

B”H

Maamar Shoftim veShotrim 5716 not mugah dvar malchus 5773.

Sedra Shofetim

THE SEDRA¹ TELLS US TO PUT JUDGES AND OFFICERS AT ALL OUR GATES. On one level this is about organising a basic aspect of civilized society: a system of legislation, which defines the laws, the judges, and the ‘officers’ or police who will enforce the laws. In this sense ‘gates’ means the Gate of the city, where, in ancient Israel, the law court was to be found.

Similarly, a verse from the well-known text ‘A Woman of Valour’ tells us ‘her husband is known at the gates.’ He is known at the regular gatherings of significant and responsible figures, which take place at the gates of the city.

Now let us consider other levels of understanding these teachings. We will begin with the verse from Woman of Valour: her husband is known at the gates. Whose husband? The kabbalists explain that this ‘wife’ is the Jewish people, and her ‘husband’ is G-d. But in what sense is G-d ‘known’? G-d is Infinite! He is beyond human knowledge.

The Zohar² gives two explanations. One is that He is not really ‘known’. The word Gate ‘she’ar’ relates to word ‘hashe’arah’ ‘approximation’. We can know of the Existence of the Divine, but not His Essence. The other explanation is that we are not speaking of the unknowable Essence of the Divine, but of His manifestation through the Sefirot. In this sense, G-dliness can be ‘known’. One can explore the microcosm of a human being, a structure of intellect and emotions, and through that have some level of knowledge of the macrocosm, the Divine Sefirot.

Exploring this structure of the Sefirot, we learn that there are 50 Gates of Understanding, through which there is a flow from the higher levels of the Sefirot to the lower. There are also ‘32 Paths of Wisdom’ which represent an interaction between the upper Sefirot of Wisdom and Understanding. Working back to the individual, we need to be able to connect our emotions to our minds, and conversely, our minds to our emotions.

This brings us back to the concept of Judges and Officers at our gates. The gates, according to commentators, are the gateways of the consciousness of the individual: our eyes, ears, nostrils and mouth. We need to be able to guard these gates, to see that they open to admit only appropriate material; or, in the case of the mouth, that they express to others only appropriate material.

Through taking control of the 50 Gates of Understanding and the 32 Paths of Wisdom within ourselves, we are able to be master of our Gates as well.

In this process we need the Judges, the Torah teachings which give us the guidance, and the Officers, who help us stand firmly to our decisions when things are difficult. It is through such self mastery that we will achieve true blessing for the coming year...

1. verses of Sedra 2. Zohar I 103a. CHECK INSIDE. Also Lik Torah Matot 85b ff.

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