



Prayer for Weighty Discussion

The Talmud related that Rabbi Nehunya ben Hakana would say a prayer – that he not err in his judgments of halakha, or Jewish law – upon his entrance to the *beit midrash*, or study hall. Today it appears on the inside cover of Artscroll's printing of the Talmud (Schottenstein Editions). This prayer for humility reminds us that it is not our own moral superiority or wisdom that helps us reach difficult conclusions. We do not rejoice in the stumbling of our friends or colleagues nor in proclaiming something impure. Instead, we pray to God to guide us and to help us remember why we do this work.

This language, or an adapted version, may resonate with you or your community as you discuss sensitive issues.

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקי שלא יארע דבר תקלה על ידי ולא אכשל בדבר הלכה וישמחו בי חברי ולא אומר על טמא טהור ולא על טהור טמא ולא יכשלו חברי בדבר הלכה ואשמח בהם. כי ה' יתן חכמה מפיו דעת ותבונה.

"May it be your will, Hashem, my God, that an offense not come about through me, and may I not stumble in a matter of Halakha and cause my colleagues to rejoice over me. May I not pronounce anything pure that is impure, or impure that is pure, and may my colleagues not stumble in a matter of Halakha, and I rejoice over them. For Hashem grants wisdom; from God's mouth comes knowledge and understanding."

Questions for Reflection

1. How do we avoid judging incorrectly, know our own fallibility, and retain our humility in situations where we are called upon to make judgments?
2. In what areas might you stumble when seeking the right path? What assumptions or preconceived notions may you bring and how do you plan on addressing them?
3. How do we remind each other of the sacred purpose that motivates the work?

This piece is part of the Respect & Responsibility: A Jewish Ethics Study Guide that is a joint project of Sacred Spaces and the Center for Jewish Ethics. Learn more at www.jewishsacredspaces.org.