

לֹא-תַטֶּה מִשְׁפָּט לֹא תִכִּיר פָּנִים וְלֹא-תִקַּח שֹׁחַד כִּי הַשֹּׁחַד יְעוֹרֵר עֵינֵי חֲכָמִים וַיְסַלְּף
דְּבַר צְדִיקָם:

“You shall not corrupt judgment, you shall not show partiality, and you shall not take a bribe. Because bribes blind the eyes of wisdom and upsets the words of justice.” (Devarim 16:19).

This pasuk, when interpreted carefully, expounds many lessons. “Do not corrupt judgment.” The word is also similar to נָטָה *reach out*. This means, any person (not just the judge) should not influence the judgment. There may be a one judge panel or there may be three or seventy judges. Either way, a person shall not influence a judge and one judge shall not reach out to influence the judgment. Each judge should come to the conclusions without sway from the others. The Torah also said, “You shall not influence judgment of the needy in their disputes.” (Shmos 23:6). Judgment must stand regardless of the litigants’ personal circumstances.

“Do not show partiality.” Literally, the pasuk means *do not recognize faces*. Justice must be blind. The judge should not see faces but should only see the two sides, their disputes, and the facts. The individual person has nothing to do with the judgment. The Torah already said, “you shall not glorify the poor in his litigation.” (Ibid 23:3). The personal circumstances of the litigants are irrelevant. Favoring a poor litigant over a rich one when the latter is correct, is stealing from the rich litigant. The same with a righteous or upstanding litigant versus an evil or undesirable adversary. Obviously, friends, relatives, acquaintances, or status should not be recognized in Court. Neither should the judge recognize the *tanoim* (advocates) or friends, relatives, or acquaintances of the litigants. Impartiality means looking at black and white facts, and considering nothing else.

“Do not take bribes.” The word “taking” in the Torah connotes a transaction. The judges are warned not to pay for bribes. One pays for bribes because bribes change the judge. There is a cost, and the cost is justice. It is also the cost of the judge’s wisdom and justice. The Torah already said, “Bribes, do not take, because bribes blind the seeing, and upset the words of righteousness.” (Ibid 23:8). There it says “Bribes, do not take.” Here it says “Do not take bribes.” There, the pasuk taught about the danger of bribes for any reason. *They blind the seeing and upset the words of justice*. Here, the Torah is teaching about the cost to the judge himself. There is a cost, not only to justice, but to the judge.

To comfort Bnei Yisroel that they will always be Hashem’s nation, Moshe told them that Hashem does not take bribes. (Devarim 10:17). There can be no cost to Hashem, so He can take no bribes.

“Because the bribe blinds the eyes of wisdom.” The judge is not being called the wise one but it is referring to Wisdom as its own being. It is the eyes of Wisdom that is blind. A judge borrows this wisdom to make proper judgment. Also, the wisdom in the facts will also be blinded and it will not be able to present itself to seek out justice. The

judge must realize that it is Wisdom that will bring true justice. The cost of taking a bribe is blinding Wisdom.

“And it upsets the words of righteousness.” *It retards the words.* As the litigants speak and plead their case and arguments fail to have an impact. The pleas and arguments get bogged down. The words of the judges, then, will also not be justice. Their words will be words of corruption and their judgments will be evil.

More than moral code, this pasuk teaches the great impact and cost that judging improperly has on the case, litigants, justice, and the judges themselves.