

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
ד"ה שופטים ושוטרים תשכ"ז בלתי מוגה

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GUARDING THE GATES

THE SEDRA STARTS BY DECLARING THAT 'YOU SHALL SET (APPOINT) JUDGES AND GUARDS AT ALL YOUR GATES'. This is a decree that every city in the Land of Israel should have a Law Court with judges, who define the legislation, based on the Laws of the Torah, and guards or police officers, who ensure that this legislation is enforced.

The Midrash² comments on this with a parable about a King who had a beautiful orchard, which he loved very much. The King had many children, of whom his favourite was the youngest. The King decided that he would give his precious orchard to his most favoured child. Thus the Holy One gave the Laws of Justice of the Torah – which are specially beloved by the Divine³ - to the Jewish people, who are also specially beloved as it says 'for Israel is a child, and I [G-d] love him' (Hos.11:1).

The Midrash concludes by citing G-d as saying that by the merit of Justice, G-d will make His Shechinah dwell among the Jewish people, and also bring the Redemption.

The Rebbe asks: when explaining why Israel is beloved by G-d, and will therefore be given the Laws of Justice, why does the Midrash quote a verse in which the Jewish people are described as a child? In order to study and administer the complex laws of Justice, 'Mishpatim', it would be more appropriate to be a scholarly and experienced adult rather than a child. There are

¹ Maamar *Shofetim veShoterim* 5727 (1967), published in Dvar Malchus Shofetim 5774. The Hebrew text was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Devarim Rabbah 5:7.

³ See Isaiah 61:8 'for I G-d love Justice'.

several other verses describing G-d's love for the Jewish people which could have been quoted. Why choose one which describes Israel as a child?

In order to understand this point, we have to explore the spiritual dimension of this instruction. It is clear that in practical terms this is a law addressed to the community as a whole. The community has to organize local law courts in each city, higher courts for each Tribe, and ultimately the Great High Court, the Sanhedrin of 71 Elders. But it is interesting that in Hebrew it is phrased as an instruction to each individual. The literal translation in antique English which shows the singular is: 'thou shouldst set Judges and Guards at all thy gates..''.

This means, each individual has to set up judges and guards at their own personal 'gates'. What are these gates? One view⁴ is that the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands and feet are all 'gates', which means all one's active limbs. But in the Book of Creation⁵ we find the idea that there are seven specific gates in a person, which link back to the seven planets and seven 'double' letters in Hebrew⁶, which are their spiritual source. According to the Book of Creation, the seven gates of a person are his or her two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and the mouth.

These orifices of the body can be characterized in four groups: sight, hearing, scent and speech. These relate to the four letters of the Tetragrammaton, and to the Sefirot: the eyes, Sight, correspond to Wisdom, the ears, hearing, to Understanding, one's power of scent through the nostrils connect with the group of six Sefirot⁷ and the mouth, Speech, expresses Malchut, Kingship.

Since these seven gates of the body receive their spiritual flow from the seven 'double' letters, they too are 'double', in the sense that each can be used either by the Divine Soul, for a holy purpose, or by the Animal Soul, for a possibly unholy purpose.

One could even say that the seven gates of the Divine Soul are also 'double', because each might be in a state of dynamically thrusting forward, or moving back and consolidating⁸. The Tikkunei Zohar⁹ links this to the 'double' quality of the letters: the letter with a Dagesh is in a state of 'moving forward', or 'upward', which is a form of Severity; the letter without a dagesh is 'moving back, consolidating' which is an expression of Kindness.

Both of these can be in the realm of Holiness, as we see with Shamai, who expressed Severity in his more strict rulings, and Hillel, who expressed a form

⁴ Sifte Cohen on the Torah.

⁵ 4:4.

⁶ These are the letters which take a light Dagesh: Beit, Gimmel, Daled, Kaf, Peh, Resh, Taf. (This ancient list includes Resh; modern grammarians would not do so).

⁷ Kindness, Severity, Tiferet (Mercy), Endurance, Submission, Dedication.

⁸ This image comes from Ezekiel's vision (Ezek.1:14) in which angels are described as 'moving forward' or 'coming back'.

⁹ Tikkun 70 (128b).

of Kindness in his more lenient rulings¹⁰. They were both great Sages, yet they expressed their teachings in contrasting ways.

This is the meaning of the command to have Judges and Guards at all one's gates, one's personal gates of one's senses and all one's limbs. One always needs to be alert. Especially since – as the Tzemach Tzedek explains – the Evil Desire can sometimes appear in a pious guise¹¹.

In this process of self-mastery, one can also understand the Judges as being Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge, the Mind, and the Guards as the Emotions which are sparked by the Mind and which then compel the person in his or her daily activities.

Looking more deeply at the function of the Mind, the Judges, in service of G-d, like human judges investigating a case in court, the power of the Mind is to analyse and explore, to examine every detail. Chassidic teachings present this process as something exalted and spiritual, reaching supernal heights. This links also to the idea of the manifold details of the Mitzvot. The Mitzvot come from the Divine Will, higher than Wisdom and Understanding. But they are transmitted to us with myriad details as explained by the Sages in the Talmud and Code of Law. These details are very precious to the Divine – and this explains why, as was mentioned earlier, G-d particularly loves Justice.

However, now we can also understand the emphasis on Israel as a child: the child expresses the quality of simple Faith, which reaches even higher than the subtlety of intellection. Not everyone is able to reach the subtle analytic intellect of the Judges, Wisdom and Understanding. But every Jew has a bond of Faith with G-d, which is like an inheritance, of 'great wealth for which one did not have to work'¹². And even a child can inherit such great wealth. Hence G-d gives Israel, and each one of us, as a child, His great Judgement, His Torah and Mitzvot in all their details. Because our simplicity as a child enables us to connect with the Divine 'simplicity' beyond all other levels.

This links with the atmosphere in the month of Elul when this Sedra is always read, and the author of the Shelah¹³ points out that the Sedra always connects with the season and festival. The month of Elul is a month of personal accounting and stock taking about one's behavior during the past year. Such accounting of the soul begins with the Judges and Guards on one's senses and limbs, and one's 248 limbs link with the 248 Positive Mitzvot, leading to positive service of G-d with one's Thought, Speech and Action.

¹⁰ Tanya explains that the Severity of Shamai is that he says this particular action cannot be spiritually elevated and therefore it must be forbidden, while Hillel is 'Kind' in that he says it can be elevated, and therefore he permits it. See Tanya, Introduction, and Part IV sec.13.

¹¹ See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Hayom Yom*, 23 Sivan.

¹² See Tanya Part I ch.33.

¹³ Rabbi Yehashaya Halevi Horowitz (16th century), author of *Shnei Luchot HaBrit*.

In Elul there is the service of 'I am to my Beloved', which leads to the Divine response 'My Beloved is to Me'¹⁴. This is the flow and revelation from Above to the Jewish people, leading to the realization by everything living 'that You have made it exist' (as we say in the Rosh Hashana liturgy), and the beginning of this awareness is in the Land of Israel, from where it spreads to the whole world, and indeed ultimately the Land of Israel will spread over the whole world¹⁵, with the coming of Moshiach, may he come and redeem us swiftly in our days.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

¹⁴ The initial letters of the complete phrase 'I am to my Beloved and my Beloved is to me' (Song of Songs 6:3) form the word Elul.

¹⁵ See Yalkut Shimoni Isaiah sec.503.