

# LOOKING OUT FOR THE OTHER GUY

*by Rabbi Daniel Travis*

Pharaoh summoned Avraham and said, *"How could you do this to me? Why didn't you tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say that she was your sister, that I would take her to myself as a wife? Now here is your wife! Take her and go!"* (Bereshith 12:18-19)

Pharaoh admitted that Avraham had done the right thing in telling his subjects that Sarah was his sister (since he knew that the Egyptians were an immoral people). Yet it angered Pharaoh that Avraham had told him the same story, for he felt that he himself could have been trusted to act morally. Avraham made no response to this, for although Pharaoh considered himself completely righteous, the truth is that he was no different from his subjects.<sup>(1)</sup>

It is very easy to detect someone else's faults, but detecting one's own shortcomings is very difficult indeed. In most cases, when one person criticizes another, he himself suffers from the same problem he is complaining about in the other person.<sup>(2)</sup> Since he is well aware of all of the "behind the scenes" factors which cause him to act that way, it is very easy for him to justify his own actions. When it comes to someone else, since we are not aware of all of the background information about their lives, it is difficult to view their actions in the same light as our own.

Once, following a very inspiring lecture, someone who had come to hear the Rav went to speak with him privately. In the course of their dialogue it became clear to the Rav that the person speaking to him needed to work on the very problem he had addressed in his lecture. As they were finishing their conversation the listener thanked the Rav for his appropriate words, explaining that although they did not apply to him, he was aware that many members of the audience needed to hear what he had to say.<sup>(3)</sup>

The Shach<sup>(4)</sup> was once summoned to a beith din, and the beith din decided in favor of the other party. Surprised by the ruling, the Shach pointed out to the judges a number of commentaries that supported his position. The judges responded that the halachah does not follow those opinions; rather we rule according to other opinions, which the Shach himself had ruled as the halachah. Convinced that he was right in this case, the Shach forgot that he was disagreeing with his own position!

If it is natural for a person to be blind to his own faults, how can anyone ever come to recognize the truth about himself? If a person is searching for the truth and genuinely wishes to know it, then God will reveal to him what his weak points are, and will help him to correct them. <sup>(5)</sup>

1. *Malbim on Bereshith 12:18-19.*
  2. Kiddushin 70b.
  3. Heard from Rav Shlomo Brevda.
  4. One of the greatest commentators on the Shulchan Aruch.
  5. Rabbeinu Yonah, Mishlei 21:2; Shabboth 104a.
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