

“You shall not revile G-d, and you shall not curse a leader among your people.” (22:27)

Words are cheap, and emotions, at times, run high. We might accidentally say something that we will regret later on. What we do not understand is that words have an effect and they might cause irreparable damage to another person, as the following story illustrates: A certain rav in Yerushalayim, a Slonimer chasid, did not have children for twenty-four years after his marriage. Ultimately, following a miraculous incident he and his wife were blessed with a child. He related that as a young man he was a student at Yeshivas Slonim in Yerushalayim. The woman who came nightly to clean the floor would bring her children, who, because of their young age, could not be left at home alone. The children, of course, did not comprehend the importance of the Torah study that was going on in the bais ha'medrash. Thus, the noise level of these children often disturbed those who were learning.

It happened that one night the noise level became intolerable for this young man, and he remarked to the woman that it would be a good idea for her to discipline her children. The woman who was beset with enough headaches remarked, “Would that you not merit to experience tzaar gidul banim, the pain of raising children.” At the time, the young man felt that the woman was, in effect, blessing him to have an easy time raising his own children. Undoubtedly, this was her true intention.

These words, however, were issued during a moment of anger and the effect was tragic. Years went by. The young man forgot the incident. He met his bashert, intended mate, and they married. They had a blissful marriage – except for one serious concern – they were not blessed with children. They traveled all over the world in search of the doctor, the drug, the miracle that would grant them progeny. It was to no avail. They were rapidly approaching middle age, and still no child.

For some reason, the man remembered the incident that had occurred many years earlier concerning the cleaning woman, her children, his derogatory rebuke and her response. Suddenly, he realized that what he had understood as a blessing was actually a curse. Immediately, he went in search of this woman. With luck, he was able to locate her. He quickly went to visit her, to beg her forgiveness for his impatience and for the impudent remark he had made many years earlier. She was happy to forgive him and even added that those wild children were today great Torah scholars serving in positions of distinction throughout Eretz Yisrael.

Nine months later – twenty-four years into their marriage, they were blessed with a child. Yerushalayim clamored; everyone was overwhelmed with excitement. They all took heed of the lesson: the impact of every single word, its far-reaching effect and consequence. No one meant any harm, but words were said, and the consequences had taken effect.