

And the Land shall be conquered before Hashem, and then you shall return – then you shall be vindicated before Hashem and from Yisrael. (32:22)

“So what if people do not understand my lofty goals?” “Since when must I explain myself to people?” “As long as I satisfy Hashem, is that not what is important?” It is statements such as these, with the attitude of arrogance that accompanies them, that get people into trouble. The end does not justify the means. One must act in a manner that does not incur public suspicion of impropriety. Everything we do must be above board, maintaining sufficient transparency to withstand the greatest scrutiny.

There is a well-known **Teshuvos Chasam Sofer** (6: *Likutim* 59) in which the revered *Rav* of Hungarian Jewry writes: “My whole life, I was always anxious concerning the *pasuk*, ‘You shall be vindicated before Hashem and for *Yisrael*.’ These two obligations – Hashem and *Yisrael* – ride heavily on our backs. It is much easier to fulfill (be vindicated) the first: Hashem. It is so much more difficult to have one’s actions pass human scrutiny. The sin of *chillul Hashem*, desecrating Hashem’s Name in the eyes of people, is an egregious sin. This applies even if the suspicion people have is far-fetched. We must put it to rest and not give people a reason to talk.

“I have often wondered if it is truly feasible for one to fulfill this *pasuk* (which demands human vindication). Indeed, Shlomo *HaMelech* writes, *Ein adam tzaddik b’aretz asher yaase tov v’lo yecheta*, ‘There is no righteous person in the land who does good and does not sin.’ [Simply, this means that no one is perfect.] I think we are being taught that it is impossible to elude, to satisfy the suspicions of people. The most perfect action, the holiest, saintly person, is never above the suspicion and dissatisfaction of people.”