

When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male. (12:2)

The *Midrash Rabbah* (*Vayikra Rabbah* 14) quotes the *pasuk* in *Sefer Tehillim* (139:5), *Achor va'kedem tzartani*, "You have created me behind and before." Rabbi Yochanan said, "If man merits, he inherits two worlds, This World and The World to Come (*Olam Habba*). This is what is meant by, "You have created me behind and before" (referring to This World and The World to Come), and, if not (if he does not merit), he comes to give a *din v'cheshbon*, judgment/justification and a reckoning. The terms *din v'cheshbon* have been immortalized in *Pirkei Avos* 3:1, Akavya ben Mehallal says, "Consider three things, and you will not come into the grips of sin: Know from whence you came; where you will ultimately go, and before Whom you will give *din v'cheshbon*, justification and reckoning." Formally, *cheshbon*, accounting, precedes the final judgment. Yet, here we see that *din* precedes *cheshbon*. Why?

This would be true with regard to human-centered judgment. In Heaven, however, judgment comes first. The *sefer*, *Eid Yaaleh*, explains that Heavenly judgment takes a different course concerning adjudication. Man/ the sinner is granted the opportunity to render judgment on a person who committed the very same transgression for which he was found guilty. If he is able to find merit in his behavior, or a reason to absolve him of his sin, then he will be judged similarly by Heaven. If, however, he comes down with the gavel and declares, "Guilty," showing no compassion, he will likewise be found guilty. Thus, the *din*, judgment, which he applies to someone else will precede his own *cheshbon*, accounting. This is what took place when Nosson *HaNavi* presented the "case" of the lamb that belonged to the poor person. David *HaMelech* rendered his *din*, judgment, unaware that he was actually rendering judgment against himself.

The *Ben Ish Chai* explains that when one looks at the actions perpetrated by a stranger, his perspective remains untainted by subjectivity. He sees the truth in its unblemished form. Otherwise, when one looks at his own actions, he looks with rose-colored glasses through lenses of vested interests. One sees the truth in others – rarely in himself. Thus, Heaven tests him with *din* before It renders its *cheshbon*.

In *Niflaosecha Asichah*, Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, *Shlita*, relates the story of a Jew who acted nefariously toward his co-religionists. He would inform on them to the gentile authorities and generally make life miserable for them at every juncture. To put it simply: he was not the most beloved Jew in the community. Indeed, he had no friends who cared about him. When he passed away, the community did not seem broken up by it. Every Jew, regardless of religious belief or reputation receives a *taharah*, body purification, through the services of the volunteers of the *Chevrah Kaddisha*, Jewish Sacred Burial Society. The deceased was no different, except that during the *taharah*, one of the *misaskim*, volunteers who were washing the body, slapped the deceased lightly on the back. When the rest of the group looked at him incredulously, actually shocked by his action, he said, "He deserved it."

That night, the deceased appeared to the young man/volunteer (who was a devout, decent *ben*

Torah who was carried away with righteous indignation) and said, “You humiliated me in front of the other members of the *Chevrah Kaddisha*. I am summoning you to a *din Torah* in front of the Heavenly Court to adjudicate my embarrassment. Obviously, the young man was at first quite shaken up from his dream, but it did not last very long. He comforted himself with the notion that dreams are unrealistic, nothing more than a figment of his imagination. They are meaningless and should be disregarded. When the apparition kept on appearing nightly with the same claim and declaration, however, the young man became frightened.

He related the dream to his friends. He became morose and stopped eating. Soon, he was relegated to bed, because he had no strength, having not eaten in days. After two weeks of misery, the young man hovered near death. His friends finally spoke up, suggesting that he go to the *Maharsha, Horav Shmuel Eliezer HaLevi Eldels, zl*, the premier *gadol*, Torah giant of his generation, an individual who was as holy as he was erudite. He was also wise in the ways of the world. He would know how to address this problem. The young man demurred, claiming that he feared the *Maharsha*'s reaction to what he had done. After another week of physical deprivation, as the young man hovered near death, he relented and allowed his friends to consult with the *Maharsha*.

The *Maharsha* listened and told the young man's friends to have him brought to his house. The young man lay down to sleep, knowing that tonight would be no different than the other nights – the soul of the man whom he had humiliated would return to make him miserable. He was right. This time, however, the *Maharsha* was waiting to speak with him. “Who are you?” the *Maharsha* asked. “I am the soul of so and so who was humiliated by this fellow. He slapped me and referred to me as a *rasha*, wicked person.”

“What is the issue? Everybody was aware that you were wicked. You never covered up your nefarious activities, and, even if he shamed you, since when does the Heavenly Tribunal punish a person who calls his fellow Jew a *rasha*?”

When the soul heard this, he became disconcerted. This was one thing he was not expecting. “You obviously are unaware of the eminent welcome I received when I arrived in the World of Truth. At first, all of the punishing angels were lined up to strike me, but I was protected by the angels that were created through my *mitzvos*.”

“What *mitzvos* did you perform that granted you such esteem?” the *Maharsha* asked.

“Once when I was walking along the banks of a river, a Torah scholar fell in and was drowning. I quickly jumped in and rescued him. I carried him to his home and instructed his wife in his care. Her response was very negative, ‘What can I give him? We have no money and no means of support.’ When I heard this, I opened my wallet and gave her money. I agreed to support them until her husband had completely recuperated. This was my source of merit. (In other words, I am not such a bad person after all.)”

The *Maharsha* told him, "Listen to what you are saying. Due to the merit of saving and sustaining one life, all of your past sins have been erased. I think, however, that it is all a sham. Whatever you did was because you happened to be in the right place at the right time. Your motivation was not for the sake of Heaven. It just happened to fall into your lap and you took advantage of the opportunity. Otherwise, you do not deserve to be saved from *Gehinnom*, Purgatory! The Heavenly Tribunal decided to test you: 'Were you sincere? Did you really, out of the goodness of your heart, save the Torah scholar, or was it by chance that you decided once in your life to be good?' They wanted to see how you were acting towards another Torah scholar. Unfortunately, the manner in which you are acting towards this young man indicates that you really do not care about Torah scholars. You care only about yourself. Thus, you deserve your rightful punishment!"

When the soul of the deceased heard this, he immediately left the young man alone. He was never heard from again. *Din v'cheshbon*: We determine our own judgment by virtue of the manner in which we judge others.