

“You shall not move a boundary of your fellow.” (19:14)

It is forbidden to increase one's property at the expense of one's neighbor. A simple law, which is really common sense. Yet, we find *hasogas gvul* to be a common malady, whether it is in business or in

any other endeavor. For some reason, when one Jew is doing something and doing it well, soon he will have a competitor down the block, doing the same thing. The following story, although it does not condone the inappropriate actions of Jew versus Jew, does offer rationale for the offensive behavior.

Horav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, z.l., the distinguished *rav* of Kovno, was in St. Petersburg to meet with the leaders of the Jewish community. Two of the wealthiest Jews in Russia, Baron Hertz Ginzburg and Shmuel Poliakov, made a reception to honor the famous Kovnor *Rav* and invited members of the Russian parliament to attend. One of the most powerful cabinet members was very impressed with the *Rav's* brilliance and ability to converse in all areas of intellectual endeavor. One question particularly bothered the cabinet member about the Jewish people: Why is it that the Jewish people are always encroaching upon each other's business? A Jew opens a store, and a few days later someone else opens a store right down the block – or across the street. Indeed, this was a phenomenon found only among the Jews. No other nationality seemed to encounter this problem.

Rav Yitzchak Elchanan gave the following response: “We see among the animal world that members of each individual specie do not attack one another. The lion does not prey on another lion, the bear does not bother another bear, and so on and so forth in regard to all animals. This phenomenon stops when it comes to fish. The fish of the sea prey on each other. Survival of the fittest and the biggest is the rule in the sea. Why is this? The answer is simple. The animal world is vast. They can roam wherever they want in search of sustenance. Since they have no problem finding food among the other species, they have no reason to prey on their own. The fish, however, are restrained to a specific area – the sea. They cannot exist out of the water. Being remanded to one area, they are compelled to fight for their existence even at the expense of each other.

“We Jews are no different. We are not permitted to live in the large cities. We are subject to living in the cramped quarters allotted to us in the small dingy ghettos. Earning a livelihood is almost impossible, since we are constrained wherever we attempt to go. While encroaching on one another is inappropriate, it is regrettably forced upon us by the Russian Government.”

The purpose of the above narrative is not to condone the reprehensible behavior of a minority. It is rather to emphasize that their offensive behavior is for the most part due to circumstances. Some can just manage the situation better than others.