



# Elul Elevation

Our *parashah* commences with the obligation to appoint *shoftim*, judges and officers in all our cities and settlements. Clearly, this is a command highlighting the importance of the justice system, our moral obligation to ensure judicial fairness and lawfulness in our societies. Considering that every concept and topic in Torah is relevant on multiple levels, let us look at this first *passuk* of our *parashah* on a deeper, more personal level and see how it contains profound lessons for our individual lives.

Rabbi Friedman, in *Shevilei Pinchas*, notes that one of the well-known acronyms for Elul is “*Echad Lema’alah, U-sheva Lematah - one upwards and seven downwards.*” This phrase alludes to the service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur. As he sprinkled the blood of his *korban* in the *Kodesh Hakedoshim*, he would count,

“One, one and one, one and two...one and seven.” Why do we highlight the service of *Yom Kippur* in the month of Elul? Just as one must be aware of his destination as he begins a new journey, we must keep our goal of this *tekufah* at the forefront of our consciousness. Every day of Elul reminds us to work on achieving forgiveness from Hashem through our *teshuvah* and *ma’asim tovim*, culminating in the *Yom Kippur avodah*.

The Remah in *Torat HaOlah* understands the ‘one’ upward as referring to the *yetzer tov*, the force that helps a person direct all his efforts to reach closeness to Hashem. The ‘seven’ down, refers to the *yetzer hara*, which *chazal* teaches us has seven names - *ra, arel, tamei, sonei, michshol, even, and tzifoni*. Thus, the Kohen Gadol would count “one” before each time he sprinkled downward, using the positive force to exert its powerful influence over the negative forces that drive us downward into the mire of sin.

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The *Bnei Yissachar* notes that *parashat Shoftim* always coincides with the beginning of Elul. The Torah instructs us to put judges and officers at our gateways. These hint at the senses that Hashem has given us through which we interact with the world. They include our two eyes, two nostrils, two ears, and our mouth. Elul is the month when we focus our efforts to use our *yetzer tov*, the ‘one,’ to control these seven gateways, ensuring that we use them all properly to serve Hashem. Likewise, if we realize that we have misused one of these gateways, we must be the “*shotrim*” to take accountability and rectify our misdeeds.

The Slonimer Rebbe in *Netivot Shalom* expands this idea further. “*Shoftim ve’shotrim titen lecha bechal she’arecha* - appoint for **yourselves** judges and officers.” (*Devarim 16:18*) The word “*lecha* - yourselves” is expressed in the singular. It is a direct injunction to each of us to continually judge and guard ourselves. Each person is charged with the responsibility to evaluate all he sees, hears, and says and decide whether it is aligned with Hashem’s Will, and if what he does brings him closer and strengthens his relationship with Hashem. ■

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