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**הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל**

**Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha**  
Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim

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בעזרה שׂיית

## פרשת קדושים

With Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l

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### *Judging Others Favorably*

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### Part I. You're a Judge

#### THE WEALTHY MAN AND THE PAUPER

In this week's *parsha* there's a *mitzvah* of בְּצֶדֶק תִּשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיתְךָ – “You should judge your fellowman with *tzedek*, with righteousness” (Kedoshim 19:15). Now, in its most simple *pshat* what that means is that if you're a judge, if you're a *dayan* in the *beis din*, so you must always be on guard that your first inclination, your emotions, shouldn't be the reason for your decision. Don't allow any superficial thoughts to lead you to conclusions; instead you must be careful to follow the *din* of the Torah in all its details.

Let's say you're a judge and now there's a poor man standing before you; he's one of the two litigants who came to the *beis din*. Now, you're a compassionate man after all - so you might say, “This poor fellow has a tough life - and I should go now and make him guilty and make it even worse?! Let me give him a break!” “No,” says Hashem, “Don't do that”: לֹא תִשָּׂא פְּנֵי דָל – “Don't follow your superficial emotions in the courtroom and try to give an edge to the poor man” (ibid.).

On the other hand, sometimes it might be a wealthy man, somebody important, and so your inclination might be to judge

him more favorably. After all, he's much more impressive, this well-heeled fellow, and just seeing him in his four hundred dollar suit makes his arguments seem stronger. "Nothing doing!" says Hashem: וְלֹא תִהְיֶה כְּפָנָי גָּדוֹל - "Don't show any preferable honor to an important person" (ibid.) If you're a judge, it has to be *b'tzedek*. You have to follow the strict letter of the law; whatever Hakadosh Baruch Hu prescribes in the Torah. That's the job of a *dayan* - he has to subjugate his feelings, his emotions, to what Hashem expects him to think, and to *pasken b'tzedek*.

### AN ADDITIONAL LAYER

Now all of this appears to be irrelevant to us here. It's an admonition to *dayanim* who sit in a court, but for us ordinary people, it doesn't seem to apply at all. Where does this *mitzvah* of *b'tzedek tishpot amisecha* come into our lives? It could be that one or two of you will one day study the intricate details of *Choshen Mishpat*, all the *dinei mamonos*, and you'll get a certain *semicha*, '*yadin yadin*'. And once you receive that permission to judge *dinei mamonos* so besides for all the *dinim* you'll have to know, you'll also have to always remember these words of the Torah: בְּצַדֵּק תִּשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיתְךָ - "Don't let your emotions get the best of you when you're sitting in judgement in the *beis din*." But for most of us it's not applicable at all.

However, that's not the full meaning of the *possuk*. There's an additional layer of meaning in those words that we're going to study tonight, and it's a *mitzvah* that applies to all of us, *all the time*. In *Mesichta Shevuos* (30a) the sages tell us that בְּצַדֵּק תִּשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיתְךָ is also teaching us as follows: עִם שְׂאֵתְךָ בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת הַשְּׁתֵּתֵל - A person who is with you in Torah and mitzvos, be *mishtadeil*, put effort into judging him favorably" (Shevuos 30a). It's what we learned in *Mesichta Avos*: הָיוּ דָן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת - "You, every single one of you, should make sure to judge your fellow Jew with righteousness." *L'kaf zechus* means that you have to ignore the *kaf chov*, the side of guilt, and instead go out of your way to judge your fellow man *l'kaf zechus*, to the side of merit.

### DON'T BE A COW OR A LIBERAL

And what that means is that *every person* is a judge - it can't be helped. As soon as you see somebody, you're forming opinions. You can't avoid it! If you were a cow, *chas v'shalom*, so you'd be able to go through life without thinking, without judging; but if you're an *adam* then you're already a *dayan*. Don't be a liberal and say "Oh no, I don't judge anyone; I would never do that!" It's not true! You're *always* passing judgement on people; don't think otherwise. You're judging your wife or your husband all the time! Why did he do this? Why didn't she do that? Why did he say this or that? You're judging your neighbors all the time! Why did he block my driveway? Why does he let his son ride his bike on my lawn? You're judging your children all the time! And your co-workers, and your *chaavrusa*, and the people in shul, and the Rav of your shul. You're even making judgements about strangers who pass you by on the street! You're *a full time dayan*.

And even though you're not publicizing your decision, you're not telling anybody what you're thinking, nevertheless, Hashem is *yireh l'leivav*, He sees what's going on in your thoughts. And so in the eyes of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, you're acting as a *dayan*. And so, if you want to succeed in your "career of *dayanus*", you had better get busy purifying your thoughts as much as possible, and doing whatever you can to make sure that you're judging those around you favorably all the time.

### WE'RE OBLIGATED TO DRILL

Now, if you're paying attention you'll note that the *mitzvah* בְּצִדְקָה תִשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיתְךָ is a source for two seemingly contradictory *halachos*. On the one hand, the Torah is obligating a judge to issue his verdict on the basis of absolute justice, in strict accordance with the law. And yet, these same words are teaching us that outside the *beis din* we are obligated in the *mitzvah* הָיִי דֵן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם - "Judge your neighbor *favorably*," which means that we are obligated *not* to be strict and instead to do our utmost to justify the actions and behavior of our fellow Jews.

And it's the resolution to this apparent contradiction that will provide us with the tools we need to be successful at being

*dan l'kaf zchus*. Because what *b'tzedek tishpot* really means is that we expect from a *dayan* in the courtroom not to be fooled by superficialities. So what of it if he's a poor man dressed in rags?! Who cares if he's mumbling or stuttering when presenting his claim?! And if he's a wealthy man, if he's dressed in a tailored suit and he's so impressive looking - so what?! Are you going to pass judgement on the basis of such a shallow thing?! With half-baked ideas you'll *pasken* on a *Yisroel*?! *Chas v'shalom*! The *dayan* is expected to ignore the veneer of superficialities and drill down to the core of justice - he's expected to be *dan din emes la'amito*.

It's not easy for a *dayan* to see past the superficialities in the courtroom. It's not easy to ignore what's right in front of his eyes - it's there; it's so real and concrete. What he sees in the poor man is real! What he sees in the wealthy man is obvious; it's so tangible! And so, it's very hard to push it all away, to ignore it completely, and come to the right decision. And yet, as difficult as it might be, that's the obligation of *b'tzedek tishpot amisecha*.

#### WE HAVE A BIG JOB!

And outside of the courtroom *we're* expected to do the same! We have that same obligation outside the *beis din*; absolutely. In all of your contacts with *amisecha*, with your fellow Jews - the ones you like as well as the ones you don't like as much - you're expected to ignore the superficial things that bother you and instead you're obligated to drill down to the core of the person and judge him favorably. And that means that we all have a big job ahead of us! Because it means that *you have to think!*

So don't be lazy about it! Nobody said it's easy; you might have to take a minute or two to think, but you have to do it. You're *michuyav* to think, to search your mind for the answer that satisfies you, until you can give your fellow man the benefit of the doubt and walk away without any *hakupadah* in your heart.

#### WHO WILL CRITICIZE THE GREAT MAN?

Let's say your wife says a sharp word to you - it happens sometimes. So instead of getting upset, instead of being hurt, you're obligated - it's a *mitzvah d'oraisah* - to search for reasons to

give her the benefit of the doubt. First of all, maybe you deserved it - it could very well be you deserved to hear some criticism. Absolutely! When a wife criticizes a husband, you should know that she is doing a very great thing. Nobody will criticize this great man. Who's going to tell him the truth outside the house? And after a while he begins to think, "Maybe I really am great." So he comes home and right away his wife deflates him. She puts a pin in his balloon and it bursts. That's a tremendous achievement. It's a perfection to be cut down to size once in a while. And so, you can forget about being upset at her; you should thank her.

And let's say she was wrong - you didn't deserve to be told off at all. So you'll be a failure and judge your spouse because of something superficial; she criticized you; so what?! In two minutes she'll forget what she said. You're going to judge her because of that?! Maybe she was up all night with a crying baby while you were sleeping soundly. Maybe she had an impossible day with the children. Whatever it might be, you're obligated to seek to justify what your fellow Jew does or says by giving him or her the benefit of the doubt.

#### MEASURE FOR MEASURE

Now in *Mesichta Shabbos* (127b) there is a statement which has to be examined by us if we want to understand this subject more thoroughly. The *gemara* there states as follows: הָדֵן אֶת הַבֵּרִי הַדֵּן אֶת הַבֵּרִי - "If you judge your fellow man on the side of merit, so *middah k'neged middah*, Hakodosh Boruch will judge you favorably."

Now, those words are somewhat difficult for us to understand. Because up until now we learned *pshat* in being *dan l'kaf zechus* like this: if a person did something, and you're in doubt - it's possible that he meant well, it could be; but it also could be that he did it for a wrong reason, that's also a possibility. It's a *safek*, a doubt, so it's a *mitzvah* to judge him favorably. You should be charitable and give him the benefit of the doubt.

But if judging *l'kaf zechus* only means that you're obligated to give others the benefit of the doubt, then when the *gemara* says that Hashem will pay you back in turn, it means that when Hashem is in doubt about you, He will judge you favorably. But how could we say such a thing? What sense does it make to say that Hashem is *dan l'kaf zechus* when He's in doubt, *chas v'shalom?* Doubt?! He's never in doubt about you! Hakadosh Baruch Hu knows *exactly* who you are. You can't give the benefit of the doubt when there's no doubt at all.

#### LEARNING A NEW ATTITUDE

And so we're forced to learn another layer in the *pshat* of what it means to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *b'tzedek tishpot amisecha*, and we'll say as follows: To be *dan l'kaf zchus* is actually much more than learning how to clarify a doubt - it's *learning an attitude* in dealing with other people that leaves no room for doubt altogether! What that means is that we're expected to acquire the *middah* of seeking out the positive in people; to be a הִפֵּץ בְּטוֹבָתוֹ שֶׁל הַיָּרֵוֹ, to want only good things for the people around us, and thereby train ourselves to see only good.

When you appreciate people by focusing on their *ma'alos*, so you begin to actually like them and want them to be a *zaka'im* - you want them to be free of all faults, to always be good. If you *want* a person to be a *zakai* - if you *actually desire* to look at people favorably - so you'll find ways to explain his actions in a way that it should be a *z'chus*. And even when you can't do that, you'll appreciate his other *ma'alos* so much, that it will weigh down the scale to the *kaf z'chus* and you'll overlook the negative. "Who cares about that?! It's only a *narishkeit*," you'll think. "I love that man!"

"Oh," Hashem says, "You want him to be a *zakai*? So I want you to be a *zakai* too." And when Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants things to be good for you, you can be sure He has ways of accomplishing that; He has His ways. And so when you train yourself to look at the good, to overlook the superficial things that may bother you, so *middah k'neged middah*, Hashem treats you the same way.

## THEY ONLY WANT DIRT ON THE PRESIDENT

Now, in order to judge somebody *l'kaf zechus*, if you want to succeed in seeing people as *zaka'im*, so you're going to need training in becoming an *oheiv tzedek*; you have to love to see people in a good light. You know, when people love to see trouble in the world, so they pick up the newspaper to see what crimes were done. No one is interested to see if somebody did a good thing; if somebody kept the law let's say, or if somebody helped his fellow man. That doesn't matter - they wouldn't put that in a newspaper. "Who was caught doing something embarrassing?" "What new faults did they dig up in the President today?" That's news! That's what people want to hear.

To say that here we have a President who is a decent man, who minded his own business - I'm talking about Reagan now - that he didn't want to put big taxes on you and that he wanted to protect the country from the Soviet Union, that they won't speak about. They won't tell you that President Reagan didn't mix into other people's business. To say that he didn't try to push the *Medinas Yisroel* into making agreements with Arabs, no, that they won't talk about.

He wasn't pressing anybody; he just wanted to keep Americans safe and wealthy. He was a quiet man and he was good natured and smiled to everybody. But that wasn't good enough for the journalists, for the *meshuganeh* liberals. No, that's no good at all, nothing doing. "Reagan, no good!" "Reaganomics, no good!" "The Reagan years were the worst years! He's no good at all." Always looking for faults.

## A PRACTICAL PROGRAM

And therefore the program for success is to rise above all the faults that you have the tendency to see in people, and to see the *tzad zchus*, the other side of the scale. Now, I know it's not easy to think, to always be using your mind - it's a burden - it's much easier to make judgments on what you see superficially. But Hakodosh Boruch Hu says that you have to make up your mind to get along with any *meshugas*, anything that you think is an idiosyncrasy, that you think is unreasonable. And so you have to,

as much as possible, ignore all the faults you imagine you see because that's what the Torah requires of you; to judge a person by his *kaf zchus*, and to overlook the *kaf chov*.

It's so important to develop an appreciation of the good qualities of the people around you. I'll give you a practical *eitzah* for accomplishing this - an *eitzah* that's been tried and tested. One of the most practical programs for success in this endeavor is to attach a good *middah*, a *ma'aleh*, to all the people you know. Your friends, your neighbors, your coworkers, everyone has *something* that makes them special. I had a rebbe once, a great rebbe, and he once told us that a person is not one thing, he's a bundle of things. It was sixty years ago that I heard him say that and I remember it like yesterday. "A person is not one *middah*," he said, "He's a bundle of *middos*." So one thing might be not good, but something else is good in him.

#### YOU'LL BE SURPRISED AT WHAT'S IN THE BUNDLE

And so when we see the man in shul who is a nuisance, the one who gets on people's nerves, we *don't* see that. Instead we look for the *ma'alos*, for the *kaf zchus*. He pays the electric bill for the shul. Quietly, without anybody knowing, he pays the bills for the shul. Now, when I see this man, I see the man who pays for the air conditioner; the man who pays for the lights. *That's* what I see and I *don't* see anything else! Because our job in this world is to ignore the more difficult parts of the bundle and focus on only the good parts. And once you begin to look at people and see them only with their *ma'alos*, that's your ticket to overlooking the superficialities of the things that would bother you, and fulfilling the mitzvah of being *dan l'kaf zchus*.

Now, if you'll try to think about a person's *middos tovos*, you'll be surprised there isn't a person who doesn't have good in him. Among the *shomrei Torah* everybody has good qualities. In this *middah* he could be excellent, whereas somebody else is excellent in a different *middah*. So in case you can't love the person entirely, love at least one aspect of his personality.

Let's say he *davens* well. Love him for that. It says that Hashem is "*oihev tzadikim.*" Why does Hashem love *tzaddikim*? Because they give Him *kavod*?! They pay him money?! No; He loves them *because they're tzaddikim*; they daven, they learn, they dress with *tzniyus*. So you can love them too! You see a *tzaddik* that *davens* well. Love that man just because of that! In your eyes, from now on *that's* what you see when you see him. Another person learns well. Another person gives *tzedakah*. Another person is quiet and well behaved. Find what you can in each person and you'll be surprised. You'll be very surprised; people are full of good things. And that's the only thing you should be looking at.

### PLANT THE SEEDS

The *shomrei Torah*, no question that they're full of good things. They're raising up families of children who will be *ovdei Hashem*. They're upholding the *shuls* and the *yeshivos* with their money, with their participation. They themselves are *mekayeim mitzvos* every day. There are many reasons why you should love these people. And Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves them for that, so with a little bit of thought you could do the same.

Try to like him because of his *ma'alos* - whatever they are - and little by little it will enter into your heart and you'll gain a certain warmth towards that person. And that warmth as little as it is, it's a tremendous achievement. That's why we came to this world. To learn to be happy with, to see favorably all kinds of people - even the *ba'alei ga'avah*, and the *ka'asanim*, and the nuisances; everybody!

We're learning now that the *mitzvah* of *b'tzedek tishpot amisecha* is really a program for life; and it requires planting the seeds of loving your fellow Jew in your mind, of seeing the *ma'alos* - of seeing *only* the positive - of the people around you. It's not easy; I understand that. But even if you'll achieve only a *ma'shehu*, a small fraction of this *avodah*, it's a tremendous perfection of your character. And the more you plant and nurture the proper thoughts in your mind, the more you're won over, and the more

you'll be able to fulfill this *mitzvah* in all of your encounters throughout your life.

## Part II. How to Judge

### THE JEWS YOU BARELY NOTICE

Now, the *possuk* doesn't say *b'tzedek tishpot es* 'your wife' or 'your neighbor' or 'the nuisance in shul'; it says *amisecha*, 'your nation'. "*B'tzedek tishpot amisecha*" means that "you should judge your fellow Jews - *all of them* - favorably." עַם שְׂאֵתְךָ בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת - "A person who is with you in Torah and *mitzvos*, be *mishtadeil*, put effort into judging him favorably" (Shevuos 30a). If he's a loyal Torah Jew, then you have to judge him *b'tzedek*. The *reshaim* we leave out; it's not our business now. Being *milameid z'chus* on wicked people, that I'll leave to somebody else, somebody bigger than I am. But the great mass of frum Jews, we're obligated to look at them all with favor.

So what do we do now with the whole *Am Yisroel* - people you pass on the street that you've never even thought about, frum Jews that you barely notice? All those *frum* Jews are your brothers and Hakadosh Baruch Hu expects you to have a certain attitude of being *dan l'kaf zchus* when you see them. It's a *mitzvah min hatorah*. *Amisecha* doesn't mean this man right here who is a good friend of yours; it means all of all the frum Jews. And that means that even the people we don't know; the strangers we pass on the street, the unfamiliar people we see in shul, everyone from the *Am Yisroel*, we're obligated to see them in a good light. If he's a loyal Torah Jew, if he's *amisecha*, then you have to judge him *b'tzedek*.

But we'll say here that the word *amisecha* is doing much more than including all of the *frummeh*; what it does is give an impetus, a dynamo, for *how* to fulfill the *mitzvah*. Because if you train yourself to look at all of your fellow Jews as the עַם שְׂאֵתְךָ בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת, as your comrade in arms - you're on the same team after all - so you begin to develop a favorable attitude towards all of the *Am Yisroel*.

## TAKE A TRIP TO BORO PARK

This is a remarkable opportunity for success in this world. It's something you can practice all the time in the street. You see a fellow Jew, so what should you think? "He's my brother, this man. He puts on *tefillin* after all. That's enough!" When you see a Jew in the street with a covered head, whether it's a black hat or a *yarmulke*, or a woman with a *sheitel*, you're already sold out to that person. "He covers his head like me! He's ours. He's wearing a *yarmulke*, a cap, whatever he has, if he covers his head, he belongs to us."

I don't care what kind of *yarmulke* he wears, he's still my brother. And even though he follows a different Rebbi, or a different set of political objectives, nevertheless, don't lose sight of the fact that, fundamentally, *he belongs to your people* and that therefore you're *michuyav*, you're obligated, to think well of him. This alone that he is *amisecha*, that he is on your team, that should be enough for you to always look at him with favor, *l'kaf zchus*.

Let's say you're walking in a far-off neighborhood, in Bedford Stuyvesant let's say, where there are no Jews. And suddenly you see from a distance a man with a *yarmulke*. A *yarmulke*! It's exciting! So you feel a warmth towards him; it's a *brother*, a *chaver*. And it's true; he is your brother.

But it's a mistake to think that it's a thought you only have when you're in an Italian neighborhood or a colored neighborhood. In a strange neighborhood maybe you're happy to see a fellow Jew because you feel safer that way. But that's how you should think when you walk in Boro Park. Boro Park! Big *mezuzos*, and everybody has beards and *payos*. It's a neighborhood of *amisecha* so you should practice feeling warmth towards everyone on the street. I told you once before - if you have some time, I think it's worth it to go to Boro Park and just stand there for a half hour appreciating the frum Jews. You watch as they walk back and forth, back and forth, and you're thinking, "These are my people, and I love them all." It's worth every second.

### THE WORLD IS GOING CRAZY

Now all this is work, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu expects that work. Otherwise, you'll remain a person who sees only faults all of his life. Because when people have that attitude, when they're looking for faults, so Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "You'll succeed," and that's what they find. Not only do they find faults in people, but they find trouble too. That's what happens in this world. The natural tendency is to see the imperfections in people, and all the good, the *kaf z'chus*, is ignored.

Constantly today people can't get along with each other because they are *dan* each other *l'kaf chova*. If you're a rabbi, you'll sit at the telephone and it's always ringing. Husbands and wives are fighting all the time today. And in some places - a man told me he was in a certain community; I don't want to say where it was - and he said that there are divorces, and divorces and divorces. Among Jews! What's doing here? The world is going crazy; everybody's fighting.

### THE HUSBAND WHO IS ONLY TROUBLE

Now when you speak to them, you see right away that nobody has a *havah amina* of being *dan l'kaf zchus*. Nothing doing! Only *themselves* they judge favorably. I spoke to a couple of women today. They called me up to tell me that their husbands are no good at all.

I said, "Is he working?" "He works." "Does he bum around?" "He doesn't bum around." "Is he *shomer mitzvos*?" "He's *shomer mitzvos*." "Does he give you money?" "He gives me money."

"So what's the trouble?" I said. "Oh, he's *only* trouble," she says. He does this wrong, he says this wrong, he acts like this and like that - a whole laundry list she's reading off to me. "He's so mean to me; he's inhuman," she said. Now, if I ask *him* I'm sure he'll give me a report about his wife. She doesn't do her work. She's nagging me; this and that. And I'm sure that everybody's right. A little bit everybody is right. But *they're all wrong* because they're all sinning against this great quality which Hashem said

you should try to gain - to judge your fellow man *l'kaf zechus* - to ignore the faults of people and train yourself to focus only on their good qualities.

#### FORGET THAT HE FORGOT YOUR BIRTHDAY!

When she thinks about her husband, she should think that he goes to work every day. He'd like to sit home instead. He'd like to go the *beis medrash* to learn and instead he's wasting his life in the shop where he's working. It's a great pity on him, but he's doing it out of loyalty to his family. And she should think, "Look, my husband is an *ish ne'eman*." He works hard by day and then he comes home at night. There are so many loafers today in the world, unfortunately. Some people loaf around in Brooklyn and then they take a vacation from loafing to go to Atlantic City to loaf some more. The frum loafers, they go to *shtiblach* to loaf; they sit in *shtiblach* and open a *gemara* and get busy loafing - he doesn't learn a word. You ask him, "Why don't you get a job?" he says, "תורתו תמנו", he says, "My *umness* is learning." What he means is that "Loafing is my *umness*."

But *your* husband is a decent man. He's working, supporting his family; he's giving away his life. His life! And the wise woman appreciates that. When she sees her husband walking up the steps to the door, that's what she sees - the man who comes home and he gives her money she needs and she appreciates that. She should think, "I love that man! He's working all day long to support my children." "I admire my husband the *talmid chochom*." She doesn't see that he opened his big mouth last night and said something stupid. She doesn't see the man who forgot it was her birthday. She's overlooking the *kaf chov* and she's being *dan* him *l'kaf zchus*.

#### CHOLENT FOR THE MIND

That's your job in this world - to look for the good in each person. You're going to say that you can't find good in your wife?! You can't find good in your husband?! Come on; come on! *That's nothing but wickedness!* And Hakadosh Baruch Hu pays the

wickedness with wickedness; they see *only* faults and they suffer as a result.

Every man has a tendency to have complaints against his wife - it's only natural; you're living together and your tendency is to see the faults of a person. But the *avodah* we're learning now is to train yourself to always see the *kaf zchus* and to let the good side of the scale outweigh the *kaf chov*. A wise man understands that his wife is important; that she's raising the children, and feeding the family. Not only does she fulfill her duties in the home; she *is* the home! But it's not enough to know that in general terms - he has to study the details of that so that whenever he sees his wife, *that's what he sees!*

Let's say your wife made for you a *cholent*. Don't say, "It's nothing; it's just food." For the wise man, for the one who wants to be *dan l'kaf zchus*, even a *cholent* is enough to win him over. If you think about it, your wife gave you cooked potatoes; but not only potatoes, she knows how to make it brown and tasty. She added in onions for you, and barley and beans too. It's a whole meal that she prepared for you. And if while you're sitting there and enjoying it, you think about that wonderful thing that she did for you, so it will become part of your personality. Not only does it go into your body - it becomes your hair and your bones and your eyes - *but it goes into your mind*. Your wife should be a different person in your mind after a good *cholent*. And after every supper she becomes even more and more precious in your eyes.

#### **DON'T STOP THE DRILLING**

That's how you should think about these things; the appreciation for the food she made for you should fill your mind at the same time it's filling your stomach. Now, I'm just giving one little example. There's no end to the appreciation you should be feeling for your wife; its *mamish* endless. And once a person begins to think in these terms, he'll find ways and means of assessing the importance of his wife in his life, the happiness that she's giving him by taking care of the children and the house, and

for what she creates in the kitchen. It's an endless happiness that she brings to your life.

And so you have to train yourself - it won't happen by itself. So you see your wife you should say to yourself, "I love that woman over there." You see her on the street from far away, she goes shopping, and now you see her coming back carrying shopping bags, so you say, "I love that woman over there, carrying home the food for my children."

Only that what happens? The husband ignores all the good that his wife does and he sees only the superficialities - she nagged him, she complained, she wasted money - he never drills down past the superficial things to the core of what his wife really is, and what she means to his life. And same thing with the wife - to be a *dan l'kaf zchus* she has to be a *dayan* who ignores all the superficialities of the *ba'alei din*, and focuses only on the truth to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *b'tzedek tishpot amisecha*.

#### CANCEL THE THORN

Now, I only mention a husband and wife because it is the most common interaction and the home is a great opportunity for perfection - but that's how you should train yourself to look at *everyone*, by focusing only on the good; even small things. You must look for good things. No question, everyone has good things. And even if one thing might not be the best, something else *is* good. And your job in this world is to ignore the more difficult parts of the bundle and focus on only the good parts.

Here's a man is *roidef achar hakavod*, he loves *kavod*. He's a *ba'al ga'avah*, he thinks much of himself. Naturally, that's what sticks out at you - it's a thorn in your eyes. And it will remain that way forever unless you cancel out the *kaf chov* by focusing on the *kaf zchus*. And if you'll look you'll find a lot of good! But if you're busy looking only for what's wrong, you'll find that too and that's how you'll remain a failure.

And the truth is that once you start looking, you'll discover, you'll find all types of good qualities. And that's the *mishpat tzedek*, the righteous judging that Hashem wants from

you. בְּצֶדֶק תִּשְׁפֹּט עִמִּיתְךָ – You should judge your fellow man with *tzedek*, by focusing only on the *tzedek*. You're a judge all the time, and if you're an *oheiv tzedek*, so you love to find good things in people, and that's how you follow the program of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

### THE MOST INTERESTING THING

Now, you have to know how to look at your fellow Jews - it's an *avodah*! First of all, look at his face, and remind yourself that it's *tzelem Elokim*. Isn't that reason enough to honor him and to think well of him? Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave that reason! He said, "The face of a man resembles Mine" (Bereishis 9:6). It's not an accident. Every person you look at is a *tzelem Elokim*. It's a beautiful sight, the human face. Look at a person's face. Eyes! Eyes are so expressive, so beautiful. You can see the *neshama*, you can see intelligence shining out of the eyes. Even the cheeks, the way the cheeks move, a smile or sadness; it's expressing emotions. The nobility of the human countenance is unequal. In the entire universe, there's nothing like it - if you'll travel, let's say, to the far off countries; if you'll climb mountains and search the vast wilderness, you'll never see anything in the universe as interesting as a human face.

Now how to explain that, that's a different subject. It'll take us a lot of time to understand that. But we have to at least practice it up - it's in the Torah after all. So when you look at the face of a fellow Jew, the very first obligation is to think that you're seeing something very very impressive.

Only that we're very far away from the *ruach haTorah*. The spirit of the Torah declares that when you look at the face of a fellow Jew, you should be very much impressed. Now don't tell me, "Oh, it's exaggerated. You're blowing up, making a whole story out of nothing." It's in the Chumash! בְּדִמְיוֹתוֹ – that's the resemblance of Hashem. And Hakadosh Baruch Hu insists that we should learn the Torah and get into our heads, that when you're looking at the face of a person, you should think that you're seeing the *tzelem Elokim*.

Men look in a men's faces, and women look in women's faces. And when you look, the first thing is to think, "*Tzelem Elokim*." And no matter how much you'll think, you should know, you're not thinking enough. Don't say, "I'm maybe overdoing it." You're always *under* doing it! And even if you spend years of this effort, you should know, you haven't reached the standards that Hakadosh Baruch Hu expects in appreciating what it means *tzelem Elokim*.

### THE GREATNESS OF TALL SKINNY JEWS

So now you have what to be busy with. Instead of thinking what faults you can find in people - he has a comical face; he talks too much; he's tall and skinny; he's short and fat - instead of looking for things to ridicule, you have to get busy now looking at the *tzelem Elokim* in his face. If you can't do it with all the people around, then start one at a time. You're standing on the street and looking at your fellow Jews walk by and you're thinking, "*Tzelem Elokim, tzelem Elokim, tzelem Elokim*."

Now I understand that these words don't find an echo in your mind immediately. But you must understand that Torah must be learned; it's Torah after all. There's a lot of work to be done and don't think you can shirk it. It's expected of us that we should plant this seed in our minds and as the years go by it will take root and it will grow branches and fruit. Of course it's artificial; in the beginning you'll be a hypocrite, but *החיצונית מעוררת את הפנימיות*. We make an attempt, and after a while, the spark will be kindled in your heart. *הבא לטהר מסייעין לו* – Hakadosh Baruch Hu will give you assistance and you'll gain a certain appreciation of *amisecha*, the Am Yisroel.

Now once you understand the greatness of *tzelem Elokim* - you don't yet, it's a tremendous idea; a skyscraper - but there's another skyscraper that's even greater than that one. The  *mishna* in *Avos* says (3:14) that while it's true that all of humanity is blessed with *tzelem Elokim*, but there's one nation in the world that is praised with an even greater title. It says *חביבין ישראל שנקראו בנים למקום* - "How beloved are *Yisroel* who are called the children of

Hashem." A child of Hashem! Now, that's something! The first skyscraper of *tzelem Elokim* goes up to the skies, but this skyscraper goes all the way up to Hashem. "How beloved are *Yisroel* who are called children of Hakodosh Boruch Hu."

### TORAH OR GARBAGE?

We're accustomed to saying, "We're all children." Let's say the reform Jews get together on a stage with the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and they say, "We stand in solidarity with our African American brothers because we're all children of the same G-d." That's not Torah - it's *garbage*. Nobody is the children of Hashem except for the *Am Yisroel*. בְּנֵי אֱתֶם לַהֲשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵיכֶם – *You are children of Hashem and nobody else, and make no mistake about it.* Now, we don't care what the world says - they'll say it's chauvinism; maybe so, but we stick by the Torah, and the Torah says that *only we* are the children of Hashem.

Suppose a man comes to see you. "I noticed that you married my cousin." So you ask him, "Who are you?" "I'm the son of the *rosh yeshiva* of Ponovezh," he says. "Oooh-wha! I didn't know I got such a *mechutan*! The *rosh yeshiva* of Ponovezh became my *mechutan* by marriage." You're excited over him; he's the child of somebody great! But you can tell him, "I'm the son of somebody greater. I'm the son of Hakadosh Baruch Hu." He jumps up! "You're the son of Hakadosh Baruch Hu?!" "Yes, I am", you say. "It's in the Chumash, בְּנֵי אֱתֶם לַהֲשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵיכֶם."

### THE VERY HEAVY JEW

We're *expected* to think that way. It's not written in *Pirkei Avos* for nothing. *Chavivin Yisrael!* We are the beloved ones! Now when it says we're beloved, it doesn't mean that Hashem likes us like we let's say, like a second cousin or a nephew. It's much more than that; it means He loves every single one of us more than anything else in the entire world.

And we're told this for an important purpose. And that is because we're expected to think that way about every single Jew. Not in general, in a way that's abstract. Yes, that you're willing to

say: "In general, on all Jews, I can say *chavivin*. I can love the *Am Yisroel* in general. But when it comes to this Jew, not this one. And that one? No, not him either." And that's a terrible mistake. *Chavivin Yisroel*, means *every* one of them! All *shomrei Torah*; even though he's not from your *shtiebel*, not from your community. A different *shtiebel*, so you might think, he's not in your neighborhood, maybe not your *nusach*; maybe he's a *Sefardi* or a *Taimani*. Maybe he's a Russian Jew or a Polish Jew, so you think, "Not him, not him." No, when you see any fellow Jew, any *shomer Torah u'mitzvos*, you're looking at a person who is most beloved by Hashem.

If you have a big scale, and you put on one side of the scale the sun, and also the millions of stars and all the planets too; and also all the nations - all the Englishmen, all the Americans, all the French, every other people on the face of the earth, all on one side of the scale. And on the other side is this one *Yisroel*, this one Jew that passes by you on the street, so he is *machri'a es kulan* - he outweighs all of them. That's what *chavivin* means, and that's how you have to think.

#### DON'T BE LAZY!

Now, I'm very sorry to say that all of this will not happen, nothing good will grow in your head, if you're a lazy man. על שדה - איש עצל עברהתי - "I passed the field of a lazy man," said Shlomo Hamelech. And what is growing there? הנה בָּסָה פְּנֵי הַרְוִלִים thorns and brambles; all types of weeds grow in the head of a lazy man. Maybe he was too lazy to come to these lectures altogether. Or maybe he came, but it was entertainment, to get out of the house a little, that's all. That's good too, it's also good - but if you never work on these ideas, so what grows in your mind instead of delicious fruit? רַאשׁ וְלַעֲנָה - "Poison growths." *Sinas chinam, miskabeid b'klon chaveiro*, other thorns. But not *b'tzedek tishpot amisecha*; no, no, that won't grow on its own.

And so you have to always be on guard - you're busy always weeding out your field, pulling up thorns that creep up in your mind. Let's say a thought comes into your mind when you

see this person, “Why is he wearing *that*?” “Why did he do such a thing?” “Why did she say that?” You can’t let a poison weed like that fester in your mind! You can’t be an *ish atzeil*, a lazy person, and allow that thought to grow. You have to do something about it! And so you get busy right away thinking the thoughts we spoke about tonight.

Now, don’t think that it’s merely a thought. No, you’re actually planting seeds in your mind. And these seeds, once they take root, they grow into beautiful flowers of *dan es chaveiro l’kaf zchus*. Try to judge a fellow man with a meritorious balance, to think well of him. And the more you do it, the more you’ll succeed at this program. And the more you succeed, then Hakodosh Boruch Hu *y’dineihu l’kaf zchus*, the more you’ll succeed at gaining the goodwill of Hashem for yourself. Because that’s the purpose why Hashem brought you into this world, to give you one opportunity to plant a garden of delicious fruits and flowers in your mind, a garden that will last forever.

#### HAKADOSH BARUCH HU WILL LOVE YOU

Now how much can you do?! You’ll say, “I should love my neighbor? I should love my *chavrusa* and my boss? I should love the man who sits next to me in shul? That’s too much!” So Hashem says, “At least plant the seeds; as much as you can always look at that person with a favorable eye. Be *dan l’kaf zchus*; go out of your way to judge him favorably, to find a reason to make him a *zakai* in everything he does.” And הָבֵא לְטֹהַר מְסִיעֵין לוֹ, if you try to be good, then Hashem will help you be good.

And one of the ways He’ll help you is by giving you more and more opportunities to perfect yourself - He’ll send you all types of people, He’ll put you in contact with all types of from Jews. And כָּל עֲנִיֵי הָעוֹלָם נְסִינֹת הֵם לְאַדָּם, everything in this world is an opportunity; every person that you meet is a test for you to see if you’ll rise to the occasion and use the opportunity to plant the seeds of *b’tzedek tishpot amisecha* in your mind.

And you’ll live a happier life because of it - you’ll be happy with your spouse, and with your neighbor and your boss,

and with all your fellow Jews - the world becomes a happier place. And it's a good investment as well, this business of thinking well of your fellowman, because *Hamakom yidineihu l'kaf zchus*, Hashem will look at your *ma'alos* and He'll be happy with you. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is going to love you too; despite the fact that sometimes you can be a nuisance too. Hakadosh Baruch Hu will overlook that and see that you have good things in you. **בְּמַדָּה שֶׁאַתָּם לִי מוֹדֵד מוֹדֵדִין לוֹ** - "The way you treat others is how you'll be treated." And when Hakadosh Baruch Hu does that, He does it with a full hand, a heaping hand of reward in this world and also in the World to Come.

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"שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך"



## Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

**Q:**

**If somebody criticizes me saying that I behaved contrary to the halacha, and now I asked somebody who knows and I discovered that I was right the whole time and he was the one who made a mistake. Should I tell him that he was wrong?**

**A:**

Keep quiet. וְנַפְשִׁי כְּעָפָר לְכָל תְּהִיָּה "And my soul, my emotions, should be like dust to all those who insult me." You say it every day a few times. It wouldn't be that bad if you did it once in a while as well.

So you'll ask me, doesn't that person have to know where he made a mistake so that he can correct himself? Of course it would be a benefit for him if you would tell him he was wrong. But it's a bigger benefit for yourself not to say anything. So, be selfish. Give the benefit to yourself! וְנַפְשִׁי כְּעָפָר לְכָל תְּהִיָּה It's a tremendous zechus; don't give it up so easily. כָּל הַבּוֹלֵם פִּי בְשָׁעַת מְרִיבָה If a person closes his mouth when there's a quarrel; let's say someone starts getting angry at you and you keep quiet. You should know that תּוֹלָה אֶרֶץ עַל בְּלִימָה—the whole world hangs on the *zechus* of the one who is keeping his mouth closed. So big is the *zechus*, it's a tremendous opportunity. Don't look for it, but if it happened, somebody attacks you suddenly, woow, out of nowhere he had some sharp words for you, and you keep quiet. You keep your mouth closed. "Oh," Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "That's a tremendous zechus. The world is being supported by you." TAPE # E-44 (December 1995)

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