

Azamra: The 7 Habits Of Highly Connective People

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Why are we asked to make a judgment at all, positive or negative, about others? Why does Hashem arrange for us to “stand in judgment” of each other?

Rebbe Nachman tells us that everything that we see, hear, and experience as we live each day contributes to our spiritual growth. What we see or hear concerning other people is no exception.

The holy Baal Shem Tov said that, “Before a Heavenly decree is passed against a person, the person himself whom the decree concerns is asked about it.”*

If the person who is facing the Heavenly judgment agrees with

the Heavenly court that the decree should be passed—it is passed. In other words, our own “ruling” determines what happens; our own judgment about our actions decides the consequences we must face.

But Nobody Asked Me. Or Did They?

Now, if you’re like most people, you probably don’t recall ever being asked for your opinions about these lofty proceedings. But, says the Baal Shem Tov, though you may not be aware of this adjudication, you have indeed been asked.

Every time you are given the opportunity to pass judgment on another, know that it is actually your own actions you are judging. The other person’s actions might be obviously similar to your own, or they may be related in ways you find difficult to fathom. You might read about them in the newspaper, you might hear about them from a friend, or you might be a witness.

You may feel annoyed, upset, or angry with the person or you may simply feel an urge to condemn them. If you do, you condemn yourself in the chambers of the Heavenly Courts, says Chassidus. However, if you are able to squelch the desire to adjudge, attack, or accuse; if you reach deep into your heart to be *dan l’chaf zchut*; if you are able to turn away from the negative and seek and find only the good points in that person, then *the positive judgment you pass is on yourself*.

We instinctively know this to be true, which is why we admire non-judgmental people, people who are accepting of others, people who are able to see the good in others. On the other hand, those who give into their urge to pass sentence on others, tend to be really hard on themselves, if not openly, at least deep down inside. Arrogance or hypocrisy are often covering up real fear or shame.

Uh, oh. I now realize that I pretty much condemn others

all the time—kind of like a negative tape loop running in my brain. What can I do to stop?

It sometimes feels like it isn't possible to look for the good in others, it requires too much effort. Expressing negative judgment, whether through open condemnation or snide remarks, can easily become habitual. (After all, snarkyism is everyday fare in the predominant cultural media.) Besides, even if we manage to control our mouths, we might really harbor hatred in our minds and hearts.

Let's say we're good to go—we can give our fellows a pass. Still, it's possible to feel able to give a pass to everyone except one particular person. You know who he (or she) is.

You think, "Okay, I can look for the good in everybody, except *fill-in-the-blank*. They are simply too... annoying, disgusting, haughty, rude, unkind, etc. No one could find anything good about them."

Remember, that one person is US. If we pass judgment, it's still our court case, our decree. We might possibly be forfeiting our own acquittal.

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In Balak, this week's parsha, the evil Bilam's attempt to curse the Jews turns into a blessing despite his unwilling mouth. He says, "...He (Hashem) does not look at wrongdoing in Yaacov or vice in Israel." If Bilam can bless, certainly, so can we.

HaShem Himself is intent on constantly looking for our good, and Hashem is our greatest role model. In fact, one of the reasons why Hashem reveals His particular actions to us throughout the Torah is in order for us to emulate them. Not for His sake, however, but for our own, the sake of our personal growth.

Of course, we're limited—we're human. And sometimes it can

feel like the hardest battle on earth to see the good in a fellow Jew for whom we have negative feelings. But we can train ourselves by stopping hateful the tape loop.

Any habit can be broken—or even better, replaced by a healthy habit. In this case, remembering that we are all connected in ways we can only begin to appreciate, helps.

1. It's usually easiest to begin by practicing with someone who doesn't push your buttons so much—someone you don't know personally, perhaps, such as a political figure or other person in the news, or maybe a friend of a friend. Think about someone distant from you, someone who you have a negative opinion of.

2. Remind yourself that unlike Hashem, Who is able to see the good inside each of us, we aren't omnipotent. We are bound by time and space. Therefore, it is completely impossible for us to know every thought or feeling another person has had or every action he has done. We are judging the person as he is in only one moment of time.

There are 52,560,000 minutes in one hundred years (assuming your "villain" lives a nice, long life). Your odds of being struck by lightning in your lifetime are about one in three thousand. You have a far greater chance of being struck by lightning than knowing what is going on in another person's heart the other 52,559,999 minutes of his life.

3. Ask yourself, would you want to be judged on the few minutes in your life where you personally failed? Or would you rather be judged on the other millions of minutes where you succeeded in being the kind, honest, generous person you truly are?

4. Once you've mastered the ability to be *dan l'chaf zchut* a stranger, then you can progress thinking kindly of a colleague, maybe someone in another office you don't run into too often. Then your workmate. Even your boss.

5. Practice finding the good points in your noisy neighbor. Your enemy. Your friend. Actually list the good points, silently, verbally, or even in writing.

6. What about those closest to you? Are you able to ignore their irritating habits? What about the past hurts? Practice on your parent. Your sibling. Your spouse. Your child.

7. Once you've mastered the art of being *dan l'chaf zchut*, of giving benefit of the doubt for others and finding their good points, don't forget to do the same for yourself. Remind yourself of all the good deeds you've done, your generosity, the effort you make to help another.

If you can't recall grand good deeds, think of all the little ones. Did you light Shabbat candles last Shabbat? Did you cook a meal for your family? Did you do your best, making sure to fulfill your obligation to do the work your employer expects of you? Did you pay for the groceries on your way home (you probably didn't steal them)! Did you pray today, even briefly? Think of all the good deeds you've done, no matter how small.

*We use the language of court to describe the effects of our actions, but these terms (Heavenly court, decrees, rulings, etc.) may be understood in a less coarse, more metaphysical light, one which does not diminish their very real effects.