

It happened when Moshe raised his hand Yisrael was stronger. (17:11)

Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 29a) ask: “Was it Moshe’s hands that won the battle or lost the battle? Rather (the Torah) teaches you: As long as *Klal Yisrael mistaklin k’lapei Maalah*, looked Heavenward and subjected their heart to their Father in Heaven – they would prevail. When they did not, however, they would fall.” *Horav Yosef Nechemiah Kornitzer, zl*, renders *Chazal’s* statement homiletically. He focuses on one of the most important verities that plays a major role in *Klal Yisrael’s* merit to achieve success: *achdus*, unity, harmony among Jews. As long as we are united, fused together with the common goal of serving Hashem – no nation will ever prevail over us. What is the greatest obstacle to unity? Negativity; viewing our fellow through a jaundiced eye. We must search for and acknowledge our friend’s virtues – not his shortcomings. Concerning one who is plagued by deficiency, we must find a way to justify the challenges that he must overcome – and keep this in mind. Anyone can find fault. It takes a big person, a secure individual, to find and acknowledge virtue.

This idea, explains *Rav Yosef Nechemiah*, is alluded to when *Chazal* say *mistaklin k’lapei Maalah*; the word *maalah* in this context would be translated as virtues/*maalos*. As long as Jews focus on one another’s *maalos*, no nation will subjugate us. To paraphrase the well-known words from *Horav Elimelech m’Lishensk’s Tefillah Kodem HaTefillah*, prayer to enable one to pray: *Aderaba, tein b’libeinu she’nireh kol echad maalas chaveireinu v’lo chesronam*, “On the contrary, place in our hearts appreciation for the goodness/virtues of our fellow; let us not seek to find fault with them.” This is how a Jew should live. If we follow this prescription for living, we will subdue the Amaleks of every generation, and we will still our enemies who envy us and what we represent.

Rav Yosef Nechemiah supplements this thought to explain the “punishment” Moshe *Rabbeinu* received from Hashem for suspecting the Jewish People of a lack of belief concerning his message regarding their ultimate liberation from Egypt. For his mistrust of the Jewish People, Hashem smote his hand with leprosy. As penance, Moshe raised up his hands as a sign to the people that they should look for their fellow’s virtues: a “hand” for a “hand.”

Hevei dan es kol ha’adam l’kaf z’chus, “Judge all (the) man meritoriously,” is a staple of Jewish life. *Horav Itzikel, zl, m’Pshevork* (Antwerp, Belgium) (quoted by *Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita*), would recite these seven words as he wrapped his *Tefillin* around his hand seven times. (The custom is to recite *V’atem ha’deveikim b’Hashem Elokeichem chaim kulchem ha’yom*.) He felt that the manner in which one clings to Hashem, the path towards *kedushah*, holiness, is through judging our fellow in a positive light.

Chazal (*Pirkei Avos*) talk about the person who is tolerant and forgiving regarding his honor. If someone mistreats him, he overlooks it and absolves the offender. They also speak of the one who judges his fellowman favorably. Which one of these two types of character is greater? Clearly, they

are both enviable. At first glance, one would say that the tolerant and forgiving fellow acts more laudably. He swallows his pride and, although he was slighted or even insulted, he forgives the offender. It would seem that judging someone favorably does not really make demands on a person to the extent that swallowing his pride does.

Horav Aryeh Levin, zl, teaches otherwise. When a person overlooks an injury to his pride, he has acted nobly and should be commended for his extraordinary tolerance. In addition, he has forgiven the individual who hurt him. Nonetheless, the offender remains a miscreant who dealt ignobly with a fellow Jew. Conversely, when one judges his fellow in a positive light and gives him the benefit of the doubt, not only does he elevate his personal spiritual status, he also raises his fellow's spiritual status a higher notch. With him, it is a "win, win" situation.

Entire volumes have been written addressing the importance of judging others favorably. Most of the stories are well-known. I would rather address the negative consequences of misjudging someone. While it is crucial that we remain vigilant in guarding the sanctity of the Jewish People and all that they consider holy, we have a distinct way to act and not to act. Usually, our motive for getting involved and raising the level of anger is our myopic, subjective view of the offenders who we are about to excoriate. A group of community activists in *Eretz Yisrael* had met concerning a secular incursion that was denigrating the sanctity of Yerushalayim. They decided to print large placards calling attention to the disgrace and pouring out their calumny against the perpetrators. While the signs were impressive, it was critical that they have recognized *rabbinic* leaders affix their signatures in support of the protest.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, was visited by one of the *gedolim*, Torah giants, of the generation when the leaders of the protest presented themselves with a request for his signature. The *gadol* read the strong wording of the sign, turned to *Rav Galinsky* and asked, "Nu, what do you think?" *Rav Galinsky* was a clever and astute scholar, who understood the ways of the world and how the most well-meaning protest could be misjudged by others – the protestors in their zeal and passion for Torah and *kedushah* might get carried away, and, as a result, the situation could get ugly. The consequences would not only not help their cause, it would undermine any good that might have resulted from their actions.

In his reply, *Rav Galinsky* cited the commentary of *Yalkut Shemoni* to *Megillas Esther*, who relates the behind-the-scenes reaction to Haman leading Mordechai on the king's horse. The evil Haman's daughter peered out of her (second story) window to see two men in the street. One was sitting on the king's horse, himself attired in the clothing of a monarch, while the other was leading the horse. The fellow leading the horse was announcing, "This is how one who endears himself to the king is treated." The daughter, whose father had bequeathed to her his love for the Jews, assumed that the one riding the horse was none other than her illustrious father, who was being led by the Jew, Mordechai. She proceeded to take a pot of waste water and flung it down, so that it would hit the one who was leading the horse squarely on the head. How shocked she was when Haman, who was now soaked to the skin, looked up, and the father and daughter saw one another

face-to-face. She was so distraught that she jumped to her death. In the end, Haman was humiliated, and his daughter was dead.

“The lesson to be derived from this incident,” said *Rav Galinsky*, “is that if you are about to pour waste water on someone, make certain who it is and whether he warrants your actions. Come down from your high perch and take a closer look at all the ramifications.”