



Cause No Pain

“You shall not cause pain to any widow or orphan” (Shemos 22:21). Rashi adds that it is forbidden to hurt any person; however, the verse speaks about the most common cases. Widows and orphans are usually defenseless; therefore, they are most vulnerable to those who wish to inflict suffering. This prohibition includes hurting their feelings, as well as causing them physical distress.

How careful do we need to be with the feelings of others? Rav Yerucham Levovitz zt”l cites the Mechilta’s commentary on this very verse. Rebbe Yishmael and Rebbe Shimon were being led out to be executed by the Romans. Rebbe Shimon said to Rebbe Yishmael, “Rebbe, my heart goes out because I do not know for what reason I am being killed.” Rebbe Yishmael replied to Rebbe Shimon with a question. “Did anyone ever come to you for a *din* (judgment) or a *shayla* (halachic question) and have to wait because you were finishing your drink, putting on your shoe, or wrapping your tallis? Our Torah warns us, ‘If you will surely inflict him pain . . .’ (Shemos 22:22). It does not differentiate between a small *tsar* (distress) and a large one.” Rebbe Shimon was relieved. He replied, “You have comforted me, Rebbe.”

Rav Yerucham is astounded by the extent of how far-reaching this *din* is. “Let us search our ways and evaluate them!” Contemplate the following thought for a moment. Making someone wait for a few moments is not a very big inconvenience. Yet the holy Tanna Rebbe Shimon felt that he received the penalty of death by the sword for this *aveyra*. What about major suffering that we cause people? Oy va voy va voy! How a person must be careful every minute of every day to watch himself! He must be sure that what he says and does will not hurt anyone in any way.

One of our gedolim of the previous generation often had visitors knocking at his door during mealtime. If he had a piece of food in his mouth, when he heard the knock, he felt distress. How was he able to swallow his food when someone needed his assistance? We see how far his concern for not hurting other people’s feelings extended.

Kinderlach . . .

People are very important. Do not hurt them in any way. If you had a valuable piece of jewelry, how would you treat it? Very carefully. You would be sure to handle it very delicately, making sure that it would not scratch or chip. A human being is much more valuable than any piece of jewelry and more sensitive also. Treat him with great care. Do not do anything that will cause him any distress, even the smallest amount. The rewards for this are great. Hashem loves those who treat His children with tender loving care.



Fight Discrimination

One day at the post office, a long line of people are 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 is 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.

Parasha Questions:

- What happens to those who make widows and orphans cry out to Hashem? (22:23)
- To whom should we give *trefe* meat, and why? (22:30 and Rashi)
- What will happen to a defendant who, although he deserves the guilt sentence, is declared innocent? (Rashi 23:7)