



Dvar Torah for Parshat Shoftim Based on Likutey Moharan I, Lesson #1

"Do what the Sages teach you. The way they teach you Torah...don't stray right or left from what they tell you" (Deuteronomy 17:11).

"...in order that [the king] stray neither right nor left from the mitzvot" (ibid. 17:20).

"One who is wise will consider these words, one who is prudent will note them. For God's highways are straight. The righteous walk them, but the wicked stumble in them" (Hosea 14:10).

Whether you're a commoner or a king, there's no lack of temptations that might lead you off course. Rebbe Nachman teaches that to attain maximum visibility and not go off the road you need to learn Torah, particularly when the going gets rough.

A Jewish king, who was liable to think that the world was his to do as he pleased, was required to always carry a Torah scroll with him. This was to help him become more and more aware that he, too, was a servant of the One Above. His study-induced royal humility was to get him to see that even a seemingly insignificant detail of a mitzvah was so important that his entire reign depended upon it. (See Rashi on Deuteronomy 17:20).

We commoners have common temptations, but those are enough to deal with.

How do we increase the visibility of the road ahead and walk through life without stumbling over them? Again, the solution is to make the effort to occupy the mind with Torah (e.g., attending a class, reading a book), even when it's difficult or inconvenient. To do this will often demand having faith in the genius, goodness and trustworthiness of our Sages. This is necessary if we are to follow their teachings, especially when they contradict "commoner" sense, for example, telling us that right is left and left is right. In commanding us to humble ourselves and accept the viewpoint of our Sages, the Torah is offering us an opportunity to turn on the headlights and walk straighter, and more securely, through life. We have to learn to do that.