

The Wonders of Your Torah

Choice Excerpts from the Teachings of Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh Shlit" a

Seven state officials

The opening sentence of this week's Torah portion, *Parshat Shoftim*, is "You shall place Judges and law enforcers at all of your gates that *Havayah*, your God gives you to your tribes and they shall judge the people with a just judgment."

Further on in the *parashah*, we find the verse, "Justice, you shall pursue justice, in order that you live and inherit the land that *Havayah*, your God gives to you." Both of these verses allude to the inherent connection between God's gift of the land and the necessity of enforcing righteous justice. and this is also explicit in the verse, "Appoint, you shall appoint upon you a king whom *Havayah*, your God has chosen for you, from amongst your brethren you shall appoint a king upon you; you will not be able to appoint upon you a foreigner who is not of your brethren." So, first we have judges and then we have a king and later on in the *parashah* we find that God will also appoint a prophet, who is also "of your brethren." Contemplating this *parashah*, we see that all the official functionaries in the kingdom are described: priests, levites and judges, a prophet, a police force and a king. To these six functions, the *Zohar* adds the duty of the kingdom's citizens to testify truthfully in front of the courts.

Altogether there are seven different officials who complete the array. As in a musical orchestra that contains different players and instruments, we need a government that is composed of a variety of officials who act together in harmony. The first three, the priest, the levite and the judge, are one unit who represent the *sefirot* of loving-kindness, might and beauty, respectively. The last four, the prophet, the police officer, the witnesses and finally, the king, represent the *sefirot* of eternity, acknowledgment, foundation and kingdom, respectively.

In order to judge and define who is innocent and who is guilty and to authorize appropriate reward and punishment, one needs to be learned in all the laws of the Torah whose "ways are ways of

pleasantness and all its paths are peace."¹ The judge is associated with the *sefirah* of beauty, which according to the *Zohar* represents the Torah, to which all of the other categories of officials are subject, including the king. Although we might think that judgment is harsh and corresponds to the *sefirah* of might, the *Zohar* teaches² that true judgment is issued through compassion, the inner motivating force of the *sefirah* of beauty.

From Harav Ginsburgh's class 2 Elul , 5772

Short and Tweet

Every year, come the month of Elul, we begin to feel the refreshing breath of *teshuvah* (return to God) in the air.

The New Year is fast approaching, and this is the time to make an accounting of our actions over the past year and to mend our ways.

When we delve into our hearts, we find that our actions were in accordance with the law but our intentions were removed from God.

On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, we ask God to forgive (סלה), pardon (מחל) and absolve (כפר) us of our sins.

Our relationship with God is threefold; He is our Father, our King and our Husband.

To truly rectify our sins, we must realize where we strayed from our relationship with God.

We rectify our father/son relationship with God by treating Him and His commandments with honor and respect; then God forgives us.

We rectify our king/servant relationship with God by obediently obeying His commandments; then God pardons us.

We rectify our husband/wife relationship by being sensitive to the Divinity that resides in the world and by relating to it.

¹ Proverbs 17:3.

² *Patach Eliyahu*, the introduction to *Tikunei Zohar*.

Mind over heart

Shoftim is the 48th *parashah* of the Pentateuch. The number 48 is the numerical value of the word “mind” (מִחָה), which immediately associates us with the phrase in the *Zohar*, “The mind rules over the heart” (מִחָה שְׁלִיט עַל הַלֵּב), which in the classic text of Chassidut, the *Tanya* forms one of the most profound and fundamental tenets of our service of God.

Short and Tweet

Elul equals 67 and so does “understanding” (בִּינָה).

Elul, the final month of the year, is the time to understand the past year’s events.

In *Elul* one is inspired with a new understanding of how to rectify the past and create a new and better future.

The first step to understanding is dedicated introspection in search of the true motivations behind all of our efforts.

The true will and motivating power of a Jew is always good.

In Kabbalah rectification begins by the power of will becoming conscious of its own positive inner motivation.

Once we understand that our motivations are positive ones, we can begin to actualize our deepest positive desires in practice.

Our good will is God-given; actualizing it is the ultimate return to God

Wholehearted return to God heals one’s soul and body: “... his heart shall understand and he shall return and be healed” (Isaiah 6:10).

Of the different officials who are enumerated in our *parashah*, the foremost, mentioned in the opening verse of the *parashah*, is the judge who represents the lucid mind of Torah study and sanctity. The heart of the nation is represented by the king, who is completely subject to the rulings of the Torah scholars. This is true to such an extent that in certain cases, the judges are referred to as “God” (אֱלֹהִים), because the ability to judge is one of the principal attributes of God, as the verse states, “For God judges; this [individual] He deposes and this one He elevates” (Psalms 74:8). In contrast, the king is referred to as a “prince” (נָשִׂיא) and being mortal, he is liable to sin as the verse states, “When a prince sins” (Leviticus

4:22). In fact, one of the reasons why the Torah limits the king’s number of wives and horses is, “so that his heart shall not become haughty,” relating in particular to the heart’s proclivity to sin. This is why the king’s special commandment is to carry a Torah scroll against his heart so that the Torah, his judge and his rational mind, will rule over his heart and he won’t become arrogant over his brethren. Obviously, the king needs to be subject to “God,” represented here by the judges.

Nonetheless, the king has special privileges that no other Jew has, even the judges. This comes to reveal, as Chassidut innovates, that although the Torah’s rulings must be absolutely abided to even by the king, the heart of the nation, there is a more profound level at which “the innermost point of the heart rules over the mind.” The king in particular bears the paradox of conveying an outer casing of sovereignty, while nurturing an inner sense of profound lowliness and humility. Whereas by studying the Torah’s laws, one can reach a level of knowing the entire Torah, the innermost point of the king’s humility is infinite, “The heart of kings is unfathomable” (Proverbs 25:3). Thus, the king’s external demeanor is subject to the rulings and teachings of the judges, but his innermost core of humility actually rises above their level and rules over them.

Within our personal Divine service, this level is that of a completely righteous individual who has refined himself to such an extent that he naturally acts accurately according to the Torah’s principles without having to deduce them rationally from his Torah knowledge.

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Distributed by Gal Einai

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