

You shall not cause pain to any widow or orphan. If you (dare to) cause him pain For if he shall cry out to Me, I shall surely hear his outcry. (22:21,22)

The widow and orphan represent all of the weak and disadvantaged, those who have no one to protect them or to look out for their interests. Sadly, there are those who take advantage of the weak, either because they are easy prey or because the tormentor himself is so insecure that he must “beat up” on the weak in order to maintain a false sense of self-dignity. The Torah tells us in no uncertain terms that Hashem Himself will intervene on behalf of the weak and disadvantaged because, when they cry, their tears go directly to Him. Hashem listens to everyone, but the widow and orphan have His “ear” more readily than others. Hashem will be exacting with His punishment of those who torment the weak. One who causes pain to the widow and orphan should expect severe and swift retaliation from Hashem.

Noticeably, the Torah reiterates the pain caused by the tormentor, *ano saaneh*; it doubles with the outcry of the afflicted, *tzaok yitzak*; and it is likewise redundant stating the punishment, *Shamua Eshma*. Why does the Torah repeat itself three times? *Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl*, explains that the Torah seeks to underscore the pain suffered by the widow and orphan (and all others like them who are weak and disadvantaged, who have no one to look out for them). When someone takes advantage of a widow or an orphan, the victim experiences a dual feeling of pain and helplessness. Aside from their response to the actual pain, they feel an added emotion of misery, resulting from the awareness that had their husbands/fathers been alive, this would not have happened. No one would dare to subject them to such misery if they knew that they were protected, that there was a “man in the house.” Thus, when they cry out, their outcry is doubled: for the actual pain, and its accompanying reminder that they are alone in the world. Hashem will listen and respond to the dual pain with equitable punishment.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* is teaching us a powerful lesson concerning how we should view our interpersonal relationships. When we cause pain to our fellow Jew, we must take into consideration that there will be collateral damage for which we will also have to answer. We rarely take into consideration that the innocuous joke or ribbing at the expense of another Jew might not be as benign as he thinks. He may not take it in the manner that we dish it out. Furthermore, he might be someone who has dealt with bouts of depression for any number of reasons, and, just when he thought he had it controlled, someone came along and took advantage of him. The person might be uncaring, unfeeling and narcissistic, an individual who just wanted to have a laugh at someone else’s expense. Little does he realize that he just added another nail in the poor fellow’s coffin.

Perhaps one may offer an alternative reason for the redundancy of the *pesukim*. *Horav Aryeh Levine, zl*, was lovingly and reverently referred to as the *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim for his multifarious acts of *chesed*, kindness, visiting the prisoners who were incarcerated by the British ruling government during its Mandate. He would make it a point to visit and comfort all bereaved

women and children, not exclusively widows and orphans of those who had died at the hands of the British government. *Rav Aryeh* understood that comforting the bereaved was critical, not only because of the obvious pain sustained over their present loss, but also because a person who suffers a loss invariably has questions of faith. His overall conviction will, to some extent, become compromised. Thus, by consoling him, not only does he revitalize the mourner's spirit and courage to go on, but he also returns his faith to its original strength.

Bearing this in mind, we become aware of another aspect of the collateral damage catalyzed by impinging on the feelings of the disadvantaged. They are miserable and alone. All they have is Hashem. When someone inflicts harm on them or takes advantage of them, however, they begin to question Hashem. The tormentor is now responsible for another sin. This is perhaps another reason why the Torah speaks in redundant terms.