

# Condemning Others

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Hugh Walpole writes in *Old Ladies*: "To one fear of the dark, to another of physical pain, to a third of public ridicule, to a fourth of poverty, to a fifth of loneliness — for all of us our own particular creature lurks in ambush." Each belittles the fear that does not touch him. The man who cannot stand heights will ridicule the one who is afraid of snakes.

As with fear, so with sin. Each has a sin to which he is predisposed, and another that leaves him cold. Why judge so harshly? To see faults in others is to elevate oneself. Public scandals reassure us. The politician or the sports figure is diminished and we are exalted. In the private recesses of the soul a fear is soothed. I am not so bad — look at what he did.

The Baal Shem Tov taught that finding a sin in someone else is an infallible indication of its seed inside you. Condemnations are more forceful by the giddiness of having escaped. We permit ourselves the pleasure of indignation to compensate for the pleasure denied us by not committing the sin we denounce.

Society cannot exist without judgment. Religions judge good and bad. But there is an unseemly glee in our world that says less about the actions of those rebuked than it does about the insecurities of the ones who condemn.