

## Walking thru the Parsha with Rabbi David Walk

### IT'S PERSONAL

One of the great gifts I got from my Mom was a love of reading. From an early age, I learned to be rude by reading all the time. No matter where I was or who was around, I could escape into a book. It sometimes demanded a high-level of concentration, but it was worth it. The focus was aided by inserting myself into the action. I became Tom Sawyer, the Count of Monte Cristo, James Bond or Hercule Poirot. It was a bit weird with Miss Marple, but I persevered. Actually, she became one of my favorites. I must, a bit sheepishly, admit that I try this same technique with Tanach. I want to feel that Moshe Rabbeinu is addressing me, personally. So, you can understand why this week's Torah reading presents me with a bit of an issue.

The parsha, which is a primer on Torah government, begins, 'You shall set up judges and law enforcement officials for yourself in all your cities that the Lord, your God, is giving you, for your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment (Devarim 16:18).' Probably, you can see my problem already. Moshe Rabbeinu can't be speaking to me, personally. He's clearly addressing the whole community, the body politic. He's not addressing the individual listeners. This is a community obligation to arrange for proper judges and constabulary to establish a functioning society.

But there are always more ways to view

an issue. Amongst our Torah giants there are legalists and grammarians who look at verses with a strict literal approach, but there are more ethereal souls. These poets of spirituality often see intriguing possibilities in even the most prosaic texts. The most famous such approach to our verse was propounded by Rav Yeshayahu HaLevi Horowitz, the Shela HaKadosh (1558-1630). He suggested that the verse was indeed speaking to every individual Jew. So, the 'gates' are each person's 2 eyes, 2 ears, 2 nostrils and mouth. We must supervise carefully those seven portals, carefully weighing what enters and exits these gateways to our souls.

Reb Mordechai Yosef Leitner, the Mei Shiloach (1801-1854), added his own personal touch to our verse. For him the court officials are allegorical. SHOFTIM, the judges, represent wisdom and the ability to discern right from wrong. SHOTRIM, the court officers or sheriffs, stand for our respect and reverence for the law, the ability to police ourselves. Once we've wisely discerned the right act, we enforce these rulings upon ourselves to carry through on that conclusion.

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, the Kedushat Levi (1740-1810), was known as the great defender of Israel. He was famous for always finding the good in every Jew, no matter how deeply it might be hidden. The Rebbe follows his own philosophy in explaining the legalese of our verse. The only true Judge is, of course, God in heaven. But we must begin this judging process down here to arouse the Divine sense

of mercy and compassion. That's why the verse emphasizes that the judging must be MISHPAT ZEDEK. The Rebbe understands that to mean we go out of our way to find every litigant innocent. This is, actually, in keeping with the Talmud in Tractate Sanhedrin, when judges are enjoined to DAN L'KAF ZECHUT, judge toward the side of merit.

However, the Rebbe carries this important concept one step further. He claims that our verse is also talking about everyday life. He explains that the 'gates' are all of the experiences and encounters in our lives. Every human interaction creates a 'gate'. We must always view our fellow with merit and empathy. This influences the 'gates' or the cases in the heavenly courts to adjudicate the case of every Jew towards a positive outcome. We're being informed by Moshe Rabbeinu that we can influence the Divine court.

Reb Elimelech of Lizhinsk, the Noam Elimelech (1717-1786) saw our verse as a double edged sword. The SHOTER or police man in the verse is always assuming the worst in ourselves. Always concerned that the YETZER HARA (evil inclination) is fooling us into believing that our misdeeds are, indeed, the right path. It's so easy to fool ourselves that we always must be on guard for the human genius for self-justification. But ultimately, we must never judge ourselves to be evil. Society works when police are tough and judges are kind and fair.

Finally, we come to Rav Yehuda Aryeh Lev Altar, the Sfat Emet (1847-1905), who was the second Gerer Rebbe and

figures often in these articles. He avers that the SHA'ARIM (gates) are to the human heart. In our hearts, we need judges and cops. The judges follow our own personal wisdom to arrive at just behavior. But we need police, who aren't there to make any decisions at all. Just to enforce the laws of God. We need both, because our wit doesn't always have the prudence which Torah and God demand.

In 1878, the Rebbe discussed our verse in connection with the month Elul, which always corresponds to this parsha. He goes on to explain that these judges and police in our personality development are out to achieve TZEDEK TZEDEK (righteousness, righteousness, found two verses later), because the Rebbe insists that truth is found within every Jew. Therefore, we can pursue TZEDEK x2, because we are assured that if make the effort we will arrive at true justice. As we begin our countdown to the Days of Awe, this message is crucial to our preparation. Look deeply, you'll find TZEDEK.

Ultimately, I find a way to sense the verses addressing me personally. Torah is so much more to me than the novels I read for relaxation, so injecting my psyche into the text is that much more important. I just have to find the strength to put these lessons into practice when my nose isn't stuck in the pages. Because trying to be a ZADIK is so much greater than being a hero, or maybe is the best hero.