

הַיְהוּדִים THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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YOU WILL APPOINT JUDGES AND OFFICERS AGAINST THE SCHEMES OF THE EVIL INCLINATION (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

Why does the first verse of our parsha mention judges before officers? First of all, officers present the one who has transgressed the law before the judge. It is only afterwards that the judge pronounces his verdict concerning him.

This is because, as we have explained in previous lessons, our Sages teach us to appoint judges at all our shearim (gates or openings – i.e., mouth, nose, eyes, etc.), to prevent us from doing what is forbidden. It is a truly difficult task, for the evil inclination is stronger than us. It is very cunning (*Genesis 3:1*) and it is made of fire (*Zohar I: 80a*), whereas we are made of flesh and blood. It is the serpent that embodies the forces of evil (*ibid I: 35b*). It only wants to wage war against us, especially in sensitive areas. This is why the Torah, which consists primarily of judicial instruction (*ibid II:82a*), encourages us to place guards in front of each of our members in order that we not come to sin. And, as we know, Heaven helps the one who seeks to purify himself. As we see from the verse in Parsha Ki Teitzei (“*When you go out to war against your enemies and the L-RD your G-d will deliver them into your hand*” (*Deuteronomy 21:10*)), you only have to begin the war. G-d will then help you to conquer your evil inclination.

The war that we wage against the evil inclination requires all our abilities and strength. It

involves speech, thought, and deed. Let us therefore judge ourselves correctly in the first place, and then move on to action as the body begins to carry it out (which answers the aforementioned question).

The Torah commands us to appoint expert judges, who in turn name G-d fearing officers to whom they teach the laws (the officer doing nothing on his own initiative). Judges can in this way adjudicate fairly. The one who watches over his body must wage war against the evil inclination. He himself should be both judge and officer in order to know how to proceed. Concerning the verse that states, “*If one blesses his friend loudly from early in the morning, it will be considered a curse to him*” (*Proverbs 27:14*), our Sages teach: The one who publicly gives a perutah to a beggar [thus causing him shame], it is as if he injured him (*Hagigah 5a*). Let us therefore be judges over ourselves.

Concerning the spies who slandered the land of Israel, Hashem swore: “*Your carcasses will drop in this wilderness*” (*Numbers 14:32*). Moses related these words to all the Children of Israel, and the people greatly mourned (*v.39*). The Children of Israel told him that they were ready to march towards the place that Hashem had designated. All the same, Moses ordered them not to ascend to the top of the mountain, for Hashem was not in their midst. However, precisely since they were obstinate, Amalek and the Canaanite beat and tore them to pieces (*vv.40-45*). It was precisely when G-d was not with them that they wanted to ascend!

Those people, who had wanted to perform a mitzvah, thought that they could atone for their sin (slandering the land of Israel) by waging war against their enemy and dying to glorify G-d's Name and the holiness of Israel. Yet, from our perspective, they did not act as judges over themselves and they did not think things through before acting.

Afterwards, we read the following in our parsha: "*When the L-RD will broaden your boundary ... then you shall add three more cities to these three [cities of refuge]*" (Deuteronomy 19:8-9). In other words, if Hashem helps you to conquer your evil inclination and He broadens your boundaries (by sharpening your Torah study and strengthening your fear of G-d), above all don't stay at the same level. Advance with an ever-increasing strength. Don't tell yourself, "*This is enough for me.*" The evil inclination never ceases to launch attacks against you. If you lo mosif (do not add), teassef (you will disappear (Ta'anith 31a)).

Consequently, it is advisable that we strive to constantly increase our boundaries so as not to be defeated by the evil inclination. It is in this way that we attach ourselves to G-d. Why does the verse specify three cities? Because a threefold bond is less easy to break (Ecclesiastes 4:12). In this way, we will never again detach ourselves from Hashem and His commandments. Following that, we may imbue the world with blessing and connect all the worlds together.

Moreover, the numerical value of shalosh ("three") is the same as lekasher ("to bind"), namely 630. As for the cities, the Zohar (I:40a, 41a) teaches that these represent the worlds of Beriah (Creation), Yetzirah (Formation), and Asiyah (Action), and that a person who constantly increases his service and fear of G-d attaches these worlds to their source because he acts as a judge and officer over himself. An outpouring of Heavenly abundance then descends upon the earth, thus allowing a man to conquer his evil inclination.

At this point, we can understand why the angels

were jealous of man at the time of his creation (Bereshith Rabba 9:8), and why they were against G-d giving him the Torah. G-d, however, pointed out to them that it is He "*Who places [His] majesty on the Heavens*" (Psalms 8:2). Believing that man had no role to play in this world, the angels wanted that this Torah remain in Heaven. Nevertheless, the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Children of Israel mitzvot to carry out in order for the angels to see that they in fact have a very important role to play. Moreover, the angels also benefit from this, due to the fact that man connects himself to his Creator and connects the three worlds to their source.

When Adam sinned by eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the angels were greatly frightened and asked the Holy One, blessed be He, "*Why did You punish man by imposing death on him?*" (Shabbat 55b). They feared that because of his death, he would not be able to connect the lower worlds to the upper world, hence their entire existence depended on man. They therefore pleaded in his favor. Moses explained to them that the Torah was given to the Children of Israel because only they were capable of uniting the worlds to their source by their rigorous study of Torah. The angels then went to Moses and revealed various secrets to him. In particular, the Angel of Death revealed the secret of the incense (Shabbat 89a). An outpouring of abundance and blessing then descended upon the world.

The initials of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah (beit, yud, ayin) have the same numerical value (82) as zeh sod (it is a secret). In revealing secrets to Moses, the angels enabled us to spiritually elevate ourselves and to connect the worlds (Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah) to their source.

The Angel of Death transmitted the secret to Moses because of the fact that, in the World to Come, there will be neither evil inclination nor Angel of Death (Sukkah 51a), and he can't contradict reality. Moses received this gift in order for man to continue to serve G-d.

STORIES OF TZADIKIM

THE POWER OF A GOOD DEED

From the story that follows, I learned just how great an influence a good deed has, even the simplest one, when done by an upright man with the intention of performing a mitzvah.

We know that in his final years the Chofetz Chaim decided to journey to Eretz Israel, with his plan being to settle in Petah Tikva. In view of this great event, the small town built a beautiful home for the greatest Rav of the generation, and public restroom facilities were also built nearby for those who wanted to come and meet the great Tzaddik. For various reasons, the Chofetz Chaim was prevented from fulfilling his dream of coming to Eretz Israel, but be that as it may, everything was still built. Then one year on the eve of Yom Kippur, the Gaon and Tzaddik Rabbi Eliyahu Dushnitzer Zatzal began to bustle about in the public restrooms, cutting and preparing toilet paper for Yom Kippur. A non-observant boy passed by at the time, and he looked with great curiosity at Rabbi Eliyahu's activities. He finally approached and asked him what he was doing. Rabbi Eliyahu explained to him, patiently and gently, that since tomorrow was Yom Kippur and many people were expected to come to pray, he had to make preparations for the good of the public.

The boy was so astonished by this noble deed that he told him that every piece of paper the Rav had cut had made a deep impression in his heart. By the influence of that deed, the boy came to the Yom Kippur prayer service and completely returned to G-d. He would often burst into tears when recounting that every piece of paper that the Tzaddik tore had also torn his heart.

THE REPENTANCE OF RABBI SAADIA GAON

People say that throughout his life, Rabbi Saadia Gaon Zatzal mortified himself by rolling in the snow and by performing other acts of penitence. His disciples found his behavior strange, to the extent that they asked him, "Our teacher, how can you repent? Do you sin? We know that you are a great Tzaddik, so why all this suffering?"

He replied to them, "My dear students, there are two types of repentance: A person can regret his sins, or a person can regret even his mitzvot. It is for the latter that I repent, for each day I become more aware of the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, and each day I perfect myself more than the day before. I repent from my imperfect past, and I truly regret not having known the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Torah as I know them today!"

He continued: "I learned this from a very simple Jew. One day I found myself in a distant city, and I went to a Jew who didn't know me. Naturally, he acted with me in accordance with the mitzvah of hospitality, as he should. After a few days, some people who recognized me came by and told others that I was staying there. The entire city was buzzing with excitement, and everyone came to receive my blessing and to ask for my advice. When my host saw all this, he was overtaken by remorse, bitterly regretting that he had not welcomed me with greater honor. From that point on, he provided me with finer sheets and served me meals fit for the holidays. Despite all this, however, when I left his place he fell to my feet and begged my forgiveness: 'May our Rav forgive me for not having honored him as I should.' I told him that he had done everything he possibly could, and I thanked him very much for it. Nevertheless, he did not stop asking for my forgiveness, and I gave him my blessing."

Rabbi Saadia Gaon finished his story by saying: "From that day on, I drew a lesson from a Kal Vachomer: If a person can feel so much regret that he has not sufficiently honored a human being, how much more should a person feel regret when it comes to properly honoring the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He? And how greatly should one feel regret for the omissions of the past!"