

The Dee Pirkei Avot Project

יְהוּדָה בֶּן טַבַּי וְשִׁמּוֹן בֶּן שְׁטַח קִבְּלוּ מֵהֵם. יְהוּדָה בֶּן טַבַּי אוֹמֵר: אַל תַּעַשׂ עִצְמָךְ כְּעוֹרְכֵי הַדַּיָּן, וְכַשִּׁיהוּ בַּעֲלֵי הַדִּין עוֹמְדִים לְפָנֶיךָ, יְהִיוּ בְּעֵינֶיךָ כְּרָשָׁעִים, וְכַשִּׁנְפָטִים מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְהִיוּ בְּעֵינֶיךָ כְּזָכָאִין, כְּשֶׁקִּבְּלוּ עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת הַדִּין.

Judah the son of Tabbai and Shimon the son of Shotach received from them. Judah the son of Tabbai would say: When sitting in judgement, do not act as an advocate. When the litigants stand before you, consider them both guilty; and when they leave your courtroom, having accepted the judgement, regard them as equally innocent.

This Mishna teaches us how difficult it is to pursue justice in our world. We should not behave like those legal advisors who may distort the truth by pre-arranging the court case in order to favour one side or by teaching litigants how to organise their claims. The judge should discuss each case wisely and skilfully in order to extract the full truth without letting the litigants deduce his intentions. When the Mishna states that both litigants should be viewed as “wicked”, it means that the judge shouldn’t assume that one of them is a righteous person and cannot claim falsely, since this will prevent him from investigating the case objectively. However, after the legal procedure is over and the litigants accept the judgment, both of them should be seen as meritorious, because accepting the court decision requires dignity and good will.

This Mishna can be also understood metaphorically. Despite often being tempted to come up with excuses for ourselves to minimise the guilt felt, we need to admit when we do something wrong. King David teaches us how to face the bitter truth of our wrongdoing directly: “I have sinned to Hashem” he says to Nathan the Prophet (Shmuel II 26:13); “I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is always before me” (Tehillim 51: 5). Following his example, we can experience deep repentance and regain our integrity after some serious inner work of refining our middot (qualities of character) and repairing our misdeeds.

In the modern world, the truth is being easily manipulated by arranging facts to fit ideological claims or by shifting the focus from the essence of events to minor details. Just like precious silver needs to be purified and cleansed in the course of a long and tedious process, so too, finding the full truth requires our serious and conscious efforts.

Discussion points:

Have you ever felt that admitting your wrong deed eased your inner pain and enabled you to go on with dignity and integrity?

What conflicts can you think about in which it is difficult to decide who is right?

What personal qualities do the leaders need in order to judge objectively?

לעילוי נשמת:

לאה בת רפאל הכהן וציפורה

מאיה אסתר בת הרב אריה מרדכי ולאה

רינה מרים בת הרב אריה מרדכי ולאה

Idea by Dr. Shulamit Kopeliovich, Lucy's teacher from Herzog Academic College, Israel and translator of the Russian Dee Pirkei Avot Project



The Dee

Pirkei Avot Project

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