

בשבת

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APPEARANCES AND APPAREL

Amongst the many commandments found in *Parshas Mishpatim*, there is one in particular that stands out for its far reaching effect. This is the law that one should distance oneself from any falsehood. 'To distance oneself' implies not even coming close to any aspect of violation, no matter how slight. And, in fact, that is how the Gemara¹ understands this *passuk*.

The Gemara gives an example of two litigants who come to court, one well-dressed, and the other in rags. The Gemara states we require the two of them dress the same — either both in rags, or both well-dressed. This, too, is based on 'distance yourself from falsehood.'

It would seem a judge may be swayed by the appearance of one of the litigants, and base their decision on what they see. Therefore, to avoid such an issue, the Torah expects the litigants to dress to a similar standard.

Reb Leib Chasman (1869–1935) uses this *halacha* to point out a fascinating insight into human nature. The Torah expects our judges not only to be *talmidei chachamim*, but to also have sterling characters.² Furthermore, during the judgment itself, a *dayan* has to view himself as if a sword is resting on his neck, and a vision of purgatory below him.³ This is to ensure the *dayan* will not be swayed from the path of truth.

With this background, would a judge truly be swayed by the facade of fancy clothing? Could the gleam and gloss of glitzy garments overpower the good character and fear of Heaven every judge is supposed to possess?

Indeed it can, says Reb Leib Chasman. At the end of the day, all judges are human, and as human beings, we are often swayed, perhaps in subtle ways, by what we see in front of us. Therefore, prudence dictates one avoid this trap, and demand the litigants dress in similar attire.

Knowing how easily swayed we are by an outer veneer is exceptionally helpful in our *avodas Hashem*. *Avodas Hashem* can often involve deep decisions and complicated dilemmas. By removing the false influences, we allow ourselves the clarity needed to reach the correct decision in our *avodas Hashem*.

1 *Shevuos* 31a

2 *Choshen Mishpat* 7:11

3 *Rambam Hilchos Sanhedrin* 23:8

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As human beings,
we are often
swayed by what we
see in front of us.

Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

If we are easily susceptible to what we see, and can change our minds based on fickle considerations, what safeguard can we put in place to remain free of these influences?

The first step is to acknowledge that we can indeed be influenced by paltry factors. Once we know that there may be trivial things affecting us, we are ready for the next step.

Now, focus on a specific influence or *middah* and think, "Is this affecting me? Is this the reason for my thought process?"¹

Go down the line, thinking through the various potential influences and biases one may have. By allowing ourselves to explore each influence, we give ourselves the ability to excise whatever may be extraneous, and focus on what is truly important.

1 *Chiddushei HaLev* on *Bereishis* 46:1

s.v. יסע ישראל

This idea needs no proof since it is so obvious - through learning Mussar one will come to diligence and intensity in their Torah learning. - *Yesod V'Shoresh Ha'Avodah Sha'ar HaNitzotz*, Perek 6

A FRIEND IN THE END

So I was sitting there learning with my *chavrusa* when I realized there was a bit of a commotion near me.* There was a fellow about my age trying to make his way down the aisle, but kept hitting the edges of tables, or knocking over *sefarim*. He was attempting to maneuver his bulky wheelchair in a tight space, and it was made even more difficult by the fact that it didn't seem like his arms were cooperating with what his mind told them to do.

To make the scene even more absurd, the young man had a broad smile on his face, as if he did not have a care in the world. Finally, the tumult ended when he parked his wheelchair at our table, swung out a hand towards my *chavrusa*, and said a hearty, "Hi!"

"Heshy! Wow, I didn't expect to see you here! How have you been?"

I watched with fascination. It seemed my *chavrusa*, Yaakov Goldblatt, knew this Heshy from before. They even seemed to be good friends. Heshy then turned to me, as best he could, and held out his hand. I shook it, as he said, "Heshy Linzer. Nice to meet you!"

"Tzvi Zuckerman. Nice to meet you as well."

"Well, I best be running! Or, well, rolling!" And off he went.

I wasn't sure what just happened, and threw a questioning look towards Yaakov. "What? Heshy? Oh, he's great. I met him when I was learning out in Los Angeles. To answer your unasked question, I don't know what his diagnosis is. He has a very hard time walking, and controlling his movements. He's also a great friend, and has a wonderful personality."

Yaakov was right. Heshy was the type of guy you gravitated towards, you just felt good when you were around him. He was funny, smart, and always had that smile on his face. It didn't take long before Heshy and I became good friends.

Heshy never shied away from the obvious. He knew there were people uncomfortable around him because of his wheelchair, or his movements. But just a few minutes with him, and people were at ease. It was a constant lesson in our biases and preconceived notions.

Heshy is now married, has a couple of kids, and is raising a beautiful family. We keep up here and there and as life moves on, I tend to forget the various stories of our days in *yeshiva*. But I vividly recall that first meeting, and how it highlighted so starkly, not to judge a person by what you see.

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Even one as great as *Yitzchak Avinu* can be subtly influenced by a superficial experience.¹
- The expectation to not jump to conclusions is codified in *halacha*. This is known as '*dan l'kaf zechus*.²

1 *Chidushei HaLev* on *Bereishis* 25:28, s.v. ויאהב יצחק

2 *Chofetz Chaim* 3:7

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