

Bringing the Farbrengen Home

YOUR NOSE IS A TRIANGLE

by Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer

When one of my son's was 5, he looked at me and said, "Your nose is a triangle." After a brief pause, he continued, "Why are there two holes?"

Truth is, I don't know. I'm sure there's a good reason.

Anyway, it got me thinking about the opening verse from this week's Torah portion, Shoftim (Deut.16:18): "Appoint judges and policeman at the gates of your cities."

The contextual meaning of the verse is exactly at it sounds. Rabbi Shabtai Cohen (1621-1662), on the other hand, offers an alternative perspective. Although Rabbi Cohen is generally associated with his legal writings, he also authored a Kabbalistic commentary on the Five Books.

The "city" the verse speaks of can also refer to one's body. The "gates" are the eyes, ears, nose and mouth. In other words, guard what you let in to your body.

That reminds me of a story.

There was once a well-meaning individual who was bothered by distracting thoughts during prayer. So he asked his rabbi what to do.

His rabbi instructed him to journey to the town of Zhitomir to seek counsel with one of the great sages, Reb Zev. Now back in those days, a trip to a nearby town required traveling by horse and buggy, and the Ukrainian winters were not forgiving.



He arrived after nightfall, found the home of Reb Zev, and knocked on the door.

No one answered.

He saw a candle burning inside, so he knew someone must be home. He knocked again. No answer.

"It's freezing out here, let me in!" he shouted.

Still no answer. He eventually made his way to the local synagogue, which remained unlocked, and slept on a bench. The following morning, he returned to Reb Zev's home, to find the door wide open. Upon entering and seeing Reb Zev at his table, he asked, "Why didn't you let me in last night?"

"To teach you that you are in charge of your home, and you decide whom to let in," responded Reb Zev.

This chassid had learned the intended lesson: ultimately, he is the one who can stop distracting thoughts from getting the best of him during prayer.

Well, now that I just told one story, I'm reminded of another. That always seems to happen :)

This story centers around a different Chassidic Rebbe, Rabbi Meir of Premishlan (1783-1850). One time, a group of chassidim were sitting around sharing words of Torah.

Someone served a nice-looking piece of meat. These men were pious individuals, and were always very careful about ensuring that the food they ate met the highest standards of Kashrut.

As they discussed back and forth whether the ritual slaughterer of this piece of meat was sufficiently pious for them to eat his meat, Rabbi Meir interrupted them with some sharp words.

"You are so careful about what you put in to your mouth, but what about the words that come out of your mouth?!"

An important lesson about watching what we say -- and how we say it.

Oh, and if you're still wondering why we have two nostrils, I posed the question on Facebook, and an old college friend offered the following: One stays a little congested, so some air moves faster and some slower. The slower one is resting the cilia that clean the air. This pattern alternates sides. 🌀

Just Me שו"ת A Question

Q: What does the name of this month (Elul) symbolize?

A: One understanding is that Elul is an acronym for the phrase:

אני לדודי ודודי לי which means 'I am to me Beloved & my Beloved is to me.' This is a reference to the deep and loving relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people.

כתיבה וחתימה טובה

The Gates of Our City

by Tzipah Wertheimer

We walk into the room unguarded. 'It's fine,' I tell myself, 'I can handle it.' The truth is that a lot of times we can handle it. We can rely on our inner strength, and our personal sense of right and wrong.

We've all been there, however. That moment when you're just in over your head. It's hard to make the right decision. It's hard to know what to do.

This week's parsha talks about *Shoftim* & *Shotrim* – not only do they sound alike, they are alike. *Shoftim* are judges who adjudicate the law and *Shotrim* are officers who enforce the law. In fact this is actually the second mention in the Torah of the judges & enforcers. The two roles are mentioned in Parshat Devarim as well.

In the first mention the judges & enforcers are part of one process. The judges make the rulings and the enforcers proceed to carry them out. In the second mention, the judges make the rulings and if the people do not abide, the enforcers step in.

And so it is in our lives. There are times when our inner judgment and our self control work hand in hand – part of one system. Then there are times when we get overwhelmed and even though that inner voice is trying so hard to



be heard there is so much static in the air waves. It's at these times that we need the "officers" to step in and take control of the situation.

Who are the officers? They are the ones that guard the gates of the city. The gates of a person are their eyes and ears which can let in all sorts of things. By guarding our focus and our influences, we can overcome whatever is overwhelming and stay on top. ☯

Just שו"ת Me A Question

Q: Since water is the source of life, why doesn't it have it's own special blessing like bread or wine?

A: Grapes & wheat undergo a transformation that improves them. When grapes are crushed and left to ferment, they transform into wine, which brings joy. Wheat, too, undergoes a transformative change that elevates its status.

Water – despite being indispensable to life – does not undergo a process. Humans need not transform it, and thus its bracha remains shehakol.

HAYOM YOM

6 Elul

The Tzemach Tzedek related: The Baal Shem Tov was very fond of light, and said, "Or ('light') is the numerical equivalent of raz ('secret'). Whoever knows the 'secret' contained in every thing can bring illumination."

Chassidic Story

Continued from last week...

After banishing R' Elimelech of Litzhensk so that the Jews would not be able to receive his blessing, the Poritz went on a hunting trip. He lost all his belongings and was unrecognizable. He ended up travelling with the group of beggars. The group made their way to Litzhensk. Begging outside the local church the real Poritz saw an imposter Poritz emerge from the building!

The real Poritz immediately recognized his servant dressed in fine clothes stolen from his master. He could not believe his eyes. Suddenly he remembered that his troubles started right after he has ordered the great rabbi to evacuate.

The Poretz decided to go to R' Elimelech of Litzhensk and ask forgiveness as it was still with the 30 days of notice. He fell at the feet of the rabbi and begged forgiveness and promised to always treat his Jewish tenants well. Of course the promises were contingent on being restored to his former status of greatness.

The Rabbi gave him a large sum of cash and instructed the Poritz to have his Jewish tailor make a new set of Sunday clothes. "Next Sunday," he said, "you will find your usual coach waiting for you behind the church. Tell the driver to take you home and you will know what to do next."

When the imposter Poritz arrived on foot (wondering why his coach was not waiting for him), the real Poritz had his servants seize the man. After many lashes he admitted all that he had done. The reinstated Poritz treated the Jews very well from that point on. He banished the antisemites and recognized that he has been given a new lease on his manor only because of R' Elimelech of Lizensk. ☯

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