This week's Torah portion, Shoftim which speaks of the commandment to establish judges and legal systems in the land when we enter into it, is a timeless and timely message. As I look back over my 20 years of rabbinic sermons and files from examples of when I have spoken on this verse previously, invariably it has also been relevant to the time. No matter what is going on in the world the pursuit and the doing of Justice is topical and this parasha speaks with prophetic voice and vision.

As the Canada confronts its own history and present tense of structural racism, as the US straddles between two political conventions and their competing cries of injustice; and as world grapples with a global pandemic and climate crisis; our parasha reminds us; because we seem to always need reminding that justice and its pursuit are the foundation of the world. This week's parasha teaches that more than anything human beings can do to show their appreciation to

God for creation and the world we live in, the pursuit of justice and the doing of righteousness is our shlichut our sacred purpose as God's partners in an unredeemed world.

How does the parsha make this point, through a powerful yet relatively brief verse. The parsha commands, *Tzedek, Tzedek t'rdof*, justice, justice shall you pursue. Our tradition gives many reasons for these words to be repeated, noting that words are not repeated in torah without intention, and very seldom are they repeated at all. The other most familiar repetition., is Abraham, Abraham in the akedah where the angel wants to make sure he has Abrahams attention before he sacrifices his son Isaac.

Most explanations note that Tzedek, Tzedek is repeated because there is the justice of compromise and the justice of adjudication, or that they are repeated for emphasis to impress upon the Israelites

how important the pursuit of justice is in the world. I don't disagree with any of these but I would like to add another explanation, not for how long the verse is, made longer by the repeated words, but for how short it is. The torah takes only 3 words to tell us that the pursuit and doing of justice is the most important aspect of our relationship and partnership with god and each other.

Why only three words, because the doing of justice while it may require a lot of effort and hard work it does not require a lot of words to explain, justice while not simple, is often straight forward, justice is the right thing, the thing that we know in our soul is what is required to make a situation right, to treat a person fairly. Justice is not simple, but it is so often obvious. It is the wrong thing, the halfway, the slippery slope of values verses desires, the abdicating of justice, and the eventual realization that we have been unjust that takes a lot of explanation.

For proof we need only look at the lengthy explanations given by politicians when called out to explain an unjust policy or even those who disregard public health by-laws in the midst of a pandemic and are caught. If they had put had as much effort into observing the health guidelines or the basic principles of the social compact as they do trying to justify their unjust activity our world would be a more just place.

It is a simple test but one we would do well to remember, and learn from Torah, justice and righteousness are obvious, we may have to work hard to get there but what is right and what is wrong quite often stands out like a repeated word in the Torah. Our job, our obligation is as the Torah commands, l'dof is to pursue it.