

IDENTICAL DEEDS

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

The days which stretch from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur are known as the 'Aseres Y'may Tshuv'---the Ten Days of Repentance. As difficult as it is to shake ourselves from the stupor of our set patterns and ways, we need to try to find some concrete way of improving ourselves during these crucial days.

Thankfully, Chaza"l discuss a beautiful concept--one that can be worked into our daily dealings--and teach that it has the capacity to cause Hashem to 'pass by' our sins and shortcomings. The Sifteï Chaim explains it in the following way.

The Talmud [Rosh Hashana 17A] teaches: Rava said: One who is *maavir* {passes by} his *middos* {attributes}, his sins are also 'passed by.'

Rav Dessler explains that this concept of 'maavir' is analogous to a road being almost totally blocked but one can still pass by. One who hasn't completely eradicated a bad *middah* but has minimized it to the degree that he can get past it. Anger is the usual response when wronged. If that anger totally fills the person he will be unable to get past it--to understand the other side and give the benefit of the doubt. If, however, he is able to hold that anger in check and minimize it to the degree that he can get past it, he will be able to understand the other side and forgive the perpetrator.

When one treats others in such a fashion, Hashem's attribute of *middah k'negged middah* [reciprocity] dictates that His judgment will also be minimized. Hashem will 'get past' that person's sins and will judge with *chesed* [kind mercy].

This will not only affect a person's station in the World to Come but will even nullify harsh decrees aimed at a person in this world. The Talmud there relates that Rav Huna was so ill he was on the verge of death. After he had fought off death and was once again well, he related what he had experienced. "The heavenly court had decreed death but Hashem intervened arguing that since I had been *maavir* on my *middos*, the court must also look past some of my actions."

A person actually has the capacity to dictate how he'll be judged by the heavens. Two people can perform identical deeds and yet be judged totally differently. One who was *maavir* and found the good in others will have his sins mitigated and his merits magnified. The second, who refused to cut others some slack, will have his actions meticulously scrutinized and unceremoniously rejected unless they were completely pure. This is not necessarily a punishment. It is simply a reflection of the person himself.

With this, the Chofetz Chaim explains a seemingly difficult passage in the 'Avinu Malkainu' prayers that are recited during these days. We implore our Father and King to inscribe us in the Book of Merits. Why do we need to ask Hashem to do this? If we have merits then we should automatically be inscribed. If we don't have such merits, then even asking to be inscribed in that book should be considered quite audacious!

He explains that every person has performed some good deeds and as such has merits. However, close scrutiny of these deeds may leave nothing more than a bare skeleton of the original act. We might have donated charity to a needy cause but our feelings of pride, guilt and honor might not leave much of a balance. It might no longer deserve to be inscribed in that heavenly Book of Merits. As such, we implore Hashem not to dissect our actions too thoroughly. If we did a good deed, inscribe it in the Book of Merits.

The way that we can push that decision to go in our favor is, of course, through middah k'negged middah [the attribute of reciprocity]. If we accept the good that others do for us at face value without overly analyzing it, if we are willing to get past the less savory aspects of other's deeds, then middah k'negged middah will dictate that we and our deeds will be inscribed in the Book of Merits.

It all depends on how we look at things...

The great Chassidic leader, Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, once witnessed a seemingly boorish sight. A simple wagon-driver, in the midst of his prayers, began greasing the axle of his wagon. Other shocked bystanders couldn't help but commenting on the crudeness they had witnessed. "Imagine a person greasing an axle while praying!" they cried out in dismay.

Rav Levi Yitzchak, whose love for Israel seeped out of his every pore, had a totally different slant on the situation. "Imagine such a Jew!" he excitedly exclaimed. "He even prays when he greases his axle!"

A g'mar chasima tova. May we all be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Merits and the Book of Life.

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