

Justice, justice shall you pursue. (16:20)

Rashi explains the Torah's enjoinder that we pursue justice as a demand that we seek out the most competent, knowledgeable court of law to adjudicate our dispute with another Jew. *Sifsei Chachamim* adds that, even though the case we have can really be listened to by any decent court of law, the claimant has an obligation to go out of his way to seek the most learned, qualified, impartial *bais din* available. A *din Torah* is often "cut and dry." Reuven owes Shimon, so all that is necessary is a judge who is not "blind," and who has the courage to render judgment. The command, *Tzedek, tzedek tirdof*, is speaking to a plaintiff who himself seeks justice. The Torah does not address itself to crooks. For them, there is no hope. No court will make a difference, and any judgment which they hear will be impugned – unless, of course, they win. Clearly, a deceitful plaintiff, bent on cheating the defendant, is not interested – nor will he adhere to the Torah's admonition to seek the best court of law. The Torah is speaking to the honest Jew – the upright, moral, dignified Jew who feels he has been wronged and is now going to court to retrieve what he feels is his. If he feels confident about his position, and if he has great trust in, and respect for, the court of law in his town, why must he go elsewhere to seek the highest quality court of law? Yes, the Torah commands him to search for the very best court of law – even if it means traveling – even if he trusts the court in his town.

To put it succinctly: Reuven claims that Shimon owes him a substantial sum of money. Reuven, the plaintiff, feels secure in his legitimate claim and substantiates it with incontrovertible proof. In his eyes, the defendant, Shimon, is clearly wrong. Reuven has no qualms about having the case adjudicated by the local *bais din*. Yet, the Torah says that he must make every effort to have his case heard by the most qualified court, which could entail traveling to another city and incurring some unexpected expenses. Why?

Horav A. Henoch Leibowitz, zl, derives a powerful lesson from here. The Torah requires a Jew to maintain an exemplary level of honesty and integrity. We may be certain in our heart and mind that we are correct, but, what if...? We must always introspect and question our motives. Do we seek the truth? Are we interested in retrieving our money? Do we want to hurt the fellow who hurt us financially? Is *emes*, truth, a priority in our lives, or just when it coincides with our comfort level? We might be right, but if there is a remote chance that a less-scholarly court may err in our favor, thereby taking money from the defendant unjustly, we have participated in a fraud. Thus, the Torah expects us to seek out the most scholarly judges to ensure that the level of integrity never be impugned – even in error. We choose a *bais din*, not because it will provide us with a "win," but because of its impartiality and accuracy in deciding the *halachah*. In other words, we, the plaintiff, do not want to wrong the accused. We only want the truth.

People do strange things for money. While they maintain the strictest standards of observance concerning their relationship with Hashem, their attitude suddenly changes when money is involved. By his very nature, man has a strong gravitational pull towards money. There is a reason it is called the root of all evil. I think the greatest allure of money emanates from the fact that it

grants one power without accountability. While some will use their material wealth for the pursuit of good – to help others, support organizations, etc. – there are those who use their money to lord over others and not have to answer to anyone for their reprehensible behavior. The Torah is teaching us the importance of honesty and how we should go out of our way not to do anything that is not above reproach. A Jew should shudder at the thought of doing anything that might harm his fellow.