

# The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל  
פרשת שופטים תשכ"ט ד"ה שופטים בלתי מוגה  
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## JUDGES AT THE GATES

**T**HE SEDRA STARTS WITH THE IDEA OF HAVING JUDGES AND POLICE AT THE GATES OF EACH CITY, AND PROCEEDS to the concept of 'clearing out evil' from the Jewish people<sup>2</sup>. The Midrash<sup>3</sup> presents the idea that the 'city' is the body, and one's limbs are the inhabitants of the city. The city is attacked by a powerful king – the Evil Desire. It surrounds the city and builds ramparts to attack it. So, the Sedra tells us to put judges and police at each gate of our bodies, in order to defend ourselves from this attack.

The goal is to conquer and clear out the evil from oneself and from the entire Jewish people; the ultimate effect of this is to clear out evil from the whole world. This idea is expressed in the Rambam's teaching that a person should always consider himself or herself equally balanced as regards good and evil, and that the whole world is equally balanced, so that one's next positive step will transform oneself and the whole world to good<sup>4</sup>.

Further, since - as the Sages tell us<sup>5</sup> – the world was created for the sake of the Jewish people, if they succeed in clearing out all their evil, then all evil will be cleared out from the entire world.

How does one accomplish this? What are the judges and the police in terms of our own individual struggle with our Evil Desire?

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<sup>1</sup> Maamar Shofetim 5729 (1969). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Shefotim 5775. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 17:7,12.

<sup>3</sup> Kohelet Rabbah 9:15

<sup>4</sup> Rambam, Laws of Repentance, 3:4.

<sup>5</sup> See Rashi and Ramban to Genesis 1:1.

The Rebbe explains that the ‘judge’ is our attempt to challenge our own Evil Desire. The Talmud<sup>6</sup> presents this as an uncertain process: a person could try to withstand a temptation, but might fail. Hence judges alone are not enough, one also needs ‘police’. As explained by the Rebbe, the ‘police’ represent the strategies which the Talmud suggests in order to help us in our resolve.

[For example, Torah study might have the effect of inspiring a person so that he or she can successfully fight against a negative tendency within them (whether this concerns a temptation to do something wrong, or to desist from or delay doing something right). If that doesn’t work the Talmud suggests reciting the Shema, or thinking of the day of one’s death. In Jewish thought there are a number of such strategies: the Sages tell us that when Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph, his moral stance was strengthened by the image of his father Jacob<sup>7</sup>. Each individual might devise their own range of conceptual ‘policemen’ which help them to achieve self-control.]

However, the Rebbe points out that the first step is to have an internal ‘judge’, the desire to have this self-control, to actually challenge the inappropriate desire or tendency, rather than just giving in without a fight.

Now let us consider in a deeper way what is meant by the ‘gates’. The famous text ‘Woman of Valour’<sup>8</sup> includes the verse ‘her husband is known at the gates’<sup>9</sup>. Chassidic teachings explain, based on the Zohar, that the husband means G-d, and each individual recognises G-d according to his or her own ‘gate’, *sha’ar* in Hebrew, which relates to the word *shiur*, ‘measure’. No two individuals are the same, and each person has their own ‘measure’ and gateway whereby they recognise the Divine. However great one’s perception might be, in relation to infinite G-d, it is limited – an idea also suggested by the word *shiur*, measure. But nonetheless, whatever one’s spiritual level, each person can achieve some aspect of awareness of the Divine through their own personal ‘gate’.

But a further meaning of the gates of the city, or the soul, and the need for judges and police, is the Chassidic teaching that each person has four main gates: sight, hearing, the sense of scent, and speech. Each of these can be a way to relate to the Divine. Sight, as expressed in the verse ‘lift your eyes heavenwards, and see who created [the stars]’<sup>10</sup>; hearing, as in verses such as ‘and now Israel, listen to the laws and statutes which I am teaching you’ (Deut.4:1). The sense of scent is also a way of relating to the Divine, as we see

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<sup>6</sup> Berachot 5a

<sup>7</sup> See Rashi to Vayeshev, Genesis 39:11.

<sup>8</sup> Friday night liturgy at home, Proverbs 31:10-31.

<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 31:23.

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 40:26.

from verses which compare Divine service and prayer to incense<sup>11</sup>. Speech, of course, is a means to communicate with G-d both through prayer and Torah study.

These are all positive aspects of the four gates of the body. But books of ethical teachings, and some Chassidic works, also point out the need for judges and ‘police’ at these gateways because of their negative possibilities. Thus, one should guard one’s sight from looking at any inappropriate scene. One may feel that one is not ‘affected’ by it, but Chassidic teachings stress that the mere experience of seeing something inappropriate can result in a negative effect on one’s psyche.

One’s hearing too, should be guarded, from hearing things like Lashon Hara, the Evil Tongue. This has a bad effect on the one who thinks it up, the one who repeats it, and the one who hears it<sup>12</sup>. A great spiritual gain from a person’s refusal to listen to Lashon Hara is that, measure for measure, it causes the Heavenly Court to refuse to listen to accusations against that person.

The sense of scent is compared in the Talmud to thoughts of sin<sup>13</sup>, which can be even more enticing than the forbidden action itself, just as the delicious scent of certain kinds of food can provoke more desire than the actual act of eating. So here too, one’s personal ‘judges’ and ‘police’ are required. Finally, speech. Quite apart from forbidden speech, such as Lashon Hara mentioned above, or what the Sages call ‘worthless words’<sup>14</sup>, the Rambam writes<sup>15</sup> that one should be sparing with *all* speech. He cites Ethics of the Fathers (1:17) ‘I have found nothing better for the body than silence’.

Thus through the judges at the gates in this personal quest for self restraint, one comes closer to achieving the goal of clearing evil out of the Jewish people as a whole, and also to the positive aspect of recognition of the Divine through one’s own individual measure.

This approach to life will lead also to the literal fulfilment of the verse about judges at the gates of the city. For, as Isaiah says<sup>16</sup>, G-d will again establish our judges and advisors, with the coming of Moshiach, and the true and complete Redemption.

**Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care**

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<sup>11</sup> See Vezot Habracha, Deut. 33:10, and Rabbi Dov Ber the Mitteler Rebbe’s *Peirush Hamilot* ch.89.

<sup>12</sup> Erchin 15b, and see *Hayom Yom* 13 Cheshvan.

<sup>13</sup> See Yoma 29a.

<sup>14</sup> See Tanya Part 1 ch.8.

<sup>15</sup> Mishneh Torah, Hil. Deot 2:4

<sup>16</sup> Isaiah 1:26. The Rebbe explains that in the time of Moshiach one will not need ‘police’ to enforce the law, for no one will want to disobey the law. But ‘advisors’ will give counsel about the best way to fulfil it. See *Sefer Hasichot*, 5751, Shofetim p.780 ff.