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maskil Le'David

Appoint Judges over Your Middot and Officers over your Thoughts

"Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities" (Devarim 16:18).

What novel insight is the Torah teaching us with this commandment? Is it not obvious that every country must appoint judges and officers in order to enforce law and order, and all citizens must obey the country's laws? This is how a country functions – so why is there a special Torah command concerning this matter?

I would like to suggest an answer: The Torah is referring to the *yetzer hara*. We are commanded to appoint judges and officers over ourselves so that we will not be misled by the urgings of our *yetzer hara*. If a person does not appoint "judges" over his desires and constrain his indulgences, he will be swept away by their current and G-d forbid fall to the depths of sin.

The *yetzer hara* cunningly misleads a person, making one imagine he has nothing to worry about or be afraid of. With his slippery tongue the *yetzer hara* subtly draws people to the entrance of the pit. When one finally realizes his mistakes and wishes to repent, it is too late: he is deeply immersed in the material cravings of This World and awash in physical desires, from which it is difficult to withdraw. Therefore, the Torah demands "judges and officers shall you appoint", so they should warn him and help him discern the *yetzer hara* and his ploys, before he is trapped.

Similarly, a person must also appoint "censors" over his bad *middot* and work on not feeling haughty or superior to others – the trait of arrogance is extremely despicable, yet not easily identified. One who possesses this negative trait is not liked by others; even his close family members will try to avoid him.

This is an important principle in marital harmony: an arrogant person who acts superior to his wife destroys his marital harmony. A clever husband realizes the value of submission and of acting humbly towards his wife; if she offends him, he forgives and forgoes, thereby erecting strong foundations for his home. Hashem then is pleased with this couple and dwells among them, as it says (*Sotah*

17a), "A husband and wife who merit, the Shechina dwells among them; the Name of Hashem is among them."

One of my *talmidim*, whom I assisted in returning to a religious lifestyle, related how he regularly visited a family member, a sick girl who was hospitalized, hovering between life and death *r"l*. While there he would also visit an elderly man in the adjacent room, encouraging him and bringing him treats to lift his spirits. One day the elderly man said to him, "Come, I wish to tell you a nice insight, for who knows if you will see me again..." And this is what he told him: "Why, when we recite 'He Who makes peace' at the end of the *Shemone Esrei* prayer, do we take three steps back? Because when one wishes to reconcile with someone and restore peace, one is obligated to step back a few steps, to lower oneself and subdue one's heart. For if he stands by his rights and opinions, he can be sure that peace will keep its distance from him, and argument and strife will be his lot."

Indeed, this concept that the elderly man told over is a wonderful and accurate insight. It is a powerful principle for every Jewish home. From the beginning of their journey, the couple must establish for themselves "judges and officers" over their *middot* and subdue their pride. If they are able to forgo an insult and not demand their rights, they are promised that theirs will be an eternal home for the Shechina.

The *pasuk* "judges and officers shall you appoint" also hints to us that we should contemplate all those people who left us suddenly at a young age *r"l*. This rouses a person to repentance and brings him closer to Hashem Yitbarach; they increase appreciation of LIFE. These are holy thoughts, included in the concept of "judges and officers," because they distance us from evil and bring us closer to doing good.

There is a wealthy Jew who lives in New York whose precious son became ill with cancer *r"l*, and his situation was very serious. He came to me crying that I should pray for his recovery in the merit of my holy ancestors *zy"ta*. With Hashem's help, his son eventually recovered and regained his health.

At the time I told him to make a commitment that this son will be a *ben Torah*; that he must dedicate him to Hashem Yitbarach. It was hard for him to accept this, so he replied, "Let's make a deal. This son who is a sharp and clever child will enter the business world, while I will dedicate my second son to Torah."

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6 Elul 5785

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Shofetim



Hilula

6 Elul

Rabbi Naim ben Eliyahu

7 Elul

Rabbi Aryeh Leib Lopian

8 Elul

Rabbi Yichya Amar

9 Elul

Rabbi Tzaddok Hakohen of Lublin

10 Elul

Rabbi Pinchas Shapira of Koritz

11 Elul

Rabbi Shalom Yosef of Rozhin

12 Elul

Rabbi Ahron Alkaslassi *zy"ta*





PARSHAH PEARLS

Inspiring Reflections

Giving Charity from Money Earned Honestly

“Righteousness, righteousness [lit. charity] shall you pursue, so that you shall live” (*Devarim* 16:20).

Rabbi Yehuda explained this verse (*Bava Batra* 10a), “Charity is great for it brings the redemption closer, as it says (*Yeshaya* 56:1), ‘Thus said Hashem: Observe justice and perform righteousness [lit. charity], for My salvation is soon to come.’”

How did Rabbi Yehuda learn from this verse that charity alone brings the redemption closer? Does the verse not say, observe justice *and* perform charity? Maybe it is charity that is performed *together with* justice that brings the redemption closer? Perhaps charity alone is not enough?

The Ben Ish Chai *zy”a*, in the name of his son Rabbi Yaakov, answers that charity alone can help bring the redemption closer, on condition that the charity givers observe justice. Not every act of charity has the power to bring the redemption nearer. It refers to charity performed with money earned honestly and justifiably and containing no trace of theft. But, “One who amasses wealth unjustly” (*Yirmiya* 17:11), even if he gives charity from this wealth, remains undesirable by Hashem; Hashem “loves justice and hates a burnt-offering [brought] with robbery” (*Yeshaya* 61:8). This explains the verse, “Observe justice and perform righteousness [lit. charity].”

From this explanation Rabbi Mantzur Ben Shimon *zt”l*, derived the meaning of “Righteousness, righteousness shall you pursue.” Give charity with money that was earned righteously; in this way, your charity will bring the final redemption closer.



WORDS OF THE SAGES

A Baby’s Smile Melts the Heart

The month of Elul is characterized as a time of repentance and good deeds. Every G-d fearing Jew occupies himself with repentance and good deeds in preparation for the day of Judgement. In a talk given by the Admor of Dinov *shlit”a*, he lauded the significance of every effort of each Jew during the month of Elul, even if G-d forbid, he has committed many sins.

There are some who unfortunately fall into despair. They feel they have committed so many terrible sins, and that repentance is beyond their grasp. Repentance, they feel, is only for the righteous. But for regular people like them, who have sinned so much and followed their desires, how can they repent?!

The Bnei Yissachar tells us something awesome. In some instances a sinful act can bring Hashem pleasure; even a transgression as serious as *avodah zara*. How? Through complete repentance. The Torah testifies that one who transgresses will lose both This World and the World to Come. This does not perturb the sinner; he nevertheless repents sincerely to Hashem and begins obeying Him. This gives Hashem great pleasure.

It is known that the Maggid of Mezritch was extremely destitute; he simply didn’t have even a coin to buy food for his children. One day, when hunger overcame them, the Rabbanit approached the Maggid and poured out her distress: she has nothing to feed their children! Out of deep sorrow, a sigh escaped the Maggid’s pure heart. Suddenly he heard a declaration from Heaven – due to that sigh he had lost his share in the World to Come! Hashem is meticulous with the righteous, even to the smallest degree.

At first he was dismayed! He had toiled and labored so greatly in Torah, and now he would not receive any benefit? Would he not acquire a single drop of reward in the Next World? But immediately he strengthened himself, declaring, “Until now I studied Torah with some personal bias – I anticipated the reward I would receive. From now on I will occupy myself with Torah only for the sake of giving pleasure to the Creator! Since I already lost my share in the World to Come, I will not benefit from it personally.” The Maggid immediately returned to his learning with renewed strength, until he heard another declaration from Heaven announcing that he once again merited a share in the World to Come.

The Admor of Dinov *shlit”a*, recounted how someone shared with him that his young child would interrupt his sleep each night, and on one occasion the child cried throughout the entire night. The father, not having slept a wink the entire night, felt angry with his young, difficult child. Since he was awake anyway, he went to pray with the *vatikin* minyan. He returned from his prayers still feeling angry with his son. He went to his child’s room and found him sitting in his crib; he gave the widest, cutest smile, as babies do. “At that moment, all my anger dissipated, as if it never existed. His smile melted my heart and renewed my love for him – as if he hadn’t kept me awake the entire night.”

A father’s love for his child is a *mashal* for Hashem’s love of Klal Yisrael, about whom it says, “You are children to Hashem, your G-d.” All we need to do is smile to Hashem and show Him that we love Him and wish to do His Will. In an instant He will accept our repentance with open arms.

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“Hold fast to both,” I told him. “The older son will be a *ben Torah and* a businessman.” He agreed to my advice and indeed today that son has made great strides in the business world, but Torah remains his main priority with his profession secondary. He has fixed study times for Torah every single day for several hours, and *baruch Hashem*, he has merited finishing the entire *Shas* twice. With Hashem’s kindness, the second son follows in his footsteps and is a true *ben Torah* who considers the Torah to be his profession.

This is an example of a Jew who merited placing “officers” on his personal wishes and “judges” on his *yetzer hara*, and with great self-sacrifice agreed to dedicate his sons to Torah. Today he enjoys much *nachat* and joy from them, and they embody the *pasuk*, “All your children will be students of Hashem...the seed that Hashem has blessed.”



FROM THE TREASURY

Based on the teachings of Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi **David Chananya Pinto, shlita**

Protecting Hashem's Honor

I heard the following powerful story from Mr. Yehuda Dehan, about his father Rabbi Meir Dehan *zt"l*.

Rabbi Meir Dehan *zt"l*, once asked if he could accompany my holy grandfather, Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto *zy"l*, to the city of Marrakesh. My holy grandfather agreed and Rabbi Meir drove him to Marrakesh in his car.

When they arrived, all the town's leaders came out to greet them, and the townspeople welcomed them with great honor, as is fitting for the honor of Torah. Suddenly, from among the crowds, a brazen-faced *goy* approached Rabbeinu and began disgracing and defaming him, spitting on his forehead on the exact spot where Rabbeinu placed his Tefillin.

Rabbi Meir Dehan, who witnessed the incident, related: Right then, the town's leaders who were shocked at this *goy's* brazenness, wished to wipe the *tzaddik's* face from the spittle, but my *Saba a"l* prevented them, saying, "I do not seek my honor; I forgive the slight to my honor. But the *goy* spat on the sacred spot where I lay Tefillin — this I cannot forgive by any means. For the sake of Hashem's honor I will seek revenge and hold it against him." And he added, "You will soon see Hashem's strong hand."

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a French police officer appeared, took his gun, aimed it exactly at the *goy's* forehead, and shot him, killing him in front of the crowd!

Morei v'Rabbotai, the Holy Rabbeinu Chaim is someone who merited placing "judges and officers" on his "gateways" throughout this life. Therefore, the *yetzer hara* was unable to penetrate his heart or implant feelings of pride. He was easily appeased and was able to forgive and overlook his personal disgrace; he did not possess a trace of personal pride. However, Hashem's honor was extremely important to him; Hashem's presence was constantly before his eyes. Offending Hashem's honor was something he could not forgive or pardon. That is why this *goy* received his punishment. "So may all Your enemies be destroyed, O Hashem!" (*Shoftim* 5:31).

May it be His Will that Hashem merit us to fight against our Yetzer Hara and subdue him by placing superior protection at every step of our path in life, especially during these holy days of Elul.



WALKING IN THEIR WAYS

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Rabbi **David Chananya Pinto, shlita**

Inspiring anecdotes from the life of the esteemed Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto *zy"l*

In honor of the fortieth *hilula* of my father and teacher, the *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto *zy"l*, which will take place this week on the fifth of Elul, I would like to relate several inspiring stories that demonstrate the piety of my esteemed father. May they serve as lessons for us in our *avodat Hashem*.

About five years prior to his passing, my father and I travelled to Morocco via Marseille, France, where we stayed in someone's home. When our host informed us that there was no *minyán* in his area, Abba said he would find accommodations in the center of town, for he has an obligation to be called up for the Torah reading. Our host replied in dismay, "What will be with me if you leave? You bring blessing to our home." Abba responded, "Listen, tonight I will stay with you but tomorrow I will go to the town where I will be able to pray with a *minyán*."

"But the town is about four or five kilometers away," the host pointed out. For Abba it made no difference.

I turned to my father, "Abba! How will you manage such a long distance? You have a hernia! Even walking a hundred meters tires you out!" But nothing could stop him.

The next morning several people came to accompany us and Abba walked for two hours straight, without stopping even once. It was simply amazing.

Another observation worth pointing out is that throughout the way, Abba kept his eyes focused on the ground; he did not look up once. When someone asked him how he managed to walk without raising his eyes from the ground, he answered modestly, "Now during the summer the streets may be dirtied with dog's mess, so I focus downwards so as not to dirty my feet." In truth, Abba was evading the real issue. I know well why he constantly gazed downward. The streets were full of immodesty (this incident took place during the month of Av/July-August) and Abba was most particular to guard his eyes. Whenever interacting with someone, he always lowered his eyes, no matter who the person was.

I once travelled with my father to England to see an ophthalmologist. Although it was his first visit, Abba did not look up as he walked. He was able to proceed directly to the office; he even led the way as if he knew the route by heart, without asking for directions.

The *tzaddik* Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto would always sympathize with other people's troubles, as the *pasuk* says "In all their troubles, he was troubled." He would pray for others after lighting many candles *l'iluy nishmat* his holy father. He exemplified the *pasuk*, "A *tzaddik* decrees, and Hashem fulfills his words."

He believed strongly in the merits of his holy fathers. If anyone came to seek his blessings, he would bless them in the merits of his exalted fathers, not referring to any of his personal greatness, in complete humility and self-effacement.

Rabbi Moshe Aharon lived humbly and modestly. When Torah scholars came to receive his blessings, he would stretch out his hand in greeting, but pull it back before they had a chance to kiss it. Then he would try to evade being asked for his blessings or for his prayers, saying, "Who am I to bless you? After all, you are sitting in the Beit Hamidrash elucidating the words of the holy Abaye and Rava. Blessed are you, who merits being involved in the study of the holy Torah."

Rabbi Moshe Aharon lived by the words of the Mishnah, "Be exceedingly humble in spirit." When approached by anyone, whether rich or poor, prominent or destitute, he would stand up to honor him. When he was once asked to explain this behavior, he explained, "Every person possesses a spark of Hashem, and I stand up in honor of that spark. Do not look at the vessel, but what is in it." May his merit protect us. Amen.

A NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA

Kind Officers



“Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities” (*Devarim* 16:18).

Who, in fact, were these judges and officers that the Holy Torah commands us to appoint in all our cities?

Rashi, at the beginning of the *parsha*, explains, “The officers are the ones who ensure the people obey their commands. They hit and force with a stick and whip until the person accepts the ruling of the judge.”

One who accepts the position of officer must agree to enforce law and order. Rabbi Yehuda Lichtenstein, in his *sefer Avodat Yehuda*, points out something fascinating: when offering someone this position, his acceptance was essentially an agreement to strike the Jewish people!

If, for example, we would see a notice in the ‘Wanted’ section of the newspaper, that Moshe Rabbeinu is seeking men who are prepared to strike Bnei Yisrael, how many applications would he receive? The Gemara (*Makot*) explains that these officers were not corrupt people who were accustomed to hitting and tyrannizing others. On the contrary, the officers had to be compassionate people who would not hit too much or too harshly. In that case, who from among Bnei Yisrael would want to buy whips to beat their people? In addition, the verse does not tell us that they received remuneration for this.

Which Jew would offer to become an officer when it involved forcefully hitting his brethren? And how is it possible to hit a Jew if the Torah orders us “love your fellow as yourself?” We are forbidden to cause pain to any Jew; how can someone pick up his hand against a fellow Jew?

The Maggid, Hagaon Rabbi M.Y. Reizman *shlit”a*, explains this matter beautifully by relating an incident that occurred as a result of the Spanish expulsion, which took place on Tish B’Av 5652. Not all the Jewish people were capable of withstanding the challenge of escaping from the country while leaving all their possessions behind, as some three hundred thousand Jewish people did do with great self-sacrifice (see *Abarbanel* for more details). Many of the Jews who decided to remain in Spain became “*anusim*” (secret Jews), observing Judaism in secret. Many of these *anusim* found themselves unable to withstand the pressure, for the Inquisition

would burn anyone suspected of secretly practicing Judaism. Out of great fear and dread, many of them eventually decided to follow their brothers and secretly leave Spain.

When they arrived in Eretz Yisrael, a group of these *anusim* came crying to the Mahari Berav. They related how during that period when they had to hide the fact that they were Jews, they had no choice and on several occasions, under the duress of death, they desecrated the Shabbat, ate forbidden foods or consumed food on Yom Kippur, in order to act as true Christians. If they felt the long arm of the Inquisition was spying on them, they transgressed several Torah prohibitions, although according to Torah law they were not considered exempt under exceptional circumstances. Since the king had offered them the choice of leaving the country by Chodesh Cheshvan if they wished to remain practicing Jews, they were not considered as truly having no choice but to sin.

The Mahari Berav wrote that these *anusim* cried to him bitterly to save them from the punishment of *kareit* (the soul of the sinner is cut off from life in the World to Come, or early death). Receiving lashes overrides the charge of *kareit*, since committing a negative transgression incurs *kareit*, and one who transgresses a negative commandment is liable to lashes from the Beit Din, which gives him atonement and permits his life to be spared.

They stood at the Mahari Berav’s door, sobbing terribly, begging him to agree to give them lashes. But from the time we were exiled from our Land, we no longer had the authority to give lashes. This is something that is permitted only if there is a Beit Din that was ordained by an authority that leads back to Moshe Rabbeinu. So how could the Mahari Berav penalize them with lashes?

The Mahari Berav decided to follow a ruling from the Rambam, who writes that if all the Jewish people who dwell in Eretz Yisrael unanimously agree that one particular *tzaddik* is the Gadol Hador, this Gadol has the authority to ordain a Beit Din, just as Moshe Rabbeinu had the power to do. And so it was, all the Sages of Zefat crowned the Mahari Berav as the ruling authority, and with this great power he gave authority to another three of the generation’s *tzaddikim*,

the Mabit, the Alshich and Maran the Beit Yosef. This Beit Din convened and appointed officers who gave lashes to the Jews who had escaped from Spain. How great was their joy at now being exempt from the punishment of *kareit*! The following Shabbat they made a *Kiddush* to celebrate the occasion.

In those days, a great *tzaddik* called the Ralbach, Rabbeinu Levi ben Chaviv, lived in Yerushalayim. He wrote to the Sages of Zefat, questioning how they did such a thing without first concurring with the Sages of Yerushalayim. Furthermore, how could they give lashes, for the penalty of lashes must always be preceded by a warning. The Mahari replied with several reasons, to which the Ralbach wrote back citing his opinion. This entire exchange of letters between them is printed at the end of the *responsa* of the Mahari Beherav, and in the *responsa* of the Ralbach. Among other things, the Mahari Berav wrote to the Ralbach that if he would have witnessed their desperate weeping, he too would have found a way to by-pass the absence of the condition of warning.

The *Avodat Yehuda zt”l*, writes that this was the idea behind the position of “officers” among Bnei Yisrael. The officer did not raise his hand or stick without the guilty party begging the officer, “Please I beg of you, have compassion on my wretched soul and purify it through lashes.”

If someone is guilty of a certain sin that he transgressed in This World, we have no idea of the great distress his soul experiences in the World of Truth; through a bit of pain that the body suffers down in This World, the soul can be purified for eternity. The Gemara tells us (*Megillah* 7b): “Since he was struck, he is considered as your brother.” This demonstrates the relationship between the one who carries out the penalty of lashes and the sinner.

This is precisely the meaning of the verse, “Judges and officers shall you appoint.” Bnei Yisrael joyfully appointed these officers over them. G-d forbid, the officers did not accept this position due to corrupt *middot*, nor was it considered degrading work. On the contrary, the officer had the merit of purifying the souls of Bnei Yisrael. As the Mahari Berav relates, the *anusim* rejoiced to such an extent when receiving the lashes for it exempted their souls from the sentence of *kareit*.