

THE GATES OF JUSTICE

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Shoftim begins with the command to appoint judges in all the cities of Israel. The Torah states: Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities -- which Hashem, your God, gives you - for your tribes; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment (Deuteronomy 17:18). The issue is that actually the Torah does not say to appoint judges and officers in all the cities rather it uses a different Hebrew term all your gates. It is a strange expression. After all, the Torah is not referring to appointing officers to serve as border guards. Therefore the verse is translated as the gates of the cities, meaning, of course, all your cities. But why say the word gates instead of the word cities? Actually, the use of the word gates is analyzed by many commentaries, some that interpret the word gates as a reference to the personal gates of the human body the seven orifices which are a conduit to four of the five the senses i.e. two ears, two eyes, two nostrils and a mouth. The Shalah (Shnei Luchos HaBris) explains that those bodily gates of entry need both officers and judges who are constantly on guard to ensure that only the right matter is absorbed. However, I'd like to present a simpler approach.

Often the readers of Faxhomily and Drasha send in stories from anthologies or personal reminiscences that I might be able to use in future faxes. Here is one that I received not long ago, though, unfortunately, I do not have the name of the author. He related the following revealing story:

I remember my wife's grandfather of blessed memory. He was a shochet (butcher), a Litvishe Yid (Lithuanian Jew). He was a very sincere and honest Jew. He lived in Kentucky, and later in life he moved to Cincinnati. In his old age he came to New York, and that is where he saw Chassidim for the first time. There were not too many Chasidim in Kentucky and Cincinnati.

Once he went to a heart doctor in New York. While he was waiting, the door opened and a distinguished Chasidic Rebbe walked in accompanied by his gabbai (personal assistant). It seems that the Rebbe had a very urgent matter to discuss with the doctor, who probably told him to come straight into the office. The gabbai walked straight to the door and ushered the Rebbe in to see the doctor. Before going in, the Rebbe saw my grandfather waiting there.

The Rebbe went over to my grandfather and said, "I want to ask you a favor. I am going to be with the doctor just one minute, if it's okay with you. If it's not okay with you, I won't go in. One minute is all I need."

My wife's grandfather said okay, and the Rebbe went inside. He was in there for a minute or so, and

then he came back out. The gabbai was ready to march straight out the door, but the Rebbe walked over to him again, and said, "Was it okay with you? I tried hard to make it short. I think it was just a minute or two that I was there. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it." Later my wife's grandfather said to me, "I don't know much about Chassidim and Rebbes, but there's one Rebbe that I could tell you is okay."

Perhaps the Torah is telling us that those who adjudicate and lead are not only responsible to the people while they are in the court of justice. They are responsible even in their entries and exits as well. By telling us that judges must be appointed at the gates, the Torah may be telling us that the demeanor of the court officers and judges does not merely begin when the judges are performing official judicious acts in courts. Our leaders have a tremendous impact wherever they may be even at an entrance into the gates of justice.

Good Shabbos

Dedicated by Rabbi and Mrs. Pinchos Chatzinoff In memory of Jesse Chatzinoff Yishai ben Zev Wolf 5 Elul

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