

Parasha Meditation Shoftim

Devarim 16:18-21:9

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

The Gatekeepers of our Soul

Introduction

Making Fences and Appointing Personal Judges of Spiritual Protection

“You shall appoint judges and police officers for yourself in all your gates that Hashem your G-d gives you...”¹ Although according to the simple meaning (*peshat*) the verse is directed at the community of Israel to appoint a righteous judicial structure, however, this verse is written in singular as if speaking to each of us personally. *Netivat Shalom* explains that each individual has his or her personal gates. We all have the gate of seeing, of hearing, of smelling, of speaking, eating and feeling. We need to make a fence around each of these gates and appoint judges and officers to guard them. The purpose of our guards is to ensure that we use our eyes, ears, nose and mouth only for the sake of Hashem.

Guarding the Gates of our Senses

Before looking at something our appointed “judges” need to determine if it is Hashem’s will or not to look at this particular thing. For example it is a mitzvah to look at a beautiful flower and feel awe for its creator, while it is prohibited to look at a person of the opposite sex that is not our spouse or immediate family in order to derive pleasure. The same goes for listening to the words of Torah and wisdom and closing our ears to gossip and *Lashon Hara*. Even the nose needs a gatekeeper, to smell the scents of Hashem’s mitzvot like fragrant herbs for Havdala, and refrain from purposely smelling foul odors. For many of us, the gate of the mouth, is the hardest to guard, allowing only the food and amounts that will give us energy to serve Hashem to enter the mouth, and only the words of wisdom and kindness to leave the gate of our mouth. The gatekeeper is our local police man, he knows and patrols our area. He chases off all those petty criminals that want to pick our pockets. We always need to have our gatekeeper's mobile number handy. He will help us say, “No, I am not interested in what you have to offer,” just as we would tell a salesman that knock on our door that we are not interested in purchasing what he is selling.

Training Our Eyes – Nipping Transgression in the Bud

When we appoint judges and officers at each of the seven gates of the apertures in our face, the “judge” weighs the matter carefully and comes to a final decision about what may enter the gates and what needs to be kept away. The “police officers” uphold the judge’s decision

¹ Devarim 16:18.



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and reinforce proper fences and disciplines that will protect us from giving in to our *yetzer hara* (negative impulse). For example, the role of the “police-officers” is to help us learn “closing our eyes from looking at evil, which is the beginning of sin – the eye sees and causes the heart to desire, and the tool of action completes the matter.”² The rectification for the eyes is to train our eyes to look at everything in the world with awe, recognizing Hashem as the Creator of all, as it states: “Lift up your eyes on high, and see: who has created these?”³

Letting Our Gatekeepers Enter G-d-Consciousness Within

In addition to preventing negativity from entering, the job of the “judges” and “officers” is to enter G-d-consciousness into all of our gates, and ensure that they will bring you to “Hashem your G-d.” This is the meaning of the continuation of the opening verse of *Parashat Shoftim*: “...judges and officers ...that Hashem your G-d gives you...” – If we rearrange the words slightly, this phrase can also be read to mean: “Judges and officers shall give (enter into you) Hashem your G-d.”⁴

Time for Spiritual Accounting

Now in *Chodesh Elul* is the time to really work on establishing new life routines conducive to entering Hashem into our lives. I recommend *Cheshbon HaNefesh* (soul-accounting), taking a paper and pen to record the decisions of the “judge” we have appointed, giving written instructions to our gatekeepers. Let us determine which things we need to distance from the gates of our senses, and make a proper plan with appropriate fences to enable the “police-officers” of our personal gates execute the plan!

Meditation

This Meditation is designed to build up and develop a relationship with your internal gatekeepers.

1. Stand with your spine upright and your shoulders relaxed, letting your arms hang naturally by your sides. Take a couple of long, slow and deep breaths. As you exhale, let go of any unnecessary tension, smile gently, and let your attention flow deep into your belly, your hips, legs and feet. Feel your connection to the earth under your feet.
2. Coordinate your breathing with taking small steps: Step forward with your right foot as you inhale; step forward with your left foot as you exhale; continue in this way. Focus your gaze gently on the ground in front of you. Walk in a relaxed way, slower than your usual walking
3. As you continue to walk slowly with coordinated breath, become aware of everything on your way that meets your eyes. If you find your eyes resting with a twinge of jealousy on your

² *Tur, Orach Chayim, Siman 1* – טור אורח חיים סימן א

³ *Yeshu'ya* 40:26.

⁴ *Netivat Shalom, Parashat Shoftim*, p. 101.



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neighbor's home, car, garden or anything else belonging to someone else, call on your gatekeeper to help stop these feelings from entering the gates of your eyes.

4. Allow your gatekeeper to avert your gaze. Instead lift your eyes to the sky, look at the silver-laced clouds, and praise Hashem for their creation. Look for other things on your way that you recognize as G-d's creation. Praise Hashem for being the Creator of the swift bird in the sky, the tall and stately tree, and the beautiful flower...

5. Become aware of the sounds that you hear all around you. Call on your gatekeeper to keep away and close your ears to your neighbor's angry bad-mannered fight, the noise of the impatient beeping cars, a mother screaming at her kid. Instead open your ears to the song of the birds, the children's prayer, and the sound of tree-branches blowing in the wind.

6. Notice the smells of your environment. Have your gatekeeper remove the dog's poop on your path, and the smell of a leaking septic tank. Focus on the scent of the flowers on your way, the grass and the herbs as your brushing footsteps release their scent.

7. Make a mental intention to become aware throughout your day of what goes in and out of your mouth. Intentions have a power and energy to attract whatever you put out there. Call on your gatekeeper to ask the following three questions before entering or exiting anything to and from your mouth: "Is this kind? Is it necessary? Is it Hashem's will?"

8. Return to your place with a heightened awareness and confidence in the power of your appointed internal gatekeepers to strengthen your resolve allowing only that which is kind, necessary and for the sake of Hashem to go through the gates of your eyes, ears, nostrils and mouth.

Notes

Our personal gates include our character-traits. Just as we need to repent from wrongdoing we need to repent from anger, hatred, jealousy, honor-seeking, lusts etc.⁵ Therefore, it states, "May the evil return from his way,"⁶ rather than "from his action." The character traits are the way and the gates of a person.⁷ Rav Yisroel Salanter taught that changing one *midah* is harder than mastering the entire Talmud. May we merit at this time, with the help of our faithful gatekeepers to purify even just an iota of our negative character-traits in order to truly enter Hashem's presence into the gates of our soul!

⁵ Rambam, *Hilchot Teshuva* 7:3.

⁶ *Yeshu'ya* 55:7.

⁷ *Netivat Shalom, Parashat Shoftim*, p. 101.



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About Us



Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is Founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha also began her practice as a spiritual healer through Emuna, tefila and energy work. For more than two decades Chana Bracha has taught Bible studies with special emphasis on women's issues in Israel and the United States. She creates curricula emphasizing women's

spiritual empowerment through traditional Torah values. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin located in the Judean Hills of Israel offers a unique program to women of all ages and backgrounds to learn in a holistic Torah study environment that nurtures the mind, body and soul. Intensive textual study of Tanach, Halacha and Chassidut are woven together with creative spiritual expression, and connection with the land of Israel through organic gardening, herbology, Jewish sources of healing and sustainable living. Classes in Jewish mysticism, Chassidism and Jewish meditation are directed at the spiritual thirst so prominent in our times.

*In 2010 Rebbetzin Chana Bracha published her first book, *Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion*.*

Chana Bracha has a married son and several granddaughters. She lives with her husband and younger son on the land of the Judean hills, Israel.

If you are interested in:

Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin contact info@berotbatayin.org or in Spiritual Healing with Rebbetzin Chana Bracha, please contact her at director@berotbatayin.org

or visit her blog: <http://rebbetzinchanabracha.blogspot.com/2010/11/emunah-healing-for-women.html>

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At Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin, we weave together Torah studies with creative spiritual expression, connecting with the Land of Israel, and healthy, organic lifestyles. In the heart of the Judean Hills, with its serene beauty, our students experience an approach to Judaism that bridges mind, body and soul. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin is designed as a micro-community within the Village of Bat Ayin where women of all ages and backgrounds engage in intense Torah learning as part of an integrated, participatory approach to Torah living.

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