

You Shall Appoint Judges and Officers in all Your Cities

by [Petr Chylek](#) (October 2022)



Two Lawyers Conversing, Honoré Daumier

The usual interpretation of this well-known statement of the Old Testament or Torah (Deuteronomy 16:18) suggests that the courts should be established in every city, as well as officers to enforce the court's decisions. What follows are instructions to judges on how to handle themselves in the process of reaching a righteous decision.

You shall judge with righteous judgement, you shall not

pervert judgement, you shall not sway your judgement in favor of a rich or a poor, you shall not accept bribes. Righteousness, righteousness shall you pursue. Why is the righteousness repeated here twice? You have to pursue the righteousness with righteousness. You cannot say that a righteous goal justifies all means available to reach it. If the means those you employ are not righteous, all the goals became unrighteous.

Here I remember the words of one of my colleagues in the field of climate research. A few decades ago he wrote, we must decide whether we want to be honest or effective. This is a problem not limited to current climate research but also involves all current political activities. People try to be effective regardless of whether their claims are based on truth or a lie. Thus, let us remember: righteousness with righteousness shall you pursue.

All the above is based on a usual literal interpretation of the text. However, there is more to learn. According to some of the wise experts, the Old Testament or the Jewish Torah as well as all other inspired texts, can be read at several different levels. In the simplest picture on at least two levels: exoteric and esoteric, meaning a straight literal meaning (exoteric) and a hidden meaning (esoteric). What can be a hidden meaning in this phrase (Deuteronomy 16:18)?

To find the clue, one has to return to the original Hebrew language. In English, the word "you" means either you as an individual, or "you" as people, as many individuals. In Hebrew, as in many other languages, there are different words used for you as singular and for you as plural. Thus, from Hebrew it is clear that the Old Testament here addresses you as an individual (singular). Thus, the instruction to appoint the judges and officers is meant specifically for you, for a singular human being.

An obvious question is now, how can you appoint judges and

officers in all your cities? The clue comes again from the Hebrew language. People noticed that any translation from Hebrew is really an interpretation of the text by the translator. Each Hebrew word has several meanings. In the considered case it is quite apparent. The Hebrew word used in the original text (SHA'AR) primarily means "the gate". Thus, a more correct translation would say: "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates". Now, if this sentence is addressed to you personally, to one specific human being; what are your gates?

In some of other religions the human body is considered to be a city of ten gates. We will not go into details about what the ten gates are. Let us just consider five of them. Here we have two eyes, two ears, and a mouth. We are asked to appoint a judge in each of them. To judge honestly what is appropriate to see, to hear, and what to say. Of course, that judge guarding the gates is you, your intellectual abilities relying on your wisdom and understanding. This of course depends on your world-view, your goals and aims in your life. You have to decide and be clear about what is beneficial for you to see and to hear. In our culture you have a wide range of choices.

Depending on your philosophy and goals in your life, some opportunity to see and to hear are beneficial and some are harmful to you. You have a choice of books to read, you have a choice of music to hear, choice of people you keep company with. You have to make many decisions and choices each day. If you don't pay attention what you are doing, there is a chance you could slide towards regions you do not want to be in.

The same applies to your mouth. You may remember that in the New Testament the disciples ask Jesus whether they are allowed to eat meat. Jesus does not answer this question and he replies that what degrades you is what goes out of your mouth, not what goes in. Similarly, there is a saying in Jewish tradition (Pirkey Avot), where a young scholar says: I have grown up among the wise sages, and the most important thing I

have learnt is to be silent.

Thus, we have to decide what is appropriate to see, to hear, and to say; and we have to do it honestly. However, we have a tendency to do things in contradiction to what we judged to be harmful or beneficial. We know that exercise is good for our health and we neglect to exercise. We know that too much sugar is bad for our health and we still eat it. That is why we need an "officer" in addition to a judge in our gates. The knowledge is not sufficient. We need a will (the officer) to force ourselves to follow what we judge, what we consider as good or not so good for us.

Somewhere I came across an invocation which I repeat every time I take a shower or a bath. It goes like this:

I wash my head from impure thoughts and images.

I wash my head from false beliefs.

I wash my eyes, to see only good in this world.

I wash my ears, to hear your tiny voice.

I wash my mouth to speak truth and in a gentle way.

I wash my neck, to turn around to see needs of my fellowmen.

I wash my hands and my arms, to do only good deeds in this world.

I wash my feet and my legs, to carry me to a company of holy men. So be it.

If you count them (the gates) you may say they are eleven. Thus, what about a city of ten gates? Well, my two legs and feet count just for one. When I go anywhere, I never use just one of them.

Thus, let us not forget to appoint judges and officers in all our gates. And let us remember that each scripture offers us stories as well as a deeper meaning behind those stories. Stories are like garments, but there is a body and the soul

hidden behind the garment. However, nobody can tell you what is behind the garment. This is something that each of us has to discover for himself/herself. There are many ways to break the shell of a nut. The above is just an example.

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