

Judges

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

The Torah insists that a just society should have a system of judges and policemen. Judges establish the law and policemen enforce it. It then goes on to assert that the criteria for both should be that they are committed to justice and do not take bribes or give preference to the rich and powerful over the poor and weak.

This was written thousands of years ago and yet the sad fact is that it is very, very rare even in modern enlightened states that this is the case.

In the USA judges are often elected and to gain re-election they become indebted to donors and people who might help them get re-elected. We have seen how a Brooklyn DA was so indebted to some ultra-Orthodox communities that he refused to pursue some scandalous cases of child abuse amongst those communities. And that was the tip of the iceberg. Politicians become so indebted to their donors they often vote against what they believe in to keep campaign promises. Ambassadors are appointed very often simply because of how much they helped a President get elected.

The same goes for policemen. We see all the time how politicians intervene, influence police policies, appointments and practices. Police themselves are often bribed and guided not by fairness but by interests and power. This cannot be just or fair and it is not. America may well be better than most other countries but it is still far from following the principles the Torah laid out so long ago.

And we too in our communities put too much emphasis on wealthy and powerful members and not enough on those less fortunate or the poor, the needy and the disadvantaged. That is not what the Torah asks or demands of us.