

## Calmness | *Nichutah* | נִיחוּתָא

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*The words of the wise are stated gently.*

*In being good, do not be called evil*

Most positive character traits have narrow parameters. Thus, if a trait is underemphasized or overemphasized, the person can be seen as having strayed from the correct path. Just as one who is dirty is seen as being repulsive, so too is ostentation and excessive display disgusting. And just as hypocrisy — i.e., one who willfully misleads people into thinking that he acts for the public's benefit — is greatly condemnable, so too is indifference — i.e., evidencing no concern for others or for their opinions. And the verse (*Bemidbar* 32:22<sup>1</sup>) states: *And you shall be impeccable [in your actions towards] God and Israel* [נְקִיִּם מִיְהוָה, וּמִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיִיתֶם]. The verse draws a parallel between the requirement to act impeccably towards Israel and towards God.

If one is required to act impeccably so as not to be repulsive to others, then one is surely required to make every effort to insure that his actions do not lead others to hate him, God forbid. Therefore, one must be very careful in his negotiations with others. He should carefully and calmly consider matters before he speaks or acts so that he does not arouse animosity, hatred or strife, God forbid. All of one's dealings and communications with others should be carried out in a calm atmosphere. Shouting and anger are only fitting for fools and the wicked. Even at those times when one must act strictly with others, one should still make every attempt not to overstep the bounds. As our Sages said (*Baba Kamma* 81b<sup>2</sup>): *When doing good [e.g., admonishing or punishing someone], do not be called evil* [do not act in a way which leads the other person to see you as evil].<sup>3</sup>

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Rabbi Mendel of Satanov. (1845). *Chesbon ha-Nefesh*. (D. Landesman, trans.) Feldheim Publishers, New York, 1995. Pages 170-171.

*End notes added.*

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<sup>1</sup> The context of the phrase נְקִיִּם מִיְהוָה, וּמִיִּשְׂרָאֵל is *Numbers* 32:20-22

20 Then Moses said to them: “If you do this thing, if you arm yourselves before the LORD for the war,

21 and all your armed men cross over the Jordan before the LORD until He has driven out His enemies from before Him,

כ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם מֹשֶׁה, אִם-תַּעֲשׂוּן אֶת-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה: אִם-תַּחֲלְצוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה, לַמְלַחְמָה.

כא וְעָבְרָ לְכֶם כָּל-חַלוּץ אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן, לִפְנֵי יְהוָה, עַד הוֹרִישׁוּ אֶת-אֹיְבָיו, מִפְּנֵיו

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22 and the land is subdued before the LORD,  
then afterward you may return and be  
blameless before the LORD and before Israel;  
and this land shall be your possession before  
the LORD.”

כב וְנִכְבְּשָׁה הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה, וְאַחַר תָּשׁוּבוּ--  
וְהִיִּיתֶם נְקִיִּים מִיְהוָה, וּמִיִּשְׂרָאֵל; וְהִיִּיתָ הָאָרֶץ  
הַזֹּאת לְכֶם, לְאֻחֲזָה--לִפְנֵי יְהוָה

<sup>2</sup> The relevant passage in *Baba Kamma* 81b reads as follows:

[The permission] to use the paths in private fields is [implied in] a statement made by Solomon, as taught: If a man’s produce has already been removed entirely from the field, and nevertheless he does not allow persons to enter his field, what would people say of him if not, ‘What [real] benefit has that owner from his field, for in what way would people do him any harm?’ It was regarding such a person that the verse says: *While you can be good do not call yourself bad* [Berachot. 30a.] But is it [anywhere] written [in scripture]: ‘While you can be good do not call yourself bad’? — Yes, it is written to a similar effect: *Withhold not good from him to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to do it* [Proverbs 3:27].

<sup>3</sup> A similar idea can be found in *Leviticus* 19:17 —

‘You shall not hate your brother in your heart.  
You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not  
bear sin because of him.’

לֹא-תִשְׁנֵא אֶת-אַחִיךָ, בְּלִבְבְּךָ; הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת-  
עֲמִיתֶךָ, וְלֹא-תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חַטָּא.

This verse could be interpreted as ‘you may rebuke your neighbor without incurring sin as long as you do not hate him in your heart, or cause him to sin by leading him to hate you.’