

# Court Is In Session

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Recently, the U.S. Supreme Court made a decision in redefining marriage that will go down as one of the most consequential positions in American history. The ethical conscience of the Western world will be highly influenced and perhaps completely reformed by this decision. But what really changed between “yesterday” and “today”? Didn’t we each already have an opinion about whether marriage is an act of sanctity, and if its new form meets the ethical threshold of our definition? Yet a group of almost evenly-split judges, appointed by our elected politicians, had the vast power to make this landmark decision.

Each of us possesses an all-important sense of judgment. It’s as if a legal court presides in our own minds. Before we make

a decision, we visit this court and weigh the sides to form our decision. But what if we don't know an answer?

This week we read, "If a matter eludes you in judgment...then you shall arise and go up to the place that HaShem, your God, chooses" – referring to the seat of the Sanhedrin, located at the Temple Mount (Deuteronomy 17:8). In ancient times, the great, true Tzaddikim who presided over the Sanhedrin would influence our decisions and steer us in the correct direction. With all the challenges of today's "modern" world, wouldn't this be refreshing? But the Holy Temple is no longer and our questions remain. Where do we go today?

As simple human beings, our understanding of God is relatively primitive. Often, we decide what God thinks of us relative to our actions, based purely on our emotions and feelings of self-worth. How does God really look and feel towards us? The same way our ethical system is based on a Godly truth that is disseminated vis-à-vis the Tzaddikim, so too, the input of the Tzaddikim is necessary when trying to understand the fundamentals of a God/me relationship. They have reached incredibly higher levels of Godly perception and have the ability to see much farther than we can.

An example of this is when we feel we have erred and are now distant from God. Our natural reaction is that God hates us and wants nothing to do with us. Yet, Rebbe Nachman teaches, it is at precisely moments like these that God looks at us, waiting to see if we will serve Him by salvaging whatever measure of good we can. Why? Because when we are so down on ourselves that our ego is null, any little thing we can do is purely for God's sake. God actually loves when we serve Him from a distance. We need a true teacher that can help us develop this sort of attitude.

Though we can no longer visit the physical address of the Sanhedrin, the knowledge and perception of Tzaddikim is available and accessible even today. As we approach the most

important days of the year, we know that this is the time to build a great and meaningful relationship with God. But we also recall having previously tried before getting snagged somewhere along the way. Let us begin again to look for true advice, but this time, pursue it relentlessly until we find something that works, something that will embolden our lives and bring about real change.

There are many Tzaddikim and also many spiritual charlatans. This makes finding the actual Tzaddik *who can speak to my soul* very difficult. Furthermore, even if I have found that Tzaddik, understanding and applying his teachings without allowing any preconceived notions to skew his words isn't easy. But if we earnestly engage in this process, God will surely be patient with us and guide us to find that true Tzaddik and his true intent. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhhot Birkhot HaPeirot 5*