

You shall not withhold a worker's wage with you until morning... You shall not curse the deaf. (19:13,14)

The deaf person will not hear your curses. Nonetheless, one does not curse his fellow. Certainly, if he can hear and is aware of the curse, such deplorable behavior is an anathema for a Jew. The *Baal HaTurim* expounds on the juxtaposition of withholding wages upon cursing the deaf. Even if one has a valid complaint, i.e. he worked hard through sweat and toil, and he put in a full day's work. He now wants/needs to get paid. He has no food at home. His children are starving. His earnings were to be used to purchase the vital necessities to sustain his family. His boss says, "No, I do not have the money now. I will pay you when I can." "But I need it now. I have fulfilled my part. I worked. Now you must keep your word." "Sorry", is all his boss replied. The worker is hurt, humiliated and angry. Is it any wonder that he wants to curse his boss, to deliver every imprecation he can think of? It will not garner a paycheck for him, but it will assuage some of the hurt. The Torah teaches us that Jews do not curse, even when they think they are justified. Take the boss to a *din Torah*, present your complaints before a court, but do not curse him.

Furthermore, one who believes in and trusts Hashem will "leave" the problem for Hashem to address. When he loses it, spews vitriol and curses, he indicates by his actions that he has given up hope of seeing a timely resolution to his problem. Who is not plagued with a situation that drives him batty because he can do nothing but wait, compelled to remain silent while individuals whose intentions are far from holy make his life miserable? Cursing may be a release from his tension, but it is ineffective and dangerous. We have boundaries in life. Cursing a fellow Jew – regardless of his ignominious behavior – is crossing the boundary.

Anyone who has ever been involved in *klal* work, helping the community or in a position of leadership will, at times, make decisions which are not consistent with the needs of every individual. As a result, people vent out their anger on the activist or leader, to the point that he says, "What do I need this for? It is one thing not to receive a thank you, but to be reviled and even cursed is much more than I bargained for." The response to him is: It is inevitable that one who is doing something, acting on behalf of the community, will have someone who will take umbrage and express negativity against him. At least he is acting on behalf of others, and it is inescapable for one to make a cake without breaking eggs. It all goes with the territory.

The *Steipler Gaon, zl* (cited by *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*), writes (*Kraina d'Igarta*), "One should know that whoever takes upon himself the mantle of *oseik b'tzarcehi tzibbur*, involving himself in the needs of the community, is not spared *agmas nefesh*, suffering of the spirit, mental anguish and torment. In the merit of the *yissurim*, troubles and pain that he experiences, however, he will be entitled to great achievement and success." In order to achieve something, some sacrifices are inevitable. One of those sacrifices is that one should expect to become the punching bag for someone who either does not agree with him or who feels that he is getting the short end of the stick. Usually, this is a person whose jaundiced outlook on life taints his ability to enjoy anything

positive. It is best to ignore him and plow ahead.

If one were to consider a time in Jewish American history when its rabbinic leadership was at its extreme lowest point, I would suggest the appointment of *Horav Yaakov Yosef/Joseph, zl*, as Chief Rabbi of New York. With the reputation as the *Maggid* of Vilna and its *Dayan*, he came with impressive, impeccable credentials. A multi-talented individual, he was a brilliant scholar, prolific speaker and, above all, a man of sterling character. He became the victim of rabid secular Jewish animus toward anything that smacked of religion and the insecurity of a number of Orthodox groups who insisted on a rabbi that was of *Chassidic* or Galician/Hungarian extraction, and not a *Litvak*, of Lithuanian background. Veritably, these groups were scared of their own shadow and feared change to the status quo.

The oldest and most prominent Polish-Russian *shul* was the *Bais Hamedrash HaGadol* on the Lower East Side. It was comprised of roughly thirty smaller *shuls*. This was to be the nexus of operations for the new Chief Rabbi. *Rav* Joseph immediately focused on what were the two most egregious transgressions that were choking the Orthodox community: The observance of *Shabbos* and *kashrus*. If a stop would not be put to the flagrant violations of the Torah's code of law, the term Orthodox would become extinct – swallowed by the powerful entrenched Reform community. He was forced to contend with the unscrupulous union of the *shochtim* who viewed him as a threat to their control of *kashrus* (which, in those times, was a pejorative term) of both meat and poultry. He fought valiantly, despite threats to his life and welfare, but it was a losing battle. He was opposed by corrupt and greedy businessmen and unprincipled, ruthless butchers. He did achieve some notable accomplishments as he attempted to bring structure to Jewish religious life. The greatest obstacles to his success were sadly from his own (supposedly) *frum* constituents who were opposed to him. He was cursed, slandered, reviled and hounded. During all of his tribulations, he maintained his dignity. He refused to allow his supporters to stoop to the level of his detractors by responding in kind.

At the end, *Rav* Josef's paltry salary, which the *shochtim* paid, was discontinued, and the *shul* could not pick up the shortfall. Shortly after this latest indignity, he suffered a debilitating stroke which incapacitated him for the last years of his life. His funeral was one of the largest in New York, the irony of which was that he was accorded greater honor in death than in life.

One wonders about the punishment meted out to the rabble rousers and their rabbinic and lay supporters. I think they were punished *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure. By their very actions, they undermined the opportunity for Torah growth in America. Every vestige of respect for Torah and its disseminators was crippled by their actions. The Torah was debased, and Hashem's Name was desecrated. This was wrought by men who had sold themselves to the holy dollar and rabbinic fellows whose fear of sharing their respect with a *rav* much more qualified than they scared them to the point that they acted as barbarians and murderers, demonstrating no respect for Torah and human dignity.

Their punishment? Their children left the fold. Sadly, children of distinguished leaders eschewed their religion, assimilated and married out of the faith. When fathers denigrate Torah and its leaders, their sons learn to complete their father's work – which they did. Even the fine, upstanding *rabbanim* who sided with the *shochtim* and criticized Rav Joseph, thus diminishing his authority, saw their children become their greatest source of pain and humiliation. Despite their *frumkeit*, they erred in taking matters into their own hands, rather than letting Hashem decide the course of events. When one curses others, he loses his opportunity for blessing.