

Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your cities... and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. (16:18)

It is almost that time of year when Hashem makes a reckoning of our deeds of the past year and renders His decisions for the coming year. We all could use “help” in obtaining favorable judgments. The easiest and most propitious way is by doing all that is asked of us. In other words, good people will receive a good judgment. What about those who were not perfect, who made their share of mistakes, who committed sins without malice (of course), but sins nonetheless? What is the best advice for them, other than *teshuvah* and going through the process of change? We all want to be good, but “things” happen. **Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, m'Berdichev**, the holy advocate of the Jewish People, derives an answer from this *pasuk*.

Hashem judges us all. He wants to give us all a “passing” grade, to render judgment that our mortal lives will continue without “pause,” but He requires *isarussa d'l'tatta*, an arousal from below. His Heavenly compassion is ready and waiting, but, unless we act in an inspiring manner, the compassion will not go into effect. We must show Hashem that we are compassionate, that we care about His children, that we overlook their errors, the hurt they have caused us; only then can we expect something in return.

There are two sides to every story, but, when we are upset, we see only our side of the story. We neither care nor want to hear the other person's reasons for acting the way he did. Are we *melamed z'chus*, seek to justify another person's actions, or do we malign him as soon as we become his victim?

Shoftim v'shotrim titen lecha – “Judges shall you appoint for yourselves.” You can help adjudicate your Heavenly decision by judging your fellow man in a positive light. By judging others favorably, you are, in turn, catalyzing your own favorable judgment. Indeed, the *Baal Shem Tov* writes that a person is judged by Heaven in accordance with the manner that he judges others. When his day of judgment arrives, he will be shown how he judged others. He will be judged commensurate with the way he judged others. When we view the actions of others and comment about it, we are actually rendering judgment – against/for ourselves. How we view them is how we will be judged. The *Sfas Emes* explains that this is the reason the *Tanna* in *Pirkei Avos* (1:6) says: *Hevei dan es kol ha'adam l'kaf z'chus*, “Judge everyone favorably.” Since when are we judges? Does our opinion of another person's actions constitute a judgment? In essence, we are judging ourselves. How we perceive others will be used one day as the measuring stick for our own judgment.

The *Tzror HaMor* suggests that this *pasuk* is alluding to the requirement to introspect and judge oneself prior to rendering judgment concerning the actions of others. *Titen lecha* – (judge) yourself! Make sure that you are perfect, that you are faultless. Double standard judgment – whereby we see the faults of others, but remain oblivious to our own deficiencies (which are often worse than those of others) – is the natural perspective for many. I think the reason for this is simple. In order

to see oneself, it is necessary to use a mirror. What we do not realize, explains the *Baal Shem Tov*, is that “mirror” reflects the actions of others. Hashem shows us the errors of others as a message: “That is you!” The actions of others, which “happen” to come to our attention, are done so by design. We are to perceive what others do, so that we realize that these shortcomings are ours. Whatever we see in others is a mirror image of our actions. How we judge them will reflect upon our own judgment.

A milkman and a baker would do business together. One day, the baker claimed that the milkman was cheating him (and others). Every day, he delivered a flask of milk that was supposed to weigh one kilogram, and, when he weighed it, it weighed only 900 grams. The judge felt that this was a legitimate accusation. Turning to the milkman, the judge asked, “Do you have a good scale?”

“No,” replied the milkman.

“So how do you weigh your products?” the judge asked.

“I have a large board,” the milkman explained, “upon which I place the container of milk on one side.”

“What do you place on the other side as a weight?” the judge asked. “Do you have a kilogram weight?”

“No. I use the loaf of bread which I purchase from the baker as a kilogram of weight.” The milkman replied.

What a powerful story – but so very true. We often judge others by our standard, which, for the most part, is in and of itself flawed.

One more story. A man was having *shalom bayis* issues. He decided that he would purchase his wife a gift as a token of reconciliation. This would start them off on the path towards marital harmony. He began to think, “What is there which was practical and would have lasting meaning?” (Obviously, he realized that jewelry goes out of style with the whim of the moment.) One of the major areas of dispute between them was the fact that she ignored him. He felt that she was slowly becoming hard of hearing. Perhaps, he would buy her a state of the art hearing-aid. (Imagine bringing your wife a hearing aid and expect it to bolster *shalom bayis*!) He went to the store and explained his predicament to the owner. He wanted the finest hearing-aid. Money was no object.

“There are all types of hearing-aids,” the owner explained. “It all depends upon your wife’s level of hearing loss. If it is only from a distance, I would give you one type. If her loss is acute, I would give you a stronger one. Perhaps you could bring her in and I would measure her hearing to determine which hearing-aid is best suited for her.”

“No,” the husband replied. “That will not work. This is supposed to be a surprise. She cannot come to the store.”

“Then the only advice I can give you is that you measure her hearing loss by speaking to her from a distance and then moving closer and closer until you can determine when she begins to hear your voice,” the owner advised.

“Great idea,” the man said, and he immediately proceeded home to “test” his wife’s hearing. At the bottom of the steps to his second floor apartment, he called out, “I am home. How are you?” – No answer. He went up part way on the steps and called out, “Hello. I came home early. What is for dinner?” – Once again, no answer. He entered the apartment and called out, “It is so good to be home. I am really looking forward to a great meal. What is for dinner?” – No answer. This was getting serious. Finally, he walked into the kitchen and almost yelled, “Hi. I am home. What are you cooking there?” This time, his wife “finally” answered, “Four times I told you hello and gave you tonight’s menu. How many times do you have to ask the same question?”

At that moment, it dawned on the husband that his wife did not have a hearing problem. He did!

It is so easy and so common to place our faults on someone else. Thus, the Torah tells us to judge yourself – first. The negativity you see across the table is a mirror image of your own shortcomings.