



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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OHR

Shabbat Shuva

HAMELECH

Judgment

In many of the *Selichot* and *Tefillot* of the *Yomim Noraim*, we find ourselves asking to be inscribed in the book of the righteous, in the book of merits. We ask to be found innocent and pure and righteous. How can we do that? Judgment is judgment. Deeds were done. Isn't judgment based upon good deeds vs. misdeeds?

Judging Favorably

In Masechet Shabbat (127) we are taught that one who judges others favorably will himself be judged favorably. Vayikra (19:15) tells us to judge our peers righteously. Gemara Shevuot (30a) explains this to be a positive commandment for each and every Jew to judge each other in a favorable light, i.e. to interpret their actions as if they are justified and correct.

Benefit of the Doubt

Gemara Shabbat (127b) relates a remarkable incident. A man who resided in Northern Israel went down south to find a job. He worked for three years by a certain employer and on *Erev Yom Kippur* he asked to get paid so that he could support his wife and children.

The employer said, "I have no money."

The worker asked, "So give me produce."

"I have none," was the response.

"So give me real estate," the worker requested.

"I don't have any."

"So give me livestock."

"Have none."

"What about bedding – pillows and sheets?"

"Don't have any."

Quite disappointed, the worker had no choice but to pack his bags and head home.

After *Sukkot*, the employer took the money for wages plus three donkeys laden with food, drink and delicacies and made his way to the worker's house.

After they ate and drank, the employer paid the wages, and asked, "When you asked for the wages and I said that I have no money, what did you think?"

The worker replied, "I thought that perhaps a good business deal had just come your way and you used all your cash on it."

"And when you asked for livestock and I said that I have none, what did you think?"

"I thought that you had rented it out."

"And when you asked for real estate?"

"Maybe you rented out your fields as well."

"And when you asked for produce?"

"I thought that you had not yet tithed them."

"And when I said that I did not even have pillows and sheets?"

"I thought that you had consecrated all of your belongings to Sanctuary funds."



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The employer affirmed, "I am telling you – that is exactly what happened! I consecrated all of my belongings because I was disturbed that my son Horkunus was not learning Torah properly. Then I went to the Sages in the south and they arranged for me *hatarat nedarim* – annulment of vows. And you – just as you have judged me favorably, so too may Hashem judge you favorably."

The Sheiltot (Shemot 40) reveals the identity of the characters in the story. The employer was Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkunus and the worker was none other than Rabbi Akiva!

Rabbi Menachem Azarya of Panu explains that this was before Rabbi Akiva went to learn Torah. Although unlearned, he already displayed exemplary *midot* and excelled in *dan lekaf zechut*.

Indeed, we consistently find Rabbi Akiva always seeing the good even in the most bleak situations. Additionally, Rabbi Akiva was wont to say that the mitzvah of loving your neighbor as yourself is the most important all-inclusive mitzvah of the Torah. The above incident certainly illustrates how he lived by that motto. Only someone who truly loves his fellow Jew will be able to find excuses for seeming misbehavior.

Friend of the King

We say on Rosh Hashanah, "He [Hashem] does not see iniquity in Yaakov nor does He gaze at idolatry of Yisrael; Hashem, his Almighty is with him [Israel] and the comradery of the King is with him."

The Sanzer Rov (Divrei Hayim) explains as follows: When a Jew only sees good behavior by his fellow Jew and no matter what the other person does, he always interprets it in a positive light, such a person will always have Hashem's assistance at his side and he will feel that Hashem is like his companion.

You – Your Own Judge

The Chofetz Chayim really explains the matter (Sefer Shemirat HaLashon, Shaar HaTevuna chap. 4). He points out that every deed, good and bad, has countless details, aspects and facets. Practically every deed has traces of good and specks of evil. It all depends on how you look at it.

If Hashem would be very strict with us, He could find blemishes in our mitzvah performance. He could label them as having been done with ulterior motives or without the necessary emotions. Also, certain details in the actual performance may have been overlooked.

On the other hand, if Hashem uses His Attribute of Mercy, He can find many a merit in all that we do. Even our bad deeds, He can find some degree of justification and explanation of how they were not so bad after all.

So which "glasses" will Hashem use? It all depends on us! On how we view our fellow Jew! If we go around all day pointing fingers and complaining and slandering and finding faults in others, then Hashem will find faults in us. But if we make a concerted effort to always view others and their actions in a positive light, then Hashem



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will do likewise for us! So, in a certain sense, we are our own judges! We decided and determine how strict our judgment will be.

Pray for Merits

We have explained that every action could be interpreted in a number of ways. And we have said that how we judge others will impact upon how Hashem judges us. We can now understand our various *tefillot*, when we ask Hashem to inscribe us in the Book of Merits or in the Book of the Righteous. We are not asking Him to invent deeds that were never done. We are just asking him to see the things we did in a positive light.

The Clay Pot

Rabbi Eliezer Rivlin was a dedicated *gabbai tzeddakah* in Jerusalem of old. His funeral was well attended, especially by good friends such as Rav Shmuel Kook and Reb Aryeh Levine. Reb Aryeh was quite surprised to see Reb Shmuel leave in the middle of the funeral and enter a flower shop only to come out with a flowerpot.

Reb Aryeh knew that there must be a most plausible explanation for this unusual behavior and he yearned to hear the explanation. He approached Reb Shmuel and asked him to share his thoughts.

Reb Shmuel explained, "For years, I helped a leper daily. Yesterday he passed away and due to fear of contagion, the medical staff ordered that all of his personal belongings be burnt. I pleaded that his *tefillin* be spared. I was told that if I would bring a ceramic vessel before 12 p.m., then the

tefillin can be buried inside the clay vessel in the ground.

"I did not know where to get ahold of a clay vessel suitable for this purpose. Then our friend passed away and I almost forgot about the *tefillin*. But as I stood at the funeral, I noticed the plant shop and the thought came to my mind that perhaps they sell there clay pots. Time was running out and I had to purchase it right then in order to save the *tefillin*."

Reb Aryeh Levine used this as his life's lesson on judging others favorably.

The Missing Eggs

A man sold eggs in Yerushalayim. He was disturbed to discover each morning one tray of 30 eggs missing. The tray was there but not the eggs. He began to suspect his next door neighbor of the theft.

The matter repeated itself a number of times and Mr. Eggseller decided to consult with the revered Sage, Rav Shmuel Salant. Rav Salant listened to the story and then offered his sagacious advice.

"Listen to me," the Rav began. "Boil up thirty eggs and place them in the top tray. Come back to me tomorrow and tell me what happened."

The next day, Mr. Eggseller returned to Rav Shmuel and told him the good news: the "*ganev*" had been found! Mr. Eggseller opened up his store that morning and discovered a large snake dead on the floor! Apparently his daily breakfast had been cooked and as such, choked him to death.



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Mr. Eggseller felt bad for having suspected his neighbor for no good reason.

Jingling Coins

It happened once in the Great Synagogue of Holon that on Shabbat, the congregation heard the sound of coins jingling in the pocket of the *chazzan*. Some people approached the Rav, Rav Yitzchok Zilbershtein, to ask what to do. The Rav asked the *chazzan* who explained that indeed, he had coins in his pocket. However, these were no regular coins; they were special coins which a *mekubal* had given him as a *segulah* for *shemirah* and as such, were not *muktzah*.

Rav Zilbershtein added: Some say that Hashem sometimes gives us the ability to think outlandish and farfetched thoughts, just so that we can use such unreasonable lines of thought in order to come up with justification for other people's seeming misdeeds.

Want a Cracker?

A woman once travelled abroad. In the airport, she bought herself a package of crackers and set herself down to eat. She got a little distracted and then turned back to her package of crackers set down on the little table in front of her. She opened up the package and took a cracker and began to munch. Much to her surprise, a total stranger, sitting right across from her, also took a cracker from the package and began eating. A bit uncomfortable, but not wanting to say anything, she finished her cracker and took another, well, so did he! With each cracker she took, her

uninvited guest followed suit. The woman was totally appalled at this man's audacity.

Finally, her flight was called for boarding. As she approached the gate, she opened up her purse to take out her passport and boarding card. What did she find at the top of her purse? A package of crackers!

Indeed, she, and not he, had been the uninvited guest! What a lesson in *dan lekaf zechut*. How often do we blame others and jump to "obvious" conclusions, when in reality, it was we who were in the wrong?!

A Good Judgment Call

What does Hoshea tell us in *Haftorat Shabbat Shuva*? "Take for yourself words and return to Hashem, remove iniquity and take good, and our lips shall pay for bulls (of sacrifice)." In light of the above, we can interpret the verse as follows: Keep your words of criticism to yourself. That is how to repent to Hashem. Remove iniquity from others by viewing their actions in a positive light. Only see the good in others. If we act in this manner, then Hashem will view us favorably and accept our prayers with the same degree of merit that *korbonot* effected.

May we merit to internalize these lessons and live by them, earning a favorable judgment for one and all.

Shabbat Shalom Umevorach

Ketiva Vachatima Tova

Mordechai Malka