

Erev Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Shoftim 5769

D'ei Chochmah L'nafshechah

“Let your soul know wisdom”

Parshas Shoftim

From the discourses of Moreinu v'Rabeinu
the Gaon and Tzaddik Shlit"á

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4 Ohalei Yosef st., Jerusalem

"YAM HACHOCHMAH"
PUBLISHING INSTITUTE
P.O BOX 5245 JERUSALEM
TEL: 057-3153884 FAX: 15325388242
E-MAIL: tc7@neto.bezeqint.net

Shalosh Seudos¹ of Parshas Shoftim 5767

”שֹׁפְטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים, תִּתֶּן-לָךְ בְּכָל-שַׁעְרֶיךָ, אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ, לְשִׁבְטֶיךָ;
 וְשִׁפְטוּ אֶת-הָעָם מִשִּׁפְט-צְדָקָה. לֹא-תִטֶּה מִשִּׁפְט, לֹא תִכְבֵּר פָּנִים; וְלֹא-תִקַּח
 שֹׁחַד כִּי הַשֹּׁחַד יַעֲוֶר עֵינַי חֲכָמִים, וַיִּסְלַף דְּבַר צְדִיקָם. צְדָקָה צְדָקָה תִרְדְּדֶיךָ, לְמַעַן
 תַּחֲיֶיהָ וְיָרְשֶׁתָּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ.”

“You shall make judges and officers in all your gates, which Hashem your G-d gives you, tribe by tribe; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not wrest judgment; you shall not respect persons; neither shall you take a gift; for a gift blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. Justice, justice you shall pursue, that you may live and inherit the land which Hashem your G-d gives you.”²

Rashi explains: **“Justice, justice you shall pursue’**—seek out a proper [yafeh, literally ‘beautiful’] *beis din*. **‘That you may live and inherit’**—the appointment of worthy judges is [important enough to] ensure the life of the Jewish people and their restoration to their land.

“Seek Out a Proper *Beis Din*”

¹ The lesson was delivered at the third meal of Shabbos.

² *Devarim* 16:18-20

We first need to understand the significance of the “proper *beis din*,” literally the court that is *yafeh* / יפה, or beautiful. The Kabbalists taught that the word *yafeh* alludes to the ultimate future when there will be a unification of the Divine Names יהייה and אדניי. This is in contrast with the unification associated with the present time, which is that of הוייה and אדניי, which has a combined *gematria* of 91. The distinction between them is expressed in the concluding affirming phrase אמן סלה. *Amen* alludes to the unification of this present time; its *gematria* is accordingly 91. *Selah*, however, expresses finality and it alludes to the unification of the future world; its *gematria* is correspondingly 95—as is that of the word *yafeh*, the “beautiful” and proper court that one should seek when pursuing justice.

Justice is itself associated with *Malchus* / Kingship [since ‘*dinah d'malchusa dinah*’—the law of the land is the law].³ During these days of repentance leading up to the *Yomim Nora'im*, each and every one of us must judge himself honestly to be able to crown Hashem as King over himself. The Maggid taught that one can see the outcome of his heavenly judgment on Rosh Hashanah by closely evaluating the quality of his Divine service here below. His own self-judgment of his Divine service, his own scrutiny of his thoughts and intentions during his Torah study and prayer, have a lot to teach him about what his judgment on high is like.

As the day of judgment draws near, we enter into the aspect of, “You shall make judges and officers in all your gates”—everyone is seized by fear and trembling of what is to come, since, “Who is considered righteous before

³ *Sha'ar Hakavanos, Tefillas HaShachar, Drush #1*

You?” For this reason, the Torah teaches us at precisely this time to pursue “justice,” to follow the attribute of *Malchus*, “that you may live and inherit,” so that the *Shechinah* will bring us to make the *yichud* of the ultimate future—the “beautiful” *yichud* symbolized by the *beis din yafeh*.

“Sound the *Shofar* on the New Month”

The *Zohar* teaches that when the day of judgment arrives, the *Soton* launches accusations against the Jewish people. Hashem then tells the *Soton* to bring two witnesses as proof, and he brings the sun, which represents *Ze'ir Anpin*, and then seeks a second witness—the moon—to no avail. When the Jewish people sound the *shofar*, the *Shechinah* which is represented by the moon goes into hiding to a very lofty place.⁴ This is the inner meaning of the verse, “Sound the *shofar* on the new month, it is a hiding for the day of our festival.”⁵ The *Shechinah* then seeks to appease Hashem and advocate on behalf of the Jewish people, and deprives the *Soton* of the ability to accuse the Jewish people. In preparation for Rosh Hashanah, then, it is vital that we “pursue justice,” that we seek after the *Shechinah* so that she can rise to the necessary hidden place where the command holds sway: “Do not delve into that which is hidden from you.”⁶

This is why the Jewish people have the custom of reciting from the *Tikkunei Zohar* during the month of Elul—to bind themselves to the *Shechinah*. And this is also why they give additional charity and say a great deal of

⁴ *Zohar* III:275a

⁵ *Tehillim* 81:4

⁶ *Chagigah* 13a

Tehillim—to empower the *Shechinah* and to “pursue justice,” to seek out the *Shechinah* so that Hashem will remember us to the good and bless us with a sweet year.

Hevel “Gazed at” the *Shechinah*

The Torah records, “Where [אֵי] is Hevel, your brother?”⁷ The Arizal taught that Hevel caused spiritual damage to the letters *alef* and *yud* of the Name אֱדֹנָי, which represents the *Shechinah*.⁸ Hevel gazed at the *Shechinah* more than was proper, and this is what caused his death and the death of all his descendants.⁹ But what does this actually mean? Hevel realized that cleaving to the *Shechinah* is a very important and precious *avodah* in Hashem’s eyes, and that this is really what defines a person as a faithful servant of the King. In truth, Hashem does want every Jew to pursue the *Shechinah*—as the verse says, “But let him that glories, glory in this: that he understands and knows Me.”¹⁰ This “glorying” is unique to the *tzaddikim* who bind themselves to the *Shechinah*. However, Hevel erred by focusing on the *Shechinah* and causing damage to the letters *alef* and *yud* of the Name אֱדֹנָי.

The *Shechinah* is always with us, even when a person sins. This is alluded to in the verse, “מִמָּרִים הָיִיתָ עִם ה'”—“You were rebellious against [literally, *with*] Hashem.”¹¹ We also see this from the fact that we recite the confession in plural language [אֲשַׁמְנָה, בְּגִדְנוּ וְכִי], as well as from Yehudah’s

⁷ *Bereishis* 4:9

⁸ *Sefer Halikutim, Parshas B'shalach*

⁹ *Sha'ar Hapesukim, Parshas Lech L'cha*

¹⁰ *Yirmiyah* 9:23

¹¹ *Devarim* 9:7

statement of guilt: "בְּי אֲדֹנָי" — "Please, my lord..." [which can also be read as, "ADNI is with me"].¹² Since this is the case, what then was Hevel's error in "gazing" at the *Shechinah*—a word which implies too much focus? Although one must initially realize that Hashem is with us everywhere at all times, He is both immanent and transcendent, nevertheless one must immediately ascend with this awareness to the higher place of *teshuvah* and not remain in the lower place of breakage and sin. This is related to the Kabbalistic teachings about the lower "limbs" of *Netzach-Hod-Yesod* within the world of *Atik* [in *Kesser*], which form the root of the *Shechinah*, as hinted at in the verse, "And the crown of kingship—the *Kesser Malchus*—was upon his head."¹³ They, *N-H-Y*, rise up from the world of *Beriyah* where they vitalize the fallen sparks that are in the world of the *shevirah* breakage [which is associated with sin], and raise them up to the world of *Atzilus*.¹⁴ However, it is forbidden to remain for long in the world of breakage; one must instead return to Hashem with thoughts of repentance so that the sin is uprooted completely and disappears. The truth is that the "separate" worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah* are not really down below, as appears to be the case since the sin of Adam HaRishon. Really, their main place is above, [bound up together with] the world of *Atzilus* as will be the case in the ultimate future. This is why it is wrong to "damage" the *Shechinah* by focusing too much on the fact that she is presently dwelling in the lowest possible places. Rather, one must know this—that *Malchus* extends down

¹² *Bereishis* 44:18

¹³ *Esther* 6:8

¹⁴ *Otzaros Chaim, Sha'ar Arich Anpin*

through all the worlds¹⁵—and immediately bind the *Shechinah* back up again to the highest places and Hashem's light through the power of one's thoughts. The "line" that sheds Hashem's infinite light into the lower worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah* does not actually descend lower than the world of *Atzilus*; it merely sheds this light from its place in a refracted way. Just as the line does not descend, so too in truth to the worlds themselves not descend, they only appear to do so after the damaging effects of the sin of Adam HaRishon. However, in the ultimate future when, "his feet will stand upon the Mount of Olives," when the "Mount of Olives" which symbolizes the lower worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah* will be shown to have always been bound up with the world of *Atzilus*, and there was never really any fall or obscuring of Hashem's presence. All of this is accomplished by not "gazing" at the *Shechinah*; by not focusing on its apparent descent into the place of breakage and sin, and by immediately rising up out of that place to the apparent light of Hashem's presence associated with the world of *Atzilus*.

Like a Newborn Child

When Hevel erred and gazed at the *Shechinah*, he caused damage in the level known as *Yisrael Sabba u'Tevunah*, and this is what caused him to forget how to properly repent. When Adam HaRishon ate from the Tree of Knowledge, he caused [his spiritual counterpart in the upper worlds of the *sefiros* which was also known as] Adam HaRishon to "couple" with the feminine aspect of impurity [known as Lilith] rather than with the *Shechinah*

¹⁵ *Tehillim* 145:13; 103:19

aspect known as *Leah*. This is why the aspect of *Leah* was not able to descend and shed light in the worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah*.¹⁶ This is why the aspect of *Rachel* assumed the task of descending to that place, which is hinted at in the Torah in the narrative of Rachel giving over the signs to her sister Leah before the wedding. Yet even though the *Rachel* aspect descends to the worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah*, nevertheless the damage that exists there does not affect her. Hevel made the mistake of focusing too much on this aspect of *Rachel*. He did not repent and uplift himself back into the higher realm of Hashem's light. Had he done so, everything would have been different, since when a person reconnects with Hashem's ultimate reality at a higher level, it is as though he is completely reborn and has never sinned at all.

“The Levi Who Comes from One of Your Gates”

”וכי-יבא הלוי מאחד שעריך, מכל-ישראל אשר-הוא גר שם; ובא בכל-אונת נפשו, אל-המקום אשר-יבחר ה'. ושרת, בשם ה' אלקיו--בכל-אחיו, הלויים העמדים שם, לפני ה'. חלק כחלק יאכלו, לבד ממכריו, על-האבות.”

“And if a Levi shall come from any of your gates from anywhere in Israel where he sojourns, and come with all the desire of his soul to the place which Hashem shall choose, then he shall serve in the name of Hashem his G-d, as all his brothers the Levites do, who stand there before Hashem. They shall have equal portions to eat, beside that which is his due according to the fathers' houses.”¹⁷ The Arizal explained that these verses contain a very deep allusion—they refer to a particular Levite, the “Levite youth” who served as a *kohen* for

¹⁶ *Eitz Chaim, Sha'ar 38*, chapter 2

¹⁷ *Devarim 18:6-8*

Micha, who had set up an idol among the people of Efraim.¹⁸ The verse says that this youth was, “Yonasan, the son of Gershom, the son of Menashe.”¹⁹ In the name Menashe, however, the *nun* is written as a superscript, to indicate that although the youth was in truth the son of Moshe, he performed lowly acts worthy of Menashe, the king who ultimately served idols.²⁰ There is another allusion to this; his name was Gershom, but it is written and read as two distinct words: *ger shem*, “a stranger to the Name.” It was said of him that if he will be committed to serving in Hashem’s Name, it wouldn’t be fitting to reject him since he had never really intended to serve idolatry at all. He had simply misunderstood the teaching: “A person should rather hire himself for *avodah zarah* rather than become dependant on others.”²¹ Gershom understood this literally, but its real meaning is that a person should be willing to assume an unfamiliar form of labor rather than be dependant on others financially. This is the meaning of *avodah zarah*—not idolatry, but literally, “a foreign labor”—a form of work that is foreign to him. After he saw the error of his ways, however, if he persists in his sin then, “They shall have equal portions to eat”—he shall receive appropriate punishment.

“Beside that which is his due according to the fathers’ houses”—who was the real source of Gershom’s error? It was Moshe Rabbeinu himself, who

¹⁸ *Shoftim* 17:12

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18:30

²⁰ *Bava Basra* 109b

²¹ *Ibid.*, 110a

swore to Yisro that his first son would be channeled toward idolatry and the second would be channeled toward Hashem's service.²²

Moshe Rabbeinu was related to the soul of Hevel, and because of this he also fell into the same type of error that Hevel did. The taking of an oath is itself associated with the attribute of *Malchus*: "He who swears is considered as one who has sworn on the King Himself, as it says, 'By the living G-d.'"²³ Moshe Rabbeinu meant to reveal to Yisro that it is possible to discover Hashem's Kingship even in the lowest places so that one can even rectify actual idolatry. This is an echo of Yehudah's confession, "And Yehudah went down from his brothers... And he said, '*Bi Adoni*,'"—literally, "The aspect of *Malchus / ADNI* is with me, even when I have fallen." After full repentance, one can reveal post facto that really he had never fallen away from his intrinsic holiness. Quite the contrary—repentance after the sin binds him to his Creator even more powerfully. All of this is true, however it is contingent on not "gazing at the *Shechinah*," on not damaging the *Shechinah* as Yonasan ben Menashe did when he served idolatry. The flaw is in not having enough fear of sin to remain in the place of *shevirah*.

The proper way to reveal Hashem's omnipresence and that every sin can be fully rectified is through, "The Levi who comes to serve Hashem at His gate, together with his brother Levites." This is the true penitent who abandons the place of sin, who does not remain in the worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah* because he "sees the *Shechinah* there." However, "He shall eat an equal

²² *Yalkut Shimoni, Shemos* 18

²³ *Sifri, Matos* #1

portion, besides that which is his due from his fathers' houses." He must maintain a quiet and hidden awareness that it is really by virtue of Moshe Rabbeinu who revealed the omnipresence of Hashem that the redemption will ultimately come.

This is the hidden meaning of the verse, "Until the arrival of Shilo [the redeemer]"²⁴—the sages taught that Shilo alludes to Moshe, since they have the same *gematria*.²⁵ [345 = שילה = משה] Similarly, the name Daniel also alludes to this *tikkun*: it comprises the letters א"ל אדנ"י, and refers to the revelation of Hashem's presence throughout all of the world of *Asiyah*, and the ultimate rectification when all of the "lower" worlds will be shown to be bound up together with the lower part of *Arich Anpin*. This is the deeper meaning of the Levite coming to eat "equal portions"—the lower worlds will be shown ultimately to be bound up in every part to the higher realms.

The Dalet of Echad

The duty to "bind up" the lower worlds with the higher, and to avoid damage to the *Shechinah*, is at the root of the obligation to properly enunciate the *dalet* of the word *echad* of the *Shema*. Failure to do so is associated with idolatry, in the sense that we have already explained.²⁶

This dynamic is seen from the phrase, "And Shaul heard..."²⁷ Shaul is symbolized by the *yud* that is within the expanded form of David's name—דויד.

²⁴ Bereishis 49:10

²⁵ Ra'aya M'heimana, Parshas Mishpatim

²⁶ Zohar III:280b

²⁷ Shmuel I:15:4

Shaul's spiritual function is to "hear" or "gather up" [which is a form of gather dispersing sound waves] all of the spiritual places that are dispersed and seem distant from holiness.²⁸ [This is in line with what we learned earlier, that the aspect of *Leah* "remains above," but the aspect of *Rachel* descends—Shaul is the descendant of *Rachel*.] What this means in terms of our personal *avodah* is that if a person finds himself falling into the error of אל אחר, of a subtle (or not so subtle) kind of idolatry, he can still follow the path of Shaul and "gather himself up" to reconnect with the life-giving light of *Atik* and *Arich*. However, he must do it in the right way—by repenting with awareness of Hashem's nearness, without focusing more than necessary on the presence of the *Shechinah* in the place of his fall. If he does so, he will be able to repent fully and be a part of the revelation of the light of the future redemption.

The Nine Lower *Sefiros* within *Malchus*

Although the innermost *Kesser*-point within *Malchus* ascends to the highest hidden places on Rosh Hashanah which will soon be upon us, nevertheless the lower nine *sefiros* within *Malchus* remain in the lower worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah* to enable us to verbally confess in the most sincere way all of our sins. This is the only way in which we can fully repent. However, this knowledge of the *Shechinah* having always been with us must not keep us from fully feeling the pain of our past sins. We must "serve in the Name of Hashem our G-d like our brother Levites," and repent fully.

Transforming the Month of Elul

²⁸ *Machberes Hakodesh, Shaar HaShofar*

In preparation for the day of judgment, the Jewish people must come to understand the inner meaning of, “I am for my Beloved, and my Beloved is for me,” which is an acronym for Elul.²⁹ [אָנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי לִי] This verse expresses Hashem’s unlimited and simple mercy that is revealed during this time. We must transform the upper and lower letters *yud* that form the *alef* of Elul into a *vav*. Then the ל"א of Elul which is associated with the permutation of the *Shem HaVaYaH* that has a numerical value of 63 [the שם ס"ג] and indicates repentance, will turn into the ל"ו of Elul—וְדוֹדִי לִי—“My Beloved will be for me”—He will accept my repentance and draw me closer to Him.

The significance of the joining of the two letters *yud* is very profound: the upper *yud* represents *Ze'ir Anpin*, and the lower *yud* represents *Malchus*. To effect a unification between them and rectify the damage that we have caused in ourselves and the world at large, we must activate the *vav* by immersing ourselves in Torah, which is associated with the number six. [The nucleus of the written Torah was the tablets, which were six *tefachim* cubed, and the nucleus of the oral Torah is the six orders of the Mishnah. The *vav* itself means a “hook” or “line” that joins us to our Father in heaven.] We accomplish this by binding ourselves to the *Shechinah* through the study of the *Tikkunei Zohar* which was written by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai specifically as a *tikkun* for *Malchus*, just as the *Zohar* itself was written as a *tikkun* for *Ze'ir Anpin*. We recite additional *Tehillim* with devotion as a means of connecting with Dovid HaMelech who was a vehicle for the revelation of the *Shechinah*, and give

²⁹ Shir HaShirim 6:3

additional *tzedakah* as a way of “doing justice to the *hei*—the aspect of *Malchus*.” [צדקה-ה]]

“In Its Time, I Will Hasten It”

“I am Hashem, in its time, I will hasten it.”³⁰ The aspect of the redemption coming “in its time” is associated with the serenity of *Chochmah*, while the aspect of “I will hasten it” is associated with the effort of *Binah*. There were *tzaddikim* who indicated that it would be less risky for the redemption to come “in its time,” since making efforts to hasten it could bring about a great deal of death and destruction, and the obscuring of Hashem’s presence. This is the deeper meaning of Hevel having brought “death to himself and his descendents.”³¹ Since Hashem’s desire is only to bring good to the Jewish people, the proper manner to bring the redemption is through the combined *avodah* of, “in its time/I will hasten it”—which is the path of *Kesser*. This is the way of joining the *teshuvah* of *Binah* with the serene awareness of Hashem’s ever-presence of *Chochmah*, and in this way we can empower the *Shechinah*, especially during the month of Elul when we are commanded to seek her out. We must never lose sight of the *Shechinah* for a moment, and must realize that the *Shechinah* herself will advocate on our behalf on the day of judgment. Then we will be able to repent completely in the way of both *Binah* and *Chochmah*, so that our sins will be completely uprooted, as if they had never been.

³⁰ *Yeshayah* 60:22

³¹ *Likutei Torah, Shoftim*

This is echoed by the teaching of the sages, “‘Fortunate is our youth, that did not shame our old age’—these are the *chassidim* and men of great deeds.’”³² Rashi explains that a *chassid* is someone who is pious “at the root”—in his essence, who always was righteous. But there is a deeper meaning here: he is righteous because his sin has been uprooted “at the root”—because he has done *teshuvah* at the level of *Chochmah* and it is as though he never sinned. This is alluded to in the statement, “Adam HaRishon was a great *chassid*.”³³

“Our Hands Did Not Shed This Blood”

All that we have learned sheds light on the final subject of our *parshah*, that of *eglah arufah*: “If one be found slain in the land which Hashem your G-d gives you to possess it, lying in the field, and it be not known who has struck him... And they shall speak and say: ‘Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. Forgive, Hashem, Your people Yisrael, whom You have redeemed...’”³⁴ But all of the Jewish people are responsible for one another—so how can the elders say that their hands did not shed this blood and their eyes did not see it? Rather, this comes to teach us that true repentance really does make it as though no sin ever occurred post facto. But this is only possible if one truly seeks out the *Shechinah* who waits for us to open our eyes and turn toward her.

The vessels through which we can receive the light of *Shechinah* are generated by looking at the letters of the Torah themselves and by visualizing

³² *Sukkah* 53

³³ *Eruvin* 18b

³⁴ *Devarim* 21:1, 7-8

the Divine Names. We must work to see that there is nothing but Hashem, while at the same time never being complacent in Hashem's presence, but always feeling the healthy fear of transgressing even the most minor *halachah*. We must repent fully for all of the commonplace infractions and spend this month of Elul investigating whether our deeds are in accordance with the *Shulchan Aruch*. This has been the practice of the Jewish people—to check their *tefillin* and *mezuzos* during Elul, which is only a reflection of the rigorous checking that we have to do into our own hearts and actions. At the same time, during this month the *tzaddikim* focused on Hashem's thirteen attributes of mercy and on the *Shechinah*, and sought the greater purpose of revealing Hashem's glory throughout all of the world, to activate the final redemption.

“Let Your Soul Know Wisdom”

It is the Sefardic custom to begin reciting *Selichos* from outset of Elul, but Ashkenazim do not begin until the final week of the month. We need to understand why the Ashkenazic custom diverged from the Sefardic, since it is obvious that the difference does not indicate any failure to begin the *avodah* of *teshuvah*. This delaying of the *Selichos* is due to the tendency of the European *tzaddikim* to focus on connecting with the *Shechinah* in preparation for Rosh Hashanah. This is the meaning of the phrase: *ידעה חכמה לנפשך והיא כתר לראשך*—“Let your soul know (*d'ei*) wisdom (*Chochmah*), and it will be a crown (*Kesser*) for your head.”³⁵ One must bind the aspect of *Chochmah* to the aspect of *nefesh*, which represents the *Shechinah*. Then it will be “a crown to

³⁵ From the *Shabbos zemer* “*D'ror Yikrah*,” based on *Mishlei* 24:14.

your head”—then you will merit to reach the combined level of the *tikkun* of *Kesser*. Then we will merit to see the revealed light of the redemption, which Hashem will “hasten, in its time.” We will be gathered together in great mercy, by gathering up all of the lower worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah* and joining them to the source of Hashem’s light. Then the *Shechinah* will be revealed in all of its spectrum of colors, with the arrival of our righteous redeemer. Amen

Translated and Adapted by Rav Micha Golshevsky.