

Parshat Shoftim
Rabbi Eryn London
Class of 2017

This week's Parsha, Parshat Shoftim we read the verse, "*Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof*" (Devarim 16:20). When looking at the translations of the verse, I noticed that not everyone was translating it the same way. In some it was translated as "Justice, Justice you shall pursue", while in others the translation was "Righteousness, Righteousness you shall pursue."

I looked in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary to see the definitions of the words justice and righteousness. Justice is "the process or result of using laws to fairly judge and punish crimes and criminals." While righteousness is "morally good : following religious or moral laws".

According to Rashi, when the Torah says to pursue *tzedek*, it means to pursue good courts. According to Rabbenu Behya, a 13th century Spanish commentator on the Bible, the use of the double *tzedek* is to teach that every person must make sure that both their actions and their speech is done in a way of *tzedek*. Rabbi Bunam of P'shis'cha teaches that the use of the double language is a warning that we must pursue righteousness through righteousness.

I see the two translations working together. The start of this week's Parsha talks about creating a justice system. We are commanded to have judges, a working court system, and are warned not to accept bribes. The Parsha then continues into the realm of righteousness or morals, when there is not an easy and clear-cut answer- what to do in a time when we see a leader going astray, the commandment to make sure that there are cities of refuge for those who murdered accidentally, the laws of war, and finally ending with what to do when one finds a murdered body without any knowledge of who the murder was.

We are encouraged to create a system of law, but at the same time realize that the law is not always black and white, and in those times we need to rely on our morals. Perhaps another translation of this verse can be, "Justice and righteousness shall you pursue."



Rabbi Eryn London, is a chaplain resident at New York Presbyterian - Weill Cornell Medical Center. She earned her B.A from Goucher College, where she majored in theatre, minoring in psychology and Judaic studies. Eryn subsequently earned an M.A. at Goldsmiths, University of London. She specialized in applied drama: theatre in educational, community, and social contexts. Eryn made aliyah in February of 2010 and studied at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies and at the Susi Bradfield Women's Institute of Halachic Leadership at Midreshet Lindenbaum. She is one of the co-founders of "Gam Yachad", a multi-denominational Beit Midrash for Israeli rabbinical students. Eryn has served as scholar in residence and rabbinic intern at the ACT Jewish Community in Canberra, Australia, Adath Shalom B'nai Israel in Chicago, Illinois, and at the Mt. Freedom Jewish Center in Randolph, New Jersey. In addition, Eryn has lectured in various communities in Israel, Canada, Colombia, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.