

Kol Rina  
An Independent Minyan  
Parashat Shoftim  
September 7, 2024 \*\*\* Elul 4, 5784

### Shoftim in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/2278/jewish/Shoftim-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2278/jewish/Shoftim-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

The name of the Parshah, "Shoftim," means "Judges" and it is found in Deuteronomy 16:18.

Moses instructs the people of Israel to appoint judges and law enforcement officers in every city. "Justice, justice shall you pursue," he commands them, and you must administer it without corruption or favoritism. Crimes must be meticulously investigated and evidence thoroughly examined—a minimum of two credible witnesses is required for conviction and punishment.

In every generation, says Moses, there will be those entrusted with the task of interpreting and applying the laws of the Torah. "According to the law that they will teach you, and the judgment they will instruct you, you shall do; you shall not turn away from the thing that they say to you, to the right nor to the left."

Shoftim also includes the prohibitions against idolatry and sorcery; laws governing the appointment and behavior of a king; and guidelines for the creation of "cities of refuge" for the inadvertent murderer. Also set forth are many of the rules of war: the exemption from battle for one who has just built a home, planted a vineyard, married, or is "afraid and soft-hearted"; the requirement to offer terms of peace before attacking a city; and the prohibition against wanton destruction of something of value, exemplified by the law that forbids to cut down a fruit tree when laying siege (in this context the Torah makes the famous statement, "For man is a tree of the field").

The Parshah concludes with the law of the eglah arufah—the special procedure to be followed when a person is killed by an unknown murderer and his body is found in a field—which underscores the responsibility of the community and its leaders not only for what they do, but also for what they might have prevented from being done.

### Haftarah in a Nutshell: Isaiah 51:12 – 52:12

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/548000/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/548000/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

This week's haftarah is the fourth of a series of seven "Haftarot of Consolation." These seven haftarot commence on the Shabbat following Tisha b'Av and continue until Rosh Hashanah.

The haftorahs of the past two weeks open with Israel's complaint that they have been abandoned by G-d. Israel is not content with consolations offered by the prophets — instead they demand that G-d alone comfort them. In response, this week's haftorah begins with G-d's response: "I, indeed I, will comfort you."

After briefly reprimanding Israel for forgetting their Creator for fear of human and finite oppressors, the prophet describes the suffering and tribulations which Israel has endured. However, the time has arrived for the suffering to end. The time has come for Israel's oppressors to drink the "cup of suffering" which they had hitherto forced Israel to drink: "Awaken, awaken, put on your strength, O Zion; put on the garments of your beauty, Jerusalem the Holy City, for no longer shall the uncircumcised or the unclean continue to enter you. Shake yourselves from the dust, arise, sit down, O Jerusalem; free yourself of the bands of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion."

Isaiah extols the beauty of the messenger who will announce the good tidings of Redemption. "Burst out in song, sing together, O ruins of Jerusalem, for the L-rd has consoled His people; He has redeemed Jerusalem."

The haftorah ends by highlighting the difference between the Egyptian Exodus, when the Israelites hurried out of their exile and bondage, and the future Redemption: "For not with haste shall you go forth and not in a flurry of flight shall you go, for the L-rd goes before you, and your rear guard is the G-d of Israel."

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

#### Shoftim: Power from the Outside or Self-Restraint from Within

by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l **5771**

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/shoftim/power-or-self-restraint/>

This summer, we've seen riots on the streets of London and Manchester on the one hand, Tripoli on the other. On the face of it there was nothing in common between them. In London the rioters were holding rocks. In Tripoli they were holding machine guns. In Libya they were rioting to remove a tyrant. In London they were rioting for clothes and flatscreen televisions. There was only one thing in common, namely that there were riots. They reminded us, as John Maynard Keynes once said, that civilisation is a thin and precarious crust. It can crumble easily and quickly.

The riots in both places, in their different ways, should make us think in

a new way about the unique political project Moses was engaged in the parsha of Shoftim, and in the book of Deuteronomy as a whole.

Why do crowds riot? The short answer is, because they can. This year we have seen the extraordinary impact of smartphones, messaging systems and social network software: the last things, one might have thought, to bring about political change, but they have done so in one country after another in the Middle East – first Tunisia, then Egypt, then Libya, then Syria, and the reverberations will be with us for years to come. Similarly in Britain, though for quite different reasons, they have led to the worst, and strangest, riots in a generation.

What the technology has made possible is instant crowds. Crowd behaviour is notoriously volatile and sweeps up many kinds of people in its vortex. The result has been that for a while, chaos has prevailed, because the police or the army has been caught unawares. The Torah describes a similar situation after the sin of the Golden Calf:

“Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control . . .” Ex. 32:25

Crowds create chaos. How then do you deal with crowds? In England, the reaction is a call for more police, zero tolerance, and tougher sentencing. In the Middle East, we do not yet know whether we are seeing the birth of free societies or a replacement of the tyranny of a minority by the tyranny of the majority. However, it seems to be a shared assumption that the only way you stop people robbing one another or killing one another is by the use of force. That has been the nature of politics since the birth of civilisation.

The argument was stated most clearly by Thomas Hobbes in the 17th century, in his political classic, Leviathan. Without the use of force, Hobbes said, we would be in a state of nature, a war of all against all in which life would be “nasty, brutish and short.” What we have witnessed in both Britain and the Middle East has been a vivid tutorial in Hobbesian politics. We have seen what a state of nature looks like.

What Moses was proposing in Devarim was fundamentally different. He assembled the people and told them, in so many words, that there would be social order in the new land they were about to inherit. But who would achieve it? Not Moses. Not Joshua. Not a government. Not a tyrant. Not a charismatic leader. Not the army. Not the police. Who would do it. “You,” said Moses. The maintenance of order in

Deuteronomy is the responsibility of the entire people. That is what the covenant was about. That is what the Sages meant when they said kol yisrael arevin zeh bazeh, "All Israel are responsible for one another." Responsibility in Judaism belongs to all of us and it cannot be delegated away.

We see this most clearly in this week's parsha, in the law of the king.

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses . . . The king must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself . . . He must not take many wives . . . He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. Deut. 17:14-17

Note the strange way the command is phrased. "When you say . . ." Is this an obligation or a permission? The people may call to have a king, "Like all the nations around us" – but the entire thrust of the Torah is that the Israelites were not to be like the other nations. To be holy means to be different, set apart. "The king must not . . . must not . . . must not." The accumulation of prohibitions is a clear signal that the Torah sees the institution as fraught with danger. And so it was. The wisest of men, Solomon, fell into all three traps and broke all three laws. But that is not the end of the Torah's warning. Even stronger words are to follow:

When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this Law . . . It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites. Deut. 17:18-20

Only one man is commanded in the Torah to be humble: the king.

This is not the place to go into the famous disagreement among the commentators as to whether appointing a king is a command or not. [1] Maimonides says it is an obligation. [2] Ibn Ezra says it is a permission. [3] Abarbanel says it is a concession. [4] Rabbeinu Bahya says it is a punishment. The Israelites, a nation under the sovereignty of God, should never have sought a human leader. In the words of Avinu

Malkeinu, "Ein lanu melech ela atah," "We have no other king but You."

The point is, however, that the Torah is as far removed as possible from the world of Hobbes, in which it is Leviathan – his name for absolute monarchy, the central power – who is responsible for keeping order. In a Hobbesian world, without strong government there is chaos. Kings or their equivalent are absolutely necessary.

Moses is articulating a quite different view of politics. Virtually every other thinker has defined politics as the use of power. Moses defines politics as the use of self-restraint. Politics, for Moses, is about the voice of God within the human heart. It is about the ability to hear the words, "Thou shalt not." Politics in the Torah is not about the fear of the government. It is about the fear of God.

So radical is this political programme that it gave rise to a phenomenon unique in history. Not only did Jews keep Jewish law when they were in Israel, a sovereign state with government and power. They also kept Jewish law in exile for 2000 years, when they had no land, no power, no government, no army, and no police.

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev once said: "Master of the universe, in Russia there is a Czar, an army and a police force, but still in Russian houses you can find contraband goods. The Jewish people has no Czar, no army and no police force, but try finding bread in a Jewish home on Pesach!"

What Moses understood in a way that has no parallel elsewhere is that there are only two ways of creating order: by power from the outside or self-restraint from within; either by the use of external force or by internalised knowledge of and commitment to the law.

How do you create such knowledge? By strong families and strong communities and schools that teach children the law, and by parents teaching their children that "when you sit in your house or when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up."

The result was that by the first century Josephus could write, "Should any one of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name. The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls."

This is a view of politics we are in danger of losing, at least in Europe,

as it loses its Judeo-Christian heritage. I have argued, in many of these essays and several of my books, that the only country today that retains a covenantal view of politics is the United States. It was there, in one of the great speeches of the nineteenth century, that Abraham Lincoln articulated the fundamental idea of covenant, that when there is “government of the people, by the people, for the people,” there is a new birth of freedom. When only police or armies stand between order and riots, freedom itself is at risk.

[The King's Torah And The Torah's King by Barry Holtz \(2017\)](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-kings-torah-and-the-torahs-king/)  
<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-kings-torah-and-the-torahs-king/>

This week’s Torah portion focuses on a wide array of topics, but underlying virtually everything we can see a thematic coherence well reflected in the parashah’s name (“judges”). The sidrah contains one of the most famous lines in the entire Bible, tzedek, tzedek tirdof: “Justice, justice shall you pursue” (Deut. 16:20). And throughout the parashah we see the Torah outlining various aspects of the pursuit of justice.

First is the establishment of courts, their organization and their authority. But the parashah has a larger vision than establishing the nature of the judiciary alone. Bernard M. Levinson, in his commentary on Deuteronomy in The Oxford Jewish Study Bible, points out “Although western political theory is normally traced back to ancient Athens, this section is remarkable for providing what seems to be the first blueprint for a constitutional system of government.” Over the course of this week’s reading the Torah presents a careful balance among four specific elements of power in ancient Israel: the judges, the priests, the prophets, and the king. No one element has absolute authority. Judges may assert their authority in matters of criminal and civil offenses; prophets may assert their vision about wrongdoing and future consequences; priests may hold sway over the primary ritual elements of ancient Israelite life, the sacrificial cult; and the king may rule “over them” (Deut. 17:14–15). But none of these powerful figures can be dominant over the others.

Of course, the parashah is laying out the idealized model. How it worked in real life is another matter, one which we can only infer from the meager evidence that we have. For example just considering the stories of Saul and David as the Bible reports them to us gives us a good deal of insight into the complexity of operating this system of what we might



call “checks and balances”; in the same way that reading the United States Constitution only gives us a picture of the way that the three branches of our government are “supposed to” work. As we have seen in a variety of instances sometimes a “check” on one branch of government may not lead to much “balance” in the world of realpolitik. Yet without the ideal we would have no standard by which to evaluate the real, and these chapters in our Torah reading give us a picture of what the Bible viewed as the proper functioning of a system of government.

For me the most powerful and moving part of the description in Shofetim is the delineation of the limitations on the king. Sometime in the future, God says, you will be settled in Eretz Yisrael and you will want to set a king over yourselves to be like “all the other nations” (Deut. 17:14). With almost an exasperated acceptance, God tells them if that’s what you want, you can do it. But there are restrictions that need to be in place—you can’t choose someone who is not one of your own people; the king can’t keep many horses, nor can he have many wives. But what is most striking to me is the following passage:

When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching (Torah) written for him on a scroll by the levitical priests. Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life, so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God, to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching as well as these laws. (Deut. 17:18–19)

The version above is from the standard contemporary New Jewish Publication Society translation used in the Conservative movement’s Etz Hayim Humash as well as The Oxford Jewish Study Bible, and it has the advantage of readability and up-to-date biblical scholarship. But there are times that its very clarity obscures the way certain biblical passages have been interpreted and understood in Jewish commentary across the generations. In our passage, for instance, torah, a common biblical word, is quite properly understood as “teaching,” as we see above. It appears that in their original context the verses are meant to say that the king should have before him a specific “teaching,” the biblical verses that apply to a king, and that he should keep those verses with him as a written document. But in this case the word torah has in classic Jewish sources been understood in a different way: to refer quite literally to a

Sefer Torah scroll. In addition, the NJPS smoothes over some confusing elements of the Hebrew original, leading to an interpretation that is essentially completely different from the way that this passage has been understood in our traditional texts.

NJPS tells us that the “levitical priests” write the “Teaching” for the king. But later Jewish tradition sees it differently. This becomes quite clear by simply looking at the way the Mishnah interprets the obligations of a king:

And he shall write in his own name a Sefer Torah. When he goes forth to war he must take it with him; on returning, he brings it back with him; when he sits in judgment it shall be with him, and when he sits down to eat, before him, as it is written: and it shall be with him and he shall read therein all the days of his life. (M Sanhedrin 2:4)

The Mishnah sees the king as writing the Torah scroll for himself. The Talmud elaborates on this concept:

A Tanna taught: And he must not take credit for one belonging to his ancestors. Rabbah said: Even if one’s parents have left him a Sefer Torah, yet it is proper that he should write one of his own . . . (BT Sanhedrin 21b)

Moreover, NJPS renders one phrase in our passage as “let him read in it all his life” (italics added)—a perfectly reasonable translation of כָּל-יָמָיו, but older translations’ more literal “all the days of his life” has a greater appeal. The latter suggests, in capturing the specificity of “days of,” that the king should read this Torah every single day, a more powerful understanding of the injunction on the king than “all his life.”

What difference do these distinctions make? Am I quibbling over minor details? I’d like to argue that this is a case where the translation matters. First, no matter what this text may have meant in its own time, it is worthwhile to remember the way it has been viewed by the core texts of our tradition—the Mishnah, the Babylonian Talmud, and later commentators such as Rashi and Maimonides.

But more than that, I believe that in emphasizing the need for the king to do the writing himself—even if he inherited a perfectly fine Sefer Torah from his parents or ancestors—the tradition understood that the very act of writing the Torah scroll is a way of making the Torah, quite



literally, one's own. The act of doing that writing becomes a powerful pedagogy through which the king comes to understand what his moral position must be. As the Torah tells us, this connection, this act of identification with the values inherent in God's "teaching," will insure that "he will not act haughtily toward his fellows" (Deut. 17:20), which, as Ibn Ezra points out, would be likely to happen if the king were "free" from the commandments. As we think about leaders in our times, it may be helpful to remember that being "above the law" is not the way for any king to view himself. Rather, as the Torah says, to "reign long" means to know that the "law" is above us all. (*Barry Holtz is the Theodore and Florence Baumritter Professor of Jewish Education at JTS*)

[Parashat Shoftim – Sanctifying Our Days by Rabbi Matthew Berkowitz](https://schechter.edu/parashat-shoftim-sanctifying-our-days/)

<https://schechter.edu/parashat-shoftim-sanctifying-our-days/>

***Dedicated to the memory of Hersh Goldberg-Polin, Carmel Gat, Eden Yerushalmi, Alexander Lobanov, Almog Sarusi and Ori Danino***

## **What constitutes a life well-lived and a life of blessing?**

This week, I had the heartbreak of being at the funeral of Hersh Goldberg-Polin. His dear mother Rachel shared the following about Hersh: "You made true and deep friendships, you traveled each summer and started to explore the world, you worked, you learned, you read, you taught, you served, you listened, you even fell in love and had a deep true relationship for more than 2 years. And you shared the excitement of that new experience with us. You charmed everyone you ever talked to, old or young. You promoted justice and peace in a way a only a young pure, wide-eyed idealist, can. You never raised your voice to me in your life. You treated me respectfully always, even when you chose a different path."

With this bitter week marking the tragic loss of six hostages and Rosh Hodesh, the beginning of a new month, we pray for God to renew our lives in the coming month: "Grant us a long life, a peaceful life with goodness and blessing, sustenance and physical vitality, a life informed by purity and piety . . . a life of abundance and honor, a life embracing piety and love of Torah, a life in which our heart's desires for goodness will be fulfilled" (Birkat HaHodesh).

This Rosh Hodesh offers us a particularly auspicious moment to dwell upon this question of a life well-lived, for this week marks the beginning of Elul—a month in which we are encouraged to take a heshbon ha-

nefesh, an accounting of our souls. At its essence, this idea demands that we look inward and become critical of ourselves and the year that has passed. This week's parashah, Shoftim, gives us one definition of a life of blessing (in addition to the inspiring model that Hersh z"l gave all of us) that we can use in evaluating where we have come from and where we are going.

Torah's description of a life well-lived, ironically & fittingly (given the horror we are living through), comes at a point in the parashah that delineates the protocol in a state of war.

Deuteronomy 20 relates, "Before you join battle, the priest shall come forward and address the troops. He shall say to them, 'Hear O Israel! You are about to join battle with your enemy. Let not your courage falter. Do not fear, panic, or dread them. For it is the Lord your God who marches with you to do battle for you against your enemy, to bring you victory'" (Deuteronomy 20:2-4).

The instruction continues, "Then the officials shall address the troops as follows: Is there anyone who has built a new house but has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another dedicate it. Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never harvested it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it. Is there anyone who has paid the bride-price for a wife, but who has not yet married her? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another marry her" (Deuteronomy 20:5-7).

Why does the Torah choose these three aspects as the definition of a blessed life? I propose that each of these facets is interwoven with the concept of kiddushin (sanctification). The sanctification of place, time, and people.

To build one's home is to sanctify place, to aspire toward building a mikdash me'at, a sanctuary in miniature. After the destruction of the Temple, it is one's table that brings about repentance. Merely by having guests to one's home on Shabbat and speaking words of Torah, one effects atonement. The home then becomes the sacred inner sanctum of the Temple.

Second, our passage speaks of harvesting one's vineyard. Every sacred time in the tradition is marked by kiddush, the sanctification of the day over a cup of wine. And so by planting a vineyard, one makes a commitment to being a partner with God in this act of sanctifying time.

Finally, the Torah alludes to the act of kiddushin between two individuals. For it is through this act that two individuals stand under a huppah (the symbol of the home they will build together) and declare their uniqueness to each other. The concern for exclusivity and loyalty (“lest another marry her”) is part of kiddushin—two people being set aside for each other.

The Torah’s primary concern is that of realization and completion. Acts of holiness and sanctification are to be completed. The Torah commands that, if we have begun any of these acts of kiddushin, then we must endeavor to complete them before risking our lives on behalf of others. We must choose life, but we must choose a life that is endowed with a recognition of holiness and wholeness.

The confluence of Rosh Hodesh Elul and Parashat Shoftim gives us a precious occasion to turn inward and think about how we ourselves define a life of blessing and a life well-lived.

How is it that we seek wholeness in our lives? Are we actively seeking holiness?

Abraham Joshua Heschel writes that Judaism is about rediscovering and hearing the existential questions that God asks of us each day.

Let this be an opportunity for us to reflect deeply and create personal visions in the month leading up to Yom ha-Din, the Day of Judgment. Only through deliberate thought and prior planning may we realize the kiddushin, sanctification, that can be a daily part of our lives.

May the model of Hersh’s twenty-three years, along with Torah, inspire us to live lives of meaning and soulfulness.

May the Goldberg-Polin, Gat, Yerushalmi, Lobanov, Sarusi and Danino families feel the loving embrace of the entire Jewish world and of humanity.

Wishing you all a Shabbat Shalom as we pray for the peace of Israel and may our hostages be Home speedily. (*Rabbi Matthew Berkowitz, an accomplished educator and artist, brings decades of experience in development to his position. From 1999 to 2008, he served as JTS’s Senior Rabbinic Fellow based in NY and Florida, responsible for cultivating and expanding the donor base and teaching adult learning study groups throughout the United States. From 2009, he served as Director of Israel Programs for JTS working closely with rabbinical and cantorial students to significantly enrich their Israel experience. He is a founding partner of Kol HaOt studio project in Jerusalem’s Artist Lane — which weaves the arts deeply into Jewish learning. Rabbi Berkowitz is the author and illuminator of*

*the widely used The Lovell Haggadah published by Schechter in 2008. Matt is a Wexner Graduate fellow alumnus and serves on the faculty of The Wexner Heritage Program. He is married to Nadia Levene and the proud father of three children.)*

The Imperfection of Justice: Shoftim by Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal

[https://truah.org/resources/jessica-lowenthal-shoftim-moraltorah\\_2024\\_/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=c14b80c3-405e-490d-8215-1140da526149](https://truah.org/resources/jessica-lowenthal-shoftim-moraltorah_2024_/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=c14b80c3-405e-490d-8215-1140da526149)

Raising two young boys is a fascinating study in negotiation. I find myself in a never-ending struggle for “fairness.” If one boy gets to choose a TV show, the other must choose the next show; one picks out one book to be read at bedtime, the other picks another book, and so on. If they manage to squeeze extra reading out of us, then we will read four books in the name of equality.

For 5 and 7-year-olds, the world is a simple place. Fairness is assumed. If they see something they deem unfair, it must be acknowledged, and they look to someone (me as a parent) — the moral authority — to correct it. In our home, I can — to a certain degree — ensure that such a world of fairness exists. At the same time, I make it clear that I am not perfect: All adults make mistakes, and justice within the real world cannot be controlled, even by our parents.

It is hard to admit we cannot control something and even harder to acknowledge that there are times we should not control something.

Torah provides many examples to help us perceive these moral challenges. Parshat Shoftim begins, “You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that your God, Adonai, is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice.”

(Deuteronomy 16:18) The Talmud (Sanhedrin 16b) explains that from this line we derive that the community must have a comprehensive justice system; there cannot be one court, let alone one judge, for the whole land.

This imperative echoes the admonishment Moses’s father-in-law, Jethro, gave when Moses attempted to solve the whole community’s problems by himself in Exodus. Jethro told Moses: “The thing you are doing is not right, you will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well.”

(Exodus 18:18) Sforno expands on Jethro’s words: “You cannot all by yourself listen to the problems of all the leaders and subsequently to all the problems of the individuals who feel they need your personal attention, believing that no one but you can deal with their specific

problems.” He reasons that if Moses acts as the only judge, the “perfect” judge, then the people will feel that no one but Moses can ever resolve their conflicts.

In both Exodus and Deuteronomy, there is a commandment against idolatry soon after the discussion of justice. In Exodus 20, we have the first of the 10 commandments against idolatry — “have no other Gods but me!” In Deuteronomy 16:20, the verse: “Justice Justice shall you pursue” is directly followed by a warning against idolatry. By placing these seemingly different topics next to each other — the need for courts and the concern of idolatry — we understand that they are linked.

There is no question that Moses has a direct line to God and that he would adjudicate fairly, but creating a society that relies on one person will, eventually, lead to belief in that one individual instead of belief in the Divine. Such a belief, that an individual can replicate the perfection of God, is idolatry. If the Israelites were to see Moses as their only hope then he would have become the very thing God despises.

Every generation faces this temptation of idolatry. Often, individuals would prefer an outside authority to clarify the world they live in, rather than sacrifice their time and energy for an inherently imperfect system. And some, even those with good intentions, want to fulfill that divine role.

Justice is, at its core, imperfect. Much like parenting. No matter how hard I try, I’ll never be able to create a perfect home for my children. However, I will continue to strive towards fairness. I will fail again and again, but I know my persistence itself speaks volumes. We value equality in our home, even though we can never fully realize it.

It is the responsibility of each person to place the pursuit of justice at the forefront of their mind and heart, while acknowledging the inevitability of human error. Living in the imperfect is reality; ignoring reality in pursuit of perfection is idolatry. It is only through a shared system of responsibility that we can combat the human desire to believe that one “special” person can save the entire world. We all must work towards a more just society, understanding and accepting that we will never attain perfection. Creating and supporting a functioning judicial system is one of the most important and enduring aspects of our Jewish

tradition that we can support today. (*Rabbi Jessica Lowenthal is the rabbi and education director at Temple Beth Shalom in Melrose, MA.*)

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Yahrtzeits

Cynthia Schwartz remembers her mother Elaine Schwartz on Sun. Sept. 8

Ilisia Kissner remembers her uncle Hyman Rosenblum on Mon. Sept. 9