

Laws of Interpersonal Relationships:

1- Judge Your Fellow With Righteousness - Part 1:

The Mitzvah:

1. The Torah commands us to “judge your fellow with righteousness.” The reason for this Mitzvah is in order to maintain peace and friendship between people, by removing suspicions and by judging others honestly. The Talmud says that “whoever judges his fellow favorably, will be judged favourably in Heaven,” & “One who suspects the innocent will suffer physical punishment.”
2. This Mitzvah is incumbent on every Jew - man or woman - at all times, in respect to every Jew - man, woman, child or adult. (excluding in respect to wicked people and non-Jews)
3. Children should be trained in this Mitzvah from an early age. This can be done by thinking out loud in the presence of your children, and sharing your thoughts with them when you see someone doing a questionable action; or by describing imaginary situations and help children practice using favourable judgment.
4. The basic rule is: In general, any time we see a Jew doing something that could be construed as either a positive or a negative act, we are obligated to give him the benefit of the doubt and judge him favourably *in our minds*, rather than suspecting him of being guilty of committing a sin.
5. Even if we have not said or done anything based on our negative evaluation of the person, once we have judged him negatively *in our minds*, we have violated this Mitzvah.
6. If we judge someone negatively in a case where we are required to judge him favourably, then even if he turns out to be guilty of wrongdoing, we are still guilty of violating this Mitzvah.
7. If we judge someone favourably as required, and when the truth emerges we learn that the person really was guilty, we have still fulfilled our Mitzvah properly, regardless of the reality of the situation.

Different Situations:

1. The Halacha will differ depending on who is doing the act we have observed.
2. When observing the actions of a Tzaddik: Even if you saw him clearly doing a sin at night, do not harbour any doubts about him the next day, because he will certainly have done Teshuva by then.
3. If the act was not clearly a sin, but it leans strongly in that direction, as long as there is a far-fetched explanation for what you observed - perhaps he was forced to act in that way, or had positive intentions you were not aware of - then even if the possibility is rather remote, you are obliged to judge the Tzaddik favourably.
4. When observing the actions of a Rasha (a person whose deeds are more often bad than good, or someone who has shown himself to be totally devoid of fear of G-d): Even if you see him doing something that appears to be a good deed, if there is the possibility that his intentions are really malicious, then you should judge him negatively and assume that he was really doing something negative, or that his deed was done only to garner honor and he did not really mean well.
5. If the Rasha is also someone who leads Jews astray, then it is prohibited to judge him favourably.