



How To Mitigate Judgment

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(This story is recorded in the Mekor Mayim Hayim, Bereshit, 154 end)

The [following] episode happened in the days of Rabbeynu Yosef Ma'aravi, a student of the Ari'zal in Tzfat. Rabbi Haim Vital was at this time in Damascus.

One Rosh HaShana, [the prophet] Eliyahu, upon him be peace, came to Rabbeynu Yosef and told him to strengthen himself in order to "sweeten" the [forces of] judgement. For they have grown so strong, that even [the archangel] Mikhael has been silenced. [Even] his strength has been weakened by the large number of accusations and judgement.

Rabbeynu Yosef [responded and] told Eliyahu, "I myself know that all year long, much Torah was studied."

Eliyahu responded and [explained more] about the growing forces of judgement. [Eliyahu said] that the majority of the Torah [studied that year] fell into the hands of the klipot (forces of evil), into the hands of [the dark angel] SahM.

For [the Torah studied that year came from] the "poison" (religious hypocrisy) of the Torah, [for the sake] of [causing] strife and [to promote personal] pride, without any pure essence.

The SahM brought before the Heavenly Court all the [spoken] letters and [words] of Torah learned. When the Supernal Council saw how the Torah was delivered into the hands of the klipot (forces of evil), then the powers of judgement grew strong and the anger went forth. Mikhael was silenced [by it, for he could] only bring a small portion of Torah which was pure and clean, [studied] for its own sake, for the sake of the letters themselves, that did not fall into the hands of the klipot (G-d forbid).

The Rav asked Eliyahu, was Avraham [Avinu] there?

Eliyahu responded and said that Avraham [Avinu] was ashamed to stand before the Heavenly Court when he saw the Torah delivered [into the hands of] the klipot.

When the Rav heard these words from Eliyahu, he aroused the hearts of all the people to do serious teshuva (repentance). So great was the forces of accusations against them



that all the men of Tzfat were aroused to tears and returned [to HaShem] with all their hearts.

Eliyahu [again] came to the Rabbi and told him that by power of the repentance [of everyone in all] the synagogues in Tzfat Avraham [Avinu] went before the [Heavenly] Court and requested that the [impending] judgment be suspended until Yom Kippur. For by then everyone will do teshuva and the Torah will be released from the depths of the klipot.

Within this period Rabbeynu Yosef also notified [the Jews living in] many countries [that they too] should do teshuva [for the great sin of insincerity].

This story does not need much comment. If we are honest with ourselves, we all must admit that we can increase our levels of sincerity regarding our commitment to HaShem's covenant.

As this story points out so dramatically, sometimes it is not enough merely to do the right things. The right things have to be done with the right intent in order for them to be done in the right way.

When proper intent is lacking, even the greatest of good and holy deeds remain empty. Even the study of Torah and prayer can become like a mausoleum, with a beautiful structure on the outside, and rotting dead bones on the inside.

Let it come as no surprise to anyone, doing the proper mitzvot for improper reasons transforms those mitzvot into averot (sins) and brings judgment down upon the heads of all Israel (Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov, Shemot, 1). Insincerity is a sin that we are all guilty of at one time or another.

Our hearts must change, only then will our actions follow. It is simply not enough if our actions become religious, while our hearts remain irreligious.

Throughout the TaNaKh, HaShem warns us that He looks at the hearts of men and judges us thereby, and not by our actions alone. In light of all the troubles today facing Israel and Jews worldwide, we should take HaShem's words to heart and not merely to mind.

A wife knows the sincerity in her husband's kiss. If a man was to shower his wife with diamonds and rubies and in the meantime not love her in his heart, she would perceive the insincerity in his gifts. She would desire his heart before all his wealth.

HaShem desires of us what a husband or wife desires of the other: the heart. This is the first and foremost of mitzvot. The proof texts for this are so abundant in number that there is no need to have to state them. Without sincerity of heart, all the other mitzvot remain only partially fulfilled.



Granted one should observe the mitzvot even for the improper reasons (lo lishma) rather than not observe them at all. Nonetheless, one who does so should never deceive himself into believing that what he is doing is pleasing in the eyes of HaShem.

At the beginning of one's walk with HaShem, improper reasons may be tolerated because the new learner does not know any better. Yet, once one has tasted of Torah study and walks the paths of the mitzvot, improper attitudes and an improper heart are even worse than improper actions. One who is ignorant knows no better. One who knows has no excuse.

Judgment stands upon all of our heads now. The only way to mitigate it is by offering up our hearts and our sincere devotion. This pleasant sacrifice will be acceptable to Heaven and will serve to mitigate the judgment against us.

When our hearts turn back to Heaven, then the Heart of Heaven (the Partzuf of ZA, the Tiferet of Atzilut) will turn back to face us. May it be soon, amen.