

## What Goes Around

When I was a kid, troll dolls were the in thing; little did my friends and I realize the trolls made their first fad appearance when my mom was a teen. The highlighter yellow t-shirts and neon clothes our eighth graders sported in Israel are a throwback to the 1980s. Even bell-bottom blue jeans made their come back in the 1990s, and now the Smurfs have resurfaced into popular culture with their new movie. If you take a look around you at any given time, it seems that just as the seasons go round and round, so do the trends in fashion, food, and music. Even education theory continues to shift the balance of experiential learning and lecture style. Yes, it seems that in all things in life, what once was old becomes new again, and yet we constantly struggle to keep up with the trends, to remain modern and “with it.”

One of the most beautiful elements of Judaism is knowing that the *Torah*, the book from which it all began, is a living document. While the events occurred long ago, the content can be understood and is relevant to our lives today almost as though it was written for us in this exact moment. The beauty of studying *Torah* year after year is that the words and meaning offer something new based on our life experiences. This week we read *parshat Shoftim*, in the middle of the book of *D'varim* which outlines our legal system, the responsibilities of judges and prophets, punishments for witnesses and more. The *Torah* recognizes that the legal system and those in charge of it must be hip to the times.

Chapter 17, verses 8-9 teach “If a case is too baffling for you to decide, be it a controversy over homicide, civil law, or assault - matters of dispute in your courts - you shall promptly repair to the place that the Lord your God will have chosen, and appear before the levitical priests, or the magistrate in charge at the time and present your problem...” These verses set up a legal system in which the judge’s word is the final word regardless of the judge who preceded them or comes after them according to the legal commentary the *Sifrei*. The text focuses on the words “at that time,” meaning that the judge must be in tune with the times, knowledgeable on today and the context of crimes within the society. Only a judge that lives in our modern world can understand how to apply the law today.

Expanded, the *Torah*, as a living document, teaches that it is the essence of the law that impacts our society today. The tag line of the conservative movement is “Tradition and change,” which speaks to a movement that is steeped in the tradition of Judaism from across time, but able to understand religious practice in terms of our ever morphing modern society.

The Judaism of today is exactly like that of yesteryear, and at the same time completely different because it is guided by our need to meld modern society with our inheritance. *Parshat Shoftim* reminds us that Judaism is a living religion that moves with us throughout our lives. For example, *Shabbat* teaches us to value rest, so while it might not make sense to us to refrain from plowing our fields, it certainly makes sense to have a day when our technology is turned off and we’re tuned into our families and restful sensibilities. Likewise, *kashrut* may not make the most sense to modern culinary sensibilities, but it reminds us that we should be conscious of all we put in our bodies. Living Jewishly is living in modernity. Our challenge is to hold onto our values in our modern world.

ללמוד **To Learn:** ללמד **To Teach:** Learn one new *brachah* to be said over your food. If you shop for whole grains, organic products, adding a *brachah* can only enhance your conscious eating. Find the *brachot* for food on page 708 of Siddur Sim Shalom

לשמור **To Keep:** לעשות **To Do:** Parents, go through an old photo album with your students - perhaps from your bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah if you had one. Let your students identify what styles and tastes have changed and what has remained the same.