



All of the service of Hashem is dependent upon the improvement of one's character traits.

Vilna Gaon - Even Shleima, Chapter 1

Judging Favorably Module

Source Booklet 1

Anyone who judges others favorably will be judged favorably in Heaven.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbos, 127b

September 3, 2006

Notes:

- 1) AJFBx refers to the “ACTT Judging Favorably Source Booklet” <story number> entry in the *Judging Favorably* Module Packet’s “ACTT Daily Activity Log” for 9/5/06 – 9/11/06
- 2) Stories AJFB2 – AJFB7 are reprinted from *The Other Side of the Story* by Yehudis Samet with the permission of Mesorah Publications; Brooklyn, NY

Table of Contents

CONTACT INFORMATION.....2

USE OF MATERIAL2

AJFB1: THE MERRY - GO - ROUND3

AJFB2: CHALLENGING OUR PERCEPTIONS.....8

AJFB3: A MULTI-FACETED ROLE10

AJFB4: HOW FAR DO WE HAVE TO TAKE THIS?12

AJFB5: THE DOUBLE STANDARD.....13

AJFB6: JUDGING THE WHOLE PERSON.....14

AJFB7: WHY DON’T PEOPLE SPEAK UP?15

Contact Information

For additional information, please contact us at:

ACTT e-mail: info@actt613.org

ACTT web site: www.actt613.org

ACTT postal mailing address: ACTT
48 Edgemount Road
Edison, NJ 08817

ACTT tel#: (732) 993-5376

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AJFB1: The Merry - Go - Round

by Rabbi Yaakov Luban

The *Malach* (angel) sat behind the desk and looked sternly at Sam Stein. “79 times,” said the *Malach*. Sam had no idea what he meant.

“Where in the world am I?” Sam asked with much trepidation. “Am I in heaven now?”

“No. In a time warp,” the angel answered tersely.

“A time what?”

“Time warp,” the *Malach* repeated deliberately.

Sam was stunned. “Maybe I’ve lost my mind,” he thought to himself.

“Mr. Stein, why don’t you have a seat, and I will explain exactly why you are here.”

Sam slowly sat down.

“You are fortunate to be here, Mr. Stein. You recently committed a crime that was so egregious that you forfeited your share in *Olam Habah*. But we are giving you a second chance to reclaim your place in eternity.”

It occurred to Sam that he might be dreaming. He pinched himself to no avail. “You are not dreaming, Mr. Stein. Do you know to which incident I refer?”

Sam knew. Due to a terrible error in judgment, Sam mistakenly accused a coworker of being a petty thief and had her fired. The ensuing damage was horrific, and Sam would have given anything to undo the past and correct his awful mistake. Sam listened intently as the *Malach* continued.

“We are sending you back into your own past, turning the clock back 30 days, just before the unfortunate incident occurred. The same set of circumstances will repeat themselves, but you will have a chance to choose more wisely this time around. Of course, you understand that you will not recall being here, nor will you realize that you are re-experiencing this event again.”

Sam protested. “But at the time that I made my decision I was certain that what I did was appropriate. I will probably make the same bad mistake once again.”

The angel smiled. “Yes, you are correct Mr. Stein. But this is a rehab center for people who leap to conclusions and don’t give others the benefit of the doubt. We intend to retrain you before you return to reality.”

Sam could not believe this was happening, but he was excited about the incredible opportunity to right the past.

The *Malach* concluded the discussion. “Mr. Stein, I hope you choose more wisely next time. If you will now walk down the corridor, you may attend your first instructional class.”

Sam walked into the hall and was surprised to see a large group of people seated in the room. Comments erupted from the audience. “Hey, you too.” “Look, another one.” “Welcome to the club.”

Soon a *Malach* walked to the front of the room and the class began.

“Do you know why you are here? Because you are all fools! You have acted with callous indifference, and the results have been catastrophic. Hopefully, you will leave my class in a far more thoughtful state.”

The audience began to grumble and Sam wondered why the angel felt it necessary to start the lesson by attacking the students.

“You are offended, and you think I am off the mark. Well then, let me ask you the following question.

The Torah requires a person to be *dan likaf zechus* – to give one the benefit of the doubt. Now, is it smart or naive to judge people in a generous fashion?”

The audience was silent for fear of being attacked by the aggressive angel. The question was also a minefield. Who would say that the Torah expects a person to be naive? The *Malach* took the initiative. “Why are you so quiet? I am sure you all have an opinion. Mr. Stein, why don’t you give us your honest view of this matter?”

Sam stammered, “Well, I think it’s good to give the benefit of the doubt, but you know there are times……I mean it depends on the situation, every case is different. Of course sometimes……”

“Mr. Stein”, the *Malach* interrupted, “don’t beat around the bush. Your honest opinion please!”

“Well then, if you must know, I do think it is naive. Life is not black and white and a person must assess the facts and formulate an educated opinion.” Sam gained confidence as he spoke. “Yes, a person who ignores compelling evidence and gives everyone the benefit of the doubt is really a simpleton.”

The audience applauded Sam for his courageous stand.

The *Malach* was quick to respond. “Thank you for your candor Mr. Stein. You have articulated your position well and struck a responsive cord with the entire group.” The audience was smiling and nodding their affirmation.

“In fact, this is precisely why you are all here today in our rehab center. Because you people thought it foolish and naive to be *dan likaf zechus*, you have made terrible errors of judgment and destroyed innocent people’s lives in the process!”

The *Malach* had the upper hand now, and no one was smiling anymore.

“So let’s see if G-d thinks it’s naive to give people the benefit of the doubt. The Rabbis derive the mitzvah to judge favorably from the Biblical verse, *Bitzedek tishpot amisecha* – with righteousness judge your fellow. Now let me ask you. Why is it *tzedek*-righteousness to judge people favorably? It is compassionate, merciful, generous, doing a favor. But what does it have to do with being righteous? Anyone know?”

The audience was silent.

“I will tell you why. Because giving people the benefit of the doubt is the intelligent and shrewd thing to do. That’s why it’s characterized as *tzedek*-righteousness, and not compassion.

I know you are not yet convinced, but you will soon come around and see the light.”

Abruptly, the *Malach* ended the class. “That’s it for today. Think it over and we will reconvene tomorrow.”

The next day, the angel began immediately to hammer his message.

“Ok, let’s be honest. You people have consistently jumped to conclusions which turned out to be false and erroneous.”

The students shifted in their chairs and shook their heads in disbelief.

“You obviously think I am exaggerating? Ok, I will prove my point.

Mr. Goldberg, do you remember last week you were angry at your son’s teacher for giving a 20 page homework assignment. You called every single parent in the class and complained that the school hired incompetent teachers. What did you discover when you went to the principal?”

“Well, they did have three months to do the assignment, but my son didn’t tell me, so how could I know?” stammered Mr. Goldberg.

“You didn’t know. Hmm. Mrs. Hertz, do you remember how angry you were at your friend Leah for buying the exact same outfit as you. You thought, surely she saw you wearing it at the class play a week earlier. And what did you discover when you told her she lacked common sense?”

Mrs. Hertz quickly defended herself. “She was sick and didn’t come to the play. She never saw my outfit. But my error was an honest mistake. Her daughter had the lead part, and it was logical to assume she was at the play.”

The *Malach* chose another target. “And Mr. Feinstein, do you remember recently telling your friends that the Greenblatt’s are cheap because they don’t buy their children clothes that fit properly?”

“Yes, but it wasn’t my fault, Mr. *Malach*, because I didn’t know that both Mr. and Mrs. Greenblatt had lost their jobs. I had no way of knowing.”

“And Mrs. Shore, do you recall spreading the word that Chaim Green once spent two years in prison because he embezzled money from his company?”

“But I heard that from my best friend Chani. She told me she heard it first hand from a friend who knew Chaim back when he was incarcerated. How was I to know that Chani exaggerated a bit and didn’t really hear it first hand but fourth hand, and that it wasn’t Chaim Green but rather Chaim Wein who stole the money?”

The *Malach* leaned back in his chair and smiled. He waited a few minutes while the audience shuffled uncomfortably in their chairs. Finally, he spoke in a hushed tone and quiet voice.

“My friends, don’t you see the pattern? There is a common denominator to each of these episodes. It’s always the same story. Mr. Stein, would you care to tell the audience what that unifying thread is?”

Sam scratched his head. “I guess it was bad luck in each case that there was a misunderstanding.”

The *Malach* became agitated. “You still don’t get it, do you? Does anyone else understand?”

No one volunteered to answer the question. “Alright, I’ll have to spoon feed you people”, said the *Malach* in exasperation. “It was not bad luck. In each instance a piece of information was missing. You all made assumptions that turned out to be erroneous because you didn’t know the whole story.

Remember the classical detective story. There are five people in a secluded mansion and one is found brutally murdered. It is apparent that one of the four survivors is the murderer. Everyone assumes it was the butler. He had the motive and the ability to commit the crime. But along comes the brilliant detective and he is not convinced. Reality is not always the same as appearance. He investigates and carefully examines the evidence. He goes through the crime scene thoroughly, and follows up on every lead. He doesn’t trust anyone. Ultimately, the detective solves the mystery and discovers that the crime was not committed by any of the four, but rather by the most unlikely candidate, the Chief of Police.

The mitzvah of *bitzedek tishpot amisecha*, judging your fellow righteously and giving him the benefit of the doubt, teaches that every person must be a sleuth, a Sherlock Holmes or Inspector Poirot. Don’t be fooled by the evidence. Don’t believe what people say. Don’t assume anything. Probe, explore, talk to all the parties, learn all the facts and discover the rest of the story before formulating an unjustified opinion – or you will miss the boat.

You people have been naive because you leap to conclusions without investigating the facts. That’s just as foolish as leaping off the Empire State Building and imagining that you are Superman.

Remember these lessons well: Don’t be a fool!

Ok, that’s it for today. Class dismissed.”

No one spoke when the class ended. The *Malach* had hit them hard and they were finally beginning to hear the message.

“Class, this is the final session. It’s time for me to tell you a famous joke.

There was an aspiring actor who wanted to be in a Broadway play. Finally, after ten years of auditioning he landed a minor part. After hearing the report of the cannon, he was supposed to say his classic line, ‘Hark, I hear the cannon’s roar’.

The young actor practiced day and night, ‘Hark, I hear the cannon’s roar, Hark, I hear the cannon’s roar.’

The great day arrived. The theater was packed; the curtain rose and the play began. Finally, the cue for the aspiring actor echoed through the hall as the cannon let out a thunderous blast. *Boom!!!*

The aspiring actor was startled to death and he yelled out, ‘Hey, what in the world was that?’

Why do I tell you this story? Because, it has a great lesson. The actor forgot his lines because the cannon sounded so real.

Well that's exactly what happens in life. G-d asks us to give people the benefit of the doubt, but most people think like you that it's naive to do that. So G-d says, 'Ok, I'll teach you a lesson!' He arranges situations that seem compelling and you jump to conclusions. Then you discover you made serious mistakes. If you are smart, you say to yourself, 'I've got to be more careful from now on.'

Part of the mitzvah of *Bitzedek tishpot amisecha* is to learn from the past to be more discerning in the future. Unfortunately, many people never learn from their mistakes. Why? Because, G-d doesn't give us easy tests. He presents realities that seem so compelling that people say, 'This time there's no question, he's guilty as sin!' The blast seems so loud that we forget our lines and instinctively cry out, 'Hey, what in the world is that?' That is why most people make the same terrible mistakes over and over again throughout their lifetime."

The Malach let his words sink in and then concluded his talk.

"You will now return to normal life. You will not recall being in my class, but the lessons you learned will be embedded in your memory. Next time you must decide whether or not to give the benefit of the doubt, don't get back on the merry-go-round. Take a deep breath and say to yourself, 'Hark, I hear the cannon's roar. I will not forget my lines.' Maybe you will remember to act intelligently."

Sam was about to go into the Yeshiva office when he noticed Leah walk to the area where petty cash was stored. Leah unlocked the drawer and removed the contents, closed the drawer and returned to her desk. No doubt Leah did not realize that he observed what had just transpired. Sam was aghast.

In the back of his mind, Sam heard a faint voice say, 'Hark I hear the cannon's roar. Don't jump to conclusions before you investigate and find out the whole story'. But Sam blocked out this nagging voice, "This time there is no question", he thought. "Leah is guilty as sin".

Sam knew what had to be done. He called the executive director and told him the story. "Mr. Brown, it pains me to make this call, but I'm doing this *lishaim shamayim* (for the sake of heaven). Leah Pearl is a petty thief and she must be dismissed from her position. Even though there was probably no more than \$50 in the box, a crook is a crook and she should not be employed by our institution". Mr. Brown concurred.

Three days later Mr. Brown notified Leah that her employment was terminated. Not wishing to embarrass her, he told her and the entire staff that her job was eliminated for budgetary concerns.

Leah's husband had passed away suddenly two years earlier. The loss of her husband and the challenge of raising three young children by herself were extremely difficult burdens and had brought on a bleeding ulcer. Losing her job added further stress, as she could no longer provide for her children, and her ulcer now required hospitalization.

While Leah was in the hospital, her children initially stayed with neighbors. Eventually the neighbors found it too difficult to care for the children, and they were placed in foster homes. This made Leah's condition even worse.

One day Sam saw Leah's six-year-old son walking in a mall with his foster parent. Sam asked the little boy where his mother was, and with tears in his eyes, he said she was in the hospital the past few months.

Though Sam was upset with Leah, he decided to visit her in the hospital to discuss her children's well being. On the way, Sam thought to himself, "Isn't it amazing how G-d punishes people for their misconduct? What *Hashgocha Protis* (Divine Providence)!" Sam was now more certain than ever that he had done the right thing.

Sam walked into Leah's room and was shocked to see her. Leah was a shell of her former self. Sam felt sorry for her and asked how she had become so sick.

Leah told Sam about the stress in her life, which led her to her medical condition. Leah concluded by telling Sam the following.

“Yesterday, Rabbi Rabinowitz, the principal of the Yeshiva, came to see me. Rabbi Rabinowitz has been a good friend. He knew how hard things were for me. In fact, three days before I was fired, I came to Rabbi Rabinowitz in tears because I had no money to buy supper for my three children. Rabbi Rabinowitz gave me the key to the petty cash drawer and said to take whatever was in there. He said he would return the money the next day. When I was let go from my job, he tried to intercede, but Mr. Brown insisted the Yeshiva had to trim the budget. It’s nice of you to come as well and express concern for my children and me. It means a lot to me.”

Sam almost fainted on the spot.

The *Malach* sat behind the desk and looked sternly at Sam Stein. “80 times”, said the *Malach*. Sam had no idea what he meant.

AJFB2: Challenging Our Perceptions from *The Other Side of the Story* (pp. 28-31) by Yehudis Samet

The baby was drifting off to sleep. It was 3:30 in the afternoon. Maybe I would be able to close my eyes and rest a little. The house was filled with children, friends, and friends of friends, happy sounds. Everything was okay. A good time to nap.

The doorbell rang. I decided to answer it. I'll never go back to sleep anyway.

I pulled on the door handle, more asleep than awake. My face brightened. "Oh, Lea, come on in. How nice to see you."

Lea Newman is one of my good friends, very respected by all. "I didn't come to visit, although I'd like to," she began.

"Something important came up and I feel you should know."

There was a sinking feeling in my stomach. What would be coming? Was it about one of my children? My mind flipped through the smiling faces and drew a blank, it was one of those peaceful seasons where everyone was happy with teachers, friends, sisters and brothers, and parents.

She seemed to be waiting for me to say something. I didn't.

She leaned forward. "Didn't he tell you?"

Oh, so it was my son. That narrowed it down. What could he have done and why did I have to miss a nap to hear about it.

"You know my daughter Chavie is running the summer day camp. That's where it happened. She felt she had to consult with me before she spoke with you. We decided it would be better if I were the one to come and tell you." My friend's voice was uncharacteristically solemn.

My son was eight and this day camp was for four-year-olds. It must have been pretty bad if Chavie had to tell her mother. Chavie is eighteen and knows how to handle children. What could he have done?

"What's the problem?" I asked her in as casual a tone as possible. Her answer exceeded anything that I would have imagined:

"Yesterday, Chavie was inside giving out pails and shovels for the sand pile when she heard a child crying outside. She looked out of the window and saw your son holding a piece of rubber hose and hitting little Shimmy. He was lying on his back and crying and holding up his hands to protect himself."

I was in shock. Such a picture! Rubber hoses, bullies, helpless victims, defenseless children — it was like a splash of ice water in my face.

I heard the baby crying. But every thing seemed far away as I looked into my mind and saw my son's face, from birth until now. I lined up his misdeeds and pulled out from all the files his worst behavior. This horrible picture simply did not fit him.

"Did Chavie actually see him hitting Shimmy?" I asked.

"Absolutely."

"Are you sure it was a rubber hose?"

"Yes. She went right out and took it away."

"Didn't Chavie ask them what it was all about?"

"Yes. Shimmy said the big boys wouldn't let him play with them."

"What was my son doing there anyway?" I asked.

"That's what Chavie wanted to know!" her mother exclaimed.

Remember, I told myself, don't make knots. Don't let her tie up the package and label it forever. There is always at least one other side to a story, if not more.

"Lea, I appreciate your coming over to tell me this yourself. I'll discuss it with my son when he comes home."

"I don't envy the punishment he'll get." she said as she left.

When my son came home, I gave him something to eat and calmly ask him if he had had a good day.

"Yes," he said.

"Did anything unusual happen today?"

"Nope."

"Anything you'd like to tell me about?"

"No, nothing special," I sighed.

"Today I heard about something that happened and I'd like to hear what you have to say," When I finished repeating what I had heard, this is the story he told me:

"Me and my friends finished learning and went out to play ball. We were playing in the grass next to the fence, outside the camp. A little kid from the camp came out and threw sand in our faces. We yelled at him to go away and he ran inside. He came out after a few minutes with a stick and hit us. We chased him and the teacher saw us and shouted at us not to come in the yard again.

"We were playing again when he came after us. This time he had a piece of rubber hose. We all ran after him but I'm faster. I chased him into the camp playground, near the slide, next to the fence and he turned around and raised the hose to hit me. I grabbed the hose in the air and he stepped backwards to pull it away and he tripped over something and fell on his back.

"Just then the teacher came out and shouted at me. After that we all went to play somewhere else."

Still the detective, I asked him a few more questions. "Why did you chase him? If he was bothering you so much, why didn't you go look for the teacher?"

"We didn't want to get him in trouble."

"So why did you hit him?"

"I never hit him! How could I hit him? He's just a little kid."

Later in the day, we went over to Lea's house. She and her daughter Chavie were both home. My son repeated his story in full. Mrs. Newman turned to her daughter and said: "Didn't you say that you saw him hitting Shimmy?"

"Well," Chavie replied hesitantly, "I'm not sure. I thought I did. . . but I guess I never actually saw him hit Shimmy, I just assumed from the way he was standing and holding the rubber hose that he had hit him."

She added up two plus two — a raised hose in a hand and a child lying on his back on the ground. It seemed like easy addition. Nonetheless, she came up with the wrong answer.

AJFB3: A Multi-Faceted Role

from *The Other Side of the Story* (pp. 55-57) by Yehudis Samet

It was late Tuesday night when the phone rang. A good friend of mine by the name of J.P. was calling. "Perhaps you can help me," he said. "I'm making a wedding soon, and I'd like you to recommend a good photographer."

After giving it some thought, I gave him the name of a man who is both an excellent photographer and is also a very reasonably priced, "I've heard about him," came my friend's reply, "but I was also told that he was unreliable."

"Oh, really," I said, quite surprised. "What makes you say so?"

"Well, I'm told that he was recently hired for a bar mitzvah and he first arrived after it was half over. He missed half the affair. There's no way I'd hire a person who is so irresponsible," J.P. said.

It's certainly a severe charge, I thought to myself. "Are you sure about it?" I asked. "That's a very strong accusation!"

"I'm quite positive," was his reply. "Yisroel was the head of the band that night, and he told it to me himself. In fact, I met someone else who attended that same affair, and he verified the facts. I'm not making it up. It's 100% true! Go check it out yourself."

"I sure will," I said. I've learned to be very skeptical as to the authenticity of any story, and I also knew that even if perfectly true, there might be a good explanation.

"Maybe due to unforeseen circumstances he was delayed?" I said to the caller, trying my best to judge favorably. "Perhaps there was some sort of emergency. What makes you so sure that it was a case of negligence or pure laziness?"

"Perhaps you're right," replied J.P., "but I just can't risk it. Besides, there is no reason in the world for coming late. He should have started out early enough so that even if his car broke down he could have taken a car service and made it on time. There is absolutely no good excuse for a photographer to walk in after half the affair is over!"

It was hard to argue with him. He had a strong point, and my defense wasn't too convincing. When I hung up the phone I found myself in a real quandary. Could I really recommend someone who is unreliable? Was it truly negligence on his part? Was my argument in his defense just a cover-up for his lack of responsibility? Truthfully, I wasn't really convinced myself of his innocence, so how could I convince someone else?

Firstly, I decided to check out the story on my own to see if it was really true. I called the musician, who was a close friend of mine, and he verified the entire story. There was no question as to its authenticity.

The very next day, I bumped into my good friend, the photographer, I brought up the subject of the bar mitzvah in question.

"Is it true that you arrived halfway through the bar mitzvah?" I asked.

"Yes, it certainly is," he said. "But why are you asking?" he wanted to know.

"I just recommended you for a job, and the people refused to take you. They claimed you were unreliable because you didn't come on time."

He looked at me in disbelief and shock, and then began telling me his story. I listened very carefully.

"The job was not mine at all," he began. "The photographer who had been hired for the job failed to show up. I received an emergency call in the middle of the affair to come down immediately. Despite being very busy at that moment, I dropped everything I was doing and raced down to the hall as quickly as possible."

With a hurt look written on his face, he added, "I only did it as a personal favor to them."

The more we practice judging people favorably, the less likely we are to speak against them, because

...

- the more insight and comprehension, the less disapproval,
- the more we consider possibilities, the less we will censure and blame.

- the more we make an effort to reconsider, the less chance there will be to pass hasty, superficial judgments . . .
because understanding and condemnation are mutually exclusive.

When you hear a report of lashon hara, act like a judge in court who isn't allowed to pass judgment until he hears both sides. You can't believe what was told to you until you consider the other side of the story.

AJFB4: How Far Do We Have To Take This? from *The Other Side of the Story* (pp. 90-91) by Yehudis Samet

I was going back to Yerushalayim after spending a few months in Tzfas. I left my bags with the Kliens, a wonderful family I had met while studying there. They happened to be away just then, but they gave me the keys to their house, so that I could come in the morning to get my luggage.

I was late and ran into the house, knowing that the taxi I had ordered would be there soon. As I dropped my pocketbook down in the kitchen, a girl who had just come to Tzfas a few days earlier walked in. I had been introduced to her —she was a traveler, out to see the world. She had a lot of energy, but few resources. She had just come by to say hello to the Kleins and was sorry they weren't home. She asked me for a glass of water and I quickly gave her one, and then ran to the back of the house to gather my things. I came back and she was gone — and so was my pocket book! The front door was wide open. A few seconds later, my taxi arrived.

I had to postpone going back to Yerushalayim and report the theft to the police. I also had to cancel my checks, and report the missing passport and ID card. Imagine the audacity of that girl, walking off with my purse right from under my nose!

The next morning I looked around the area with the hope of at least salvaging my bag with whatever the thief had chosen to leave in it.

I did find the pocketbook — across the street, by the garbage bin, barely recognizable since it was covered with mud. I looked inside, and to my astonishment everything was still there — my money, passport, checks; not a thing was missing.

Now I was perplexed. I tried to imagine the scene: She must have made a dash with my bag and as she was rummaging through it, she saw someone watching her. She probably got scared, dropped it and ran. Such an ending to all crooks, I thought. And a happy ending for me.

But that really wasn't the ending. When the Kleins returned, I told Mrs. Cold how someone had made off with my bag. But before I could give her any details, I saw her chuckling. Now what's so funny about a theft? I wondered.

Seeing my confusion, she told me that she should have warned me to keep the front door closed because she has constant problems with cats coming in and running off with things. My pocketbook has a long, thin shoulder strap, and obviously it was a fun toy for that cat, who dragged it through the mud and played with it until he found something more interesting to do.

I hadn't really wanted to accuse that girl, but how could I have thought otherwise? The thief—a cat? Come on!

What's the point of telling a story like this? Was the girl at fault for not thinking that the thief might have been a cat? Would you have thought of that possibility? How does *dan l'kaf zechus* fit in here? We are not faulted for not considering an excuse we could never have thought of. We are not faulted for lacking information about cats or other things.

What we can learn from this story and others like it is that there is a lot about life we don't know. That's what these stories are all about: to persuade and encourage us that when we catch ourselves being judgmental and unequivocally condemning, we should keep in mind that it might just be . . . another cat story.

AJFB5: The Double Standard
from *The Other Side of the Story* (pp. 110-111) by Yehudis Samet

Every morning on his way to work, Suri's husband took their three-year-old son across the street and sent him off to kindergarten. One day, with her husband running late, Suri told him she would take their son across the street.

Once they were on the other side of the street, little Ari started to fuss, refusing to go by himself, "He's taking advantage of me," thought Suri. "He never does this to his father." She tried a few tactics — "I'll give you a candy," "There's your friend" — but nothing helped. Finally, Suri took him by the hand and walked down the block to the building. At the entrance she turned to leave, but Ari was still reluctant, so Suri brought him into the classroom. When they entered the room, she was not happy with what she saw: a room full of youngsters and no teacher in sight. She was annoyed at the teacher for being so irresponsible as to leave the children alone like that.

As soon as she came home she called the school office and complained to the secretary, who said she would tell the principal.

A few days later, Suri had second thoughts about having made the call in haste. She berated herself for not speaking to the teacher first. She called back the school to try to undo the damage, but before she could say more than her name, the secretary interrupted her by saying she had informed the principal and he had agreed with Suri that children that age should never be left alone. Not only that, but he had spoken to the teacher about it.

The next morning, as little Ari was getting ready to leave with his father, he said, "You know, Mommy came to my school."

"Oh!" said his father in surprise. "When?"

"The other day when you couldn't take me, Mommy took me all the way."

"I'm so sorry that you had to take him all the way there," Suri's husband turned to her. "What did you do with the kids?"

"Well, I left them alone. It was just for a little while. I really didn't have a choice, Ari wouldn't go by himself. You know I would usually never do that, but there was no other way . . ."

As Suri heard herself going on and on she almost choked on her words, thinking about the teacher she'd been so quick to condemn.

AJFB6: Judging the Whole Person
from *The Other Side of the Story* (pp. 156-157) by Yehudis Samet

My husband and I went to a neighbor's wedding. We made an effort to arrive early so that we could get good seats. I can't enjoy a wedding unless I can see what's going on. I usually pick the aisle seat, about four rows back, so as not to take the seats of family and relatives.

When I got there, the hall was still quite empty. I picked my seat and after a few minutes people started coming. Ten minutes later, when the seats were filling up, a woman came to where I was sitting and asked if I could move down. I thought that was unfair of her since I had come early just to get that seat. But I wasn't going to tell her that, so I just pointed out that the seats next to me were filled.

"Could everybody move down?" she asked, pointing out that there was an empty seat about six chairs down.

Here I had made this big effort to come early to get the seat of my choice and this lady who comes in late just says, "Move over!"

I didn't want to make a scene, so I passed the message to the people in the row. No one else seemed to mind, so we all moved over one, and she sat in the aisle seat.

As she sat down, she turned to me and said quietly, "I have to keep an eye on my son," and she pointed to the boy right across the aisle from her. I looked up. She was referring to a boy of about 15 years of age. Who's she trying to kid? I thought to myself That boy looks old enough to take care of himself just fine. It was one thing to ask for my seat, but to make up such a flimsy excuse--that she needed to keep an eye on her son, who was no baby — took double chutzpah.

She struck up a conversation and asked where I was from, which side of the family I was on, etc. She said she had come as a guest of the bride, who was her son's teacher. Every so often she would bend over towards her son and explain to him what was going on.

And then it hit me. I remembered that this past year the bride had been a teacher for mentally handicapped children. As I watched more carefully, I could see that this boy was a special child. My indignation and her "chutzpah"—both evaporated.

We are told, judge the whole person favorably, which can be understood as saying, without the whole picture, we can't help but misjudge. We should therefore judge favorably, based on this understanding: If we could see the whole, that disturbing behavior would surely look more favorable.

AJFB7: Why Don't People Speak Up? from *The Other Side of the Story* (pp. 239-241) by Yehudis Samet

Mrs. Beck arrived promptly for her scheduled x-rays — four in all. She sat in the waiting room until her name was announced. After the x-rays were taken, she was told she could wait outside until she was called. When the technician finally called her over, though, it was not to hand her the x-rays, but to apologize, She was sorry, she hadn't put her in the right position and now she would have to repeat two of them.

Mrs. Beck felt her muscles tense. Because of this technician's incompetence I have to be re-x-rayed!

The technician took her back into the room, and prepared her once more for the repeats. Already annoyed, Mrs. Beck was fit to be tied when the technician clumsily pushed her up against the screen.

Again, she asked her to wait outside until called. The technician finally opened the door and came over to Mrs. Beck. She told her to come back in a week for the results.

Mrs. Beck was surprised. "I always get them on the spot," she said.

"No, I'm sorry. You must come back," was the reply.

This is too much: incompetence, such clumsiness in taking the x-rays, changing the rules so arbitrarily and making it so difficult. She left before she said something she might regret.

A week later Mrs. Beck returned to pick up her x-rays and bring them over to her doctor.

"Here you have the best hospital in the city," she blurted out as soon as she sat down on the chair in his office. "The most modern equipment. How could they hire such an unqualified technician?" and she told him what had happened.

When she finished, the doctor leaned back in his chair and began slowly. "That technician has been with us for 20 years. Not only is she the best around, but she is also a very compassionate human being." He paused for a minute and then continued, "She pushed you up against the screen because this machine gives a more accurate reading if the person being x-rayed is right up against it."

As Mrs. Beck sat there dumbfounded, she heard the doctor add, "She looked at the first x-rays and saw something worrisome. She showed them to the radiologist, who told her to repeat them. She didn't return them immediately, because she wanted the top man to check them.

"Because she didn't want to worry you, she made it seem as if it was her fault."

Mrs. Beck certainly had no doubt that the technician was incompetent. The evidence looked conclusive. In fact, the technician actually accepted the blame.

Not only Mrs. Beck, but most of us, would feel that in such a situation there is no point in giving a person the benefit of the doubt. Where's the doubt? She admitted her guilt! It seems conclusive enough, and yet, as we see here, the person still may be guiltless.

Even when the evidence seems indisputable — even when a person actually admits his guilt — there may still be room to judge him favorably.

During our stay in this world, we manage to pack our hand luggage full of suspicions. What's more, we feel quite self-righteous and certainly justified in our condemnations.

In a mounting crescendo of certainty we insist:

- "Well, if he had something to say, why didn't he speak up? Isn't that a proof that he has nothing to say in his own defense?"
 And we continue;
- "Okay, he did speak up. But that flimsy excuse is proof that he has nothing to say for himself."
 And finally, we present our conclusive evidence to prove that in this case there simply is no room for the mitzvah of judging favorably:
- "But he actually said he did it!"

While people should explain themselves, the fact is, they often don't and frequently can't. We hope the above true stories have helped explain why.