



Mussar HaMadda

Published by the Chofetz Chaims of Cincinnati and Hoqsmeade

14 Adar , 5762

Harry Potter

“NO, NO, NO. / TRIED TO KILL YOU” (HP SS 17:15)

Artificial intelligence is no match for human stupidity.

HARRY and his friends had all the evidence lined up. The moment Harry first saw Snape, seated next to Quirell by the welcoming feast, his scar started aching. Later, Harry saw Snape with his leg all gashed and mangled, which could only be the result of trying to sneak by Fluffy, the three-headed dog. They saw him mumbling an incantation at the same moment that Harry was having problems with his broom. They overheard conversations with Quirell that seemed to indicate guilt on Snape’s part. Finally, he clearly hated Harry. All the pieces were in place. However, when Harry got to the final room under the trapdoor, it was Quirell who was there.

Where did Harry go wrong? All the evidence seemed clearly to point to Snape. All the pieces seemed to fit. Yet, when the truth was discovered, Snape was totally innocent.

G-d bless the RSA.

The human mind absorbs information at an astounding rate; in order not to be overwhelmed, it filters the information through various prisms. One of these ways is to relate incoming facts to match previously acquired knowledge. Sometimes this works against us. Even when we are trying to be intellectually honest, we tend to unconsciously bend facts to suit our preconceived notions. Facts that contradict our “knowledge” are quickly forgotten. Any additional fact can’t be viewed objectively. Snape was automatically assumed to be guilty. He looked evil. He picked on Harry. Before long, every evil was pinned on him, from trying to steal the sorcerer’s stone, to supporting non-orthodox styles of magic, to beating his house elf. The truth was opposite of the assumptions. It may even be possible that his picking on Harry was just so the sons of Goyle, Malfoy, and Crabbe don’t tell their fathers that Snape wasn’t a Voldemort supporter anymore.

Q. Why did the רשע cross the road?

A. To get to the סיטרא אחרא.

We must always be careful to maintain our intellectual integrity and openness. We must always analyze every new piece of information in a vacuum, ignoring previous knowledge and assumptions. By closing our mind to other possibilities, we lose our ability to arrive at the truth. This is true judging our fellow man, getting *pshat* in a *sugya*, or solving the Harry Potter books.

I was sitting at home, flipping through my copy of the Golden Treasures prize booklet, when in walked my yeshivish friend Gershon. He looked at the prize booklet and stopped in his tracks. “I have my suspicions”, he said, “but I must be sure”. He snatched the booklet out of my hand and held it under his cigarette lighter. To my surprise, it did not catch on fire. When he was done, the booklet felt strangely cool. He opened up the cover and pointed to some strange letters: *אין אונזער שטאט ווערן דאס אונזערע פאמיליען פאר אונזערע פאמיליען פאר אונזערע פאמיליען*. “What do they mean?” I asked him. “They are written in Lithuanian, which I dare not utter here. However, Feivel, they mean thus in the common tongue: “One place to rule them all, one place to find them, one place to bring them all and with a brainwash bind them, in the *derech* of Mussar where *Slabodka* lies”.