



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

Packet 1

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

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbos, 127b

July 9, 2006

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Use of Material

The material in this *ACTT Module Packet* is intended for the use of the ACTT organization’s members and any other individuals interested in creating and sustaining meaningful changes in their lives. If an organization is interested in using this material, the ACTT organization would appreciate your contacting us. Thank you.

ACTT Judging Favorably Module – Packet 1

Goal of *Judging Favorably* Module

To develop an awareness and a mindset that results in consistently giving each person the benefit of the doubt and judging each person favorably.

Module Duration

Judging Favorably will be covered in several parts, where each part will last for a two month period.

To Do List

- If you are not yet a member of the ACTT Organization, fill out a membership application and submit it
- Fill out the “ACTT *Judging Favorably* Commitment Form”, keep a copy for yourself and submit a copy to the organization
- On a daily basis:
 - Follow the Learning Schedule and record your *Judging Favorably* activity in your “ACTT *Judging Favorably* Activity Log”
 - Record your maintenance activity (from *Ahavas Chesed* module, e.g., act of chesed) in your “ACTT *Judging Favorably* Activity Log”
- Participate in the chizuk activities, as desired:
 - ACTT *Judging Favorably* kick-off event and face-to-face discussion group meetings
 - ACTT online discussion group and e-mail list
 - Read inspirational material from sources recommended by the ACTT organization and also distributed by the ACTT organization
 - Recommend inspirational material to the ACTT membership and submit inspirational material to be distributed to all the ACTT members

***Judging Favorably* Resources**

The following are some resources for learning about *Judging Favorably*:

- “It Wasn't How It Seemed - Short stories about people who jumped to conclusions” by Yehudis Samet; Artscroll Mesorah; ISBN: 1578194822
- “The Other Side Of The Story - Giving people the benefit of the doubt - stories and strategies” by Yehudis Samet; Artscroll Mesorah; ISBN: 0899065198
- “Courtrooms of the Mind” by Hanoch Teller; New York City Publishing Company; ISBN: 0961477245

- “A Tzaddik in Our Time: The Life of Rabbi Aryeh Levin” by Simcha Raz, Translator: Charles Wengrov; Feldheim Publishers; ISBN: 0873061306
- “Tisha B’ Av 1999: A Positive Light: How judging with favor reshapes our world” audio tape with Rabbi Yissocher Frand; Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation
- “Tikkun Ha'Adam: Judging Others Favorably” shiurim by Rav Moshe Weinberger in MP3 audio format downloadable from the Aish Kodesh Institute web site: www.aishkodesh.org

The Obligation to Judge People Favorably

Reproduced with permission of Bnay Yakov Publications, Brooklyn, NY, from “Love Your Neighbor.” by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin

בצדק תשפוט עמיתך – “*You shall judge your fellow man with righteousness*” (Vayikra/Leviticus 19:15)

This verse obligates us to give someone the benefit of the doubt when we see him performing an action that could be interpreted in his favor. (Rambam, *Sefer Hamitzvos*, Positive commandment 177; *Chinuch* 235)

Below are the basic laws of this commandment:

- 1) If you mistakenly suspect an innocent person of doing wrong, you are obligated to appease and bless him. (*Brochos* 31b)
- 2) We are obligated to give a pious, G-d fearing person the benefit of the doubt. This is true not only when the chance of *zechus* (a favorable judgment) and *chov* (an unfavorable judgment) seem equal, but even when it appears most likely that his action was improper (*Chofetz Chayim*, ch. 3 and *Guard Your Tongue*, pp. 49-50). Since he is always meticulously careful to observe all the laws, we should assume that in this instance also his behavior was proper under the circumstances.
- 3) We are obligated to give an average person the benefit of the doubt if the probability of *zechus* and *chov* seem equal. (*ibid.*)
- 4) If the possibility of *chov* seems more likely than the possibility of *zechus* in the case of an average person, it is proper to leave the matter undecided in your mind. According to the letter of the law, however, you are permitted to assume the side of *chov*. (*ibid.*)

Even when you are permitted to judge someone unfavorably, you are forbidden to relate the matter to others for that would constitute *loshon hora*. (*Chofetz Chayim* 3:2; see *Chofetz Chayim*, chapters 4, 5, and 10 for instances when it is permissible to relate derogatory information)

- 5) Even when the possibility of *chov* appears more likely, it is meritorious for you to give an average person the benefit of the doubt. (*ibid.*, ch. 3)
- 6) We are not supposed to give a *rosho* (a wicked person) the benefit of the doubt (*Chofetz Chayim* 4:77; *Guard Your Tongue*, p. 59). Since the person intentionally violates severe offenses, we may assume that until he repents he will continue to do evil.

The status of a *rosho* is not easily determined. A *rosho* is a person who persists in evil conduct in spite of all warnings and chastisements, but not many are capable of effectively chastising others. So while our judgment of a *rosho* must be an unfavorable one, we do not often find ourselves dealing with a genuine *rosho*. (see *Marganisa Tova*, no. 17 and *Jewish Observer*, Feb. 1977)

- 7) If the person in question is a stranger and you do not know whether he is righteous or wicked, even though according to the letter of the law you are not obligated to judge him favorably, it is meritorious to do so nevertheless. (*Chofetz Chayim, Positive Commandment 3, B'air Mayim Chayim*)
- 8) Even when you must mentally judge people favorably, you still should be on your guard to protect yourself or someone else from a loss. (*Sefer Habris, part 2, essay 13, ch. 14; Kuntros Mishpot Tzedek 2:11*)
- 9) Although you must judge people favorably, when you are able to clarify the matter in order to correct the person if he has erred, it is proper to do so. (Shaloh; see *Kuntros Mishpot Tzedek 2:12* and footnotes 19 and 20)

If a community transgresses and nothing can be done to rectify the situation, you should find some merit for them. But whenever action can be taken to correct a wrong, we are obligated to take action. (*Marganisa Tova, no. 9*)

- 10) In one's prayers to G-d one should try to find merit for the Jewish people as a whole. (*Marganisa Tova, no. 9*)

Once a pious person was walking with his disciples. As they passed a dead dog, his students said, "How awful is the stench of this carcass."

"How white are its teeth!" he told them; and they immediately regretted having spoken derogatorily about it. (Chovas Halvovos, Shaar Hakniah, ch. 6)

The pious man wanted to train his students to look at only the good in everything they see. Thusly trained they would be inclined to judge people favorably. (Rabbi Shmuel Houminer)

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter said, "When I first started learning mussar I became angry at the whole world, but not at myself. Afterward, I became angry at myself also. Finally, I became angry only at myself, and I judged the whole world l'chaf zchus (to the side of merit)." (Ohr Hamussar, vol. 1, p. 55)

In Jerusalem, there is a group that regularly discusses practical ways to judge people favorably. A member of the group gives true-to-life situations, and everyone else offers explanations that would present the person involved in a favorable light. For instance:

- 1) You did not receive an invitation to a wedding.
 - a) Perhaps the person was under the impression that he had already sent you an invitation.
 - b) Perhaps he sent it to you and it was lost in the mail.
 - c) Perhaps he cannot afford to invite many people.
- 2) You are standing at a bus stop with a heavy load of packages, and a neighbor drives by in an empty car and does not offer you a ride.
 - a) Perhaps he was only going a short distance.
 - b) Perhaps he has already committed himself to pick up some other people.
 - c) Perhaps he had a problem that weighed on his mind so heavily that he could not think of anything else.
- 3) You were hoping that someone would invite you to his house, but he failed to do so.
 - a) Perhaps someone in his family is ill.
 - b) Perhaps he was planning to be away from home.
 - c) Perhaps he did not have enough food in the house.

By judging someone favorably, even if your assumption is wrong, you still fulfill a Torah commandment.

ACTT Module Packet Appendix



ACTT Commitment Form – Judging Favorably Module

Remember, it is better to commit to less – you can always do more!

Please PRINT all information

This commitment does not constitute a vow; I am doing the following, bli neder

From ___/___/___ To ___/___/___

In memory of _____

As a zechus for:

a refuah shelaimah for _____

a shidduch for _____

parnassa for _____

other _____

- *Performing ___ Judging Favorably act(s) daily in a 😊 mood*
(ACTT recommends 1-2 acts of Judging Favorably daily – the ACTT Daily Activity Log has suggestions)
- *Performing ___ act(s) of chesed daily/weekly in a 😊 mood*
(ACTT recommends 1 act of chesed daily – this is a maintenance activity from *Ahavas Chesed*; the *Ahavas Chesed Module Packet 1* has suggestions)
- *Learning ___ minutes daily from* (ACTT recommends 5 minutes daily):
 - The ACTT *Judging Favorably* Learning Schedule Book (see *ACTT Daily Activity Log*)
 - “The Other Side Of The Story” by Yehudis Samet
 - “Courtrooms of the Mind” by Hanoch Teller
 - Other _____

(Record your *Judging Favorably* and *Ahavas Chesed* activities, and check off what you learned, in the *ACTT Daily Activity Log*)

Please PRINT all information

Name: _____ Date _____

Email address: _____ Tel. number _____

Address: _____

😊 *Be happy about your ability to Judge Others Favorably!* 😊

Please email form: commitment@actt613.org or mail: ACTT, 48 Edgemount Road, Edison, NJ 08817

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ACTT Daily Activity Log – Judging Favorably Module

Abbreviations: 1) IW = Artscroll's "It Wasn't How It Seemed" by Yehudis Samet; 2) AJFB = ACTT *Judging Favorably* Source Booklet – to be distributed;
3) JF = *Judging Favorably*; 4) AC = *Ahavas Chesed*;

Acknowledgement: Some of the ideas for Judging Favorably were adapted from "The Other Side of the Story" by Yehudis Samet.

IDEAS FOR JUDGING FAVORABLY

<p>Don't jump to conclusions Judge your neighbor's actions favorably "Judge your fellow man fairly" (Leviticus 19:15) Look for possible explanation in another's behavior Give your friend the benefit of the doubt Look for the good in others "Judge all people to the side of merit" (Ethics of the Fathers 1:6)</p>	<p>Remember, it could be a miscommunication... Are we missing any facts? Look for people's strengths Remember, things are not always what they seem! Try to explain... not complain about other people's actions Focus on solutions - not recriminations Remember the excuses one makes for oneself - apply these excuses to the one who wronged you</p>
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		Learned (√)		Activity	
Date	(√)	Book	Story	(√)	Notes (description of activity, comments, etc.)

EXAMPLE ENTRY

Day	m/d/06	√	IW	x	√	JF: Realized that my friend did not see me carrying packages when he passed by
					√	AC: did car pool for a neighbor with a sick child at home

Mon	7/17/06		IW	1		
Tue	7/18/06		IW	2		
Wed	7/19/06		IW	3		
Thu	7/20/06		IW	4		
Fri	7/21/06		IW	5		



ACTT Daily Activity Log (continued) – Judging Favorably Module

		Learned (√)			Activity	
Date	(√)	Book	Story	(√)	Notes (description of activity, comments, etc.)	
Sat	7/22/06	IW	6			
Sun	7/23/06	IW	7			
Mon	7/24/06	IW	8			
Tue	7/25/06	IW	9			
Wed	7/26/06	IW	10			
Thu	7/27/06	IW	11			
Fri	7/28/06	IW	12			
Sat	7/29/06	IW	13			
Sun	7/30/06	IW	14			
Mon	7/31/06	IW	15			
Tue	8/1/06	IW	16			



ACTT Daily Activity Log (continued) – Judging Favorably Module

		Learned (√)			Activity	
Date	(√)	Book	Story	(√)	Notes (description of activity, comments, etc.)	
Wed	8/2/06	IW	17			
Thu	8/3/06	IW	18			
Fri	8/4/06	IW	19			
Sat	8/5/06	IW	20			
Sun	8/6/06	IW	21			
Mon	8/7/06	IW	22			
Tue	8/8/06	IW	23			
Wed	8/9/06	IW	24			
Thu	8/10/06	IW	25			
Fri	8/11/06	IW	26			
Sat	8/12/06	IW	27			



ACTT Daily Activity Log (continued) – Judging Favorably Module

		Learned (√)			Activity	
Date	(√)	Book	Story	(√)	Notes (description of activity, comments, etc.)	
Sun	8/13/06	IW	28			
Mon	8/14/06	IW	29			
Tue	8/15/06	IW	30			
Wed	8/16/06	IW	31			
Thu	8/17/06	IW	32			
Fri	8/18/06	IW	33			
Sat	8/19/06	IW	34			
Sun	8/20/06	IW	35			
Mon	8/21/06	IW	36			
Tue	8/22/06	IW	37			
Wed	8/23/06	IW	38			



ACTT Daily Activity Log (continued) – Judging Favorably Module

		Learned (√)			Activity	
Date	(√)	Book	Story	(√)	Notes (description of activity, comments, etc.)	
Thu	8/24/06	IW	39			
Fri	8/25/06	IW	40			
Sat	8/26/06	IW	41			
Sun	8/27/06	IW	42			
Mon	8/28/06	IW	43			
Tue	8/29/06	IW	44			
Wed	8/30/06	IW	45			
Thu	8/31/06	IW	46			
Fri	9/1/06	IW	47			
Sat	9/2/06	IW	48			
Sun	9/3/06	IW	49			



ACTT Daily Activity Log (continued) – Judging Favorably Module

		Learned (√)			Activity	
Date	(√)	Book	Story	(√)	Notes (description of activity, comments, etc.)	
Mon	9/4/06	IW	50			
Tue	9/5/06	AJFB	1			
Wed	9/6/06	AJFB	2			
Thu	9/7/06	AJFB	3			
Fri	9/8/06	AJFB	4			
Sat	9/9/06	AJFB	5			
Sun	9/10/06	AJFB	6			
Mon	9/11/06	AJFB	7			
Tue	9/12/06	AJFB	8			
Wed	9/13/06	AJFB	9			
Thu	9/14/06	AJFB	10			

Glossary

Ahavas Chesed	.....loving kindness
B'li Neder	.....without making a formal commitment
Bitachon	.....trust in Hashem
Chesed	.....kindness
Chizuk	.....moral support
Hakaras HaTov	.....gratitude
Kavanah	.....concentration
Klal Yisrael	.....the Jewish people
Lashon Hara	.....evil tongue (speech) that denotes gossip and defamation
Machsom L'fi	.....guarding one's tongue
Midah	.....character trait
Midos	.....character traits
Mussar	.....ethical teaching
Neshamah	.....soul
Nisayon	.....a test
Parnasa	.....livelihood
Refuah Shleimah	.....a complete recovery from an illness
Sefer	.....a book
Shidduch	.....a match of two eligible and marriageable Jewish singles
Shiurim	.....classes
Talmidim	.....students
Teshuva	.....repentance
Zechus	.....merit