

Sticks and Stones

פרשת שמות

In this week's Parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu sees two people fighting, and the Pasuk (2:13) says, "Moshe said, 'Rasha why would you strike your friend?'" The Ralbag derives a lesson in Middos from here. He says, "It is not appropriate for a person to hit his friend, because this is a great insult to your friend, and someone who does this act is labeled a Rasha. This can be seen from the fact that Moshe called the person who was hitting his friend a Rasha. Our Sages explain that even attempting to hit someone labels you a Rasha. This is derived from the fact that the language of, 'Why do hit your friend?' is in the future tense."

The Ralbag implies that the key factor in identifying a person who hits someone as a Rasha, is the degradation he caused, not the physical pain. It is apparent that the physical pain and the damage one caused, when compared to the emotional pain, is the lesser of the two evils. Therefore, even if one merely attempts to hit someone he is labeled a Rasha, as a human being is created in the Image of G-d, and therefore

deserves to be treated with the utmost sanctity and respect. So much for the age-old adage, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me."

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It is often difficult for us to see the above-mentioned inner-greatness in others. This is especially true if their behavior is immoral and wicked. There is a Gemara in Avodah Zara regarding Rebbi Chanina Ben Tradion, that can help us realize man's inner potential. The Gemara informs us of the excruciating pain Rebbi Chanina was forced to endure while being burned alive. The Romans placed wet wool on his chest in order to prolong the pain. The executioner said, "I will remove the wool if you

promise me a place in the next world." Rebbi Chanina agreed and promised him, resulting in the executioner removing the wool. The executioner then jumped into the fire and died to sanctify Hashem's name. Afterwards, a voice called out from Heaven and said that both Rebbi Chanina and the executioner are worthy of the next world.

The Alter of Slobodka points out that through this story we can derive an insight into the innate greatness of a human being, and the ability to transform oneself from a Rasha to a Tzadik in a moment. In the above story, the executioner was a Rasha, however, through the small act of removing the wool from Rebbi Chanina he elevated himself, and was thus able to give up his life for Hashem. This act was so significant that a voice from Heaven equated this executioner to Rebbi Chanina. This is indicative of the power a person has to change, due to the greatness of his essence.

From the above we can learn how important it is to treat others with the utmost dignity and respect. Every person has immeasurable greatness within them that is their true essence, which accordingly deems the person who merely attempts to injure someone a Rasha.

BASED ON THE WEEKLY SHMUSS GIVEN BY HARAV SHAYA COHEN, ROSH HAYESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח
לעילוי נשמת הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר
לעילוי נשמת רפאל חיים דוב בן ריסא שושנה
לרפואה שלמה יהושע דוד בן אלטא יענטא