

DON'T BULLY ME!

PARSHAS BEHAR

The NY Times, April 27, 2019: Nigel Shelby, a 15-year-old black student at Huntsville High School in Alabama, killed himself. His family said he had been the target of bullying.

Fox News Online, January 2019: A 10-year-old Kentucky boy allegedly committed suicide after he was repeatedly tormented at school.

When Abraham Lincoln became the president of the United States, aristocrats were offended that a shoemaker's son had become the president. In the middle of President Lincoln's Inaugural Address, a rich aristocrat stood up. He said, "Mr. Lincoln, you should not forget that your father used to make shoes for my family."

And the whole Senate laughed; they thought that they had made a fool of Abraham Lincoln. The President reacted with calmness and poise and changed their jeers to begrudging feelings of respect. Based on the The Epoch Times by Jocelyn Neo, February, 2019.

Verbal bullying includes teasing, name-calling, taunting, or threatening to cause harm. It is a serious issue.

The Torah tells us not to harm another through words. The Torah was aware of the harmful effects of bullying.

The Talmud (*Bava Metzia 58B*) lists some examples of words that should be avoided as they could cause anguish to another person:

- 1) Don't remind a newly observant Jew about his past sins.
- 2) Don't remind a convert about the sins of his fathers.
- 3) If a person is afflicted by serious troubles or illness don't say it is a result of his sins.

*"Each of you should not aggrieve your fellow, and you should fear your G-d; for I am Hashem your G-d."
(Vayikrah 25:17)*

4) If someone is looking to buy something, don't send him to a place that doesn't sell it.

5) Don't ask someone, "What is your opinion on this topic?", if you are certain that the person is ignorant about it and would have nothing to say. (This example is brought by the *Rambam*.)

At times, verbal bullying isn't outwardly noticeable. Therefore, the pasuk concludes, "... you should fear G-D". Hashem knows what is in your heart and what your intention is. Hashem knows whether you were ignorant or whether you were taunting.

Rav Moshe Alshich explains the motivation why one person would bully another as well as a solution to prevent the bullying. The pasuk says "Ish", that a "Man" should not cause pain to his fellow Jew. The word "Ish" in the Torah denotes an important or distinguished person. The bully views himself as an important person. He feels that he is more distinguished than his victim and that gives him the right to taunt him. To that, Hashem says that I view the two of you as equals. He is also as important as you. Furthermore, when you bully, you are doing more than disrespecting this person. This person's soul is part of Hashem's soul, just as yours is. Therefore, when you bully someone else, you are disrespecting Hashem.



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The Sefer Hachinuch says that the root of this mitzvah is to create peace amongst people. May we all realize the importance of every Jew. May we understand that each Jew has a part of Hashem's Holy soul within him. May that lead us to respect every Jew and foster peace, which is the source of blessing.

Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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