

Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital

What is a Torah Talk?

The beginning of the new school year offers a good time to review the purposes and uses of Torah Talks.

In *HaShavua* each week, and on the school blog, you will see a synopsis of the weekly Torah portion, a discussion of that portion geared towards adults, and a selection of age-appropriate questions which you can use as a springboard for a Torah discussion with your children. You can read through the *Torah Talk* with your children and explain to them in developmentally appropriate language anything they do not understand in it.

All third through sixth graders will continue to learn the *parasha* (Torah portion) together at *tefilah* (prayer) in school, taught each week by myself, a member of the Judaic Studies staff, or a member of the local clergy. Second graders will learn the weekly *parasha* with their Judaic Studies teachers in their classrooms. Pre-Kindergarteners and Kindergarteners will learn about the stories and characters in the Torah, and first graders will learn the stories and characters in the *TaNakh* (*Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim* – Bible, Prophets, and Writings.) Students of all ages can and certainly should be included in whatever discussions you have at home on the *parasha*.

We hope you will find this material enlightening and helpful and that you will talk with your family about the wealth of concepts and values found within the Torah. We also welcome feedback on these *Divrei Torah*. Please contact [Sharon Freundel](#), the Director of Jewish Life, with any comments or questions.

Continue reading on the next page for this week's Torah Talk. Happy Learning!

Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 16:18-21:9

In this *parasha*, Moshe reviews for *Bnei Yisrael* (the Children of Israel) the Torah's system of justice, the rules of kingship, the nation's relationship to idolatrous peoples, and the rules for doing battle.

One oft-quoted passage on social justice appears in this *parasha* (16:18-20):

יח שפטים ושטרנים, תתן-לך בכל-שעריך, אשר ה' אלהיך נתן לך, לשבטיך; ושפטו את-העם, משפט-צדק. יט לא-תטה משפט, לא תכיר פנים; ולא-תקח שחד--כי השחד יעור עיני חכמים, ויסלף דברי צדיקים. כ צדק צדק, תרדוף--למען תחיה וירשת את-הארץ, אשר-ה' אלהיך נתן לך.

18 Judges and officers shall you make for you in all your gates, which Hashem your God gives you, tribe by tribe; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. **19** You shall not distort judgment; you shall not recognize [one] face [over another one]; neither shall you take a bribe; for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise, and perverts the words of the righteous. **20** Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live, and inherit the land which Hashem your God gives you.

Here, as with so many passages in the Torah, we cannot fully understand the nuances, parallelism, and beauty of this text without examining the original Hebrew.

Words derived from the root צדק (*tzedek*) appear three times in these three verses. The first, צדק [משפט] (*mishpat tzedek*) means “righteous [judgment]” – in other words, judgment without distortion, as the subsequent verse explains. The second occurrence, צדיקים (*tzaddikim*) means “righteous people,” those who do the right thing by innate instinct. The third instance, צדק צדק (*tzedek tzedek*), means ultimate justice.

The literal translation of this third instance that I wrote above (“justice, justice”) is actually incorrect, because in Biblical Hebrew a word is repeated to indicate a superlative, or else to indicate that each item should be considered separately. An example of the use of repetition as superlative can be seen in *Bemidbar* (Numbers) 14:7: “הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר עֲבַרְנוּ בָּהּ לְתוֹר אֶת־הָ, טוֹבָה הָאָרֶץ, מְאֹד מְאֹד” (“The land, which

we passed through to spy it out, is a superlatively good land.”) An example of the use of repetition to indicate separation can be seen in *Vayikra* (Leviticus) chapter 20: “כִּי-אִישׁ אִישׁ, אֲשֶׁר יִקְלַל אֶת-אָבִיו וְאֶת-אִמּוֹ--מוֹת יוּמָת” (“Any person that curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.”). Thus צְדָק צְדָק (*tzedeq tzedeq*) in the passage from this week’s *parasha* would either mean that we must pursue superlative justice, or justice in any and every case we encounter. The text purposely juxtaposes צְדָק (*tzedeq*) and צַדִּיקִים (*tzaddikim*), letting us know that one cannot be considered a *tzaddik* (righteous person) unless one is not only righteous, but just. The two necessarily go hand-in-hand.

So צְדָק (*tzedeq*) means righteousness/justice. One other common usage of the root צְדָק (*tzedeq*) is the word צְדָקָה (*tzedakah*), usually translated as charity. At MILTON we like to translate it as “righteous giving,” which is closer to the original intent. “Charity” connotes something optional that we do for someone else. But, if the source word means “justice,” then supporting those less fortunate is not an optional activity for which we pat ourselves on the back, but an imperative that we fulfill while thanking God that we are in a position to give. This is a very important distinction. If *tzedakah* is an option, we can view it as doing something above and beyond the call of duty. If it is an imperative related to justice, we are all, each and every one of us, obligated to fulfill this imperative.

Let us think of *tzedakah* not as charity, but as righteous and just giving the next time we are asked to support a worthy cause.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- If you had one dollar to give to *tzedakah*, where or to whom would you give it? How did you arrive at that conclusion?
- Why is it “justice” to share our money, possessions, and time with those less fortunate than us?
- The Talmud says that everyone should give no less than 10% and no more than 20% of his or her income to *tzedakah*. Does this make sense to you? Why or why not? Under this rule, is there ever anyone who cannot give at least something to *tzedakah*?