

דין

Din / Judgment

Balancing judgment and compassion

Judgment Day

Ed Feinstein

Every year, we stand accused. The synagogue becomes a courtroom. God sits as judge, the Torah as prosecutor, and we the defendant standing trial. The world is judged collectively on Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, according to the Mishnah. But on Rosh Hashanah, we are judged individually — “all who enter the world pass before God one by one.” It is deeply unsettling. At stake, if not life and death, are an upheaval of conscience and a dreadful sense of shame. And it is highly unconventional. Ours is a culture of acceptance. It is considered impolite to judge, to be judgmental. It is deemed unhealthy to live with guilt or shame.

Why do we enter into this drama of judgment each year at the High Holidays?

Rabbi Harold Kushner tells a story about a man who ascends to heaven at the end of his life and finds himself standing before two doors — one marked “Judgment” and the other marked “Impunity.” He must choose. Judgment carries accusation and the risk of punishment. So, he turns toward Impunity. What would that mean? All is wiped away — the agonized moral choices, the moments of courage, and the acts of cowardice. Impunity means nothing in his life mattered, nothing resonates in the universe. Judgment or Impunity? The man chooses Judgment.

There is dignity in accountability. To be judged is to be visible, to be significant. Remember who you are, taught the sage Akaviah ben Mehallel in *Pirkei Avot*: “You come from nothing and your end is nothing, but you are called to give account of yourself before the Supreme Holy One.” Abraham Joshua Heschel taught: “The deepest human longing is to be a thought in God’s mind, to be the object of His attention. He may punish and discipline me, only let Him not forget me, not abandon me. This single desire which links

our life and our death will be fulfilled on the Days of Awe.”

What is judgment? In our very first interaction with the Divine, man and woman hid. God called to us, “*Ayecha?* Where are you?” Judgment is not about punishment. Judgment is a search for truth about the self. Judgment is the antidote to the human propensity to hide, to evade, to lie. Most especially, judgment aims to reveal the lies we tell ourselves.

“Nothing is easier than to deceive oneself,” taught the Hasidic master Menachem Mendel of Kotzk. In Heschel’s retelling of this teaching, “as the mind grows sophisticated, self-deception advances.” Lying to ourselves may be built into human personality. According to research, as early as age 3, children exhibit a “positivity bias,” a tendency to exaggerate their own positive characteristics. By adulthood, we draw pictures of ourselves that are more attractive, more capable, more moral than we really are. Why do we lie to ourselves? To feel better about ourselves. To shield us from realities we are unable to face. To evade responsibility and deny the consequences of our choices. To forestall the need to change. The problem is that self-deception keeps us from growing.

We stay stuck. We can’t fix what we don’t admit. *Din*, the struggle for truth, is the beginning of *teshuvah*, personal change.

On these holidays, we pray God might move from the throne of *din*, judgment, to the throne of *rachamim*, merciful love. We pray not to dismiss judgment but to temper its aftermath. The appeal for leniency comes only in the penalty phase of the trial. First, we must ascertain the truth. Because the only way to authenticity, to growth, and, ultimately, to God, is truth — and the way to truth is *din*.

Rabbi Ed Feinstein is senior rabbi at Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, Calif., and an instructor at the Ziegler Rabbinical School of the American Jewish University.

Art by Joyce Polance
“Smoke”
Oil on canvas, 24” x 24”

NiSh'ma

On this page, we offer three takes on a line from Pirkei Avot, a compilation of Jewish wisdom and ethics. Our commentators reflect on the relationship of judgment, truth, and peace. Our online version is interactive, and we welcome your comments. —S.B.



Rebecca Sendor-Israel: We learn in another mishnah, Sanhedrin 4:5, that anyone who kills a single person, it is as if they have destroyed an entire world (*olam*). Applying this principle to our text at the center of this page, if each person is equivalent to an *olam*, then in what ways do we each “stand” on *din*, (judgment), *emet* (truth), and *shalom* (peace/wholeness)?

Take *din* as our inner critic, our judge, our self-censor. This attribute can be positive — pushing us to be better versions of ourselves. It can also be negative — paralyzing us with our own perfectionism.

Emet is our “truth,” our moral compass, our personal narrative. This quality centers us and can direct us toward decisive impactful action. However, if the strength of our own *emet* prevents us from considering others’ narratives or truths, we risk becoming defensive and inflexible.

Shalom is our relational self that seeks community and attachment. This attribute can facilitate meaningful, loving, and authentic relationships. Our desire to get along and to belong, however, can sometimes encourage us to pathologically avoid confrontation or to constantly seek external validation.

Din, *emet*, and *shalom* operate like a system of checks and balances within each of us. Getting the correct calibration is the work of a lifetime and is a challenge we’d be wise to prioritize during this time of reflection and returning.

Rebecca Sendor-Israel practices law in the Greater Boston Area. She has worked at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., and at the U.S. Federal District Court of Massachusetts. She is passionate about access to meaningful and substantive Jewish ritual, and serves on the board of the Mayyim Hayyim Community Mikveh, and as a *gabbai* at the Washington Square Minyan in Brookline.



Lorin Fife: In Rebecca Sendor-Israel’s commentary, she probes the competing positive and negative attributes of *din*, *emet*, and *shalom* by reframing the universal as the individual. But how do we avoid the negative? In a parallel text, *Pirkei Avot* provides us with a guide to assist us in calibrating our lives as we seek to bring the positive aspects of judgment, truth, and peace into the world: “Shimon the Righteous would say, ‘On three things the world stands: on *Torah*, on *avodah* (service), and on *gemilut hasidim* (acts of loving-kindness).’” (*Pirkei Avot* 1:2)

Torah, we learn, provides us with the touchstones that guide us as we attempt to bring justice into the world, both personally and on a cosmic level. It provides us with a prism through which we can attempt to intuit and identify the truth, *emet*, and pursue justice without the paralysis imposed by perfectionism.

Avodah in Hebrew means work, but it also describes service and worship. It suggests a seamless approach to life in which our efforts can introduce truth, divine wisdom, and goodness, *Torah*, into the world we inhabit. It also compels us to interact with and understand the truths experienced by other human beings, teaching tolerance, the antidote to judgmental inflexibility.

Gemilut hasidim, acts of loving-kindness, elevate *tzedakah* with an understanding that they emanate from the covenant between human beings and also between God and Israel.

As we approach the Days of Awe and bring into our lives *Torah*, *avodah*, and *gemilut hasidim*, we just might also help to introduce *din*, *emet*, and *shalom* into this tumultuous world.

Lorin Fife is an attorney, an artist, and a community activist. He has served as chairman of the board of the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles and on the board of trustees of the Jewish Agency for Israel.



Yoni Fife: Our rabbis postulate two different three-legged structures that serve as the foundational elements of our

universe. The juxtaposition of these conceptualizations and the need to harmonize them provide a fascinating way to understand our place in the world as we approach this contemplative time of year.

The first set — *din*, *emet*, and *shalom* — represents values that seem to be under constant attack in our society and, as highlighted in Rebecca Sendor-Israel’s commentary, in ourselves. *Din*, the rule of law, is threatened today in Israel and in the United States by leaders who value their own political survival over protecting the most fundamental principles underlying democratic society and the basic structure that has kept the Jewish people together for centuries. The very concept of *emet*, truth, has been called into question by those who claim that any negative news is fake news. As we enter an era where bluster and instability drive international (and, often, interpersonal) relations, we veer farther away from a time defined by *shalom*, peace.

The second set — *Torah*, *avodah*, and *gemilut hasidim* — represents approaches to help us return to the principles of *din*, *emet*, and *shalom*. *Torah*, the original source of our *din*, has provided an anchor to help our people survive much more perilous times than we find ourselves in today. *Avodah*, both the introspective and interpersonal work of considering and requesting forgiveness for the harm we have caused throughout the year and the spiritual *avodah* of prayer and repentance, facilitates returning to *emet* as we consider where we ourselves have fallen short. *Gemilut hasidim* are those seemingly small acts that can begin to bring our world from its current state of brokenness to a place closer to *shlemut*, wholeness, where we might be able to approach a world characterized by *shalom*.

Yoni Fife is a transactional attorney in the insurance industry and an active member of the Los Angeles Jewish community. He is currently board chair at IKAR, a Los Angeles Jewish community aiming to reanimate Jewish life through imaginative engagement with ritual, spiritual practice, and a deep commitment to social justice. Yoni is Lorin Fife’s son.

רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר:
על שלשה דברים העולם
עומד. על הדין. ועל האמת.
ועל השלום.

“*Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel*
says, ‘On three things the world
stands: on judgment, on truth,
and on peace.’”

– Pirkei Avot 1:18

Jewish sensibilities are approaches to living and learning that permeate Jewish culture. The ideas, values, emotions, and behaviors they express — emanating from Jewish history, stories, and sources — provide inspiration and guidance that help us to respond creatively and thoughtfully to life's challenges and opportunities. Sensibilities are culturally informed senses. This month, as we approach the High Holidays, *Sh'ma Now* examines the nature of judgment, *din*. On what merits do we judge? How is judgment balanced with compassion?

The Start of God's Day

Steven Exler

The High Holiday season is suffused with an awareness of judgment — of *din*. In that climactic prayer, the *Unetaneh Tokef*, the angels call aloud “*hineh Yom haDin*” — “it is Judgment Day!” For many Jews, what makes these truly Days of Awe is the awe and fear of God's judgment, imagining that on these days God is examining our deeds, prompting us to anxiously do the same.

What response does tradition prescribe on these days? Alongside the process of *teshuvah*, of return and self-improvement, we plead for *rachamim*, for Divine compassion. We call upon God to overlook iniquity despite our not being worthy of such treatment.

Isn't this plea at odds with *din* — with strict judgment and justice? Judges must be impartial, ruling on the evidence in front of them without recourse to mercy or to love for those being judged. How can we ask for *rachamim* on the ultimate days of *din*?

Given these contradictory requests at the heart of the High Holidays, we must ask: What is it, in fact, that we want from God — and for ourselves? Do we want to be reassured that God is fair and unbiased, even if it means the outcome for us might be less rosy? Or, do we want to be reassured that God will shine mercy and compassion on us, looking away from our wrongdoings, even if it means that the world is then bereft of a Divine paradigm of justice and fairness?

The interplay between *din* and *rachamim* appears throughout rabbinic literature, describing how God employs both attributes in the initial creation of the world and in how God judges us each year during the Days of Awe. But the interplay between these two poles is so central that the Talmud underscores that this push-and-pull is a feature of God's daily routine: During the second [three-hour unit of each day], God sits in judgment of the whole world,

and when God sees that the world deserves destruction, God transfers Godself from the seat of Justice to the seat of Mercy.” (*Avodah Zarah* 3b)

At first glance, this is remarkable. God, over and over again, makes the move from the harsh initial state of judgment to the salvific state of mercy. But at second glance, this almost seems to belittle God. Why do this charade over and over again? Why not abandon judgment and just go straight to mercy?

According to the *Torat Chayyim*, a 17th-century commentator, retaining judgment represents God's refusal to give up on the possibility of each of us being *tzaddikim*, good people striving to grow and serve and observe to the best of our ability. God's insistence on starting with *din* every day reflects God's belief in the infinite possibility of the human being.

This approach suggests that *din* and *rachamim* are separate and powerful, each holding up a different important value, and God moves from one to the other.

A second approach to the relationship between these seeming opposites comes from a talmudic passage about God's daily prayers: “Rav Zutra bar Tobi said in the name of Rav: ‘... May My mercy suppress My anger ... that I may deal with My children in the attribute of mercy and that with them I stop short of the limit of strict judgment.’” (*Berakhot* 7a)

Whereas the first wishes in this prayer reference mercy, the last wish suggests that compassion must function inside the universe of judgment, not outside it. It is not compassion blotting out *din* and it is not ignorance of the law and responsibility. Rather, it is finding a practice that works in the real world, one that incorporates compassion and human reality within the law. In this approach, we ask God to bring the attributes together, to treat us mercifully within the confines of the law, however that may play out.

May this season help us to reflect on our tradition's understanding of God's balance of *din* and *rachamim*, propelling us to think about our own employment of those tools in our lives.

Steven Exler is senior rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale – The Bayit, an Open/Modern Orthodox synagogue in the Bronx. He received *smikhah* from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School, where he was a Wexner Graduate Fellow. He sits on the rabbinic advisory boards of Eshel, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (chairperson), and Yeshivat Maharat.

Contending With 'Call-Out Culture'

Judith Rosenbaum

We are coming to understand the power of our words. After countless years (decades, centuries) of choking on the words that would convey our experiences and validate those of others — because we were not permitted to speak or were not listened to when we did — women are speaking up. This chorus of full-throated and tentative voices and stories of pain, betrayal, resilience, and solidarity, evoked with the succinct headline #MeToo, is shaking the foundations of institutions. It is remarkable, and it is about time.

And yet the pathways to and processes of change are not clear-cut or dependable. The legal system of justice is playing catch up, and too often it poorly serves those with the least amount of power. The leadership of our communities has proven again and again that it would rather sweep accusations under the rug than reckon with the ethics of power. For many people, hoarse from repeated and unheeded testimonies, it is difficult to celebrate or trust the slow, creaking awakening of communal attention to these issues.

And so, into the breach comes a flow of accusations — a “call out culture” emerging primarily in the democratic media of Twitter, Facebook, and blogs, but beginning to shape traditional media reporting as well. It is born out of warring impulses of anger and fear, impatience and a commitment to justice, urgency, impotence, and a belief that accountability and judgment ultimately lie in our own hands. This “call-out movement” is a system of vigilante justice — a tactic of public denouncement and shaming to condemn an unacceptable behavior and communicate that it will no longer be condoned. Calling out is rooted in a murky blend of perfectionism and pragmatism, insisting on holding people to a high standard while conceding the failures of the system.

Like all methods of vigilante justice, calling out is not ideal; it emerges when belief in the ideal, or patience for its slow unfolding, has expired, and the only choice remaining is a precarious calculation that weighs one destruction against another. Calling out is a blunt instrument, and its dangers are real. It is the ultimate *din*: Judgment is rendered in the accusation itself, with no trial, no jury, no process for assessment of deserved punishment. In a context in which our justice system is broken, perhaps

individuals have a responsibility to step up and render judgment. When do we wait for the system to right itself, and when do we refuse to stand by while violations continue? How do we navigate the rocky terrain between judgment and justice?

In Jewish tradition, *din* — judgment — is counterbalanced by *rachamim* — compassion. The root of *rachamim* is *rechem* — womb — a vessel of potential, nourishment, and creativity. Call-out culture makes no room for compassion or for the possibility of human change and growth. This is its ultimate weakness. Justice cannot flourish or reach its fulfillment if there is no opportunity for learning and growing.

But if judgment can short-circuit or curtail justice, so can refraining from judgment allow injustice to fester. In contending with call-out culture, we must stay alert to our deeply ingrained reflexes about whose fate matters, whose stories we heed. When we dismiss call-out culture as too dangerous, we must ask: dangerous to whom? Whom are we protecting, the alleged perpetrator or the alleged victim? Keeping quiet can also be destructive: How do we attend to and measure the price of silence? Who decides when speaking out is worthwhile, and what are the consequences if we don't listen?

In an ideal world, judgment would be meted out with compassion, not fear, anger, or pain. There would be no place for shame or shaming in the pursuit of justice. But this is not the world in which we live. Given the limitations and imperfections of our circumstances, how do we measure judgment so that it does not replicate and reify destructive behaviors but rather moves us closer to justice?

“*Mi-ma'amakim kiraticha*” — “from the depths I called to you,” says Psalm 130. These words have echoed in my mind so often over recent months. Calling out is not the problem, it is a symptom of the problem. We are in the depths, and we call from a place of desperation, from a deep need to be heard. In Psalm 130, however, the ultimate balm for this cry of despair is God's attentiveness and care, not God's judgment. Perhaps, then, the best way to meet the judgment of call-out culture and soften its destructive edge is to hear the painful call and invoke the godliness within us, asking how we can best deliver compassionate justice.

Judith Rosenbaum, PhD, is the executive director of the Jewish Women's Archive (<https://jwa.org>), which is creating an archival collection of Jewish #MeToo stories. Learn more and submit your story at jwa.org/metoo.

Truth(s) and Consequences

Hadar Harris

I took a class in college that has stuck with me: The Semiotics of Soviet Socialist Film. With *Glasnost* and an emerging Soviet openness, it was trendy in the world of pseudo-intellectual college students to watch hours of black-and-white Soviet films. I didn't understand much about the class, but there was one reality-shattering takeaway that has informed my perspective ever since. Watching grainy footage in that classroom, I learned that there are multiple versions of truth.

As children, we are told to tell the truth. As we get older, most of us learn to authenticate multiple perspectives in order to find truth. The question remains: Can we find truth or is truth always constructed? How are facts related to truth? And if truth is constructed, how does that affect justice?

As a lawyer, I have sought truth and accountability throughout my career — from my early days as a labor lawyer (mediating relationships between workers and employers), as a human rights lawyer (holding states accountable for their actions to their people), and now advocating for the rights of students and journalists to find facts and speak truth.

As lawyers, we often weave facts into a narrative of truth, convincing a judge or jury that our version of truth is the “real” one, that their judgment can rely on our truth.

Often it works, but I've also seen how dangerous it can be — where people are wrongfully convicted of crimes they did not commit; where racial bias influences conviction rates and disproportionate sentencing; where states are not held accountable for their wrongdoing; where “truth” is wrong and judgment fails.

As we contemplate this High Holiday season, as we ruminate on the ultimate judgment that God makes — who shall live and who shall die — I'm struck by the impact of different versions of truth on judgment.

Jewish wisdom teaches that *teshuvah* can help us to avoid harsh judgment and alleviate punishment. We can restore ourselves through acknowledging our wrongdoing, apologizing for our misdeeds, and then changing our behavior. But *teshuvah* only happens when we commit to a reexamination of our own truths and a reshaping of our own narratives.

Although the High Holiday liturgy says

that our fates are sealed as the gates of judgment close at the end of Yom Kippur, the Zohar offers that “judgment is concluded in the world and decrees go forth from the king's palace” only at the end of Sukkot, giving us several extra days to change God's mind. (Zohar 3:31b) Does God want to give us another chance to do the right thing? Does God need more time to investigate and draw conclusions about each person? (There are, after all, quite a lot of judgments to make.)

I'm intrigued thinking about God not as a common law judge (sitting on high and determining truth after hearing adversarial arguments twisting facts) but rather as a civil law judge (investigating as well as adjudicating). Maybe God's judgment is delayed while God considers the complicated, multifaceted lens of multiple truths, while narratives are deconstructed and reexamined, facts are explored and rebuilt, and changes in behavior are taken into account.

Lawyers construct narratives to fit their version of truth. But there is a difference between claiming various perspectives on truth to create a narrative and distorting truth to fit a narrative. We need to be diligent about this, both in our justice system and in our personal lives: to acknowledge how different truths shape narratives and to challenge ourselves to reflect on how our truths line up with the facts and how those facts affect judgments. As Jews, we are lucky to have a built-in system of appeal and restorative justice, using *teshuvah*, faith, and good deeds.

Hadar Harris is an international human rights attorney, now serving as the executive director of the Student Press Law Center in Washington D.C. She previously served as the executive director of the Northern California Innocence Project. She was awarded the 2016 Raphael Lemkin Human Rights Award from T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights.

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“Consider & Converse: *Din*” is a guide that walks you through this issue, inspires reflections, prompts questions, and provides ways to connect this reading with other meaningful experiences. It is found online at www.forward.com/shma-now.

Consider & Converse

A Guide to 'Din' —
'Judgment'

Introduction

Sh'ma Now curates conversations on a single theme rooted in Jewish tradition and the contemporary moment. At the heart of this issue of *Sh'ma Now* is the Jewish sensibility of “*din*” — “**judgment.**” Key to this issue is the question of how we balance judgment and compassion — *din* and *rachamim*, and how we understand God calibrating and balancing these values during the Days of Awe, the High Holidays. At a time when few liberal Jews consider God sitting on a throne, the imagery of such harsh judgment is difficult to conjure, and less powerful. But as we suspend our rational thinking momentarily, the imagery might be helpful as we enter a period of self-reflection during the month of Elul, the lead-up to the High Holydays. And more to the point, is how we think about ourselves judging others. What criteria do we establish? What system of justice do we employ? How do we both hold onto our faculties of critical thinking and also let go of our reactive judgments?

Sh'ma Now has never viewed learning or “meaning-making” as solely an individual activity. That’s why we have included this guide, which is specifically designed to help you to consider the idea of going forth independently or with others, formally and informally.

How to Begin

This guide offers a variety of suggestions, including activities and prompts for individual contemplation and informal or structured conversations. We suggest that you use this guide to share reflections and thoughts over a Shabbat meal, or, for those who are more adventurous, to lead a planned, structured conversation, inviting a small group of friends and family to your home or to a coffee shop. If you would like more information about ways in which this journal can be used, please contact Susan Berrin, *Sh'ma Now* editor-in-chief, at SBerrin@shma.com. You can also print out a PDF file of the entire issue at <http://forward.com/shma-now/>.

Guidelines for Discussion

If you wish to hold a structured conversation, the following guidelines may help you to create a space that allows for honest personal exploration through sharing:

- Create a sense of shared purpose that can foster the kind of internal reflection that happens through group conversation.
- Remind participants of simple ground rules for conversations. For example: Avoid commenting on and critiquing each other’s comments. Make room for everyone to speak. Step into or away from the conversation appropriately. No one participant should dominate the conversation. Let silence sit, allowing participants to gather their thoughts.
- For each of the questions below, we recommend that you print out the article in question, or provide the link to it, and we ask that you take a moment to read it in print or on screen, before the conversation begins.
- Allow people a few minutes to absorb the article, perhaps even to read it a second time, before moving into the discussion.

Consider & Converse

A Guide to 'Din' —
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Interpretive Questions

can focus the reader on the ideas in the articles.

- Rabbi **Ed Feinstein** [page 1] introduces readers to Judaism's notion of judgment and how we might understand God's role of judging us during the High Holidays. He writes: "On these holidays, we pray God might move from the throne of *din*, judgment, to the throne of *rachamim*, merciful love. We pray not to dismiss judgment but to temper its aftermath." What is the purpose, during the High Holidays, of the courtroom drama with God atop a throne wielding the power of judgment? Abraham Joshua Heschel writes that it is better to be judged by God than ignored and abandoned. Do you agree? How does that sense of being judged inform your approach to Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur? Ed writes that judgment is the beginning of *teshuvah*, repentance and return. He writes that if we are stuck in self-deception, we can't find the truth and make personal change. How do you best confront your own challenges and what inspires you to work toward change?
- The human rights activist and attorney **Hadar Harris** [page 4] writes about her awakening to the notion that multiple truths can exist. She writes, "As we contemplate this High Holiday season, as we ruminate on the ultimate judgment that God makes — who shall live and who shall die — I'm struck by the impact of different versions of truth on judgment." She wants to consider "God as a civil law judge (investigating as well as adjudicating) rather than a common law judge (sitting on high and determining truth after hearing adversarial arguments twisting facts)." In that scenario, God judges "while considering the complicated, multifaceted lens of multiple truths, while narratives are deconstructed and reexamined, facts are explored and rebuilt, and changes in behavior are taken into account." How do you understand these two constructions of God as judge? How do you weigh stories of moral ambiguity that require thoughtful judgment? What happens when a judgment goes wrong? Is truth always constructed? How are facts related to truth? And if truth is constructed, how does that impact justice?
- **Judith Rosenbaum**, [page 3] executive director of Jewish Women's Archive, writes about the "call-out" culture / the #MeToo movement, a system of "vigilante justice." She notes the recent "call-out culture — born out of warring impulses of anger and fear, impatience and a commitment to justice, urgency, impotence, and a belief that accountability and judgment ultimately lie in our own hands." And she asks readers to consider whether this phenomenon might be the ultimate judgment, where it "is rendered in the accusation itself, with no trial, no jury, no process for assessment of deserved punishment." But with a broken justice system, do individuals have a responsibility "to step up and render judgment? ... How do we navigate the rocky terrain between judgment and justice?" And, with such forceful *din*, does a path toward *teshuvah* exist? What role does social media play in rendering judgment without any form of trial? Who has the responsibility to call out injustice?

Consider & Converse

A Guide to 'Din' —
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Reflective Questions

can help one to integrate the ideas in these articles with one's own sense of self.

- Rabbi **Steven Exler** [page 3] writes on the balance of *din* and *rachamim*/how we are to understand God balancing scales between *din* and *rachamim*/judgment and compassion. He notes that on Rosh HaShanah, we call upon God to overlook our iniquities, to treat us with *rachamim*/mercy. Exler writes: "What is it, in fact, that we want from God — and for ourselves? Do we want to be reassured that God is fair and unbiased, even if it means the outcome for us might be less rosy? Or, do we want to be reassured that God will shine mercy and compassion on us, looking away from our wrongdoings, even if it means that the world is then bereft of a Divine paradigm of justice and fairness?" He goes on to explain the historic and essential interplay between *din* and *rachamim*, between judgment and mercy. How do you understand this interplay between judgment and mercy? Do you prefer God to be unbiased in assessing the evidence of your behavior or more merciful? Where do you fall on the spectrum of judgment of others?
- In *NiSh'ma* [page 2], our simulated Talmud page, three commentators — all of whom are attorneys — explicate a line from *Pirkei Avot*: Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says, "On three things the world stands: on judgment, on truth, and on peace, as it is said 'Judge truth and the justice of peace in your gates.'" (1:18) Our commentators reflect on the relationship of judgment, truth, and peace. How do you understand that relationship of core Jewish values? **Rebecca Sendor-Israel** writes: "*Din, emet, and shalom* operate like a system of checks and balances within each of us. Getting the correct calibration is the work of a lifetime and is a challenge we'd be wise to prioritize during this time of reflection and returning." How do these three values operate in your life? Are they ever at odds with each other? How so? Which of the values do you privilege most?