



REBBETZIN SHIRA SMILES

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Glorious Gates

Our *parashah* opens with the injunction, “*Shoftim ve’shotrim titen lecha bechol she’arecha* - You shall set up judges and law enforcement officials for yourself in all your gates [cities],” appropriately setting the stage for the required focus during the months of Elul and Tishrei. Although at first glance this verse refers to establishing a workable judicial system, many commentators understand that there is a deeper message here for each of us.

The Tosher Rebbe in *Avodat Avodah* shares the famous idea that the ‘gates’ can homiletically be understood as one’s five senses - sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing through which we perceive and interact with the world around us. We are being cautioned here to establish personal boundaries and carefully monitor that which enters our domain.

The forty days from Elul through Yom Kippur, notes the Tosher Rebbe, parallels the forty days it takes an embryo to form. This is a time when one can improve and develop himself, reassessing his priorities and values. It is an annual opportunity to introspect and refine areas that are lacking and set up one’s individual ‘judges’ and ‘officers’ to ensure that the changes one makes are genuine and lasting.

The Slonimer Rebbe zt”l in *Netivot Shalom* interprets the ‘gates’ to be the month of Elul, the portal through which we enter the new year.

Just as we employ the last day of the month, Yom Kippur Katan, to prepare ourselves to begin a new month and we spend the end of the week, Friday, to prepare for Shabbat, the way we capitalize on the opportunities Elul affords, will determine the quality and spirit of the new year ahead.

Further, the Rebbe points out that the metaphoric ‘judges’ and ‘officers’ we establish, act to assure us that we will be continuously reminded that Hashem is our G-d, intimately connected to every detail we experience. At the beginning of the *Shulchan Aruch*, the *Rema* quotes the Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim*) enjoining each person to live with the constant awareness that Hashem’s Presence fills the earth. Our goal is to be mindful of this reality and demonstrate it through all our thoughts, speech and actions.

Thus, we have a clear direction moving forward into Elul. Let us set up a personal system of ‘checks and balances’ to clearly assess our attitudes and actions. Let us be attentive to the ultimate goal of building our relationship with Hashem, “*Ani le’dodi ve’dodi li*”, seeking out Hashem’s presence every moment in every circumstance. ■

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