

Good Shabbos Everyone. Hashem created the world and all that is in it. If we want to be good people in Hashem's world, we must play by Hashem's rules. Many of Hashem's rules involve our thoughts and feelings. For example, we have a mitzvah to love Hashem. *We see therefore that our thoughts and emotions do have spiritual consequences.* Unfortunately, thoughts can also be used for bad. In order to prevent causing bad to others with our thoughts, we must constantly study what the Holy Torah has to teach us about human relations.

We will focus this week an often overlooked mitzvah involving thought. We are referring to the mitzvah to judge others favorably. As Hashem commands us this week, *"With righteousness you shall you judge your friend."* (Vayikra 19:15) In general, Rambam explains that this mitzvah commands us to do the following: When we see a generally righteous person doing something which appears to be against the Torah, we must give that person the benefit of the doubt and try to explain his actions for the good. (Mitzvah 177, Sanhedrin Chapt. 21 halachos 1-3)

We must be very careful with what we think about others. Because when we judge others unfavorably, we awaken negative spiritual forces against that person; it is as if we call the heavenly prosecutor to trial against that person. The following two stories illustrate the extent to which we must give others the benefit of the doubt.

As Rabbi Shlomo Yadin of Bnei Brak settled into his seat on his El Al flight from New York to Israel, he noticed someone a few seats over to his left who looked as though he was either an American rabbi of a shul or a rebbi in a yeshivah. Too far away to begin a conversation, Rabbi Yadin made himself comfortable, buckled his seat belt, and waited for takeoff.

After the plane was airborne, R' Shlomo noticed that the American rabbi took an obviously secular book from his attache case and settled down to read it. Even from where he was sitting, Reb Shlomo could see that it was not a *sefer* (Torah book.) It was definitely a secular book, and Reb Shlomo was a bit surprised. What about the mitzvah of *"And [you shall study Torah] while you walk on the way?"* (Devarim 6:7) R' Shlomo himself had taken along two sefarim for the long trip, and although he realized that not everyone followed his example, he felt that at least in public a rabbi should be reading from a *sefer* (Torah book.)

A few hours later as the slender orange rays of the sun began to appear over the horizon, numerous men made their way to the back of the plane to form a *minyan* for *Shacharis* – the morning prayers. The American rabbi remained in his seat, and R' Yadin was upset. The American was not sleeping, so he had certainly seen people going down the aisles with their talleisim and tefillin. Perturbed, Rabbi Yadin thought, *"The man dresses like a tzaddik (a righteous person), and he is probably observant where people know him. But on a plane, among strangers, he acts like an irreligious Jew. What a hypocrite!"*

When the next meal was served, Rabbi Yadin looked to see if his fellow traveler was reciting *brochos* (blessings). To his shock, the man ate without a *brochah* and when he finished his meal, did not recite *Birchas HaMazon* (Grace After Meals).

Rabbi Yadin was getting more and more furious. It took all his self-control to refrain from saying anything to the American. However, he decided that if there was a group of religious-looking people at Ben Gurion Airport waiting to greet this so-called *"rabbi,"* he would inform them that he was an impostor.

When the plane landed and the passengers had gone through passport control and luggage claim, Rabbi Yadin walked behind the American to see who was awaiting him. To his amazement, when the American passed through customs and left the terminal, there was indeed a group of Orthodox people waiting to receive him.

Rabbi Yadin was about to speak to one of the men in the group when he noticed them all walking towards an old gray van. The back of the van was open, and there Rabbi Yadin could plainly see a coffin, that of the American rabbi's mother! He had come from America to bury his mother in Israel.

Rabbi Yadin clasped his open hand to his forehead in sudden understanding of what he had seen for the past 12 hours. The American rabbi was an *onen*, a mourner on the day of a burial, and was thus prohibited from performing any mitzvos! He could not study Torah, pray, or recite blessings. (see Yoreh Deah 341:1) And now, to his own embarrassment, Rabbi Yadin realized that he had wrongfully suspected this man of SO many misdeeds! (Along the Maggid's Journey, Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn, p.98)

And now for our second story, which has similar if not worse results: About 20 years ago, the Goldhirsh family planned a large chasuna (wedding.) The Goldhirshs invited all their extended family and friends. Soon after, they sent out invitations.

When people started to receive the wedding invitations, they became very excited, because the Goldhirsh family was very popular in that city. There was one family, however, which did not receive an invitation. The Roth family checked their mailbox everyday as the wedding approached, but they received no invitation. The Roths considered themselves close friends of the Goldhirsh family. Understandably, the Roths felt very offended that they were not included in the Simcha.

The night of the wedding was an overwhelming success. The music was lively, the food was good and everyone left with a smile on their faces. However, the Roths stayed home that night.

The Roths were merely offended at first. However, with time, they later became bitter and angry that they had not been included in the wedding. They cut off all contact with the Goldhirsh family. The Roths never told anyone what had happened. And the Goldhirsh family was therefore at a loss as to why the Roths had cut all contact.

What followed was decades of hard feelings, distrust and hatred, with the Roths and Goldhirshs avoiding each other at weddings and fund raisers, etc. Some 20 years after the Goldhirsh wedding, the Roths received a curious letter in the mail. The letter was one letter with a plastic bag attached to it. The main letter was a letter from the United States Post Office with something like the following: *"During our recent remodeling, we found the attached letter under one of the older machines. We apologize for the delay in delivering this piece of mail. Better late than never! Thanks for your understanding."* In the plastic bag was the Goldhirsh wedding invitation from 20 years previous. In order to know how to treat others properly we must constantly study the Torah. Without a clear understanding of what hurts others, we may go through life hurting many people without ever realizing it. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**