

The son of the Yisraelite woman pronounced the name and blasphemed - so they brought him to Moshe...They placed under guard to clarify for themselves through Hashem. (24:12,13)

Two people were in jail awaiting their fate, the blasphemer and the *m'koshesh eitzim*, the one who desecrated *Shabbos*. They were placed in different cells for an interesting reason. The *m'koshesh* awaited his punishment - death. His punishment was certain. The fate of the blasphemer, on the other hand, was yet to be decided. Had they placed both of them in the same cell, the blasphemer would naturally assume that he was to receive the same fate as his cellmate - death. Since this was not certain, it would cause the blasphemer undue anxiety to think that he was also to be executed. To avoid this unnecessary suffering, Moshe decided that the two would be placed in separate cells.

Let us examine this further. The *Daas Zekeinim* notes that *Bnei Yisrael* were reluctant to sentence the blasphemer to death because they were unsure if execution would atone for the outrage that he had committed. Perhaps death was insufficient punishment for his reprehensible deed. If one who curses his parents is put to death, should we not infer that cursing Hashem is a much graver sin? It might be so serious that meting out punishment for this sin should be left totally to the hands of Hashem. Consequently, if the blasphemer was considered such a despicable sinner that he would deserve a fate even worse than death, why did *Bnei Yisrael* arrange to make life easier for him? Let him suffer in accordance with his sin!

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, Shlita, feels that *Bnei Yisrael* were communicating to us the importance of being sensitive to the needs of all Jews, regardless of their religious persuasion and moral tendency. While the blasphemer was a *rasha gamur*- truly wicked - he still was a Jew who had feelings; he was a human being whose dignity was to be preserved. While he will surely receive the punishment he deserves, it is still wrong to add insult, humiliation and fear to his present state.

How compelling is this statement? We live in a time in which we feel we have license to disparage and humiliate anyone who does not see eye-to-eye with us. After all, "he is a *rasha*" is the usual response for every indignity we have suffered. We have no right to humiliate or hurt someone's feelings unnecessarily. Perhaps, if we would act more like *tzaddikim*, "they" would not be such *reshaim*.

We may suggest another reason for not placing these two together. We are not to bunch together two sinners if their sins are distinct from one another. People are motivated to do evil for different reasons. In one instance it may be family background; in another it might be the social environment to which the person has been exposed; in yet another, it might be something innate within the

sinner that has caused him to go wrong. We should not view all mistakes through the same looking glass. Even a sinner deserves his day in court. Whether it is an infraction against the Almighty or it is two children at home or at school who "commit" wrong, we should give each action and each individual its own moment of judgment, one distinct from the other.