The mission of **Torah Is Geshmack** is to bring out the richness and enjoyment of Torah for everyone, and in doing so bring them closer to Hashem.

פרשת שופטים תשפ״ו

Guarding the Gates from Corruption

Dovid Kopel

פרשת שופטים opens by establishing the institutions that will govern and protect כלל ישראל:

> שֹׁפְטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים תִּתֶּן־לְךָ בְּכָל־שְׁעָרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר ה׳ אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לְךָ לִשְׁבָטֶיךָ וְשָׁפְטוּ אֶת־הָעָם מִשְׁפַּט־צֶדֶק (דברים טז:יח)

You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates that Hashem, your God, gives you for your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.

The judges and officers are placed specifically בשעריך, at the gates—the place where the city's inner life meets the outside world and its character becomes public.

The מזוזה is placed at that same point:

> וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל־מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתֶךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ (דברים ו:ט)

You shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.

חז״ל teach that the gates of houses, courtyards, cities, and towns are themselves obligated in מזוזה, discussed in יומא יא ע״א. The gate that carries judges must also carry the declaration that Hashem is One. קדושה must become visible where private life enters the public world.

But once the Torah appoints guardians, it immediately begins guarding the guardians. The danger it addresses first is not the criminal outside the court, but the corruption of the judge within it.

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The Corruption a Person Cannot See

> לֹא־תַטֶּה מִשְׁפָּט לֹא תַכִּיר פָּנִים וְלֹא־תִקַּח שֹׁחַד כִּי הַשֹּׁחַד יְעַוֵּר עֵינֵי חֲכָמִים וְיסַלֵּף דִּבְרֵי צַדִּיקִם (דברים טז:יט)

You shall not distort judgment; you shall not show favoritism, and you shall not take a bribe, because a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and distorts the words of the righteous.

The Torah is not speaking only about a judge who consciously sells a verdict. חז״ל teach that even where he intends לזכות את הזכאי ולחייב את החייב—to vindicate the innocent and obligate the guilty—he may not accept the gift (כתובות קה ע״א).

The pasuk does not say that the judge ceases to be wise. שוחד blinds the eyes of the wise while his knowledge and analytical ability remain intact. Something has entered his vision, and the one thing he can no longer do is to perceive that it has entered.

חז״ל explain the word שוחד as שהוא חד—the judge and the giver become one. Once the judge receives from a litigant, his mind draws close to him; the litigant becomes like his own self, and a

person cannot see fault in himself (כתובות קה ע״ב). The gift creates a נגיעה (*a personal interest, literally a point of contact*) between the judge and one side of the case. Something that does not belong within the judgment has entered it. At that point, great חכמה is not a defense. חכמה can be recruited to justify a conclusion the heart has already reached.

This is the idea that runs through the פרשה. The נגיעה is not ordinary dishonesty, but corruption that cannot be detected from the inside. The judge may report honestly using a faculty that no longer works, much like a scale that is not properly calibrated.

The Torah gives us the mechanism in a single word. A פגם rarely forms through malice; it forms wherever something is allowed to settle. Once a thing has come to rest in a person—a gift, a horse, an alliance, an office—his judgment concerning it is immediately compromised, and the compromise is invisible precisely because the thing is now his. That is why the פרשה legislates again and again, not against holding, but against לו — in the phrases לֹא יַרְבֶּה לּוֹ and וְנַחֲלָה לֹא יִהְיֶה לּוֹ. The question is never how much passes through a person's hands. It is what remains.

That is why avoiding deliberate falsehood is not enough:

> צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדֹּף לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה וְיָרַשְׁתָּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה׳ אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ (דברים טז:כ)

Righteousness, righteousness shall you pursue, so that you shall live and inherit the Land that Hashem, your God, gives you.

The demand to pursue צדק admits that truth may not be visible from where the judge stands. He must continue searching precisely when first impressions, sympathy, honor, or interest tell him that he has already arrived. The opposite of corruption is not merely empty hands, but a heart that wants only truth—and knows it cannot always trust itself to recognize it.

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מום and תמים

The פרשה gives us language for both the resulting distortion and the state it demands. It warns against bringing a blemished קרבן:

> לֹא־תִזְבַּח לַה׳ אֱלֹהֶיךָ שׁוֹר וָשֶׂה אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בּוֹ מוּם כֹּל דָּבָר רָע כִּי תוֹעֲבַת ה׳ אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוּא (דברים יז:א)

You shall not sacrifice to Hashem, your God, an ox or sheep that has a blemish, any evil defect, because it is an abomination to Hashem, your God.

Later, after warning against the divination and sorcery of the surrounding nations, it commands:

> תָּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם ה׳ אֱלֹהֶיךָ (דברים יח:יג)

You shall be whole with Hashem, your God.

A מום is a blemish that prevents the bearer from expressing its intended form without distortion; תמים means whole and undivided. In the language of this piece, נגיעה is the intrusion, מום the distortion, and תמים the demanded state. שוחד can blemish the sight of the judge, תאווה the heart of the king, possession the mission of the לוי, and ambition the speech of the נביא.

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Where נגיעה Comes From

Why would human beings be built this way? Why can corruption enter perception without being visible to the one being corrupted?

The pattern begins with אדם הראשון, who carried the future of mankind and was charged with bringing creation toward the will of Hashem. His failure damaged the distinction between טוב ורע. After the עץ הדעת, the זוהמת הנחש (*the contamination introduced by the serpent*) entered human perception, and desire could present itself as judgment:

> וַתֵּרֶא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמַאֲכָל וְכִי תַאֲוָה־הוּא לָעֵינַיִם... וַתִּקַּח מִפִּרְיוֹ וַתֹּאכַל (בראשית ג:ו)

The woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was desirable to the eyes... and she took from its fruit and ate.

Read against שוחד יעור עיני חכמים: the word וַתֵּרֶא—she saw—and what she saw was כי טוב. The judgment was already inside the act of looking. Once טוב and רע are mixed, תאווה can appear as טוב, and the eye meant to detect the distortion is itself distorted. This may be understood as the first human נגיעה: desire arriving disguised as perception.

The immediate result was exposure:

> וַתִּפָּקַחְנָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי עֵירֻמִּם הֵם וַיִּתְפְּרוּ עֲלֵה תְאֵנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגֹרֹת (בראשית ג:ז)

The eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked.

The corruption entered through sight and culminated in nakedness. The inner person was no longer protected from the outside world; a boundary had been breached.

When the world descended further, נח carried humanity, the animals, and the future of the physical world through the מבול. Yet he damaged a second fundamental distinction:

> וַיָּחֶל נֹחַ אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּטַּע כָּרֶם (בראשית ט:כ)

Noach, the man of the earth, began and planted a vineyard.

On the level of פשט, the word ויחל means that נח began. חז״ל also connect it to חולין: he made himself ordinary when he should first have planted something else (רש״י בראשית ט:כ, על פי בראשית רבה לו:ג). The man preserved within the elevated world of the תיבה emerged as איש האדמה.

I heard from my Rebbe, HaRav Nochum Lansky שליט״א, that אדם created the mixture between טוב ורע, while נח created the breach between קודש וחול (*the sacred and the ordinary*). אדם lost the clean ability to distinguish good from evil; נח allowed an elevated existence to descend into חול.

That descent culminated the same way:

> וַיִּשְׁתְּ מִן־הַיַּיִן וַיִּשְׁכָּר וַיִּתְגַּל בְּתוֹךְ אָהֳלֹה (בראשית ט:כא)

He drank from the wine, became intoxicated, and uncovered himself within his tent.

Both failures follow one path: a הבדלה (*boundary of distinction*) weakens, תאווה and קלות ראש (*levity*) enter, and what should remain guarded becomes exposed. Both begin in דעת and end in גילוי; the damage ultimately reaches the ברית, the point through which life, identity, and קדושה are transmitted. The תיקון therefore comes through יוסף as an inversion of both failures.

יוסף does not escape the physical world. He enters מצרים, a world of ערוה and תאווה, wealth, and power, and takes control of it. Where אדם saw what was desirable and took it, יוסף sees and refuses. At the moment of his נסיון, we have חז״ל who give us the image of יעקב appeared to him through the window (סוטה לו ע״ב). The window is another gate. At the precise point through which תאווה was entering, יוסף saw his father. טוֹב כִּי הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּרֶא was sight already bent by desire; this is sight that holds. The eye that failed in גן עדן is guarded in מצרים.

Set beside שוחד יעור עיני חכמים: corruption blinds; יוסף survives because he sees. The eye is the organ of both failure and guard.

And where נח uncovered himself within his own tent, יוסף leaves his garment behind and runs:

> וַתִּתְפְּשֵׂהוּ בְּבִגְדּוֹ... וַיַּעֲזֹב בִּגְדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיָּנָס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה (בראשית לט:יב)

She seized him by his garment... and he left his garment in her hand, fled, and went outside.

נח's גילוי happened in private, where nothing appeared to be demanded of him. יוסף is stripped by force, and the garment taken from him becomes the evidence that sends him to prison. One man uncovers himself where he is safe. The other is uncovered by another and keeps the ברית whole. He surrenders the outer garment rather than let the world reach the inner one.

יוסף carries into מצרים what אדם lost. יעקב is the מידה of אמת:

> תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לַאֲבֹתֵינוּ מִימֵי קֶדֶם (מיכה ז:כ)

Grant truth to Yaakov.

אמת is seeing a thing as it is before desire enters the seeing. יוסף carries that אמת into governance, grain, silver, and empire. The image in the window is not only a father's memory, but the אמת he was sent to transmit. The judge pursuing צדק performs the same work in a smaller room, laboring toward a truth his first sight may not reveal.

יוסף receives that אמת and carries it as his own עבודה. He is the צדיק of whom it is said וְצַדִּיק יְסוֹד עוֹלָם, "and a righteous man is the foundation of the world" (משלי י:כה)—and it is as יסוד that he stands straight, transmitting what he was given without bending it.

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מידת היסוד

יוסף is מידת היסוד—the attribute of יסוד, the point of connection through which what is above enters what is below. Because it is the point of connection, it is also the point most vulnerable to corruption. יסוד need not be destroyed in order to fail; a slight bend changes everything that passes through it.

That is the broader meaning of protecting the ברית. The פגם הברית is not merely an isolated עבירה. It is damage at the point through which the inner person enters the world.

What makes יוסף the answer to פרשת שופטים is not only the famous נסיון. It is where he stands afterward.

The king's three prohibitions (which we will explore more shortly) identify domains in which power takes hold: סוסים represent force, prestige, and גאווה; the term נשים represents תאווה,

alliance, and a divided heart; כסף וזהב represent possession and self-sufficiency. Each is something the king may need for his kingdom, but cannot safely want for himself.

The Torah records יוסף within all three domains.

Force. פרעה places him in the royal chariot:

> וַיַּרְכֵּב אֹתוֹ בְּמִרְכֶּבֶת הַמִּשְׁנֶה אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ (בראשית מא:מג)

He had him ride in his second chariot.

When the famine deepens, the horses of Egypt are brought to him in exchange for bread (בראשית מז:יז).

Desire and marriage. יוסף withstands אשת פוטיפר. At the height of his ascent, פרעה gives him אסנת as a wife, and the Torah records no second marriage (בראשית מא:מה).

Possession. יוסף gathers all the silver found in Egypt and Canaan and then acquires the land itself:

> וַיְלַקֵּט יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּל־הַכֶּסֶף הַנִּמְצָא בְאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם וּבְאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן (בראשית מז:יד)

Yosef gathered all the silver found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan.

> וַיִּקֶן יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּל־אַדְמַת מִצְרַיִם לְפַרְעֹה (בראשית מז:כ)

Yosef acquired all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh.

The Torah does not formally present these episodes as a set, yet it places יוסף within each area that later threatens the king. In each, nothing entrusted to him enlarges or corrupts יוסף.

The pesukim repeatedly tell us where the wealth went:

> וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף בֵּיתָה פַּרְעֹה (בראשית מז:יד)

Yosef brought the silver into Pharaoh's house.

The horses arrive as payment for feeding a starving country, not as cavalry or display. The silver is gathered and delivered to פרעה in the same pasuk; the land is acquired לפרעה; the marriage is given rather than sought. Force becomes service. Wealth passes onward. Marriage does not become multiplication.

Nothing entrusted to יוסף comes to rest in יוסף.

יוסף demonstrates what the king's prohibitions protect. The question is not only how much accumulates, but where it comes to rest. לֹא־יַרְבֶּה־לּוֹ forbids the point at which what מלכות requires becomes the king's private enlargement. יוסף never reaches that point.

That is מידת היסוד as it is meant to function: it carries what it must and keeps nothing for itself.

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רק הכסא

פרעה himself identifies the distance between יוסף and מלכות:

> אַתָּה תִּהְיֶה עַל־בֵּיתִי וְעַל־פִּיךָ יִשַּׁק כָּל־עַמִּי רַק הַכִּסֵּא אֶגְדַּל מִמֶּךָּ (בראשית מא:מ)

You shall be over my house, and by your word shall all my people be sustained; only by the throne shall I be greater than you.

Only the throne. The house is under him, the people respond to his word, and he is called הַשַּׁלִּיט עַל־הָאָרֶץ, "the ruler over the land" (בראשית מב:ו). He describes himself as אָב לְפַרְעֹה, וּלְאָדוֹן לְכָל־בֵּיתוֹ, וּמֹשֵׁל בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם—"a father to Pharaoh, master of his entire house, and ruler over all Egypt" (בראשית מה:ח). He has every instrument of kingship. What he lacks is one seat.

This defines his function. יסוד holds everything and retains nothing; were it to keep what passes through it, it would cease to be יסוד. The seat יוסף never takes belongs to מלכות, the מידה that has nothing independently and receives everything. One gives all and keeps none; the other possesses nothing of its own and receives all. רק הכסא.

The נסיון with אשת פוטיפר pursued him יום יום, "day after day" (בראשית לט:י), and he knew what it was. The second נסיון never announced itself.

יוסף was thirty when he stood before פרעה (see בראשית מא:מו) and died at 110. For the remaining eighty years of his life, the Torah records no transfer of his authority and no moment at which the throne became his. He remained one seat away from it, surrounded by the instruments of rule, with no confrontation and no dramatic moment of refusal. That is the danger the Torah will describe in the king: not necessarily rebellion, but drift.

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The Crown and Its Corruptions

The Torah turns to the king:

> כִּי־תָבֹא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה׳ אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָךְ וִירִשְׁתָּהּ וְיָשַׁבְתָּ בָּהּ וְאָמַרְתָּ אָשִׂימָה עָלַי מֶלֶךְ כְּכָל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתָי (דברים יז:יד)

When you come to the Land that Hashem, your God, gives you, inherit it, and settle within it, and you say, 'I shall place a king over myself like all the nations around me.'

The institution may resemble the nations externally, but its inner meaning must be different. The nations see the king as the source of law, security, and national power. The king of כלל ישראל exists to reveal that Hashem alone is the true King. He sits above the nation, yet he must remain מקרב אחיך, from among his brothers; he may never cease to experience himself as one of them.

Then come the limits:

> רַק לֹא־יַרְבֶּה־לּוֹ סוּסִים וְלֹא־יָשִׁיב אֶת־הָעָם מִצְרַיְמָה לְמַעַן הַרְבּוֹת סוּס (דברים יז:טז)

Only he shall not multiply horses for himself, and he shall not return the people to Egypt in order to multiply horses.

The king may not return the people to מצרים לְמַעַן הַרְבּוֹת סוּס—in order to multiply horses. יוסף brought them to מצרים לְמִחְיָה, to preserve life (בראשית מה:ה). The same descent can serve opposite ends.

> וְלֹא יַרְבֶּה־לּוֹ נָשִׁים וְלֹא יָסוּר לְבָבוֹ וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא יַרְבֶּה־לּוֹ מְאֹד (דברים יז:יז)

He shall not multiply wives for himself, so that his heart shall not turn aside; and silver and gold he shall not greatly multiply for himself.

The word לו governs all three. The king may possess what his army and national responsibility require. What he may not do is multiply for himself. The Rambam takes this to its precise conclusion: even one spare horse running before him in the manner of other kings is prohibited and incurs מלקות. By contrast, wealth accumulated for the army, the public, and their wars is a מצוה; the prohibition is what he stores for his own grandeur (רמב״ם, הלכות מלכים ג:ג-ד).

One horse can therefore constitute ריבוי—not because one is numerically many, but because a single unnecessary horse can already be accumulation לו.

This is what יוסף demonstrated. He administered the horses and wealth of an empire, but they never became ריבוי לו. The king can cross the line with even one horse that does.

The king's fall need not begin with rebellion. Another horse appears useful, another alliance wise, additional wealth prudent. Each step is defensible. The Torah writes not that his heart will rebel, but:

> וְלֹא יַרְבֶּה לּוֹ נָשִׁים וְלֹא יָסוּר לְבָבוֹ וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא יַרְבֶּה לּוֹ מְאֹד (דברים יז:יז)

So that his heart shall not turn aside.

Rebellion is visible; drift is not. This is נגיעה in the office of the king: while it happens, he may be the last person capable of seeing it. The danger lies not only in action but in his לב.

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What the King Cannot Do

Here the problem becomes more difficult. יוסף's solution is not available to the king.

יוסף kept יסוד straight by never taking the throne. His non-ownership was built into his position. He could hold everything precisely because one thing remained outside his grasp, he was not the king.

The king has no such protection. The throne is his office; he cannot decline it. He must receive מלכות and not privately own it at the same time, permanently. That is a different problem than the one יוסף solved.

The Torah therefore gives him an external mechanism. The word לו, which marked his danger, is transformed:

> וְהָיָה כְּשִׁבְתּוֹ עַל כִּסֵּא מַמְלַכְתּוֹ וְכָתַב לּוֹ אֶת־מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל־סֵפֶר מִלִּפְנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם (דברים יז:יח)

When he sits upon the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this Torah upon a scroll, from before the Kohanim and Leviim.

The one thing that must truly be לו is the object that teaches him that ultimately, nothing is his.

The moment he ascends, he must copy a law he did not author. He writes, but is not the Author; he rules, but is not the source of law; he sits upon a throne, but the throne is כסא ה׳. He carries the Torah not to show that it belongs to him, but that he belongs to it.

> וְהָיְתָה עִמּוֹ וְקָרָא בּוֹ כָּל־יְמֵי חַיָּיו לְמַעַן יִלְמַד לְיִרְאָה אֶת־ה׳ אֱלֹהָיו (דברים יז:יט)

It shall be with him, and he shall read from it all the days of his life, so that he shall learn to fear Hashem, his God.

עמו—with him physically, daily, for life. חז״ל describe the ספר תורה accompanying him to war, judgment, and meals (סנהדרין כא ע״ב; רמב״ם, הלכות מלכים ג:א). It does for the king what never being king did for יוסף. His non-ownership was a fact of his position; the king must hold that truth in his hands because his position appears to say the opposite.

> לְבִלְתִּי רוּם לְבָבוֹ מֵאֶחָיו וּלְבִלְתִּי סוּר מִן־הַמִּצְוָה יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאול (דברים יז:כ)

So that his heart shall not become elevated above his brothers, and so that he shall not turn from the commandment to the right or to the left.

The Torah understands what power does. It raises a person until he no longer sees those beneath him as his brothers. The ספר תורה guards the king from his own crown.

✦

שלמה: The Control Case

The Torah's warnings are not theoretical.

דוד establishes the throne. He is warrior, ruler, poet, and leader, and he repeatedly recognizes that his authority comes from Hashem. He is not without failure, but when he falters he does not protect his image at the expense of truth. He returns. His greatness is not that he never stumbles, but that his heart remains directed toward its Source.

The throne reaches its greatest outward expression through שלמה:

> וַיֵּשֶׁב שְׁלֹמֹה עַל־כִּסֵּא ה׳ לְמֶלֶךְ (דברי הימים א כט:כג)

Shlomo sat upon the throne of Hashem as king.

The throne is occupied by שלמה and called כסא ה׳. He possesses extraordinary חכמה, brings peace, gathers the nation, and builds the בית המקדש in the end. מלכות and חכמה, wealth, and קדושה appear to join.

ספר מלכים then places before us, in close succession, the three fields the Torah marked as dangerous: extraordinary wealth, horses from מצרים, and many wives.

> וַיֶּאֱסֹף שְׁלֹמֹה רֶכֶב וּפָרָשִׁים... וּמוֹצָא הַסּוּסִים אֲשֶׁר לִשְׁלֹמֹה מִמִּצְרָיִם (מלכים א י:כו, כח)

Shlomo gathered chariots and horsemen... and the source of the horses that Shlomo had was Egypt.

> וַיְהִי־לוֹ נָשִׁים שָׂרוֹת שְׁבַע מֵאוֹת וּפִלַגְשִׁים שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת (מלכים א יא:ג)

He had seven hundred royal wives and three hundred concubines.

וַיְהִי לוֹ—the Torah's word exactly.

Why does ספר מלכים place the wisest man within these fields? חז״ל identify his reasoning in the two prohibitions whose reasons the Torah revealed:

> שתי מקראות נתגלו טעמן ונכשל בהן גדול העולם. כתיב לא ירבה לו נשים... אמר שלמה: אני ארבה ולא אסור
> (סנהדרין כא ע״ב)

The reasons for two verses were revealed, and the greatest man in the world stumbled through them. It is written, 'He shall not multiply wives for himself'... Shlomo said: 'I will multiply, and I will not turn aside.'

That is the drashah in one sentence. שלמה read the reason, examined himself, and concluded—with unmatched חכמה—that it did not describe him. He reasoned about his own נגיעה from the inside, and he was wrong. שוחד blinds the eyes of חכמים, not fools; the danger is greatest for the person certain he is above it.

> וַיְהִי לְעֵת זִקְנַת שְׁלֹמֹה נָשָׁיו הִטֶּו אֶת־לְבָבוֹ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְלֹא־הָיָה לְבָבוֹ שָׁלֵם עִם ה׳ אֱלֹהָיו כִּלְבַב דָּוִיד אָבִיו
> (מלכים א יא:ד)

When Shlomo grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not whole with Hashem, his God, like the heart of David his father.

לא היה לבבו שלם—his heart was not whole. The word in our פרשה is תמים, not שלם, and the difference is worth holding. תָּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם ה׳ אֱלֹקֶיךָ is commanded against divination—against a heart that seeks its certainty from a second source. לא היה לבבו שלם describes a heart divided between Hashem and אלהים אחרים. Two vocabularies for one failure: wholeness is lost not by abandoning Hashem, but by allowing something to stand alongside Him. שלמה did not cease to be wise. חכמה was never the protection.

Set שלמה against יוסף, and the contrast is sharp: יוסף holds enormous power outside the throne and does not bend; שלמה occupies the throne with unmatched wisdom, and his heart turns. The decisive question is whether the power has become לו.

✦

Torah, קדושה, and נבואה

The same principle governs the remaining offices:

> לֹא־יִהְיֶה לַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם כָּל־שֵׁבֶט לֵוִי חֵלֶק וְנַחֲלָה עִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל (דברים יח:א)

The Kohanim, the Leviim—the entire tribe of Levi—shall not have a portion or inheritance with Israel.

> וְנַחֲלָה לֹא־יִהְיֶה־לּוֹ בְּקֶרֶב אֶחָיו ה׳ הוּא נַחֲלָתוֹ (דברים יח:ב)

He shall have no inheritance among his brothers; Hashem is his inheritance.

לוי appears again. לוי teaches כלל ישראל, as the pasuk says: יורו מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ לְיַעֲקֹב וְתוֹרָתְךָ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, "They shall teach Your judgments to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel" (דברים לג:י). Knowledge is power, and קדושה is power. The ability to teach, interpret, and stand as the spiritual authority of a nation is as capable of distortion as a crown.

Whatever the full reason for לוי's lack of territorial נחלה, it prevents spiritual authority from resting upon an independent territorial kingdom. כלל ישראל must sustain him—וְהַלֵּוִי אֲשֶׁר־בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ

לא תַעַזְבֶנּוּ, "You shall not abandon the Levi within your gates" (דברים יד:כז)—allowing him to teach without building a separate center of wealth and rule.

Then comes the נביא. A nation with a king wants guidance before war and certainty in danger. Other nations turn to diviners; the Torah commands תָּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם ה׳ אֱלֹקֶיךָ and introduces the alternative:

> נָבִיא מִקִּרְבְּךָ מֵאַחֶיךָ כָּמֹנִי יָקִים לְךָ ה׳ אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֵלָיו תִּשְׁמָעוּן (דברים יח:טו)

Hashem, your God, will raise up for you a prophet from among you, from your brothers, like me; to him you shall listen.

The king may govern, but he may not manufacture the word of Hashem. The נביא does not own what he says:

> נָבִיא אָקִים לָהֶם מִקֶּרֶב אֲחֵיהֶם כָּמוֹךָ וְנָתַתִּי דְבָרַי בְּפִיו וְדִבֶּר אֲלֵיהֶם אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֲצַוֶּנּוּ (דברים יח:יח)

I shall place My words in his mouth.

He is a mouth, not an author—the same pattern in another office. The corruption of נבואה begins when a person confuses his own certainty with revelation:

> אֵת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־צִוִּיתִיו לְדַבֵּר (דברים יח:כ)

That which I did not command him to speak.

It may sound holy and be what the נביא sincerely believes Hashem would want. That is the danger: personal certainty entering the place reserved for Hashem's word.

✦

Everything Rested Upon משה

משה combined these powers. He was the supreme נביא, the rebbe and judge of כלל ישראל, and the leader who brought them from מצרים. Indeed, חז״ל say that he held royal authority—משה רבינו מלך היה—and during the seven days of the מילואים, before אהרן entered the כהונה, it was משה who performed the עבודה, as recorded in זבחים קב ע״א.

> וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה עָנָו מְאֹד מִכֹּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה (במדבר יב:ג)

The man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person upon the face of the earth.

His ענווה (*humility*) was not one virtue among many. It allowed every כח to rest upon him without becoming an instrument for enlarging משה himself. תורה and מלכות, service, judgment, and נבואה passed through him without becoming private possession. Like יוסף, he carried everything and owned none of it.

כהונה was already established independently in אהרן and his sons. After משה's death, his concentration of Torah, נבואה, judgment, and leadership continued through distinct people and institutions. What one עניו could protect inwardly now had to be anchored outwardly through separate offices and visible limits.

The king leads, the כהן serves, the לוי teaches, the נביא speaks, and the בית דין judges. Each carries a כח he does not own, and no one carries the whole. The king must copy the Torah; לוי has קדושה

but no territorial kingdom; the נביא speaks in Hashem's Name but does not sit upon the throne; and the בית דין rules through Torah, not an army.

✦

At Every Gate

The structure of the פרשה now explains itself.

The ירידה does not usually begin with a declared decision. It begins with insufficient attention to the weight of the כח in one's hands. The judge does not set out to distort justice. The king does not set out to replace Hashem. שלמה explicitly intended the opposite.

Because inner purity cannot reliably inspect itself, the Torah instead anchors inward demands using outward structures. The מזוזה declares that Hashem is One; the שופט that truth is not for sale; the king's ספר תורה that the throne is not his; and לוי's lack of territorial inheritance that Torah may not become a private empire. A safeguard existing only in the mind remains subject to the mind's bending.

בְּכָל־שְׁעָרֶיךָ—at every gate, at every point where what is inside must enter the outside world.

The Torah does not eliminate power. It sanctifies power by ensuring that the one who carries it can never mistake himself for its source. That is צדק צדק תרדוף—not merely avoiding obvious falsehood, but pursuing an אמת that may not be visible from where we stand.

✦

The Bones in the Box

יוסף held everything and kept nothing, and it cost him more than the throne.

> וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף בֶּן־מֵאָה וְעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים וַיַּחַנְטוּ אֹתוֹ וַיִּישֶׂם בָּאָרוֹן בְּמִצְרָיִם (בראשית נ:כו)

Yosef died at 110 years of age; they embalmed him, and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

He never sat upon the throne, and he never entered the Land. His work was complete, yet he waited in a box in מצרים for generations. משה carried his עצמות out at the redemption, and they were not buried until the end of the conquest:

> וְאֶת־עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר־הֶעֱלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם קָבְרוּ בִשְׁכֶם (יהושע כד:לב)

The bones of Yosef, which the Children of Israel had brought up from Egypt, they buried in Shechem.

Perhaps the עצמות of יוסף had to enter the Land because his עצמיות—the ברית guarded and יסוד kept straight—had to enter the national life before מלכות could stand upon it. Yet יוסף does not arrive with the crown. יסוד delivers to מלכות and does not share the throne.

One view in חז״ל identifies משיח בן יוסף as the figure killed before the final revelation of משיח בן דוד, as brought in סוכה נב ע״א. Here יסוד and מלכות remain divided: the straight one goes first and still does not sit upon the throne.

Until they are joined, our work is to build structures that keep us straight where our sight will not: the judge at the gate, the מזוזה at the door, and Torah in the hands of the one who might

imagine the power is his. Corruption rarely announces itself; we must pursue אמת and משפט knowing that our first judgment may already have been touched.

✦

The Sound in the Camp

פרשת שופטים never falls elsewhere. נצבים is always the last Shabbos before ראש השנה, which places שופטים four Shabbosos earlier—between the second and the sixth of אלול in every year. The gates are posted in the opening days of the month, in the same week that the שופר begins.

There is no obligation from the Torah to sound the שופר in אלול. It was חכמים who instituted it, and the reason they gave belongs to this פרשה:

> בראש חודש אלול אמר הקב״ה למשה עֲלֵה אֵלַי הָהָרָה... והעבירו שופר במחנה, שהרי משה עלה להר, שלא יטעו עוד... לכן התקינו חכמים שיהיו תוקעין בראש חודש אלול בכל שנה ושנה, כדי להזהיר את ישראל שיעשו תשובה
>
> (פרקי דרבי אליעזר מו, הובא בטור ובשולחן ערוך אורח חיים תקפא:א)

On Rosh Chodesh Elul the Holy One said to Moshe, 'Ascend to Me upon the mountain'... and they passed a shofar through the camp, for Moshe had ascended the mountain, so that they should not go astray again... Therefore the Sages instituted that the shofar be sounded on Rosh Chodesh Elul in every year, to warn Yidden to return in teshuvah.

שלא יטעו עוד—so that they should not go astray again. A nation that had stood at הר סיני was given a sound. Not new knowledge, and not a stronger resolution: a sound, posted outside themselves, arriving whether or not they judged that they needed it. That is the same instinct as שופטים ושוטרים תתן לך בכל שעריך. The safeguard is placed where the person cannot place it himself.

The רמב״ם tells us what the sound says:

> אף על פי שתקיעת שופר בראש השנה גזירת הכתוב, רמז יש בו, כלומר: עורו ישנים משנתכם ונרדמים הקיצו מתרדמתכם, וחפשו במעשיכם וחזרו בתשובה וזכרו בוראכם (רמב״ם, הלכות תשובה ג:ד)

Although the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a decree of the verse, there is a hint within it, as if to say: Awake, you sleepers, from your sleep; you slumberers, rouse yourselves from your slumber; search your deeds, return in teshuvah, and remember your Creator.

וחפשו במעשיכם—search your deeds. Not only wake, but search. A person who could see his own נגיעות would have no need to look for them. The רמב״ם writes this of the שופר of ראש השנה; the month that precedes it is the time given for the searching.

> דִּרְשׁוּ ה׳ בְּהִמָּצְאוֹ קְרָאֻהוּ בְּהיוֹתוֹ קָרוֹב (ישעיהו נה:ו)

Seek Hashem where He is to be found; call upon Him when He is near.

חז״ל apply this pasuk to the עשרה ימים שבין ראש השנה ליום הכפורים, and they specify that it speaks of the יחיד rather than צבור (discussed in ראש השנה יח ע״א). Meanwhile, אלול is the approach to those days, and the work it requires is the work of the יחיד. Each of us accumulates נגיעות over time, quietly, in the ordinary course of living. This is the season the Torah provides to take inventory of what has been allowed to settle—and to look hardest in the one place we are least equipped to see.

I have long seen the שופטים ושוטרים posted at the gate of every city as our own wake-up call: to stand guard against שוחד not only in how we judge others, but in our own עבודה.

May we merit to guard the gates of our homes, communities, and hearts; to use every כח with attention and humility; to build for the נגיעות we cannot see; and to guard מידת היסוד until the מלכות of Hashem is revealed completely in the world.

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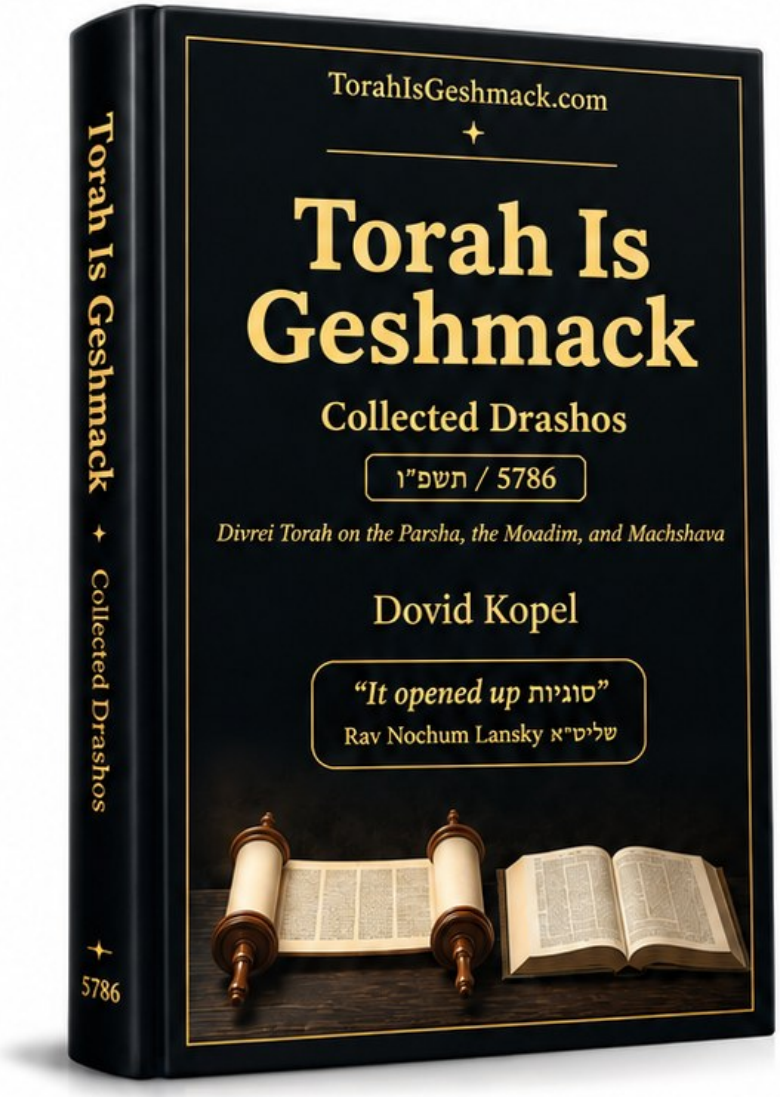
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