

## Each of you shall not aggrieve his fellow, and you shall fear your G-d. (25:17)

*Chazal* teach that, unlike the previous *pasuk* (14), “Do not aggrieve one another,” which refers to business conduct, this *pasuk* addresses the prohibition of *onoas devarim*, hurting people with words. Regrettably, too many ways exist in which we knowingly and unknowingly transgress this sin. Who does not know the meaning of the term *shtoch*, sticking a needle into a person? Sadly, a needle comprised of words is ultimately more painful, and the pain endurance longer, than a needle of steel. Reminding people of their earlier infractions or other embarrassing events in their past, be it their own or that of their tainted ancestors, is one example of this malevolent behavior. Rendering advice to someone who trusts us, who believes in us, whom we manipulate to our own personal advantage is another example of this sin. Lest one think that he will get away with it – (After all, who knows, who will tell?), the Torah responds, *V'yareisa mei Elokecha* – “Hashem knows, and He will exact punishment.”

Interestingly, when the Torah refers to *onoas mamon*, financial aggrievement, it writes, *Al tonu ish es achiv*, “One should not aggrieve his brother.” In contrast, concerning *onoas devarim*, it uses the term *amiso*, “his fellow.” **Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita**, explains that the Torah is alluding to the fact that, with regard to money, one invariably finds a dispensation to permit larceny: “I need the money; He has the money. So, why not?” In the course of discovering a dispensation with which we can live, we slowly help ourselves to another fellow’s hard-earned money. While we may allay our own conscience with all forms of excuses, at the end of the day it is all about one thing: my wallet. I want to have more, and what easier way than relieving my “friend” of his money?

Therefore, the Torah teaches us a lesson which should set a standard for us. When we are about to be *moreh heter*, impose a self-generated, prejudicial dispensation, we should ask ourselves, “If this fellow was my brother, would I act so callously toward him?” If he is certain that he would not act in such a callous and heartless manner to his brother, then this Jewish fellow should be no different. All of *Klal Yisrael* is part of one large family. Why distinguish between relatives?

**Horav Yisrael Yaakov Fisher, zl**, *Ravaad* of the *Eidah Hachareidis*, once remarked that he was amazed that *sheilos*, halachic queries, are presented to him on issues discussed in the *Shluchan Aruch Orach Chaim* and *Yoreh Deiah*, which cover the gamut of daily life and *kashrus*. Surprisingly, very few questions concerning *Choshen Mishpat*, monetary laws, are brought to him. It seems that people are not interested in hearing what the *rabbanim* have to say concerning these issues. They feel that they can render their own viable solution to any question that might arise. Why “trouble” the rabbis?

When **Horav Yaakov Kaminetsky, zl**, was *Rav* in Tzitevian, Lithuania, a member of his community informed him that the postal clerk had erred in giving him change. Instead of giving him the change for a ten zloty bill, he had given him the change for a one hundred zloty bill. He asked the *Rav* what

he should do. *Rav* Yaakov instructed him to return the overage immediately.

Several weeks later, *Rav* Yaakov went to the post office to purchase stamps. The postal clerk gave him more stamps than he had paid for. *Rav* Yaakov immediately returned the extra stamps, thereby asserting a *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of Hashem's Name. The postal clerk was duly impressed, since his "error" had been intentional; he had been testing the new *Rav's* integrity. He wanted to see if, in fact, he was personally as honest as he instructed his congregants to be. *Rav* Yaakov noted the man's mischievous smile when he returned the stamps. The man was actually impressed by the *Rav's* behavior.

A number of years later, *Rav* Yaakov had occasion to meet a Holocaust survivor from Tzitevian, who related that, when the Nazi's overran Tzitevian, it was the postal clerk who was willing to hide Jews in his home during the war. *Rav* Yaakov was convinced that the gentile had risked his life to save Jews as a result of the honesty manifested to him by *Rav* Yaakov.

This is with regard to integrity in financial matters. The Torah mentions a second *Lo sonu: onoas devarim*, which covers interpersonal relationships. We may do nothing that might remotely hurt a fellow Jew. The Torah concludes the prohibition, saying, *V'yareisa mei Elokecha*, "And you shall fear your G-d." The **Sifsei Kohen** comments that adding this suffix to the prohibition teaches us that the punishment for *onoas devarim* is exacted in this world! This means simply that, if we aggrieve another Jew – regardless of our rationale for doing the reprehensible, we will pay – [here](#). This is a frightening statement. How often do we stop to think before we say or do something to another Jew who might be offended by our words or actions? How often do we casually put someone down without thinking twice? I am not talking about outright slander or downright humiliation. This is a reference to simple, thoughtless, careless words, which have a stinging effect on people. Those seemingly "harmless" words can be quite destructive.

**Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl**, suffered a heart attack on *Shabbos HaGadol*, while giving his *derashah*, lecture. He was in acute pain, but he refused to halt the *derashah*. He gripped the lectern, and, in a cold sweat, continued his *derashah*. He later described his ordeal as the most painful experience of his life. He was taken to the hospital, where a pacemaker was implanted in his chest. A week later, it was discovered that the procedure had failed and had to be repeated.

*Horav Reuven Feinstein, Shlita*, relates that his father subjected himself to some serious soul-searching to determine why he was undergoing such suffering. He wondered what he had done that it had been decreed upon him to go through an ordeal akin to the death penalty.

*Rav* Moshe delved through his past and, after much soul-searching and introspection, he arrived at the conclusion that it had been the result of embarrassing someone. Apparently, when he was a young child, some eighty plus years earlier, the *rebbe* in *cheder* had posed a difficult question to the class. One of his friends gave one answer, while he gave another one. The *rebbe* preferred the young (*Rav*) Moshe's answer to that of the other child. *Rav* Moshe thought that perhaps he might

have enjoyed that moment – at the other boy’s expense. He felt that he was guilty of embarrassing the boy. This was the only instance in his life that *Rav Moshe* could find that might have catalyzed such intense pain some eighty years later! He had felt a trace of pride and haughtiness.

The true nature of a person is most noticed, as *Chazal* say: *b’koso, b’kiso, u’b’kaaso*; when he has imbibed an alcoholic beverage; with his wallet – his reaction to monetary loss; when he is angered. The effects of these experiences can be overwhelming, causing the individual to lose control of his self-discipline, thereby revealing his true nature. At this point, we see if the strict demeanor to which one has subjected himself is real or merely a façade.

Towards the end of the social laws for helping our fellow Jews, the Torah writes, *V’yareisa mei Elokecha – v’chai achicha imach*, “And you shall fear your G-d, so that your brother may live along with you” (ibid. 25:36). The *Chassidic* Masters teach: “If your brother can live along with you, then the two of you are living. If, however, you take advantage of your brother and oppress him, then you are oppressing your own life as well.”

The statement addresses the crux of all interpersonal relationships. We think that, if we take advantage of the “other guy,” it is he who is losing out, but we are still at an advantage. How untrue this hypothesis is, and how sad and pathetic is such a person. By taking advantage of the other fellow – we are thereby destroying ourselves.