

Sermon by Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch

Shoftim 20 “Deuces”

[FYI this is the sermon that Bez”h I’ll be presenting tomorrow when we reopen shul for Shabbat.] Gut Shabbos. Shabbat Shalom. Welcome back to Shabbat services at shul! We’ve all certainly had some trying and unpredictable times during this pandemic, but it’s certainly reassuring to know that we’re part of a community of members committed to one another and to our shul, through good times and bad.

And on that note, I’d like to say a few words about the High Holidays, which are soon approaching. We appreciate everyone who responded to our call for emails to help us gauge interest in our indoor and outdoor services this year. We have a lovely and spacious outdoor venue, but we can’t complete our plans until we know how many people are interested. If you haven’t responded yet, please do so by this Sunday, because next week we’ll announce the final schedule and invite reservations. We also need volunteers to set up the outdoor space so please email if you could help.

We mentioned last week that the parshiot which precede the High Holidays are relevant to those holidays. One of the parshiot I often refer to in connection to Din, God's quality of strict justice, is this week's parsha, Parshat Shoftim. One of the themes in the parsha is duality; everything revolves around the number 2. For example, the Parsha begins with the words "shoftim v'shomrim" referring to the judges and the police – the two major aspects of a just society –one the judicial system and the other the law enforcement system. And in the verse about pursuing righteousness, the word tzedek is recited twice – *Tzedek, Tzedek tirdof* "Justice, justice ye shall pursue" placing an extra emphasis on Justice when building a society. These are just a couple of the numerous examples in the parsha.

We explained that *din/strict justice* is related to this theme of the number 2, and din is the primary theme of Rosh Hashana, because Rosh Hashana commemorates creation, and God created our physical world with the fundamental quality of din. Knowing this helps to explain the nature and ultimate purpose of evil, even when we find it difficult to comprehend why God allows it to occur in each instance.

We also explained that one of the functions of duality is to create 2 opposing forces, opposites, such as north/south, fire and water, air and earth, yin and yang. They act against each other in this world, and so they serve as symbols for the challenges we must face every single day. But they also reflect the way God encourages and brings hardships against us, because he wants us to overcome the challenges.

There is no doubt that this year the High Holidays are going to be more challenging than usual, fitting for the holidays of din. But I firmly believe that the dedication and spirit of our amazing community will carry us through, God willing, into a wonderful new year ahead. Shabbat shalom.