



RABBI SHALOM

ROSNER

Rav Kehilla, Nofei HaShemesh
Maggid Shiur, Daf Yomi, OU.org
Senior Ra"m, Kerem B'Yavneh

Giving the Benefit of the Doubt

The Torah dictates “*B’tzedek tispot Amisecha*” (you shall judge your fellow with righteousness, Vayikra 19:15). In *Pirke Avos*, Chazal take it a step further by stating that one should grant others the benefit of the doubt (“*kaf zechus*”, *Avos* 1:6).

Two *pessukim* later in our parsha we are told to rebuke others (*hocheach tocheach es amisecha*). How is one to know when to rebuke and when to judge the other favorably? Perhaps the answer is not only with respect to when to judge, but with respect to **how** to judge. In both *pessukim* the term “*amisecha*” is used. The other individual is referred to as a **comrade**.

It is important to offer rebuke in a loving and caring manner out of concern for the other. To bring out the best in another individual rather than to embarrass or humiliate them. We have to first make sure we are offering the rebuke to sincerely help the other individual improve upon themselves. Then I am judging the other righteously. It is all in our attitude and perception.

A story is cited by the Tifferes Shimshon that brings this point home. Towards the end of WWII when the US army entered the concentration and labor camps, Rabbi Eliezer Silver served as a Rabbi (chaplain) and tried to facilitate organizing minyanim and other communal religious activities in the liberated camps. There was one individual who profusely refused to participate in any religious activity. After Rabbi Silver inquired, the individual explained that during his time in the concentration camp he witnessed a man who was able to hide a siddur in the barracks and he would lend out the siddur for use by others for half an hour in exchange for a piece of bread, which was rather scarce. The individual explained to Rabbi Silver, that witnessing such a wicked act, bartering a prayer book for a piece of bread, turned him off totally, that he wanted to have nothing to do with the group with which such an individual associated. Therefore, he could no longer practice Judaism.

Rabbi Silver startled by the survivor’s response replied: why do you focus on that wicked individual who took advantage of others by bartering his siddur for bread. Why don’t you look at all those righteous individuals who were willing to sacrifice their meager source of nutrition in order to be able to daven?

B’tzedek tispot Amisecha teaches us to

maintain the proper perspective and to have a positive outlook – always awarding the other the benefit of the doubt!

Before we judge our friend, neighbor or spouse, let's introspect and ensure that we are doing so with the proper motivation and in a respectable manner so that it will indeed yield positive results. ■

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