers. In fact, many religions try to create a special place of worship in which people who go to that place of worship almost literally go to heaven. They are supposed to get a glimpse of heaven when they go to their places of worship. They are supposed to feel that from then on they have hope because they have seen the beauty of a future world, not this world, because this world cannot be perfected, but they have hope and solace because they know that such a place does exist. They can then face the terrors of the world in which we live. Their religious experience is basically an esthetic response to the world. They look at the world and they say, "This world cannot be fixed, but I have a vision of a better world." The esthetic response is actually, when you get right down to it, a response of helplessness. When we see a Rembrandt painting or a great sculpture or an athlete perform we marvel at the feat. We admire it, but we know we cannot do it. We know we cannot produce such beauty, and, therefore, all we are capable of doing is to look at it and stand on the sidelines helpless. This is the attitude that many religions of the world inculcate in their followers.

This is not Judaism's idea. Therefore, it really is not important whether synagogues are esthetically pleasing. It is nice to have to have a beautiful synagogue, but that is not the essence of the Jewish religion. When a Jew goes to the synagogue he goes in order to feel that G-d is with him, that G-d will give him the courage and the strength to perfect this world. We are called upon to fix this world, to make it a better place. We are not called upon to glimpse heaven and, therefore, get solace and hope, and then return to the world the way it is and just learn to put up with its miseries. What we are to do is change its miseries and make it a better place.

In the Pir Kiovos we learn that Shimon Hatzadek, who was one of the survivors of the Keneset Hagadol, used to say that on three things does the world stand: on Torah, on worship, and on the doing of deeds of kindness. At the end of this same chapter we learn that Rabbi Shimon Ben Genail says that on three things does the world exist: on truth, on judgement, and on peace. As it says, "Truth and the judgement of peace, you shall judge in your gates." There seems to be a contradiction here. In the beginning of the chapter we learn the world stands on three things (on Torah, on worship, and on doing deeds of kindness), and at the end we learn that the world exists on truth, on justice, and on peace. How is this possible? The rabbis answer that if you look at the word "Omaid - stand" you see that it refers to potentiality. In Hebrew when you say, "I am about to go on a trip", you say, "Omaid Linsoa". Omaid does not just mean stand, it means potentiality. You are about to do it.

In this first chapter of the Pir Kiovos we are learning about how we can have culture, we can have Torah, how we can have proper worship, how we can have deeds of loving kindness. How are these things possible? How can we bring them about? The answer is found in the last sentence of that chapter: by having truth, justice, and peace. Unless you stand for truth, justice, and peace you will never be able to come to a situation where you have true worship, true culture, and the doing of deeds of kindness. Without a combination of peace and righting of grievances and truth we will not be able to ever arrive at a situation in which humanity will want to live together harmoniously studying Torah, expanding their mind, worshipping G-d, and helping one another. It is imperative that truth, that righting of grievances, and peace must all exist, and they all must exist simultaneously. Those people who have grievances and have been subjected to great injustices, have to realize that they must also serve truth and serve peace. We know that any conflict, when resolved, must be resolved in peace. If it is not, you have continual warfare. What do you do when you defeat a foe? are you going to kill every man, woman, and child? If you are not ready to do that, then you have to learn how to make peace with them. The trouble with many people

when they get into an argument is that they fail that when the argument is solved, they have to live with these people. They have to live with these people after the war is over, after the argument is over, after the battle is over. In order to do this you have to remember that they have something to say on their side as well, and they probably have some grievances as well. You cannot just do anything you want to further your own cause. There are limits to what you can do, and unless you are willing to limit yourself you will never have peace. A person must realize, as well as nations and groups, that truth must be served. So many people are willing to pervert truth to get what they want. I would dare say today in the Middle East that the P.L.O. is not a great threat to Israel. It is a nuisance. It harms Jews throughout the world now. It is villainous and murderous, but it is not going to destroy Israel. The P.L.O. is probably a greater threat to Arab regimes than it is to Israel, mainly because it perverts truth so much. It undermines the foundations of all society. It postulates the violence is the way to achieve everything. It creates situations such as Lebanon where peace is impossible. No one can win in that given situation, and without peace you cannot have Torah, culture, learning, worship, or one human being helping another because you are divided in so many lines: religiously, classes, nationalities, races, etc. We must always have not just Mishpat but, as we say in our Torah portion, Mishpat Tzedek, the law of righteousness. We Jews have become the symbol of this in the world, and the world holds it against us. They do not want to change. They do not want to perfect the world. They want to stay the way they are. They do not want to according to morality. They do not want to make the effort to live according to truth, to righting grievances, and truth. They want to continue their games. Therefore, we are their natural enemy. Hitler knew what he was doing when he singled us out. He said the Jews are sentimental people. The Jews have given the world a conscience. Why shouldn't the strong take what they want? This is echoed here in the economic sphere where people say, "Let the poor suffer. They don't deserve to get anything. They are not talented or ambitious. They are lazy. Let them suffer

in their poverty." This is a position which we Jews abhor. We cannot accept this position. We Jews have always been attacked and probably always will be attacked, because we are symbol of a message the world does not want to hear. Not all Jews are worthy. There are some bad Jews, but Jews, per se, no matter whether they speak Hebrew, whether they are pro-Israel, are a symbol to the people's of the world of G-d's message in Sinai to perfect the world. Many people do not want to change or do what is necessary in order to make sure that peace, justice, and truth prevail in the world. We should never lose hope, though, because eventually the world will accept this message.

I am reminded of the story they tell in the time of Hitler. I just saw a television show about Henry Kaufman, the great American economist, who when he says something, Wall Street goes up and down. He was born in Germany and went to school in Hitler's time. This story did not happen to him but it could have. They tell the story that it was Hitler's birthday and the teacher asked the class what they would like to do if they were Hitler's son. One boy said, "I would like to be a stormtrooper and attack the enemies of the State for Hitler." Another said, "I would like to be an aviator and fly in the Luftwaffe and punish the enemies of the state." The third boy, Abie Cohen, said, "I would like to be an orphan." Let us hope and pray that soon there will be no more Hitlers, no more people who want to destroy us because they will have accepted the basis message of Sinai, which is that we must perfect this world, make a world in which peace, justice, and truth prevail. Amen.

SHOFTEEN 1987
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In the Torah portion Shoteem we learn about justice. Justice is very important in Judaism, not just because of economic loss, but it is very important that it is only in this way that a person can preserve his own self-respect and dignity. It is only in this way that he cannot have that little piece of G-d within him diminished. When a person is taken advantage of, then the person feels he is no longer equal to everyone else about him. We destroy that feeling of self-respect and dignity which is important for every individual. We Jews believe that everyone is equal in the sight of G-d, that each of us has a little piece of G-d within us. That is, of course, is what our Neshoma, our soul, is. We cannot trample on this. When we trample on a person's Neshoma and make him out to be a nothing, we, in effect, diminish him. We make him lose his self-respect and dignity.

This concept has been taken over by America. That is the very basis, of course, of one man one vote. If we look at the whole system of one man one vote we will be impressed with this illogicalness. It is impossible to say that one man's opinion is as good as another. You mean to tell me that a university professor who is an expert in political science and studies all the issues and knows all the candidates inside and out is not more qualified than a fellow who gets drunk three times a week? Yet, that is the way the American system works. The man who gets three times a week

and can hardly hold down a job and never reads a book has as much voting power as the professor who understands all the issues involved. This, of course, is based on faith, the faith that each of us in our society has a right to have equal importance, to have an equal voice, that everyone's opinions must be taken into account. That is why everyone must be treated with dignity and respect.

That is basically what this Torah portion is all about, maintaining justice in society, making sure everyone has an equal say, that people are not taken advantage of, even people whose talents and even people who even have moral qualities are not so great. We cannot say, "Oh, we don't care about him. Let them suffer. Let's take away their property. Let's take away their assets and use them for more deserving people." We cannot do that. That is, of course, what the upper class used to do in Europe. They used to say, "Oh, our type of people are better, and if our people get into a dispute with those type of people it really doesn't make any difference for these lower type of people that they have one or two less things. Our people need them. We are the fine people. We are the people upon whom civilization depends." This, of course, is false. Many times people are put into a predicament where they have to choose between their own dignity and their economic livelihood. That is a terrible situation to put people in. That is why employers and people in power have to be very careful that they preserve the dignity of the people beneath them, that they

give them the right to have an opinion, that they give them the right to disagree, although, ultimately, they have to follow the authority of the boss. The boss has the authority but he can make out of his employee a toady. We have seen how this happens where people sacrifice their own self-respect and dignity for economic security, and they hate themselves for it. Sometimes they take out their anger on other people. We have to make sure people are not called upon to sacrifice their dignity in order to maintain economic security. Of course, many people do it because they are afraid. They are afraid to go out into the world. They are afraid they cannot make a living, afraid they cannot assert themselves in the world and support their family if they do not give in on their principles and become yes men to whoever is around them.

That is why it is very important that justice be maintained because without justice in a society you will have a lot of hidden anger and violence which will eventually surface and explode. That is why we learn in this Torah portion about "Tzedek Tzedek Turdofos - Justice justice you should pursue." The rabbis say the reason this is stated twice is that you should pursue justice with righteous means. You cannot pursue justice with unrighteous means. Every issue has two sides. That's why Tzedek is repeated twice. We have to look at both sides. Not both sides are equally valid, but there is another side, an opposite side. We have to give a person

the opportunity to express the opposite side.

Unfortunately, there are many people who only see their own self-interest and do not see another side at all. On the other hand, there are other people, especially older people, who see the other side and think they do not have a side at all. They completely deprecate their own interest and think their interest does not count, that you only have to take into account the other side and not your side, too. This is wrong. You should pursue justice.

That is why here, too, we learn about a king, that when a king is placed upon the Jewish people it says, "V'Chosavlo Es Mishnah HaTorah HaZos - And you should right for him a copy of this Torah." The rabbis explain that the word Mishnah means that there were two copies of the Torah. One copy of the Torah he was to keep with him in his home and the other copy he was to take with him. The rabbis explain that the second copy of the Torah he actually bound around his hand. They say it would be impossible for him to carry a whole Torah on his hand so, therefore, they say what he took with him instead was the Ten Commandments. There are 613 words in that portion of the Torah which deals with the Ten Commandments which is reminiscent of the 613 commandments, that the king in his home would have the complete Torah. When he went out among the people he would have the 613 commandments. What was the reason for this? That the king should always remember he is subservient to the law, not like the Queen of England and when the British flag passes the

Queen in review it is dipped to symbolize that the queen, in certain instances, is above the law. In Jewish law the kings of the House of David were never above the law. They were always subject to the law, as is the President of the United States. Otherwise we would have had a dictatorship here a long time ago. The king, when he deals with everyone, must deal with the people with respect and dignity and allow them their say. He is also not to force upon them certain religious views, even if he knows they are right. You have to meet the people where they are. Their laws never change. The Torah never changes, the rabbis tell us, but circumstances do, and you have to meet the people and understand their circumstances.

What do I mean by this? For example, the Torah says we must preserve our health. That means that in the summer we do the exact opposite of what we do in the winter. We take off our coat instead of putting on our coat. I remember once a man came to me and said, "Rabbi, can I stick a baby with pins?" I almost threw him out of the office. I said, "What's the matter with you? What kind of a sadist are you? Do you know the trauma you will do to the baby? Do you know what you will do to your own soul. Get out of here. I do not want to talk to you." The man said, "But, Rabbi, I am a doctor. I want to know if I can give a baby a shot?" I said, "Oh, give a baby a shot? Of course, that is okay." The king, too, has to understand the circumstances of the people. The law does

not change, the law at home remains the same, but when he goes out among the people he must make sure that they observe the basic moral laws but has to understand their circumstances, too. He has to give them dignity and self-respect and let them talk and give their reasons and not force them to lose their feeling that they, too, are children of G-d. He cannot diminish the soul, the Neshoma, which is in each one of us.

Of course, we all know how to rationalize. We all know that leaders who have power many times rationalize and they, therefore, think that whatever they do is right so it doesn't matter if they take advantage of this or that one because they are right anyway and it is to the benefit of everyone anyway. I remember the story the Dunmanagenah tells about the rationalizing capacity of the human being. He tells how a person went up to his friend and borrowed a cup from him. A week later he returned the cup with a saucer. The friend asked, "Why are you returning the cup with a saucer?" The man replied, "Well, the cup had babies." A week later he borrowed a bowl from him. A few days later he returned the bowl and there is a smaller bowl in the larger bowl. The friend asked, "Why are you returning another bowl?" The man said, "Well, they got married and I did not want to separate the bowls." A week later he borrowed a silver tray. Several weeks pass and the tray was not returned. Finally the friend asked, "Why didn't you return my silver tray?" The man said, "Well, he died." The friend said, "How could the silver tray

die?" The man said, "Well, if a cup could have babies and bowls can get married, then a silver tray can die." Of course, that is the way people rationalize. The man was willing to accept the extra saucer and bowl because it was to his benefit. When it came to the silver tray, of course, then he realized how foolish it was.

That is the way justice must be done. It must not be taken in by false rationalizations. If we are, then we are in for a lot of trouble. Today we are honoring a person who understand these things. We are honoring a man who understands that you have to treat everyone with justice and integrity. You cannot kowtow to this one or that one. It is the same rules for everyone. It is a person who is willing to go out and meet everyone.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a son of a Chusid who was drafted into the army and sent to a small southern town. There he met a Jewish girl and decided he would get married before being shipped overseas. He asked his father, the Chassidic rebbe, to come down to perform the marriage. The father was very happy to do so. After all, it was a Jewish girl. The son told his father he could not meet his father at the train station because he would not be off until the evening but told him to wait in the hotel three blocks away and he would get him in the evening. The father took the train wearing his kapputa and his shtreimel. When he got

off the train he noticed several young boys around. The boys noticed him and started to follow him. As he walked another half block 10 more boys began to follow as well. As he walked a full block there were 10 adults also. At two blocks there were 20 more adults. By the time he got to the hotel it looked like there were 150 people behind him. He turned around with his kapput and his shtreimel and said, "What's the matter, boys? Ain't you ever seen a Yankee?" That is, of course, the situation in many of the small towns of the south regarding any aspect of Judaism. People look at you and do not even know what you are talking about. Yet, you have to meet them and try to convince them to upgrade their standards to make things better. Of course, the gentlemen we are honoring today always tried to do this. He always tried to upgrade them but always meeting them on their own level, never trying to destroy their dignity, never trying to put them down, always giving them their say and treating with respect. Yes, of course, people make mistakes, and sometimes he made mistakes, too. If he would ever speak harshly of anybody he would always say he was sorry, not just in private but in public as well. Therefore, we all must honor him because of the way he has handled himself and conducted himself all these years. Pay Gimel in Hebrew stands for 83 and also stands for P'nai Godol, the face of a great man. Even though he is short he is a very great man because he has always treated people with dignity and respect. Sometimes he has made mistakes and said things he should not say, as we all do, but he has always apologized, realizing the mistake,

never trying to cover up or hide them. He is a person who has always respected the dignity of others. Many he be granted many, many more years.

SHOFTEEM 1988
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

The underlying theme of the Torah portion Shofteem is the importance of substance. It is not the way that things appear that counts, but what counts is the way things are and the way things can be. Unfortunately, in America today all we care about is appearance. The way things look is more important than the way things are and the way things can be. This Torah portion has the famous line, "Justice, justice you should pursue." Not only should your goals be just, but you should also pursue them in a just manner. There are too many people who feel that since their goals are just or they feel their goals are just, therefore, they are justified in using whatever means at hand in order to further their goals. This is wrong. Not only must there be justice, the appearance of justice, but there must actually be justice. You cannot pretend that you are someone's friend and then turn against him and use information that you gained in confidence to harm him. You cannot, in pursuing a cause, use anonymous letters and innuendo and rumors. You must be what you seem to be. You cannot, if you want society to run on an even keel and institutions to endure, pursue just goals with unjust means. This merely infuriates people and makes them angry and destroys institutions.

In this Torah portion we learn, too, that we are not supposed to put a tree beside the altar for the same reason. The important thing is not the appearance but it is the contrite heart which makes worship acceptable. Even in this shul many times people stress appearance rather than substance. I know how just a few weeks ago a rabbi came to visit us. He had to walk more than a mile, and he came without a jacket. Walking in Houston's 100° weather and 80% humidity in the summertime requires that you walk without a jacket. It is impossible to walk with a jacket unless you walk only a few blocks. When he came to shul he sat down and davened with reverence and sincerity and feeling, but several people looked at him and said, "Look

at that bum. He came to shul without a jacket." This comment is made even to other people who walk to shul, outstanding scientists and philosophers, etc. There is also someone in the shul who has a world-famous reputation, but he has what they consider a scraggly beard, so many people have turned and said, "Look at that bum." That is not the way people should judge people. We do not judge people by their outward appearance. We judge people by what they can do and who they are and who they can become, not by their outward appearance.

Unfortunately, in America today we have empty shuls, but you know we have the most beautiful shuls that have ever been in the whole course of Jewish history. Many times people will go to slum neighborhoods or working class neighborhoods in the east and they will find shuls that are not as pretty as shuls in the suburbs. They are worn, but they are used. You will find five minyoneem a day in these shuls. You will find huge crowds that come to study groups and come to pray mincha and maariv. Most shuls in the United States do not have a daily minyan. We are fortunate to have a daily minyan, but how long will it last when the average age of our daily minyan is 72 or 75? It is difficult to maintain religion when all you have is outward appearance. Religion comes from the heart, from the inside out not from the outside in. You have to have inner spirituality. It is not the outward appearances that are important; it is the inner spirit. I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who came to a shtetel in Europe, and he found a person at the outskirts and he said, "I am looking for Moshe. Do you know Moshe the Hunchback? You know, he has a ginky eye and who limps. You know, the great scholar who is known for his good deeds?" The man said, "Oh, you mean the Scheina Yid, Moshe the Scheina Yid." Beauty is more than outward appearance.

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It seems shocking, too, that in our convention, which was just over, one of the commentators said that one of the contestants for the vice president of the United States was chosen because he looked good, because of his appearance, because this would end the gender gap. Perhaps if this commentator were to say that about men, then perhaps it would have been more appropriate to say it about women. Men, of course, are probably much more impressed by looks than are women. It was, of course, a demeaning comment to make to women, but it is indicative of the American attitude, that the way things look is more important than the way things are.

Throughout this whole Torah portion we are taught not to judge by the way things look but by the way things are or can be. When they speak here about a prophet, it teaches us that we are not to follow the prophet even if he will do miracles. "I will raise him up a prophet from among their brethren like unto thee," but you judge a prophet by what he does, not by what he says. If he tells the people to violate the laws of the Torah, he is not a true prophet no matter what he says. This whole theme is repeated throughout the Torah portion, that it is not the way a person looks, and many times people can look distinguished and make a good impression and even be a little pompous, but this does not make them into an important or a good human being. People who judge by appearances are over and over again.

The same thing was true for a king. A king was not to have too many horses. He was not to stress the material things. His heart should not be turned by gold and silver. It is not the appearances that count. The Shah could probably be ruling in Iran if he had not spent so much money on ostentatious projects. This is the story, unfortunately, of many people. They stress

appearance over substance. Even the same vice presidential candidate who makes such a strong statement about Viet Nam and the importance of serving our country is found that he probably evaded service in Viet Nam by joining the National Guard. There is nothing wrong with that. Many of my friend's children did that. I know many people who have done that, but the question is then that you do not take a strong stand condemning people who have done the same thing. Appearance must match substance. It is more important who you are and what you can become than the outward appearance.

Unfortunately, today many people feel if they say the right things even if they do not do the right things, that that is sufficient. But that is not sufficient in Jewish life. In Jewish life you must be judged by what you do, not by what you say or what you look like. You have to be a person of inner substance, a person who wants the best kind of person he can be. The word for "world" in Hebrew is the same word as "hidden". The important things in life are the hidden things, not the surface manifestations. What we are to do is make manifest things which are hidden. The love a mother has for her children, the love spouses have, the feeling of unity with a family and with a community, these are things which cannot be seen. The courage, the integrity, the character of a person cannot be seen. They can be demonstrated in deeds, but they cannot be seen, and sometimes words camouflage them. The important thing is not necessarily to say the right thing but to do the right thing.

I am reminded of the story they tell about an Aggie. I do not know why they always pick on Aggies, but Aggies seem to have the characteristic of trying to be someone they are not. This particular Aggie decided he had to get the social graces so he went to a charm school. After six years at the charm school, he decided to go and try his skills so he sought out

a speciality store and went to the store and said, "I would like to order a special kind of prime rib." He also would like to order Rothschild wine, and bleu cheese from Switzerland. The owner of the store looked at him and said, "You're an Aggie, aren't you?" The Aggie said, "How did you know?" The man answered, "Because this is a hardware store." In life it is not surface impressions that count; it is what you are and what you can become. We should all try to become the best we can become. We should forget about trying to impress people with surface impressions. We should do that which is right. We should have integrity and honesty. We should always remember that what we are and what we are striving to become is infinitely more important than surface impressions.

This is, too, why the pig is considered the most treif, the most non-kosher, of all the animals. After all, why should the pig be considered more non-kosher than the cat or dog or horse? We all know, though, that when someone gets mad at the police or other people, he does not shout, "You cat." He shouts, "You pig!" The reason, of course, for this, the rabbis teach us, is that there are two different signs for kosher. There is an inner sign, which is chewing the cud, and the outer sign, which is the split hooves. A pig is different than other non-kosher animals because the pig sticks out his feet all the time saying, "See, I am kosher. I am kosher." In reality, he lacks the inner sign. There are too many people who try to stress the outer impression, who try to make you feel that they are important and right and worthy of dignity and respect because they put on this fake impression, while really inside they are not kosher. They connive. They steal. They mislead. They manipulate. The important thing is not surface impressions. The important thing is that we all act with integrity and honesty and decency. Let us all hope and pray that all of us will do so.

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One of the underlying themes of the Torah portion Shofteem is change, how to confront change. We learn how the Jewish people, if they wanted, could appoint a king, although all the rabbis, with the exception of Rabbi Yehuda and later Maimonides, say that appointing a king is not only not a necessity, only an option, but that it is actually something that should not be done. We all know how Samuel berated the people because they wanted a king, but in certain circumstances when the Philistines are attacking, when the Jewish people have threats internally and externally, sometimes the people will want a king, and, therefore, since they want a king there are certain procedures which have to be followed in order for them to get the king and the king had to be limited. He had to be a constitutional monarch.

However, the Torah is always afraid that a king would turn out to be a tyrant and despot so, therefore, according to the Gemora and Rabbi Nehorai it is better that we do not have a king. A king can only lead to a lot of trouble, but some changes in society, as I mentioned before, would cause the people to clamor for a king.

We also learn about the impending battle to enter the land of Israel and the conquer the land from the Canaanites. This whole Torah portion really concerns itself with change. We all know that when the Jewish people were about to go into battle the chief Kohen, the priest who was assigned to be with the army, had to give a speech in which he told certain people to go home, that they should not serve in the army. He said, "One, a person who has married a woman or has become engaged and has not actually married her yet, he should go home and return to his house." In other words, a person who was newly married also is not allowed to be in the army. The rabbis say he should stay home one year with his wife at

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least. Of course, the reason for that was that marriage, itself, is a situation of change. A person has to get used to marriage because when you enter into marriage all your relationships change. It is not just that you are adding another relationship but from now on all your relationships change. From now on the number one person in the husband's life should be his wife and the number one person in the wife's life should be her husband. It is no more parents or siblings or friends. They are much further down in the scale of priorities. From now on it should be a person's wife and then their children and then their parents and siblings and friends, etc. So, therefore, all their relationships have to change and it is a difficult process to confront change. We all know that it is very important and that you have to work on it. It is not easy and, therefore, a person should not go away into the army and leave his wife alone. We all know what happens when this occurs. We know so many soldiers who get married right before they go into the army and, of course, quickly they receive "Dear John" letters. The wife is lonely and, of course, he becomes lonely, too, and the wife does not want to stay by herself and, therefore, she gives him up for another man. We know that we have to cement relationships and work at it. Marriage is a holy institution. It is considered the most important institution in Judaism, and you have to really believe in the institution of marriage in order for a marriage to succeed. We all know that there are many ups and downs in a marriage, and that is why there are so many divorces today. People do not believe in the institution of marriage. After all, you are going to have many aggravations, many disputes, many arguments. You are going to look at things from different points of view, but so what? If you believe in marriage you believe that marriage

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actually enhances you and, in spite of all the aggravations, is going to make you into a better person, a more complete person. It is going to add meaning to your life so you put up with these momentary setbacks because they are inevitable in the whole process. It is like when you go to school and you want to get a degree. You know that it is very difficult sometimes. You have to give up certain things in order to study. Sometimes it is almost impossible to understand certain concepts, and you have to go over and over them again. Sometimes you have disputes with your teachers and classmates, but you know that it is all worth it because this is going to make you a better person and enhance your life and give you greater understanding. The same thing is true with marriage. Marriage enhances your life and gives you greater understanding and allows you to raise a family and have the great opportunity of shaping and molding the future in the shape of your children. Marriage is a wonderful thing, but marriage, itself, has its ups and downs and it is inevitable that it will have ups and downs. In fact, the rabbis compare the bride and groom to a king and queen. We know that the rabbis say there is a restriction on a king, that when a king becomes king not only are there certain material restrictions but he also has to always carry around a Mishnah Torah, a sefer Torah with him at all times. The rabbis comment on the word "Mishnah Torah", that it means that he has to have two Torahs. He has to have one Torah with him all the time and another Torah that is safe at home in his treasury, in his storehouse, and that he is supposed to take this Torah that he has with him every place he goes but that he must always maintain a Torah in his treasury, in his storehouse. The rabbis ask, why should that be so? They give an answer which, at first glance, does not seem to make sense. They say because the Torah

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that he takes with him into the field will become tattered. The letters will fade and flake off and, therefore, he has to periodically check this Torah with the Torah in the storehouse to make sure he has an accurate Torah. Of course, we can always ask, why can't he take his scribe with him and his scribe can check his Torah every day in the field and make sure it is completely kosher and holy and correct, but the rabbis say, no, there is a deeper meaning to this. What this means is that when the king goes to fulfill his duties he has to make certain decisions. One of the major jobs of any king is to make decisions, and he should make decisions according to the laws of the Torah, but many times the laws of the Torah conflict. We are under great pressures.

For example, we know that today where according to the Constitution of the United States we have free speech. On the other hand, we have to be concerned about security so, therefore, now at the Republican convention and Democratic convention a very small area very far away from the main arena is going to be reserved for free speech, for protest. Now whether this is right or wrong we know that this is a curtailment of free speech, but, on the other hand, we have to make sure no bombs explode. Therefore, we have to balance things. The same thing is true of the king. When he goes out he has to make certain decisions and these decisions should be in accordance with the Torah, but many times the Torah can conflict. It says the king has to protect his country but each individual has rights, too. A Jewish king is a constitutional monarch. He is not a despot and should not be a tyrant. Therefore, after he makes these decisions, and he has to make decisions right now, he has to

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go back to the storehouse periodically and look at the Torah there in the calm of the moment while all these decisions being forced upon him which requires his immediate attention and see whether he is really, after reflection, has followed the rules of the Torah. The rabbis say the same thing is true in a marriage. In a marriage there are situations where emotions may flare, where partial knowledge is all we have and we may make decisions and say certain things that we should not have done. Later, after reflection, we should think about it and when we come to the correct conclusion we should say we are sorry. Eric Segal wrote a book a while back in which he said that if you love someone then you should not have to say you are sorry. This is foolishness and a complete lie. If you really love someone you will say that you are sorry. Sometimes we make mistakes, sometimes we felt we did the right thing when we did the wrong thing. We should always be prepared to say that we are sorry. It is true that in a marriage we make many promises and sometimes we cannot keep the promises because we have promised too much. Then, of course, we have to get out of the promises but we should do it in a correct and proper way with the consent of the person to whom we made this promise, to our spouse. We have to say we are sorry. Many times we make snap judgments and say things that are wrong, and we have to learn how to say we are sorry. If we do not know how to say we are sorry, then we have done a bad thing and ruined our relationship.

This, of course, is what the king must be willing to do, too. He has to be willing to admit that he made an error. Also, a king has to be concerned for his people. He has to look out

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for the best interests of his people. The same thing is true in a marriage. You are married to a particular individual and you have to think about their well being as well as your own well being. It is very important that we believe in the institution of marriage, but we also have to look at the individual in that marriage, too, and do what is best for that individual.

I am reminded of the story that they tell about a man who called up a young lady and he had a very repentant tone in his voice and as soon as she picked up the phone he said, "I am sorry, honey. I will buy you a Rolls Royce for a wedding present. I will buy an apartment on the gold coast in Chicago. I will allow your mother do live with us. Will you now marry me?" The woman answered, "Of course, but, please, tell me, who am I talking to?" When we get married we have to realize we are dealing with an individual and we have to look at their individual needs and it has to be mutual. One spouse just cannot look at the needs of the other. The other spouse has to look at the needs of the other one, too. There are compromises that are required, but the most important thing of all is we have to remember to have that sefer Torah in the quiet of our home. We have to remember that we have to say we are sorry when we are sorry.

This Torah portion opens with a strange statement. It says that judges and policemen you should give for yourself, and it uses the singular. We can understand that judges and policemen you should give for the community. The community needs them. It should be in the plural, but the rabbis explain this sentence means you should be your own policeman, that

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the person who should criticize you the most is yourself. We should be our own harshest critics. We should look at our own actions and see whether or not we have done the right thing, and we should be willing to say we are sorry when we have done the wrong thing. We have to be willing to admit that we have made mistakes. If we are willing to do this, then our relationships will flourish. Let's all hope and pray that all our relationships will flourish and always be strong so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

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In the Torah portion Shofteem we open with the lines, "The judges and officials or bailiffs, you shall appoint for yourself in all your gates." This sentence seems to be strange because it is in the singular. You would think that this is a commandment that is directed toward the community, so why should it say judges and bailiffs you should give for yourself in all your gates, and your gates is plural? The rabbis explain this in many ways.

The first explanation is that you must have judges whose orders are fulfilled. You can have the best constitution in the world, but if it is not implemented, what good is it? That is like the Soviet constitution. You could not find a better constitution than the one the Soviet Union drew up. The only problem was that it was not put into effect. The judges did exactly what the Communist Party told them what to do and did not follow the constitution. We also know that in interpersonal relationships, if you say certain things and do not follow through, it is going to destroy the relationship. Therefore, you have to be careful that when you lay down rules, that you observe them yourself. In fact, we all know that one of the best ways to assure that your children rebel against you is to lay down rules which you do not observe. They will most certainly rebel against you and in a most devastating way. You cannot demand of your children things that you are willing to do yourself. We see in the Middle East, too, where all these elaborate treaties have been arrived at after hard negotiation between Israel and the PLO. The PLO has no intention of keeping these treaties and consider them only a fig leaf for Israel's withdrawal. It is just like everybody knew that the agreement that the United States signed with North Vietnam was only a fig leaf. The United States was not going to keep the agreement, and if North Vietnam violated it, they would not

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retaliate with any punitive measures, although it said in the agreement that the United States would, and, therefore, everybody knew it was a fig leaf. The same is true of this agreement with the PLO. Arafat does not feel bound to keep at all anything he agreed to because he feels this is just a fig leaf for Israel's surrender. It is no good having documents and laws, having judges if nobody is going to enforce their rulings.

This, of course, is the plain meaning of the text, but the rabbis give another interpretation of the text. They say if you have judges, these judges must obey the same rules that they require of everyone else. "You have judgments and laws, then you must also enforce them for yourself." If you are not going to enforce them for yourself, then you are not going to be fit to be judges. Throughout Jewish history there have been two main heresies. There has been the heresy which has to do with the fact that people thought they could be religious without being moral. That is what the prophets railed against. They said, "What good are your sacrifices, what good are your prayers, what good is even your giving charity if you treat your fellow human being with terrible disrespect, if you persecute the poor, if you deny food to the hungry, if you do not clothe the naked, if you pervert justice, if you always favor the rich, if justice is only a function of who you know, then you are going to truly be punished." The rabbis say that both temples were destroyed because the Jewish people did not act morally. In the second Temple they had Torah, learning, but they were filled with senseless hatred. They hated their brothers. They did not treat each other in a morally correct way, and, therefore, the Temple was destroyed.

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This is the major heresy in Judaism, but there is also a second heresy in Judaism. The second heresy in Judaism we are living through today. That is that we say that all that is required to be religious is to be moral, that morality is religion. Of course, that is not as serious a heresy as the first heresy because that does not condone immoral behavior at all. The reason this is a heresy is because it is false according to human nature. It does not understand the psychology of a human being. A human being has to get close to G-d. That is one of his basic needs. Unless you are willing to fulfill that basic need, some other religion or philosophy will fill it. That, of course, is what happened basically in America where the basic underlying philosophy of the reform movement was that all that really counts is being moral. The rest is only fluff. If you want to do it fine, if not, that is also fine. We say that for a person to get close to G-d, he first has to be moral. Judaism has always postulated the rule that you first have to be moral before you can get close to G-d. A person cannot get close to G-d if he is immoral. That is where Judaism differed from ancient paganism, and that is where Judaism comes down very hard to this modern day. We cannot say that you will put on a black hat and daven all day and learn Torah and then shoot your fellow human being. If you do that, then you are not religious at all. You cannot get close to G-d if you are immoral. The purpose of Judaism, though, is to get close to G-d. The first step is to be moral. The second step is to fulfill those things which bring us close to G-d, like Shabbat and learning Torah and keeping the other mitzvahs. These bring us close to G-d. When we learn Torah we hear G-d speaking to us. We establish a connection to Him, but this connection cannot occur if we do not act morally. That is very, very

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important, because, unfortunately, throughout Jewish history there have been individuals and sometimes groups who have slipped. They think they can be religious and get close to G-d without first being moral, but you cannot. Even today, people who feel that all there is to religion is to be moral, really do not believe it because they say, "I am not religious. I am just reform," or something of that nature, which is actually a damning indictment of themselves, but they realize that they are lacking a spiritual dimension in their own life.

Perhaps we Jews gave up, especially in this country, so much spirituality because we were filled with spirituality in Europe but were very poor and were segregated, and when we had the opportunity to come out and obtain material things, we downgraded the spiritual, but we know that man needs the spiritual. There has been a big breakthrough among Jewish youth in this country. If they cannot find the spiritual in their own religion, they go to other religions and cults, or what they have been doing, some of them is trying to explore the spiritual roots of Judaism. We know that many of the other movements in Judaism are coming back to spirituality because man basically needs it. I just read an article the other day about a man who studied under the Dalai Lama in the 1960's and now he has his own Buddhist sect and his mother calls him the Deli Lama because she claims he still has Jewish roots. We know that unless you fulfill basic human needs, they will be filled another way. Eventually we will lost all these people because being moral is not enough. You need something more. That's why the rabbis say that this is a heresy. On the other hand, it is a lesser heresy than the first heresy.

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The rabbis say there are actually two keys to get close to G-d. They say that there are two gates. That is why it says that you have to have the Jewish conception and ideas, but you also have to have to actual practice, the implementation of these ideals, and you should get every one of them within your own gates. You must have it. These two gates refer to the two locks. If a person has Torah, has the Shofteem, the theories of how to get close to G-d, he has the inner key, but he does not have the outer key. The outer key you can only get if you are moral. That is why we have the expression that we find in the Book of Proverbs, "You have to know wisdom and discipline." Wisdom is the knowledge of the laws, what we would call the Torah, getting close to G-d, but it is of no use unless you also have the Musser, and the Musser is explained in the Sedra by the word Shofteem, implementation of the laws. You have to be morally correct. That's why the Musser movement meant a person who was morally correct in all his dealings. Unless you first are morally correct, you will not be able to enter into the outer gate so you can enter the inner gate. If you have the key to the inner gate, it is no good without the key to the outer gate. If you have the key to the outer gate, eventually you may acquire the key to the inner gate. The rabbis teach us that G-d, Himself, said, "I prefer that you forget about Me but keep my morality rather than you forget about My morality and worry about Me." That's why Ahab from Ahab and Jezebel, was such a successful king at the beginning. He conquered everything. He was popular na successful and the economy flourished. It was only later when he confiscated the field in Avot that had him killed because his wife wanted the field that everything went to pot. Before that, G-d favored him. Why? Even though he was a Baal worshipper, even though

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he allowed idolatry in the kingdom, he was moral and just and a good king, but once he stopped being moral and just, which, of course, is what will inevitably happen if you stop believing

G-d and wanting to get close to G-d, then everything fell apart, but if you are moral, there is still hope that you can fulfill your inner cravings by trying to get close to G-d in the Jewish way. On the other hand, if you are filled with Torah and learning and still act immorally, then it is very difficult for you to come back and act morally because you have justified your immorality, so to speak, by using and misquoting verses of the Torah. The rabbis say that is a terrible thing. We first must be moral before we can get close to G-d. Getting close to G-d means that we want to be holy. You cannot be holy unless you are first moral. That's why it says, "Tomeem, you should be perfect with the Lord, your G-d." You have to be moral before you can become spiritual, before you can become holy.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who wanted to change his name. He went before a very traditional judge who did not believe in people changing their names but occasionally he let a person change his name. The man came before the judge and the judge asked, "What's your name?" He said, "My name is Frank Stinkheimer." The judge said, "Oh, my goodness. Okay, I'll let you change your name. What do you want to change it to?" The man replied, "I want to change it to John Stinkheimer." Unfortunately, there are many people, too, who do not realize that if they are immoral, they are stink and that they should change and not be this way. The outer key to getting close to G-d is to be moral.

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The inner key is to learn Torah. That is why it says, "Ladas Chochma Unmusar." To know Chochma, you have to know Chochma, but first you have to know Muser. Muser is the outer key. Muser is the implementation of the Torah's moral laws. Then you can worry about Shoftim. Then you can worry about getting close to Hashem. Let us all hope and pray that each of us will realize this and that we will make sure that in all our activities we are moral so, therefore, we can come close to G-d. May we all do this soon so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

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In the Torah portion Shoftim, we have the famous line, "Tzedek Tzedek Tir Dov, righteousness, righteousness you shall pursue," which the rabbis explain that you should pursue righteousness righteously. The ends do not justify the means. We also learn from this sentence that righteousness, morality is the highest Jewish value, not love. Love can be perverted. We learn many times how for the sake of love of humanity millions were killed. That is what the Communists did. We know that in a person's personal life to retain a person's so-called love, a person will do terrible things. Susan Miller was even willing to drown her children so she would not lose the love of her lover. We know, too, how women in abusive relationships will stay because they love their man. Righteousness and justice and fairness are higher values than love.

Right after this sentence, we learn how it says, "You should not plant a leafy tree or any tree near the altar of the G-d, your G-d." Why should we have such a sentence, and why should it be right next to a main teaching of Judaism? After all, we are a religion who loves trees. We have a holiday for trees, Tu B'Shvat, and, what's more, even in this Torah portion we learn that even in time of war you are not allowed to cut down trees unnecessarily. One answer, of course, is reminiscent of a sentence in the Pirkei Ovot which states that if someone is learning Torah and he sees a beautiful tree in a furrow and he comments how beautiful it is, he is liable for his soul. This, of course, means by the hand of G-d, not by the hand of man, but what could this mean?

This refers to the struggle that we Jewish people had with Greek culture. To the Greeks,

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everything that was beautiful had to be good. In fact, they tell the story of an Athenian general who went over to the Spartans and became one of the leading commanders. He inflicted grave losses on the Athenians. At the end of two years, he was captured and brought before the Athenian Senate as a traitor. A prosecutor presented all the evidence against him, which was massive. He then got up to defend himself. The only thing he did was take off his robe. He was a very handsome man. He was immediately acquitted because nobody who was so beautiful could do anything so bad.

This is similar to the story they tell about Rabbi Yehoshua, who was a hunchback and had other deformities. He was a very wise man. The daughter of the Roman Emperor once came to him and said, "Why did G-d give such wisdom to such an ugly man?" He looked at her and said, "Tell me, where does your father keep his wine?" She answered, "My father keeps his wine in clay vessels." He said, "Why doesn't your father keep his precious wine in vessels of silver and gold?" She replied, "My father should do this." She ordered that all the expensive wine should be placed in vessels of silver and gold. A week later her father called his steward to bring in the expensive wine. It had all spoiled. He turned to his daughter and said, "What happened?" She told him the story. She then went back to Rabbi Yehoshua and said, "You were right. Expensive and beautiful vessels do not always produce good things. Wisdom can be found in ugly vessels." Just because something is beautiful does not mean that it is good.

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We also learn from this sentence that the Jewish religious experience is not the same as an aesthetic experience. In other religions this may be true. In other religions when a person comes to a house of worship he is really leaving this world and entering heaven. He knows that the real world is not like his house of worship, but his house of worship gives him a feeling of hope that things will be better in the next life. There is something to work for, and many times these houses of worship are really an aesthetic experience, but the problem with an aesthetic experience is that it makes us passive. When we see a beautiful painting, it fills you with awe and admiration, but you know you cannot do it. When you see a good baseball player, like Mcguire, you are filled with admiration, but you know you cannot do it. You may go up to heaven, so to speak, when you come into this house of worship and be overawed by its opulence and beauty, but you know you cannot attain these things in this world. In Judaism we do not want to go up to heaven when we enter a synagogue. We want to bring G-d down to earth. We want G-d to help us with our problems, to give us the strength to go on. We want G-d in our prayers to activate us to do things, not to become passive.

That's why the flow of the prayers in a traditional synagogue is from the people up, not from the bema down. We are not coming to see something overwhelming. We are coming to get the strength to go out and make this world a better place and ourselves better people. That's why a tree was not placed near the altar. We should not be obsessed by aesthetics. We should remember that the purpose of a synagogue is to give us the strength to improve

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ourselves and the world, to give us the courage to face the world and to remember that G-d helps those who help themselves.

I am reminded of the story they tell about an elderly couple who were out for an evening walk. They were accosted by a robber who said, "Give me all your money." They gave him all their money. The robber then pointed the gun at the woman and said, "What's your name?" She replied, "My name is Mary." He said, "That's good because my mother's name is Mary, so I won't shoot you." He then went to the man and said, "What's your name?" He said, "My name is George, but everybody calls me Mary." We all need the strength to face life's many problems. Let us hope and pray that we will all be given this strength so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.