

Judges and officers you shall make... and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment... you shall not turn judgment." (16:18-19)

The *Torah's* transition from the third person form, *and they shall judge*, to the second person form, *you shall not turn*, seems enigmatic. The *pasuk* begins with the imperative to appoint judges, goes on to list their responsibilities and continues to implore the individual to be just in judgment! *Horav Nissan Alpert Z"l* interprets this change as the *Torah's* encouragement of each individual to assume personal responsibility for judging his fellow man in his own unique manner.

Every person has the occasion to judge his fellow man, whether he chooses to do so from a positive or negative perspective reflects individual choice. We are enjoined not to deviate from true justice, not to view someone in a positive light due to friendship alone or simply because he shares our opinions. *Horav Alpert* contends that this concept may be applied to the *Mishna* in *Avos (1:1)* where it is stated: *Be deliberate in judgment*. A judicial decision, particularly one dealing in *Torah* law, may not be rendered in haste. One must prepare in order to be deliberate in judgment. This notion applies to the ordinary citizen, as well. We tend to formulate opinions without careful consideration of all the aspects of the matter. We may allow the obtrusive influence of self-interest or personal prejudice to cloud our sense of judgment.

In contrast to this, *Reb Yitzchok Bunim Z"l* suggests that subjectivity can not only be helpful, but it is mandatory. In order to grasp the situation completely, one must view the situation from the perspective of the one who is involved. Although objectivity lays the foundation for impartiality, it can also create insensitivity to the consequences of a judgment in the life of the individual who is judged. Imagine yourself as the defendant, the student, or whoever it is that has been brought before you. Would you judge yourself similarly or would your direct involvement change your perspective?

We may expand upon this thought further. We often observe individuals whose competency in regard to *Torah* law and philosophy is questionable. Although they are viewed as "knowledgeable of *Torah*", their "expert" knowledge of the subject matter does not meet the standards applied to other professions. Despite their shortcomings, however, they do not hesitate to state their opinions on any topic in *Torah* literature. These same individuals do not accept the opinions of laymen in their own profession, but when *Torah* is involved too many individuals assume the mantle of "authority". *Be deliberate in your judgment*. Competency in *Torah* erudition is more important than

in any other field, for we are dealing with Jewish souls. A mistake in the area of *Torah* law is an eternal one. An appropriate judgment also lasts forever.