

YEHOShUA BEN PERAḤIAH:

**JUDGE EVERYONE WITH THE SCALE WEIGHTED IN HIS FAVOR. (1:6)**

וְהָיִי דָן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת.

There was once a young girl who had been taken captive and two saintly folk went after her to ransom her. One of them entered the harlots' apartment. When he came out he asked his companion: "What didst thou suspect me of?" The other replied: "Of finding out perhaps for how much money she is being held." Said the first: "By the Temple service, so it was!" And he added: "Even as thou didst judge me with the scale weighted in my favor, so may the Holy One, blessed be He, judge thee with the scale weighted in thy favor" (ARN).

If there is some person whom you do not know to be either righteous or wicked, and you see him doing something or saying something which might be interpreted either favorably or unfavorably, interpret his action favorably and do not suspect him of evil. But if the person is well known as a righteous man, always doing good, and some action of his seems to be bad—only with extreme difficulty can one justify it—then it is proper to judge it favorably, since there is at least a remote possibility that the action is a good one; and it is not permitted to suspect such a person of evil. It is in this connection that the Sages said (Shabbat 97a): He who suspects the upright should be whipped! However, if there is a person notorious for his wicked ways, and you see him do something which seems to be good, but there is a remote possibility that it is evil, then it is wise to beware of him, not to assume that he is doing good. It is of such a person that the verse says, He that hateth dissembleth with his lips . . . when he speaketh fair, believe him not (Proverbs 26:24 ff.) (Maimonides).

HILLEL:

**DO NOT JUDGE THY COMRADE UNTIL THOU HAST STOOD IN HIS PLACE. (2:5)**

וְאַל תִּדְיִן אֶת חֲבֵרְךָ עַד שֶׁתִּגִּיעַ לְמַקוֹמוֹ.

Even if your comrade has been guilty of a transgression, do not condemn him, saying: "He deserves to be burned! He deserves to be stoned! He deserves to be strangled!—because he was guilty of this sin" (Vitry).

If it happened with your comrade that he did not withstand tempta-

tion, do not disgrace him. Say instead: "What he did is nothing!" For it is possible that had the same circumstance befallen you, you too would not have been able to withstand the temptation (Aknin).

This is of a piece with the statement that a man is not to trust in himself and be too sure of his own judgment. If a person sees that a companion of his in high office does not behave justly, let him not say: "If I occupied his position I would not do any of the evil things he does." You don't know. Human beings, one's no better than the next! Perhaps that office would have perverted you too. When you have reached his position and his station and revealed a better nature, then you may question his ways (Rabbi Jonah).

Some of my teachers interpreted this saying to me as follows: If you have met some stranger in your city and you find him fastidious in conduct and full of extraordinary virtues, do not conclude on your own that these constitute his real nature until you get to the place where he dwells: note his behavior there, is it like his behavior here? Then you will be in a position to judge him. Many are the cheap and mediocre individuals who show their true colors in one place, and elsewhere put on a show of a saintliness which is not native to them (Meiri).

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