

FACTS SPEAK BETTER THAN WORDS

Category: Holidays, Rosh Hashana

How are we to judge a politician, a potential suitor, or prospective work partner? Do we dig deep into their past or evaluate them in the current state? The answer can teach us a lesson about how we approach questions about Judaism, and how we approach G-d on Rosh Hashanah.

Past or Present?

In recent years, a new phenomenon has arisen. It's called "cancel culture." In our day and age, there is a wealth of information about every individual online, so it is quite easy to scroll through ten or fifteen years of statements and find some racist or bigoted statement, or at least something that is considered bigoted by today's standards. So the question arises: How are we to judge people? By digging through their past, or by evaluating them in the present?

You may ask the same question regarding a Shidduch - when researching about potential suitor, should you dig into the boy's younger years to find out what kind of person he really is, or just be content with seeing how he is today?

What do you think? Is it really necessary to find out every move these people made years and years ago, sometimes even before some of us were born? Is it fair to judge people based on their past? How can you be sure that his past is an indication to what he will do in the future? Maybe people have to be judged by how they are now?

As always, we must look into the Torah to see how to deal with such a dilemma.

On Rosh Hashanah we read the story of the birth of Yitzchak. This story reminds us that it was on this day that Sarah was remembered and that Rosh Hashanah is an especially opportune time to have prayers and requests granted as Sarah's was granted on this day.

But there is more. In addition to the story of Yitzchak's birth we read about

Avraham sending away his wife Hagar and son Yishmael with only a small jug of water. Of course the water ran out and Yishmael nearly died of thirst in the desert.

Why do we read this non complimentary story about Abraham on Rosh Hashanah?

The Talmud describes an argument that took place in heaven as Yishmael was lying unconscious under a bush in the desert. G-d wanted to make a miracle for Yishmael and save his life by creating a spring of water nearby. The angels argued that this boy must not be saved because he was destined to cause trouble for Yitzchak and his children were destined to persecute Yitzchak's children. As we see clearly, until this very day, Jews suffer from Yishmael's offspring. Since in the future he will turn out ultimately evil, the angels argued that it was not right to make a miracle and spare him from death. But G-d answered them with the question, "Is he righteous now or is he evil now. I will judge him as he is now."

Therefore, the Gemara concludes, *Rabbi Yitzchak said, 'We only judge a person by his actions today, as the verse says, "and G-d hearkened to the lad's as he was there."*

What Are the Facts?

This is actually the way we naturally judge other people, even politicians and political parties.

By any election, most people decide who they are going to vote for long before Election Day. There are those who thoroughly know the platforms of the various parties, but the fact is that very few people are actually interested in the philosophies or moral beliefs of the contestants. Most people have the attitude that "It makes no difference to me what the party's philosophy is and I don't care what the party's founders or elected officials have to say. I only care about what they do."

This is a pretty practical way of judging candidates, political parties or anyone for that matter. We must only judge people by looking at the facts.

This rule applies in Judaism too. When we read in the Torah that it is a mitzvah to

wipe out Amalek, people are aghast! How can Jews be required to kill? Isn't Judaism a religion of mercy?

Well let's close the book for a second and look at the facts on the ground.

Is there a more merciful nation in the world than the Jewish nation? Is there any army more meticulous about protecting innocent civilians than the IDF?

When you want to judge a belief system or a lifestyle to see if it is valid or not, it's always helpful to look at the facts. The fact is that Judaism has proven itself to be a successful and enduring system, especially in the twentieth century. In the last hundred years, Judaism has survived Communism, which rose and fell, and Nazism which also came and went. All of these regimes may have looked very good on paper, but the facts on the ground are that they turned the world into a living hell!

Judaism, on the other hand has shown itself to be a kind and benevolent religion. Just look at the percentage of Jews involved in social or communal aid programs and charitable foundations, both in the US and throughout the whole world - far more than our percentage in society.

Discrimination in Practice?

Here's another example. Let's talk about the "Yiddishe Mamma"? People accuse Judaism of discriminating against women. They say that in Judaism, women are second class citizens.

I can give you many explanations of how the roles of men and women in Judaism are equal though different - but for now, let's just look at the facts. The fact is that Jewish men treat their wives very well.

And this didn't start in the seventies either. Men these days treat their wives as they saw their fathers do, who treated their wives the way their fathers did and so on all the way back to Avraham who was told by G-d (and we read this portion on Rosh Hashanah), "Whatever your wife tells you to do listen to her."

The Talmud is full of stories, one after another, of the Sages and Rabbis honoring their wives and their mothers.

This tradition stems from the fact that in the Jewish home the women play a very important role. And you don't have to go very far to see this. Everyone knows that the woman is everything, and many of the most important decisions are left in her hands; including which synagogue the family will attend for the high holidays. Is there any other culture in the world where the woman has been lifted up onto such a high pedestal as in Judaism? Where else do woman receive such respect?

There is no discrimination against women in Judaism. There is only the greatest respect and honor. And there is nothing cruel and unjust about Judaism. The Torah has been proven to be **the** true, enduring and most correct lifestyle in the world.

A Rosh Hashana Reminder

The previous Rebbe explains that this is why we read this portion on Rosh Hashanah the Day of Judgment. It serves as a reminder for us to turn to G-d and beseech him that He should judge us as we are today - not by our past and not by our future. We have made mistakes in the past, and we will certainly make mistakes in the future, but now our sincerity and regret is real and true. So, "please G-d, judge us according to how we are standing now before You."

So, let's not be quick to jump to pass judgments. Rather keep in mind the traditional saying, "Judge others favorably and G-d will do the same for you."