

And if a man inflicts a wound in his fellow, as he did, so shall be done to him. (24:19)

Kol ha'posei b'mumo posei, "One who finds fault (in others) (he who charges others as being flawed) is (actually) calling out his own blemish (is himself flawed). *Chazal* (*Kiddushin* 70a) present for us a psychological appraisal of those who thrive on negativism, especially concerning individuals whom they enjoy criticizing for whatever reason raises their fancy. He who denigrates others should first take a penetrating look at himself and see if, in fact, he has that same flaw. Prior to passing judgment on someone, we should take a stark look at ourselves and ask: "Is that not I whom I am describing?"

The *Shlah HaKodesh*, *zl*, interprets the above *pasuk* along these lines. "If a man inflicts (finds) a *mum*, blemish, (fault) in his fellow," as he did, so shall be done to him." The blemish that he finds is actually his own blemish; what he inflicts on his fellow is his own flaw. The *Baal Shem Tov* taught, "Your fellow man is your mirror. If your own face is clean, the image that you perceive will be likewise. If when you look at your fellow, however, and you see flaws and blemishes, it is, in fact, your own imperfection which you are confronting. You are being shown what you must personally correct within yourself." When we look at others and attempt to analyze their behavior, we discover ourselves in them. The profile we perceive of the world around us is shaped by and large by our personality. We are unaware of our own deficiencies, faults. When we look at others with a critical eye, the negativity that we see is in reality our own areas of weakness which we refuse to acknowledge. Thus, the faults we seem to "find" in others could be pause for our own introspection: "Maybe it is 'I' whom I am talking about."

Why is my awareness of someone else's defect an indication of my own personal flaw? Why should the transgressions I see others commit be a signal of my own misdeed? Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twersky employs a simple experiment to explain this. Take a group of people to a busy street corner, and, after a few moments, ask them to report what it is that they saw. All of their observations are likely to differ from one another, because, among the multitude of stimuli, each person's attention is drawn to what captivates his interest the most. Our observations are personally motivated. We see what we want to see. Indeed, how often, when we are told about something that occurred in our presence, do we say, "I did not even notice it"?

The *Baal Shem Tov* is teaching us that the reason we often see faults in others is that our defense mechanisms downplay our own faults. We are unable to deal with the self-recrimination that results from introspection, so we find fault in others as a maneuver to assuage our own failings. What is the *etzah*, advice, to circumvent such negative reactions? The *Baal Shem Tov* would direct attention inwardly to ferret out what it was about his behavior that might be lacking (on his exalted spiritual level) and make the necessary changes that would lead to self-improvement. In other words, what we see in others should inspire us to look within ourselves to search for parallel shortcomings upon which we can improve.

One summer Friday night, the *Chortkover Rebbe, Horav David Moshe, zl*, was sitting in front of his house, surrounded by a group of his *chassidim*. It was prior to the *Shabbos* meal, and it was a prime opportunity to relate *Chassidic* stories and anecdotes to his followers. A Jew – who, based on his contemporary mode of dress, appeared to be modern – walked by using a walking cane. This is an activity which is considered to be carrying outside of the *eruv*, designated private domain in which one may carry on *Shabbos*. Also, the walking stick might have been *muktzeh*, being that it was to be used only in a specific area. Outside of that area, it was not to be used, rendering it *muktzeh*/set aside, separated, not to be used on *Shabbos*. The many *chassidim* did not bat an eyelash as he walked over to the *Rebbe* and, in a resounding voice, wished him, “*Gutt Shabbos!*”

The *Rebbe* was beside himself. He viewed the man’s walking through a public domain on *Shabbos* with the help of a walking stick to constitute a public desecration of *Shabbos*. The *Rebbe* viewed his perceiving the act of *chillul Shabbos* as a personal failing in his own observance of *Shabbos*. He turned white and announced that he could not yet recite *Kiddush*. He needed to spend time alone, introspecting his deeds and activities *vis-à-vis Shabbos*, to search for the deficiency in his personal observance. An hour passed, as the *Rebbe* sat secluded in his room, while the *chassidim* were huddled outside, wondering what was happening. Suddenly, the door of the *Rebbe*’s room opened, and the *Rebbe* stood smiling: “We may now recite *Kiddush*. I am ready. I have to repair my actions, based upon the (Heavenly) message that I received today. This should not, however, prevent me from reciting *Kiddush*. For, when I utter the words, *Va’yechulu ha’Shomayim v’ha’aretz v’chol Tzevaam*, “Thus the Heaven and the earth were finished and all their array” (*Bereishis* 2:1), we attest to the fact that Hashem created the universe and everything in it during the Six Days of Creation. *Shabbos Kodesh* is the seventh day, the day of rest. Let us analyze this. There is an adage, *Lo ivri sahadu ela l’shikri*, ‘Witnesses are required only to prevent falsehood.’ (Testimony by witnesses is necessary only when there is someone or a reason to refute what is being claimed. If, however, it is an accepted verity to which there is no denial or challenge, the testimony of witnesses is unwarranted.) Now, when we see a Jew who, by his actions, repudiates *Shabbos* by profaning its sanctity, we must attest to the sanctity of *Shabbos* and what it represents. This is how a Torah leader viewed a negative action by a fellow Jew. It was a personal message to him. (This is exactly how we should regard an act of *chillul Shabbos*.)