

Torah Portion Shof'tim

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What can we do with our ancient texts? This week's parshah proclaims "Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land." Some read this outline of ancient Hebrew justice literally or look in it to justify their preconceptions. It becomes more interesting when we ask it questions. How does justice relate to thriving? If we are to honor prophets but kill soothsayers, how do we tell the difference? Are there limits on conscription, war, and treatment of enemies? How might women's and men's roles in justice differ?

Commentators take interpretation even beyond interesting questions. They help us combine points of views from the Torah, Talmud, historical commentators, and even other systems of thought. They connect texts for us. They expand the boundaries that we put on interpretation, helping us reframe meanings and apply them to new contexts. Ultimately, they help us turn the ancient texts into living documents that developed through the ages and can even change today and in our own futures. It is exciting to have Rabbi Meeka, a commentator new to us, bring us fresh views on our ancient texts and help us reflect on what justice should mean today.