

Treating The Disadvantaged

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Parshat Kedoshim contains the famous pasuk: “You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am the LORD” (Vayikra 19:14).

The well-known explanation of “the stumbling block before the blind” is that the Torah is not speaking only of the specific case of a physical obstacle in front of a blind person. Rather, the message it seeks to share is more general: Do not take advantage of someone’s weaknesses in a way that causes them to “fall,” whether physically or spiritually.

However, the preceding commandment of “You shall not insult the deaf” is spoken about less.

One way we can understand this commandment is through a story from the Gemara (Megillah 24B). The Gemara relates how Rabbi Yosei witnessed a blind man walking at night with a torch. Initially puzzled, Rabbi Yosei approached the man and asked what good the torch could be to a blind man. The man answered that although the light of the torch provides no direct benefit to himself, other people see him in the light. With their help, he is able to avoid pits and thorns.

A similar idea can be applied here. “You shall not insult the deaf” is not a commandment meant to protect the deaf, who cannot hear an insult. The commandment is meant to protect the potential insulter. The Torah wants us to be careful with what we do and say, not only in cases of damage to another, but also in cases where the only “damage” is to one’s innocence (dvar-tora.co.il).

Just like the blind man and the stumbling block can be understood as a specific example used to represent a general idea, here too we can apply the same logic. When someone insults a deaf person, he did no palpable damage and his victim is clueless as to what happened. What can possibly be wrong? No harm, no foul. Unfortunately, these situations are common, such as laughing behind someone’s back. If no one knows the victim personally, and he’s oblivious to what’s happening, who cares?

Now we jump to the end of our verse: “You shall fear your God: I am the LORD.” You raise yourself by taking advantage of those at a disadvantage (the deaf and the blind)? Remember your place, remember that you too are powerless compared to the Almighty.

May we merit to always treat others the way we want to be treated.

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