

You shall not cause any pain to any widow or orphan. (22:21)

It takes a truly reprehensible person to take advantage of a widow or orphan. These are individuals who are alone against the world. Why make life even more difficult for them? At first glance, we may even wonder why the admonishment against afflicting the *almanah*, widow, or *yasom*, orphan, is even included with the many laws that are mentioned in this *parsha*. Quite possibly, Hashem wants to put everyone on notice: He takes a special interest in the plight of these lonely people. He will listen to their pleas when they cry out to Him in pain. Anyone who causes them harm will have to answer to Hashem.

Another – perhaps deeper – lesson can be derived from here. Although many laws can be found in the Torah, the Jewish Code of Law, other equally important laws may not be written explicitly in the Torah. These are the laws that are written on the *Sefer ha'lev*, book of the heart. While the laws of the Torah are written on parchment, the laws concerning the widow or orphan – or anyone like them – are written on the walls of one's heart. Only someone whose heart is made of cold stone turns a deaf ear to the pleas of the widow and orphan. The following story, which took place with **Horav (Dayan) Yechezkel Abramsky, zl**, demonstrates this concept.

In England, where *Rav Abramsky* was Head *Dayan* of the *Bais Din*, full-time *yeshivah* students who were registered in a bona-fide *yeshivah* were exempt from military duty. Her Majesty's royal army respected Torah study. England is very meticulous in its adherence to the letter of the law. Thus, a student was required to produce papers that were filled out by the *yeshivah* and had proper signatures affixed, before he would be freed from military duty. The exemption was renewed annually. The signature of the Chief Judge of the Rabbinical court had to be affixed to the paperwork, or it would be rejected.

One day, just before the deadline for submitting the exemption requests, a woman visited *Rav Abramsky* with a tale of woe. She was a widow, the mother of a *ben yachid*, an only son. He was a special young man whose commitment to Torah study and *mitzvah* observance was unquestionable. He spent every waking hour immersed in Torah. The problem was that since his father had passed away, he felt that his mother should not be left alone. He, therefore, had left the *yeshivah* and was studying the entire day and most of the night in the local *shul*. While this was acceptable to his mother, she could hardly expect him to receive a military deferment based on *shul* attendance. The government demanded organized institutional learning; studying in *shul* did not qualify for an exemption.

The anxious mother reported to *Rav Abramsky*, "I spoke to the administration of the *yeshivah* and asked them if they could still keep my son on their list of students. After all, he is studying full-time. They replied that rules are rules; if a student does not actually attend the *yeshivah*, he may not be included on their roster of students. I have come to the *Rosh Bais Din*, Head *Dayan*, of England, to help me in my plight. I cannot allow my son to be drafted."

Rav Abramsky replied, “Now look, according to natural law, there is no way around this rule. One is either registered in *yeshivah* – or he is not. There is, however, a different “code of law”, that to which we Jews adhere: supernatural law, *l’maalah min ha’teva*. Hashem is the Father of widows and orphans. His Divine compassion overrides all laws. I will immediately go to the clerk in charge of deferments and appeal to him. You should supplicate Hashem for *rachmanus*, mercy. I will do mine. You will do yours. Together, we will hopefully succeed in saving your son.”

And so it was. The widow sat down with her *Sefer Tehillim* and poured out her heart to her Father in Heaven. The tears flowed freely. When a child appeals to a father, no holds are barred. One says what one feels. Rav Abramsky wasted no time. He immediately took a taxi to the Ministry of Defense and presented himself before the individual in charge of deferments. Rav Abramsky was a well-known, highly respected figure in England. When he personally came to the ministry, it was understood that it was not a social call. It was a matter of the greatest importance.

Rav Abramsky was immediately ushered into the clerk’s office. “How can I help you, Rabbi?” the clerk asked. Rav Abramsky related the entire story, saying how he had prepared the list of all *yeshivah* students who were up for deferments. He explained that a widow had appealed to him to help her son. Her story was sad, her circumstances certainly extenuating. Could he help? The man gave the usual response, that he would love to help, but his hands were tied. Rules were rules.

Rav Abramsky now began his plea. “My good young man, I am already an old man, while you still have a long life ahead of you. With old age comes life experience of which I have plenty. You live by and adhere to your codex of written laws. I am aware of another book of law, one which is of greater value and significance than your codex. I refer to the Book of the Heart. In the Book of the Heart, it is inscribed that whoever acts kindly towards a widow or an orphan will be greatly rewarded by the Almighty Himself. Indeed, this reward will continue on for generations. Anyone who helps G-d’s children will be the beneficiary of the Almighty’s enduring kindness. I reiterate to you. Think twice about what I am asking you. Let the Book of the Heart be your guide. The heart implores you to act kindly towards this widow and her only son.”

Rav Abramsky returned home and waited. Three days later, a letter came from the Ministry of Defense exempting the young man from military service. The clerk had listened to his heart.