

With righteousness shall you Judge your fellow. (19:15)

Judging a fellow Jew judiciously is vital, because we often do not see the entire picture, which precludes us from thinking positively prior to rendering judgment. Furthermore, if we are not prepared to give our fellow the benefit of the doubt, why should Hashem do the same for us – especially when He knows the truth concerning our actions? He might be inclined to acquiesce or gloss over some of our infractions when He knows that we act similarly towards others. Last, by exerting patience and waiting to root out the whole story, not only will we spare ourselves the embarrassment that comes with a wrong decision, we will also probably spare another Jew serious embarrassment.

Teachers make judgment calls all of the time. Most professionals do not judge a situation until they have exhausted every avenue and studied the family dynamic from every vantage point. Being wrong can destroy a child and disrupt a family. Nothing hurts a child more than losing his/her rebbe/morah's trust. Nothing is more humiliating to a family than being misjudged by an insider who has not given them the courtesy of judging their position in context or giving them the benefit of the doubt.

A poignant story has made the rounds that demonstrates how easy it is to make an error and how devastating the results can be to the student and parents. A fourth grade student in a fine school arrived late for class one morning. A school that functions professionally does not allow for its students to arrive whenever they are in the mood or whenever their parents are able to get their act together. Nonetheless, things happen and some students fall through the cracks. The teacher asked for a note from her parents explaining the reason for their daughter's tardiness. The young girl nervously handed the teacher the note, purportedly signed by the parent. When the teacher saw the note, her face turned crimson, as her heart began to throb with a surge of anger. This note was clearly a forgery. The scrawl on the paper appeared to have been the work of a child. No competent adult would write a note that was so loopy and scattered. The father's signature was no different than the body of the note. Whoever scribbled the note had endorsed it with the same illegible script.

The teacher was fuming. There is no way that an adult would sign his name to such an ill-written note. This note was written/forged by a family member – maybe even the fourth-grader herself. The teacher was about to excoriate the young girl – because, after all, someone had to set her right; someone had to explain to her that lying was prohibited. The teacher was about to take the initiative, but, at the very last moment, she decided she would swallow her pride and say nothing. She looked at the girl and said, "Thank you for the note."

The girl began to walk away from the desk when, all of a sudden, she stopped in her tracks and returned to the teacher's desk and said, "Morah, I am sorry that the note is so messy. My father wrote the note because my mother was not home. My father is blind and writing notes is difficult for him."

One can only begin to imagine what went through the teacher's mind. Baruch Hashem she had judged judiciously. As a result of her forbearance, a child's integrity was not impugned, and a teacher's faith was reinforced.