

RABBAN GAMALIEL, THE SON OF RABBI JUDAH THE PRINCE, SAYS:

LET ALL THOSE WHO LABOR IN BEHALF OF THE COMMUNITY, LABOR IN THEIR BEHALF FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN—FOR THE MERIT OF THEIR FATHERS UPHOLDS THEM AND THEIR GRACE ENDURES FOREVER. AND AS FOR YOU, I LAY UP TO YOUR CREDIT A RICH REWARD AS THOUGH YOURSELVES HAD ACCOMPLISHED IT.

LET ALL THOSE WHO LABOR IN BEHALF OF THE COMMUNITY:

This is a reference to community leaders; that is, let them engage in communal work for the sake of Heaven, guiding people along an upright course, restraining them from evil ways, reproving them when necessary. And in all this their objective must not be self-aggrandizement, acquiring honor or wealth or power or pride: for a public figure who lords it over the community is despised by God (Aknin).

FOR THE MERIT OF THEIR FATHERS UPHOLDS THEM:

Let all those who toil and trouble in behalf of the community, who devote themselves to its needs—for example, representing it before the crown or the military authorities—do so for the sake of Heaven, that is, in order to help the people . . . not to capture power for themselves. Then even if the community does not see eye to eye with them and is not pleased by some particular thing, no matter, because “the merit of their fathers upholds them,” that is, upholds those who have the responsibility of leadership—they will yet enjoy good favor and success because their intent is Heavenward—and the grace of the Fathers will stand by them, the leaders, forever (Vitry).

That is, the merit of the Fathers of the community, namely, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: it upholds them in a good and righteous course; “and their grace endures forever,” that is, the grace of the Fathers endures forever. And we do not make arithmetical calculations of the ages already gone by, saying or thinking that the merit of the Fathers will not uphold us, because that merit has already sustained previous generations and therefore that stock of reward is exhausted and cannot support us. The Holy One, blessed be He, has informed us that He promised the Fathers that their merit would endure for their sons and their sons’ sons, to the end of all generations (Aknin).

Even though you leaders work in behalf of the community and take care of its needs, it is not you who accomplish this. On the contrary, it

is the merit of the community's Fathers which upholds them, it is their grace which endures forever, to the thousandth generation (Rabbi Jonah).

AS FOR YOU, I LAY UP TO YOUR CREDIT A RICH REWARD AS THOUGH YOURSELVES HAD ACCOMPLISHED IT:

This is Rabban Gamaliel speaking to those who bear the burden of communal work, to wit: "You who bear this burden, if in your labors you have tried once and despite your efforts have accomplished nothing, do not throw up your hands in despair, saying, 'We shall have no reward, for see, we do not prosper and we labor in vain!' The Holy One will certainly not cut off your reward. On the contrary, He will account it unto you as though you had accomplished your task and you had succeeded at it." Lo, the Sages have said (Kiddushin 40a): Good intentions, the Holy One brings to fruition in action (Vitry).

This is God speaking to those who bear the burden of communal work. For there are times when they are prevented from carrying out a commandment, because they are then engaged in some public task. And so the Lord, blessed be He, says to them that He will lay up reward to their credit as though they had carried out that particular commandment, though they had in fact not done so: because they were busy in behalf of communal matters for the sake of Heaven (Maimonides).

Although the merit of the Fathers upholds the community and its needs are provided for by virtue of this merit and not because of what you do, nevertheless I lay it up to your credit, you who bear the work, as though all the community's needs were taken care of by you and by virtue of your merit. So the earliest commentators, of blessed memory, interpreted this statement. But it is possible to offer another interpretation: "Let all who labor in behalf of the community, labor in their behalf for the sake of Heaven." Do not say: "Why do I need this burden to take on communal responsibilities? Even if the people practice charity, they alone will be rewarded, for it is of their wealth they give." Do not let your thoughts take this turn: for doubly will you be benefiting yourself—since the merit of their Fathers upholds them, in what they do, you will achieve more than you would if you had been acting alone. And I will lay up reward to your credit as though you had done it all of your own, as though out of your own purse you have given all they gave because of you. Thus by the burden you have taken on to get them to

give charity, you profit more than you would have if you had met only your own responsibilities—for their works outnumber yours. And everything you undertake the Lord will cause to prosper because “the merit of their Fathers upholds them.” That is why he who devotes himself to communal needs brings great benefit to himself—so long as he directs his heart to Heaven (Rabbi Jonah).

HILLEL SAYS:

DO NOT WITHDRAW FROM THE COMMUNITY.

Instead share in their burdens imposed by the government, in their fasts, in their prayers. Thus indeed Mordecai sent to Esther: Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether boldest thy peace at this time, then will relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father’s house will perish (Esther 4:13-14). And we have learned in the Talmud (Ta’anit 11a): If one withdraws from the community, the two ministering angels who accompany a person . . . lay their hands on his head and say: May So-and-so who withdrew from the community not be witness to the comfort of the community (Vitry).

A man should not entertain views far different from those of his community. But if he sees that the opinions the people of his city hold are corrupt, and he is worried lest if he concur with them he might adopt their course, walk in their evil ways, and thus be driven from the way of life, then he must leave their midst immediately, and go to another city the conduct of whose inhabitants is proper, whose views are those right views in accordance with the principle of the *via media*. If he has found no such city close by, let him go to one far off. If he has found no such city at all, let him go off to the wilderness where there are no human beings, as Jeremiah, may he rest in peace, said: Oh that I were in the wilderness, in a lodging-place of wayfaring men (Jeremiah 9:1) (Aknin).

Praying together with the congregation is more praise-worthy than praying by oneself. For when a man prays by himself, he might include in his prayers some petition which could be detrimental either to another individual or to the public. Whereas, when the congregation is at prayer, it asks only for those things which are of benefit to everybody.

. . . Moreover, by way of parable: in a bundle of reeds, each single reed is weak and easily breakable; but as part of the bundle, a person is unable to break it (Duran).

RABBI JOHANAN HA-SANDELAR SAYS:

EVERY ASSEMBLY WHICH IS FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN WILL IN THE END ENDURE; BUT ONE WHICH IS NOT FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN WILL NOT ENDURE IN THE END.

What kind of assembly was for the sake of Heaven? For example, the assembly of Israel before Mount Sinai. And what kind was not for the sake of Heaven? For example, the assembly of the Generation of Dispersion (ARN).

ASSEMBLY . . . FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN:

That is, where men have gotten together to study and to teach (Vitry).

Any human assembly for the sake of Heaven, that is, with the aim of discovering truth and adopting the course of good and uprightness—because it is truth and goodness and uprightness that is sought—will never be broken up. For in such an assembly everybody has only one wish, to discover the truth; . . . thus they all have one object in view (Aknin).

Any assembly for the study of Torah and for the practice of good works is called an assembly for the sake of Heaven (Rabbi Jonah).

BUT ONE WHICH IS NOT FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN:

When people get together merely to lord it over one another (Rabbi Jonah).

A person's relations with his fellow man must not be based on the desire to triumph over him. This ruins the whole relationship and is the undoing of truth. For when a person has in mind only triumph over his fellow, he strives to establish his own point of view or his own wish, regardless of whether it is true or false. . . . When in any group victory is the motive, one person does not listen to the other one, and controversy takes place (Meiri).

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