

A Thought for Shabbat

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Shabbat Shalom

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This week's Torah portion, *Mishpatim*, follows the Ten Commandments portion. In it we find laws that focus on the specifics of living a righteous life. The Ten Commandments give us broad direction and *Mishpatim* (meaning "rules") instructs as to the particulars.

I am partial to this portion as 31 years ago I stood on the Bimah and read these words as a Bar Mitzvah. I remember clearly the rabbi telling me that in Exodus 23:2 we learn that "one should not follow others to do evil." He talked about peer pressure. He spoke about being my own man. He told me to stand up for what I knew to be right despite what others might think.

We see much of this today. Whether it is the protestors in Syria standing up against evil, or the lone wolves in politics standing up against the power structures, or the student who defends the unpopular kid who is being made fun of, or a parent who guides her child even though the child says, "all the other parents let their children do it;" each of them does not follow the path of least resistance, or the wrong path, or the popular path—they follow the right path. Judaism commands us to not follow a multitude to do evil. Easier said than done, but each of us has the ability to dig deep within our being and stand tall for justice and righteousness, for truth and fairness, to stop evil and make peace. We ought to think big and know that we are capable of not following wrong, but rather leading right.