

Appoint for yourselves judges and police for your tribes... - "Do not plant an asheira (a tree for idolatry) for yourself... near to the altar of Hashem your G-d." (16:18-21)

It is interesting to note the proximity of the *Torah's* enjoinder of the appointing of judges, to the admonishment regarding the planting of an *asheira* tree near the altar. *Rabbi Meir Shapiro Zt"l* explains that the *Torah* here is alluding to the character of a Jewish judge and leader. The *mizbayach* was filled with the earth and covered with copper. This denotes the nature and temperament of a *Torah* leader. He should be inwardly meek and humble as earth, and outwardly brazen, unswerving and steadfast as copper - in defense of the *Torah's* laws and the sanctity of the Jewish people. In this thesis the emphasis of the comparison of these two verses is placed upon the altar and the judge. *Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik Zt"l*, albeit, maintaining a similar approach, emphasizes the proximity of the *asheira* tree to the judge. He discusses the point raised by the *Talmud* in *Sanhedrin (7b)* that "if one appoints an unworthy judge it is considered as if he planted an *asheira*", in that the command to "appoint for yourselves judges" is followed by the exhortation against planting an *asheira*. He explains the reason for a judge being compared to an *asheira* tree. An obvious object of idolatry is immediately viewed as such and anyone who comes in contact with it will stay clear of this source of evil. The *asheira*, however, is a very deceptive idol. Outwardly it appears to be healthy, beautiful, and very appealing to its beholder. Its appeal and beauty was believed to be caused by some pagan deity. Similarly, an unworthy judge dupes the populace with his outwardly superficial display of righteousness and Rabbinic justice while, inwardly he is dishonest, unsuitable and unqualified for leadership. Therefore those appointing a Jewish judge or leader should choose men whose inner character is reflected in their Rabbinic scholarship.