JUSTICE MUST BE CARRIED OUT

by Rabbi Dovid Green

The theme of this week's parsha is kedusha, holiness. How should a community of people who strive for greatness behave? The Torah minces no words. "You shall be holy, because I am holy Hashem your G-d." Among the many commandments enumerated in the parsha, we find commandments given to judges. "Don't corrupt judgement..." (Leviticus 19:15). Even if one of the litigants is poor, and the other would not be harmed by a small loss of money, don't favor the poor litigant. That is not the way to give charity. Justice must be carried out.

The last words of that passage are "you shall judge your fellow righteously." The simple explanation is as we have stated above, but included in this commandment is a directive for all Jews. Give your fellow the benefit of the doubt. If we see someone doing an action which seems to be incriminating, don't automatically jump to the conclusion that it is. Seek an explanation for the action in its context. Perhaps there are reasons we are unaware of. The requirement of this law is that even if we see someone do something which is hard to find any excuse or defense for, we should nevertheless reserve judgement until we learn more information. We would be surprised how often our first impression would be incorrect. The following is such a story.

The Rabbis taught: "one who gives his fellow the benefit of the doubt is himself given the benefit of the doubt by G-d." It once happened that a man went down from the upper Gallilee to the south, and he hired himself out to work for three years. Before Yom Kippur he said to his employer, "give me my pay, and I'll go" take care of my wife and children. The employer replied, "I don't have money." The worker said "then give me produce." Again the reply was "I don't have any." "Then give me land." "I don't have any." "Then give me animals." "I don't have any." "Then give me dry goods." "I don't have any." At that he threw his belongings over his shoulder and he went home dejected. After the holidays of Succos which follow Yom Kippur the employer set out with his employee's pay in hand, together with a load of food, drink, and sweets. They ate and drank together and the employee was paid for his work. Then the employer asked, "What did you think when I told you I had no money." "I thought you must have found a good deal on some merchandise, and you committed your cash to it." "What did you think when I said I had no land?" "I thought perhaps you had leased out your land to sharecroppers." "And when I told you I had no produce?" "I thought they were still untithed, and as yet forbidden to eat." "And when I told you I had no animals what did you think?" "I thought you had rented them out." What did you think when I said I had no dry goods?" I thought you had sanctified all of your possessions to the temple as a donation." The employee said, "this is what really

happened. I was angry at my son, and I vowed that no one should benefit from any of my possessions. As a result,I could not give you anything at that time. I had to go and have the vow annulled. Since you did not jump to any conclusions, and you judged me favorably, may G-d judge you favorably."

May we learn the art of giving the benefit of the doubt, and may we always be judged favorably by G-d.

Good Shabbos!

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