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maskil Le'David

Judges and Officers for our Mouths

"Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities [lit. gates] that Hashem, your G-d gave you, to your tribes, and judge the people a righteous judgement" (Devarim 16:18).

The Shelah Hakadosh (*Parshat Shoftim*) explains that this verse refers to all the gateways in man's body; the openings of the mouth, ears etc. Man must appoint officers in all these places so that no forbidden matter be allowed entry, for example, forbidden foods should not enter his mouth nor should he allow himself to hear forbidden speech and so forth.

The "judges and officers" of a person's gateways are the fences and restrictions that one establishes for himself. Once a person has already seen a forbidden sight it is very hard for him to lower his eyes — especially in the street surrounded by people. He may feel that if he walks around with his eyes to the ground people will think he is deranged. Rather, he must establish fences and restrictions for himself that will keep him away from the challenge. Among other boundaries, he may decide not to walk in the company of people who speak *lashon hara* and/or are known for discussing topics which lead to arguments and strife. In this way he will save himself from temptation, because the "guard" he appointed prevents him from entering dangerous zones.

These "judges and officers" must also work in the opposite direction. They must stand on guard and ensure that just as sin must not enter man, so too it should not emerge from him. Many times a person has a strong desire to relate *lashon hara* to his friend, or tell a story to his *chavruta* in the middle of their study session which will cause them to neglect their Torah study. These and other similar situations are examples of sins that can emerge from man. The task of the judges and officers is to help a person swallow his words and keep all the

disturbances and prohibitions bolted inside, not allowing him to express them outwardly.

The Gemara tells us (*Berachot* 34b), "Even complete *tzaddikim* cannot stand in the place of a repentant." The reason is because in addition to attaining their high level, *ba'alei teshuva* also had to eradicate their undesirable traits, and as Maran Rabbi Yisrael Salanter zy"l explains, getting rid of one bad trait is seven times harder than ascending in levels of holiness. This is why *ba'alei teshuva* are considered more worthy than the greatest *tzaddikim*.

Before Bnei Yisrael received the Torah they had to attain the highest possible spiritual level, therefore Hashem gave that generation great *siyata d'Shmaya* to enable them to rise from the forty-ninth level of impurity. Each day they eradicated another negative trait from their hearts and entered a gate of purity, thereby achieving a level more elevated than a complete *tzaddik* who attained the forty-ninth level of holiness. As we know, it is harder for *ba'alei teshuva* to battle with their *yetzer hara* because it works hard to constantly remind them of their past sins. They must invest enormous toil not to snap and listen to the counsel of the *yetzer hara*.

My esteemed father would guard his eyes in an outstanding manner; the restrictions and guards he appointed over his eyes were above human comprehension. In addition, throughout his life he was particularly careful to guard his mouth. Not only did he never speak *lashon hara* or *rechilus* — and it was self-understood not to utter forbidden speech in his presence — but even a trace of untruth never crossed his lips, even in circumstances where people are accustomed to being lenient.

When Abba left Morocco to come and settle in the Holy Land, he took along a bag of gold and silver jewelry intended for the dowry of his daughters. The law in Morocco forbade taking jewelry and other valuable possessions out of the country, but Abba was not aware of this and therefore did not hide his valuables. Rather, he placed them in a small suitcase that he kept with him.

Abba stood in line for passport control and the man behind him suggested he hide the jewelry he was carrying since the official might confiscate all his valuables, but this advice fell on deaf ears.

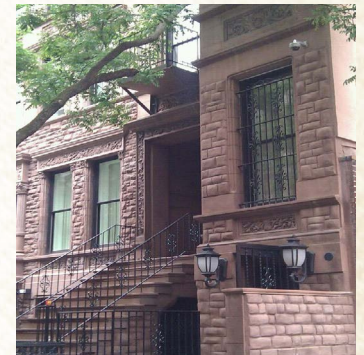
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2 Elul 5786

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Shoftim



Hilula

2 Elul

Rabbi Aharon Chason

3 Elul

Rabbi Eliyahu Mansani,
a *talmid* of the Ohr Hachaim
Hakadosh

4 Elul

Rabbi Meir Simcha Hakohen,
the Ohr Same'ach

5 Elul

The esteemed Rabbi Moshe
Ahron Pinto zy"l

6 Elul

Rabbi Naim ben Eliyahu

7 Elul

Rabbi Aryeh Leib Lopian

8 Elul

Rabbi Yichya Amar





PARSHAH PEARLS

Inspiring Reflections

The Difficult Challenge of Bribery

“You shall not accept a bribe, for the bribe will blind the eyes of the wise and make just words crooked” (*Devarim* 16:19).

The Midrash Tanchuma brings the following powerful message about the enormous power of bribery:

Rabbi Yishmael son of Elisha said: “Come and see how terrible bribery is!

“Someone once brought me the first of the shearing of his flock (one of the Priestly gifts). He had a court case and I was standing at the side and thought to myself, ‘If he claims such and such before the judge, he will win the lawsuit.’ I wanted him to emerge worthy, even though he only gave me what really belonged to me and it was not a bribe. Nevertheless, I felt close to him whenever I saw him. And even though he asked the Beit Din to rule for him, I was still interested in knowing if he emerged worthy or not.

“This teaches about the severity of bribery, for it blinds one’s eyes.

“If, when he brought me from what belonged to *me* and I took from what was *mine* I wanted him to come out worthy, all the more so one who accepts true bribery.”

In the Merit of “Kiseh” He Will Sit on the Throne of Hashem

“It shall be when he sits on the throne of his kingdom” (*Devarim* 17:18).

Rashi explains, “If he is particular about this, it will serve as a merit for him that His kingdom should be sustained.” The *Kli Yakar* brings a wonderful hint for this idea.

The word “*kiseh*” (throne) is an acronym for “*keseif*” (money), “*sus*” (horse) and “*isha*” (wife).

The verse wishes to hint that in the merit of being careful with these three things, not having too much money, too many horses or too many wives (as mentioned in the previous verses), the king will merit sitting on the Throne of Hashem, as it says (*Divrei Hayamim* I, 29:23) , “Shlomo sat upon the throne of Hashem.”

Two Torah’s; Two Conducts

“He shall write for himself two copies of this Torah in a book” (*Devarim* 17:18).

Rashi writes: “Two Sifrei Torah — one he should keep in his treasury and the other one he must keep with him at all times.”

Every Jewish king, points out the *Ktav Sofer*, must have two Sifrei Torah: One that he keeps in his treasury, for himself, meaning when it comes to himself he must be meticulous with all the details of the Torah. But the other one he should take with him when he is among other people, meaning, with regards to other people he must behave pleasantly and beyond the strict letter of the law.

WORDS OF THE SAGES



What Do We forget When Accepting the Yoke of Heaven?

In the middle of their journeying in the Wilderness, the Torah refers to Bnei Yisrael’s future request to appoint a Jewish king, as it says (*Devarim* 17:14), “When you come to the Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, and possess it, and settle in it, and you will say, ‘I will set a king over myself, like all the nations that are around me.’”

Appointing a king is not a simple event. One must first understand and internalize the essence of kingship and be ready to accept its yoke and authority. If this is the case concerning a human king, how much more so when we are talking about the King of kings, the Holy One Blessed be He.

Rabbi Michel Sholpovarsky *zt”l*, Rosh Yeshiva of Tiferet Tzvi, writes in his *sefer Tiferet Adam*: “Twice daily we recite *Kriyat Shema*, the section of accepting the yoke of Heaven. But do we in fact accept the yoke of Heaven *upon ourselves*?

“In a well-known statement, the father of the *mussar* movement, Maran Rabbi Yisrael Salanter *zt”l*, would say that a person has no problem with appointing Hashem as King over the four corners of Heaven, the seven skies and even over all the worlds, but he forgets a small point: to anoint Hashem as King *over himself*; to accept the yoke of Heaven *upon himself*!

“It is important to realize that to strengthen ourselves in this area would be a significant preparation for our approach of the service of *Malchiot* — Kingship, which is the essence of Rosh Hashanah.

“The *tzaddik* Rabbi Leib Chasman *zt”l*, Mashgiach of Chevron Yeshiva, once turned to his *talmidim* and said, ‘Pay attention. I will read a section from the siddur and you tell me what I skipped.’

“He opened the siddur and read a portion from the blessings of *Kriyat Shema*: ‘Then they all accept the yoke of heavenly sovereignty from one another.’ His *talmidim* immediately noticed that he had skipped the words (Then they all accept) ‘*upon themselves*.’

“‘That is what I wanted to hear!’ Rabbi Leib exclaimed. And then he added: ‘I was always troubled by this question. Why did *Chazal* have to add the words ‘upon themselves?’ Is the text I read to you lacking something?’

“In this way,” concluded Rabbi Michel, “Rabbi Leib wished to demonstrate that the main emphasis in *Kriyat Shema* is that each one should accept the yoke of Heaven *upon himself*.”



WALKING IN THEIR WAYS

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

Proper Prioritizing

I once arrived late to a wedding, so the host asked a waiter to bring me the fish course which had already been served to the other guests.

While waiting for it to arrive, I wanted to use the time to drink a *l'chaim* with the *chatan*. I was seated at the head table with several other rabbanim, and the rav sitting next to me pointed out that the wine I had chosen did not have a commonly accepted *hechsher*. However, the rav who gave the *hechsher* was seated at our table. I immediately realized that if I did not drink his wine, I would be causing him great embarrassment. I decided it was proper to rely on his *hechsher* since I knew him as a G-d fearing Jew and poured a cup of wine, recited the appropriate blessing and drank the entire cup.

The rav who had certified the wine noticed and smiled with satisfaction. I understood that I had acted correctly, for until now the guests had glanced at the *hechsher* and then pushed the wine away, causing him great heartache.

Several moments later the host approached. **Pale-faced, he told me there was reason to suspect that the fish was not kosher! Baruch Hashem I had been saved from eating this dish...**

I thought to myself ... those guests who were not careful about embarrassing someone sitting at their table, were among the ones who stumbled with eating forbidden fish. Perhaps in the merit of my concern regarding shaming a religious Jew, I was protected by Hashem and did not ingest something impure.

For if someone is careful not to transgress, Hashem protects him that he not sin even unintentionally.

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Indeed, when it was Abba's turn to present his documents, the official asked him if he was carrying any silver or gold. Abba confidently replied in the affirmative, declaring what he had with him, without hiding anything. The official asked him if he was aware that this is forbidden, and Abba replied that he had no idea, and if the law obligates him to leave his valuables behind, then this is what he will do, for he had no intention of transgressing the country's laws.

The official called over the inspector who opened the case and went through all its contents. He saw that Abba was not hiding anything; he had declared everything to the official. Hashem helped Abba find favor in his eyes. The inspector closed the suitcase, returned it to Abba, wished him a safe journey, and gave him permission to continue on his way.

Unfortunately, today no-one is exempt from the *yetzer hara's* grasp. In the past one had to go out into the street or enter a cinema in order to sin. Today he can sit in the *beit midrash* listening to a Torah shiur, and the cinema is right inside his pocket! We must make restrictions and fences so that we not stumble — but once we put these devices in our pocket, we relinquish any form of protection.

Therefore, each and every one of us must rid his pockets of the *yetzer hara* and stay far away from any spiritual challenges. Even then, much prayer and Heavenly mercy is required so the *yetzer hara* should not be successful in making one stumble with sins which are prevalent in every corner.



FROM THE TREASURY

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

Distance Yourself from Challenge

A person's stature is measured by his ability to establish "officers" which will protect him and guard him from sin. If he already stumbled and sinned, he must appoint "judges" which will try him for his bad deeds and arouse him to repent.

The Torah commands us, "Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities." Each person must contemplate the areas in which he must strengthen and guard himself; his points of weakness against which he must appoint judges and officers so that G-d forbid he should not come to stumble.

I remember a father of ten children who approached me and told me that the internet in his workplace caused him a great spiritual downfall. He asked my advice on how to overcome this challenge and not allow this destructive device to lead to his further decline. I told him to leave his job immediately — despite reservations about his livelihood. His top priority is to guard himself and not squander his soul, G-d forbid.

It is clear that just as a few officers cannot protect an entire town full of trouble-makers, so too it is impossible to overcome the *yetzer hara* in a place full of temptations and forbidden sights. Therefore, a person is obligated to distance himself from any challenging situation, since he cannot know if his judges and officers have enough power to guard him from sin.

For this reason we say in the morning prayers, "Do not bring us... into the power of challenge, nor into the power of scorn." If one does not have enough stamina to stand up to the temptations he faces, a challenge can bring him to disgrace. Therefore, one would do well to recognize his weaknesses in advance. He should then take himself to safer ground where he can establish judges and officers who will guard and protect him.

a NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA



Righteous Judgement?

The righteous Jerusalem residents were furious. Why?

They heard that a grocery owner in one of neighborhoods had brazenly left his store open on Shabbat. In those days, such public desecration of Shabbat was a rare occurrence.

Not in the habit of sitting with their arms folded, the residents gathered to protest this violation of the holiness of Shabbat. But the owner wouldn't budge. His cash register provided a large profit on Shabbat and he was not willing to give it up. Since he was not a man of weak character, he was not afraid of the threats and not convinced by their explanations. All he listened to was the sound of the coins that jingled in his register.

One *erev Shabbat*, early in the afternoon, an elderly Jew entered the grocery store. Even the irreligious residents felt warmly toward this elderly man. It was impossible not to love the *gaon* and *tzaddik*, Rabbi Aryeh Levin, father of prisoners, who took care of every Jew with great love and devotion, no matter his situation. Rabbi Aryeh entered the store and sat down on a chair in a far corner, facing the cash register where the owner stood and served his customers. The hour was relatively early and some of the customers were buying their last-minute provisions for Shabbat.

Slowly the sun began to set; Rabbi Aryeh was still sitting in the corner surveying the scene, leaving the owner confused. In the beginning he had thought that the elderly Rabbi Aryeh had entered his store to rest a bit on his way, but after two hours he understood that something out of the ordinary was taking place. He finally approached Rabbi Aryeh and asked him, "Can I help the Rav with something?"

Rabbi Aryeh looked at him with his warm eyes and burst out crying, "Precious Jew, I have no need for help. But I heard you keep your store open on Shabbat and I wanted to understand why you do this. I have been sitting here for two hours and I can see that you are earning

substantial profit. I well understand your difficulty to overcome the temptation of so much money. But what can I do, my son," Rabbi Aryeh sobbed while warmly pressing the owner's hand, "We are obligated to observe the Shabbat."

The owner was in shock. He declared, "**Rabbi, many people tried to persuade me to close my store. Yet none besides you came to my store and tried to understand the great challenge I have. I promise you that from this Shabbat onwards, my store will remain closed!**"

This story illuminates the query that arises from the command in this week's *parsha*. The judges are told to judge the people with *righteous judgement*. This warning seems a bit strange: If someone does not judge righteously, surely he will not be appointed as a judge?! But Rabbeinu Avraham ibn Ezra explains that this warning applies to the judges: When you judge, judge the people with righteousness. And how does this warning apply to those who are not judges?

Chazal have taught us, "One should only judge what his eyes see." As an allusion, one can say that every Jew serves as a judge when he reproves someone. The Torah warns him, "They shall judge the people." When you rebuke someone for his actions you must not simply act according to what you witnessed, but try and *feel* his feelings, try to understand the depths of his situation and look deeper into the actual act. This is what will lead to a righteous judgement.

Now during Elul, this can be our preparation for the Day of Judgement. We should try not to judge others before attempting to understand their difficulty. Something which to us seems clearly wrong might not be wrong for another person under his circumstances. We will be rewarded for this effort measure for measure and on the Day of Judgement when Heaven will find a way to judge us favorably. Sometimes people refrain from judging their friend favorably since the positive conclusion seems to be irrational. However, the truth is that this does not stem

from rationality but from hard-heartedness. If one truly loves his friend he will jump at any possibility which vindicates his friend.

A story is told about a *chatan* and *kallah* who took upon themselves to welcome Shabbat early. On the first *erev Shabbat* after their marriage, the *kallah* was slightly preoccupied, and when she remembered about the agreement she had made with her *chatan*, it was already a few minutes late. She hurried over to her Shabbat candles and to her surprise saw that they were already lit! Her new husband had lit the candles in her place! She did not think it was appropriate to ask him about this, but she was filled with disappointment. He decided to light the candles himself just because she was a few minutes "late?!" She sat through the *sheva brachot* feeling broken.

The *kallah's* mother realized she was upset and pressed her daughter to tell her what was going on. After telling her mother what had happened, her mother burst out crying and told her husband what their daughter's *chatan* had done. The *kallah's* father decided not to approach the *chatan*, but also felt dejected the entire Shabbat. The *sheva brachot* which were meant to enhance their *simcha* brought them no joy.

On *Motza'ei Shabbat* the father approached a rav for advice on how to react. The rav maintained that the story sounded strange. Everybody knows how a *kallah* anticipates lighting the Shabbat candles for the first time. Her *chatan's* actions did not make sense.

The rav went to the *chatan* to clarify the matter. The *chatan* suddenly grasped what had happened and explained, "I lit the oil lights to prepare them for my wife, intending to blow them out! But there was a sudden knock on the door so I went to open it. My father-in-law had arrived so I sat with him and forgot to blow out the lights..."

This is one of the most telling examples of how we are often missing an important part to a story... it always pays to judge one's fellow favorably!



"Contemplate and see that Hashem is good"

Exciting update: With *siyata diShmaya*, the *shiurim* of Moreinu v'Rabbeinu, the Admor Rabbi David Chananya Pinto shlit"a, are now available in Hebrew, English, French and Spanish

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