

Fight Discrimination

One day at the post office, a long line of people were waiting to be served.

"Yes, may I help you, sir?"

"One minute! I was ahead of him in line! You cannot serve him first!"

"I can serve whoever I like. Now you, who had the nerve to challenge my authority, wait until I serve everyone else."

"That's not fair. I am always served last. At the post office, the bank, the restaurant, it is always the same story. I feel like a second class citizen."

"That is exactly what you are, a second class citizen."

"I am fed up with this unfair discrimination. My ID card says that I am a citizen - just like you. I deserve equal treatment and consideration."

An onlooker was revolted by the scene in front of his eyes.

"Discrimination is terrible."

And these are the laws which you shall place before them" (Shemos 21:1). This parasha deals with the laws *bein adam li'chaveyro* (between man and his fellow man). Laws of property damage, injuries, theft, proper treatment of servants, watchmen, loans, consideration of people's feelings, and fair judgment in Beis Din are some of the subjects mentioned in the parasha. Do these mitzvos receive fair treatment, or are they the victims of discrimination? Are we as scrupulous about them as we are about the mitzvos *bein adam li'makom* (between man and Hashem)? For example, a person may be very careful to eat only kosher food with the best *hechsher* (certification). Does he make the same effort to refrain from speaking *loshon hora*? Is he equally cautious about the words that come out of his mouth, as he is with the food that goes into it? A person may spend a large amount of money on a beautiful *esrog*. Is he equally scrupulous with his money in business dealings?

Rav Yisrael Salanter zt"l fought a campaign against discrimination against these mitzvos. He founded the *mussar* movement in 5609 when he opened a small yeshiva in Lithuania. One of the three principles of *mussar* is perfection in Torah observance. All of Hashem's holy mitzvos must receive equally fair consideration, even those *bein adam li'chaveyro*. This was not an easy task, because these mitzvos go against negative character traits. However, Rav Yisrael persevered and created a revolution in the Torah world. To this very day, we benefit from his work.

Kinderlach . . .

Discrimination is horrible! Let us all fight it! Never treat any mitzvah unfairly! Parashas Mishpatim is a great place to begin. It contains 36 mitzvos *bein adam li'chaveyro*. Study them carefully. Learn their halachos (laws) and observe them. Treat them with the same respect and seriousness as you do the mitzvos of *kashrus*, *shofar*, and *Shabbos*. That is the way of the Baalei Mussar, those who strive for perfection. Emulate them. Rav Yisrael will be very proud of you.



Emmes or Shekker? You are the Judge

"Please bring the litigants into the Beis Din."

The two men are ushered in. One, obviously wealthy and influential, is dressed in a beautiful, fine-tailored suit. The other, a poor man, is wearing raggedy old clothes. The Av Beis Din (Chief Dayan) looks carefully at both of the men.

"I am sorry; we cannot judge this case now."

"May we ask the *dayan* why not?"

"Because of your dress. Both of you must be wearing the same type of clothes. We must see either two fine suits or two raggedy ones."

"How can that be?" asks the rich man.

"The Torah states, 'Distance yourself from a *shekker* (falsehood)' (Shemos 23:7). Your different clothing may bias our decision, and we will not decide *emmes* (truth); rather *shekker*. Therefore, you must change clothes. Until then the case is postponed." (This story is adapted from the Gemora Shavuos 31a.)

Rav Leib Chasman is astounded by this din. How can these holy *dayanim*

(judges) be biased? They are *talmidei chachomim*, who know the severity of judging falsely. The *Shechina* (Divine Presence) is present at a Din Torah. The *dayan* must see himself as if a sword were poised over his neck, and *gehenom* is open in front of him if he decides falsely (Gemora Yevamos 109). With such *Yiras Shamayim* (Fear of Heaven), how can he be biased? Furthermore, the bias is not even skin-deep. If the rich man would change clothes, he would still know that he is rich. The same with the poor man. Will that truly help him decide fairly? How do we understand this din?

This is the strength of the Yetzer Hora, explains Rav Chasman. Even the eyes of the holiest *dayan* are only flesh and blood, made from the dust of the earth. Hashem created them, He formed them, and He knows that they are biased. Therefore, He commanded the *dayan*, "Distance yourself from a *shekker*." Your Yetzer Hara has a tremendous power of deception. He can trick the greatest people with the simplest things. Therefore, do not give him even a drop of room to trick you. Distance yourself from him and his *shekker*.

Kinderlach . . .

Rav Yisrael Salanter points out that we are all judges. We make decisions all of the time. We have two options - one good, and one bad. The Yetzer Hara dresses the bad one up in the finest clothes, making it look very attractive. As if it will lead to wonderful things. The good option, on the other hand, is dressed in rags. Its benefits are in the next world. It does not promise any wealth or honor in this world. We must judge the *emmes*! We cannot let the clothes fool us! "Distance yourself from a *shekker*!" commands the Torah. Undress that Yetzer Hora! Expose his lies! See through the exterior into the true beauty of the mitzvah. Kinderlach, may all of your decisions be *emmes*!

Parasha Questions

- Does the master have to feed the wife of his Eved Ivri? (Rashi 21:3)
- Why was this man sold as an Eved Ivri? (Rashi 21:2)
- Which type of eved goes free if you knock out his eye? (Rashi 21:26)
- If your animal eats another person's crops, and you want to pay back with land, which type of land must you give? (22:4 and Rashi)
- How could all 613 mitzvos be written on the two *luchos*? (Rashi 24:12)