



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

Justice & The Big Rock

TZEDEK TZEDEK TIR'DOF, "Justice, justice shall you pursue" (D'varim 16:20) is the principle which the Torah ordains for Jewish law courts.

It surely chooses its verb, "pursue", quite deliberately. Pursuing justice or anything else is a process that may never succeed. Some people, after all, pursue prosperity but end up as poor as they began. Others chase status or success but never get there.

There is a temptation to say, "Because I might not win, there's just no point in making the effort." It's like someone I know who has always had dreams of winning the lottery. Because the dream never came true, they now don't bother any more to buy a ticket.

There is a difference, however. The lottery is just luck (no-one has been able to prove that there is any system that improves your chances) and nothing you do can bring you any closer to winning.

The pursuit of justice is not just luck; it's a difficult endeavour and the final prize may elude you, but you can make a difference. You will certainly get further than the person who sits

tight and does nothing.

The Midrash speaks of a big rock at the crossroads, too heavy for anyone to shift. One option is to say, "It's all too hard for me!" and to abandon the effort. The other is to chip away at the rock little by little, which takes time and does gradually reduce the size of the obstacle.

You may never live long enough to complete the work, but after you are gone, others will carry the task forward: and one day the challenge will be overcome.

The sages say, "It is not your duty to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it" (Rabbi Tarfon in Pirkei Avot 2:20).

LESS WORK FOR GOD

Almost everyone who looks at Parashat Shof'tim finds a link with its time context, since it coincides with the arrival of the month of Elul.

Shof'tim deals with the appointment of judges and officers "in all your gates"; Ellul is the month when we engage in self-scrutiny and identify the sins and transgressions which need God's atonement and forgiveness.

The message is that even before the arrival of the Tishrei time of judgment when God scrutinises all His creatures and decides what to do with them, we need to use Elul for the