



The Rebbe's Pains Parshas Behar

The Belzer Rebbe was setting in his room at a late hour of the night, he asked his Gabai (sexton), to check if anyone was in the main study hall. The Gabai reported that the hall was full. The Rebbe acknowledged and continued on. An hour later the Rebbe asked the same question. The Gabai wondered who the Rebbe was waiting for. The third time the Rebbe asked the question the Gabai reported that that the hall was now empty.

The Gabai asked the Rebbe if he needed anything. The Rebbe answered: "A doctor." During the *Tisch* he conducted earlier a fish bone got stuck in his throat. The Gabai called the doctor and then checked the Rebbe. The bone was stuck in a place that posed a threat to the Rebbe's life. The doctor came quickly and removed the bone. The Rebbe sighed in relief and returned to his previous endeavors. The Gabai wondered why the Rebbe hadn't said anything earlier.

During these days of Sefiras Haomer¹ we mourn the loss of the students of Rabbi Akiva.² The reason stated for their death is for not honoring one another properly as befits Torah scholars.³ After their death, our Sages teach us, the world became a spiritual wilderness.

During an event I attended this week for the 'Ohr Yisareli' youth movement in Afulah I quoted to them the verse from our weekly parsha: "And you shall not wrong, one man his fellow Jew, and you shall fear your G-d, for I am the Lord, your G-d."⁴ Rashi elaborates: "Here Scripture is warning against verbal abuse, namely, that one must not provoke his fellow, nor may one offer advice to him that is unsound for him but according to the mode of life or the benefit of the advisor. And if you say, 'Who would know whether I had evil intentions when I talked to my fellow man in an insulting manner?' Therefore, it says, 'and you shall fear your G-d' - the One Who knows all thoughts-He knows. Concerning anything held in the heart and known only to the one who bears this thought in his mind, it says 'and you shall fear your G-d!'"



A few verses before this verse, the Torah teaches us: "And when you make a sale to your fellow Jew or make a purchase from the hand of your fellow Jew, you shall not wrong one another."⁵ Rashi explains that this verse relates to wronging through money.

The Talmud differentiates between the two types of abuse. "Rabbi Yochanan said on the authority of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai: Verbal abuse is more heinous than monetary abuse, because of the first it is written, 'and thou shalt fear thy G-d,' but not of the second. Rabbi Eleazar said: The one affects his victim's being, the other only his money. Rabbi Shmuel Bar Nachmani said: For the former restoration is possible, but not for the latter."⁶ We learn that verbal abuse is worse than monetary abuse on three accounts. However, it would seem that actual monetary theft is worse than just some verbal comments?

I explained that theft sums up only with financial loss, and can be returned. Verbal abuse causes real pain, and cannot be rectified. Therefore, scripture states: "and you shall fear your G-d."

I told the audience about the Steipler⁷ who once appeared unexpectedly at a Bar Mitzvah in Bnei Brak. The father of the Bar Mitzvah boy was ecstatic. The Stiepler, who came uninvited, sat by the boy, spoke to him for a few minutes and then left. The father did not understand, but the boy told him that two years ago he entered a *Schul* to pray. The Stiepler thought I was reading a book instead of reading out of a siddur and made a remark. The boy showed him it was a siddur and the Stiepler apologized. The Stiepler came again to apologize because he had now become a halachic adult. The Steipler was very fearful of verbally abusing someone.

"You must be that careful", I concluded, "And my Rebbe, Rabbi Moshe Mordechai of Lelov, would say - if you harm your fellow, even his fingernail, nothing can rectify that."

Later on the Rebbe turned to his Gabai and said: "I didn't want to upset them. If they saw a doctor had come to treat me it would have caused them sorrow. I wished to refrain from that," he explained why he waited.

¹ Is a verbal counting of each of the forty-nine days between the of Pesach and Shavuot.

This mitzvah derives from the Torah commandment to count forty-nine days beginning from the day on which the Omer, a sacrifice containing an omer-measure of barley, was offered in the Temple, up until the day before an offering of wheat was brought to the Temple on Shavuot. The Counting of the Omer begins on the second day of Pesach, and ends the day before the holiday of Shavuot, the 'fiftieth day.'

² The period of counting the Omer is also a time of semi-mourning. Traditionally, the reason cited is that this is in memory of a plague that killed the 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva (ca.40-ca.137 CE). According to the Talmud, 12,000 pairs of students, 24,000 in all, were killed (they were either killed by the Romans during the Bar Kokhba revolt 132-136 CE or they died in a plague). The reason stated for their death is for not honoring one another properly as befits Torah scholars.

³ Talmud, tractate Yebamot 62b

⁴ Vayikra 25:17.

⁵ Vayikra 25:14.

⁶ Tractate Baba Metziyah 58b.

⁷ Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, known as The Steipler or The Steipler Gaon (1899-1985), was a rabbi, Talmudic scholar, and posek. He was born in the Ukrainian town of Hornostaypil, from which his appellation, "the Steipler", was later derived.