

# TIME TO GROW UP!

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

*"Judges and officers shall you make for yourselves in all your gates, which HaShem your G-d gives you for your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgement." [Dev. 16:18]*

The legal system set out in the Torah provides for both judgement and enforcement, and even more, makes the enforcement a central part of the process -- "and they shall judge" seems to refer to the officers as well as the judges. In addition, this commandment is given to all of Israel, rather than to a select group of leaders. How do we understand this? What can each of us do to set up judges, and even more, establish police? The answer, perhaps, lies in a deeper analysis of this obligation: within ourselves, we each must judge and police our own behavior.

As the Shla"h HaKadosh writes, the Sefer Yetzarah says that there are seven gates into a person. What are these seven "gates?" Two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and one mouth -- these are the gates, through which outside influences come into our bodies. The verse tells us to make judges and officers, to ensure that what comes in through our gates is not the bad but the good.

In any well-run city, produce and commerce comes in -- and the garbage is removed. But without guards at our gates, we can take in the worst garbage and filth and bring it into our hearts! Are we looking at garbage or holy texts? Are we listening to gossip or words of Torah? All of this depends upon the rules we set for ourselves and the way we police ourselves.

Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchoki, explains that "officers" are enforcers, who strike people with sticks when necessary to force them to follow the law. How, then, do we apply this when we attempt to police ourselves? In the hugely popular "Harry Potter" book series, there is an elf named Dobby who, whenever he does something that his owners would not want him to do, vigorously strikes himself as he imagines his owners would if they were there. This is meant to be humorous, because no one beats himself up in quite this fashion. This is not what policing ourselves is meant to be.

I've often been told that Aristotle was once found doing things that contradicted his own philosophical teachings, and responded to the questioner by saying "now I'm not Aristotle." In Talmudic sources [Nedarim 32b], we find that "at the time that the Evil Inclination takes control, there is no one to remind you of the Good Inclination." The key is to create reminders, the "policemen" that will catch us before we do something wrong.

In our day, guidelines are unpopular. People claim that "rules are made to be broken." It's a choice between that philosophy, and policing oneself. But isn't the latter commonly known as "growing up"?

Good Shabbos,  
Rabbi Yaakov Menken

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