

# SOME SINS HIT HARDER

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein*

*One who stikes a person so that he dies shall surely die.*

Be'er Mayim Chaim: The Torah demands that a murderer be executed by the court. It makes this quite clear by doubling the verb for dying: *mos yamus*. Every instance of such doubling in the Torah begs for further explanation. We can offer a few for this one.

The gemara<sup>2</sup> relates a tragic and startling story about the meticulousness of Divine justice. Realizing that Divine displeasure for the people was behind a terrible nationwide famine, Dovid set about to determine what sin was responsible. He learned of two, both concerning his predecessor, Shaul. A variety of factors led Shaul to believe that Dovid was plotting to overthrow him. This led to a sustained hunt for Dovid, his men, and anyone seen by the throne as aiding and abetting a rebellion against the king. At one point, the city of Nov had provided some assistance to Dovid's famished men. Shaul considered this a form of open rebellion, and had the entire city put to death. The Givonim suffered unintended consequences though the wholesale slaughter of the inhabitants of Nov. They were a group of natives that had much earlier tricked Yehoshua into believing that they were simply foreigners passing through the Land at the wrong time. They pledged their peaceful intentions in a formal covenant. Yehoshua discovered the deceit, but was unwilling to allow the possible *chilul Hashem* that could result if it even appeared that the Jewish people reneged on an agreement. The Givonim were allowed to remain in the country, but were made to be available for menial labor for the Sanctuary. Socially, they occupied the lowest niche, and were supported by the *kohanim* of the city of Nov, which housed the Sanctuary at that time. When Nov was wiped out, their lifeline was cut, and they suffered enormously. Divine justice held Shaul (since deceased) and the people responsible.

Dovid attempted to placate them, offering restitution. The Givonim could not be persuaded to settle for anything less than bloody revenge. Shaul had wronged them; they wanted Shaul's family to suffer. They demanded the execution of seven surviving sons, and the public display of their bodies. Dovid attempted to reason with them, but they remained adamant. He was forced to comply, and the famine abated.

Why this display of Divine justice, seemingly with no accompanying *rachamim*? Because the aveirah was one between Man and Man, rather than between Man and G-d. There is no *teshuvah* for such sins without the forgiveness of the injured party. In an extreme case, a victim might withhold

forgiveness unless perpetrators own children die.

This may be what our pasuk hints at with the doubling of the verb: Two kinds of people will die in retribution for murder - the murderer, and his progeny. An earlier example of this takes us back to Gan Eden. Hashem had warned against eating from the Etz ha-Daas. "On the day that you eat from it, you will surely die / mos tamus." <sup>3</sup> Here, Chazal<sup>4</sup> explain the doubled verb as indicating the person and his descendents. We can apply the same thinking here. In some cases of murder, retribution will be taken not only from the murderer, but from his children as well.

As a variation on this theme, we could suggest a different but related reason for the doubled verb. The consequences of withheld forgiveness can be worse than death. Without that mechilah, the sinner cannot enter olam habo. Thus, he will die two deaths - one in this world, and another in the next. This will work as well in regard to the doubled verb the Torah uses in the cases of both striking and cursing a parent. There, too, the sinner might have to pay the consequences in two worlds. Because he sinned against Man rather than G-d, he has fewer options with which to seek forgiveness.

R. Yishmael spoke of four levels of repentance. In the most severe, teshuvah alone was ineffective in leading to complete forgiveness. That was withheld pending the death of the sinner. Yet we find here a situation even more severe. In instances of wrongs committed to fellow humans, the greatest number of offerings cannot achieve kapparah without the agreement of the aggrieved party. That agreement sometimes comes only for an awful price. There are no exceptions - even when the wronged party's heart is made of stone, as it was for the Givonim.

Chazal<sup>5</sup> point out another disability associated with interpersonal sins. Should a person stand in judgment perched precisely between the sides of merit and demerit, any sin to another human will push the judgment to the side of demerit, as if that were the majority. It is not a risk we can afford to take.

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#### Sources:

1. Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Shemos 31:12
  2. Yevamos 78B
  3. Bereishis 2:17
  4. Bereishis Rabbah 16:6
  5. Kiddushin 39B
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