

Pardes Yehuda

← Weekly Torah Journal By Yehuda Z. Klitnick →

Parshas Shoftim

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פרשת שופטים תשע"ד

שָׁפְטִים וְשָׂרִים תִּתֵּן לָךְ בְּכָל־שְׁעָרֵי אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ: (ט"ז י"ח)
Judges and officers shall you appoint for yourself in all your cities which Hashem gives you. [16:18]. We can derive an insight from this posuk. In Parshas Kedoshim (Vayikra 19:15) we find בַּצַּדֵּק תִּשְׁפֹּט עִמִּיתְךָ In righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. In his second comment, Rashi uses (with a slight variance) the same wording as the Mishna in Avos 1:6 הוּי דן אֵת הַבָּרֵךְ לְבָרָה זָכוֹת, therefore shifting the focus to judging “favorably”, not merely “justly”. We must judge our fellow Jew in a good light. Many people are quick to stringently criticize others and to find faults in them, but when it comes to themselves they judge leniently and always come down on the right side of every issue and middah. The Torah is telling us, No! תִּתֵּן לָךְ turn the watchful gaze of the judges and officials upon yourself; have integrity! Apply to your own actions the judgments and punishments that you would like to see applied to other people. [The Ba'al Shem Tov teaches that a defect perceived in a fellow Jew is a prompt to correct the same shortcoming in the observer himself. (DPR)] (Yehuda Z. Klitnick)

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Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your “cities” which Hashem gives you. The word שַׁעַר can also mean a gateway - and can serve as a metaphor for the openings of the head, the awesome chief of all our limbs. [“awesome” in the authentic sense of the word, not as it has become debased in prevailing popular parlance. (DPR)] It is the head which contains our eyes, ears and mouth. These precious assets need stalwart guardianship! One must police the acts that revolve around these openings. Let’s take them in turn. The eyes dare not gaze on forbidden sights (idolatry or immorality, including immodesty), nor may they view anything which might incite jealousy. The ears must be blocked tight against forbidden speech (harmful gossip, slander, mockery or speech painful to another Jew.) The mouth has two potential pitfalls: 1) it must refrain from uttering forbidden speech (as before, but also falsehood or curses); and 2) it must eat only Kosher food fit for a Jew, and obtained lawfully. Our possuk adjures us to post a guard over all our “openings” -- the gateways to our souls. The openings in Hashem’s marvelous creations -- our bodies -- are intended solely to serve Hashem ki’retzono by fulfilling Mitzvochs and eschewing aveiros. (Shela Hakadosh and others)

Based on this insight we can better understand אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ: "what Hashem gives you". When someone embarrasses or insults you, the “natural” tendency is to retort in kind, even with “interest,” - right on the spot, in the heat of passion. However, Mussar sforim (*Mesilas Yeshorim and others*) teach that the proper course is to tolerate the insult, even if it is on the level of outright verbal abuse, and not to rebut, refute, or retort. The reward for this approach will be far greater than any fleeting satisfaction of returning the insult.

Two episodes from Gedolim embellish our point.

1. One day, Reb Meir of Premishlan (See also our Story of the Week) entered a Shul and a Yid took to publicly berating him (probably from a sense of imagined grievance or “rebbishe politics” (DPR)), yet he endured the insult and didn’t say a word. The next day Reb Meir approached that Yid, brought him a nice gift and also thanked him for the embarrassment! The Yid was, to put it mildly, shocked! Not only had he insulted the Rebbe but he got a present and a thank you in the bargain! The Rebbe explained: It sometimes happens that there is a decree in Shomayim that a person must pass away from this world or suffer from grievous illness. His forebears in Heaven learn about the decree and then intercede for him that it be nullified by substituting shame and embarrassment for the agony of that decree. Reb Meir revealed his first-hand knowledge of events in Shomayim: “This actually happened to me. It was decreed on high that I was to be niftar now; but when you hurled insults at me, the decree was overturned and my life was spared! So it’s only right that I thank you and show appreciation for what you did.”

2. Harav Michael Nimni שליט"א who was very close to the Baba Sali זצ"ל, the great Moroccan tzaddik, told this story. A Rosh Yeshiva came to visit the Baba Sali. The Baba Sali ordered his gabbayim not to admit this Rosh Yeshiva for an audience. All efforts by the Rosh Yeshiva were of no avail. After two days of waiting, he left Netivot, where the Rebbe lived in his last years. On the way home his car overturned in an accident and the Rav miraculously walked away without a scratch. As any ehrliche yid would do, he bentched Gomel and sponsored a *Seudas hoda'ah* - סְעוּדַת הַוְדָאָה. One day word came that Baba Sali was asking to see him. Still shaken from the accident, he traveled back to Netivot. The moment he entered the room, the tzaddik said: בָּרוּךְ הוּא וּמְצִיל “Blessed be Hashem who redeems and saves.” The Baba Sali explained to the Rosh Yeshiva: He was privy to a death sentence facing the man and sought to overturn it by substituting in its stead the embarrassment of being spurned in the waiting room for two entire days. In this way, the Rav was spared from certain death.

This is what the posuk is saying: אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ ... which Hashem is giving you. Realize that Hashem is giving you a golden opportunity to suppress a response-in-kind to an insult or provocation. Be wise enough to realize that a fate far worse than agonizing embarrassment may be forestalled by so doing. (Yehuda Z. Klitnick)

תָּמִים תְּהִיָּה עִם ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ: (יה יג)

“You shall be wholehearted with Hashem your G-D” (18:13) How can we understand the notion of being wholehearted with Hashem? The Mishna in Avos 2:1 says: עֵין רוֹאָה וְאוֹזֵן שׁוֹמְעָה Hashem sees and hears all our acts. As the Navi Yirmiyahu

warns us **”אם יסתתר איש במסתרים ואני לא אראנו”** (Yirmiyahu 23:24) *even if someone tries to hide in a hidden place Hashem still sees what he is doing.* (As Odom HaRishon and Kayin discovered in Gan Eden (DPR)), one cannot hide from Hashem. This can be the insight of the possuk **”תמים תהיה”** *be righteous and*

wholehearted [in all your ways] - not “frum” in public and unrestrained in private. The reason for this is: **עם** "you are always *with*" **ה' אלקיך**. If you are always in His presence, then of course He always sees what you are doing, as it were. (Alsheich Hakadosh)

STORY OF THE WEEK: (by Yehuda Z. Klimick)

Reb Meir coaches a chazzan "wannabe" - who doesn't take the job!

Reb Meir of Premishlan is renowned in Chassidic circles to this day for his “pikchus” - his uncanny way of devising clever solutions to intractable situations while respecting the personal feelings of everyone involved. [In his time and place, unlike perhaps ours, serving as chazzan/shaliach tzibbur was a highly-sought-after privilege; people would vie for the honor, but not always would the most suitable candidate emerge successful. Yomim Noraim time could often see a heated rivalry in this area. Shulchan Aruch O.C. simanim 53 and 581 discuss qualifications for prayer leaders. (DPR)] The custom was that all Chazanim, current and prospective, in the surrounding countryside came to Reb Meir seeking a bracha for their tefilos to be well-received in Shomayim on behalf of their local kehillos. Reb Meir also gave them the customized divrei chizuk and mussar they needed in order to be the most suitable Shaliach Tzibbur possible. On occasion, the Rebbe sensed that a given individual was not well-suited to be a Shaliach Tzibbur. In those cases, the Rebbe would give mussar until either the person did true teshuva, or else realized that he was not an appropriate choice as their town’s ba'al tefila, and hence stepped down.

In a city nearby, the long time chazzan passed away at old age and the city scrambled to appoint a new chazzan before Yom Tov. The wealthiest man in the city, who had considerable clout in communal affairs, but who also had an inflated opinion of himself, and was not well-learned, craved the position - and claimed it for himself. The roshei hakehilla had an obvious dilemma: the man funded many local needs, but they recoiled from entrusting their tefilos to Shomayim during the Holy Days to someone who was essentially an arrogant Am Haaretz! Seeing no easy solution, the local Rav set off for Premishlan to ask Reb Meir for practical advice.

Reb Meir had a clear prescription: He told the Rav to summon the Yid and tell him that the town elders are willing to appoint him as chazzan, on condition that he follow the custom of consulting Reb Meir Premishlaner to get a bracha that his tefilos be received in heaven on behalf of the town. The Rav hoped that Reb Meir would soon see how unfit the man was to be a chazzan, and that his mussar would convince the man to withdraw from consideration. Reb Meir told the Rav to identify a different chazzan candidate against this likely scenario. The Rav returned from Premishlan, met with the man and told of the custom for a prospective chazzan to visit Reb Meir in Premishlan to get a bracha. The Yid readily agreed to go.

The next day the Yid traveled to Premishlan and presented himself to Reb Meir. When Reb Meir met the Yid he straightaway discerned that he was unfit to be a chazzan since he was lacking Yiras Shamayim/Awe of Heaven and was an Am Haaretz to boot. In any case, the Yid innocently told Reb Meir about his new post and requested the customary bracha and guidance. These were Reb

Meir’s words of wisdom: *Sholom uvracha*, my good man. It is well that you have come in advance of the Holy Days. Let’s learn together a bit about the different spiritual levels to which a ba'al tfilah can aspire. The highest level is called *Tefila L'Moshe*. A chazzan like this is a tzaddik and talmid chacham, on the level of Moshe Rabeinu, who has the power to deliver his tefilos to Hashem personally. Now tell the truth: are you on that level? “No, Rebbe, I am very far from that level,” was the answer. Very well; I see that you are an honest man. Let’s go the next level down, which is called *Tefila L'David*. David Hamelech, Sweet Singer of Israel, had a beautiful soothing voice, greatly beloved to Hashem. Do you at least daven with a beautiful voice? “Honestly, no, Rebbe, but the previous chazzan didn't dafka have a great voice either!” Fine, but David had another advantage - merely hearing his song brought people to teshuva. Perhaps you are at that level? “No, surely not. That’s asking a lot!” Don't fret; we're not done yet. There is still a third level for which you may qualify, called *Tefila Le'ani*. The entreaties of a poor person who pours out his heart to Hashem for help have a special power. Would you say that you are a pauper who will pour his heart out, from the midst of poverty? “Of course not! Boruch Hashem, I am well-off financially.”

Reb Meir saw it was time to bring the conversation to a head. He asked the Yid: “My dear brother! How could you seriously hope to serve as a chazzan if you cannot attain *any* of the three categories of Tefila we’ve just learned about?” These words pierced the Yid’s heart and he began to shed hot and copious tears: “Rebbe, I will do teshuva and be a true ehrliche Yid and will forget about being the chazzan! I see it’s not for me!” Reb Meir continued with a long, personal discussion with the Yid, full of prescriptions for self-improvement. When the erstwhile chazzan returned home he headed straight to the Rav with a totally new outlook, bearing news of his transformative interview with Reb Meir. Greatly relieved, the Rav turned to the backup chazzan he had appointed at Reb Meir’s earlier behest. True, some other worthy townsman stepped over to the lectern the first morning of Selichos that year. Yet our hero ascended in Torah and Avodah, spurred on by Reb Meir Premishlaner’s admonitions. He could well have served as a ba'al tefila in some future year, perhaps even in some other fortunate community. One can only marvel at how Reb Meir Primishlaner defused a potentially volatile situation while keeping everyone’s feathers unruffled.

הגליון מוקדש לעיני זקני הר"ר יצחק בן ר' יהודה זבולון הלוי קליטניק ע"ה א' אלול תשמ"א. ולע"נ חמותי מרת שרה - אשת חבר של מו"ח הרה"צ ר' יוסף בהרה"צ ר' ישראל טויסיג זצ"ל - בת ר' חיים אהרן הכהן כ"ץ מבאטיו ע"ה ב' אלול תשנ"ב. מול טוב לר' אלעזר דוב בהרה"ח ר' יוסף בריענגר נ"י. וש"ב ר' יצחק משה בן אחי היקר הר' אהרן נח בן אבי מורי הרה"ח ר' אלעזר הלוי קליטניק שליט"א להולדת הבנים ולש"ב ר' יוסף - חתן ר' ש"ב ר' יצחק ישראל בהרה"צ ר' שבתי באלד נ"י - בן הר"ר לוי בן דודי הר"ר אהרן הלוי קליטניק נ"י ולר' יצחק ב"ר דוד וואלאפין נ"י להולדת הבנות

edited and revised by my chaver and partner in Pardes Yehuda, R' Duvid Pinchas Rose [reachable at davidrose10@gmail.com] Only with the chesed of Hashem, we are now entering our 5th year תשע"ד - 187 gilyonos to date and growing. I thank our loyal readers for their positive feedback. A publication of **Seforim World** 1000's of seforim: new, old 4403 16 Ave. Brooklyn N.Y. 11204 U.S.A. 718 438 8414 718 633 5500 www.seforimworld.com or seforim@gmail.com hours 11-7:3