

# ONE SMALL STEP FROM MAN...

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

*"You shall not see the donkey of your brother or his ox falling on the path, yet lift your eyes from them; you shall surely right it with him." [22: 4]*

We have here not only a Positive Commandment to aid our brother, echoing that found in Parshas Mishpatim [Exodus 23:5], but a Prohibitive Commandment. You shall not see... yet lift your eyes. According to the Medrash Sifri, one who fails to help in this situation fails to perform the positive Commandment and simultaneously violates the negative.

At the same time, however, there are important exceptions to this rule. A Cohen, for example, should not enter a cemetery to help, for in doing so he violates a different prohibition. One cannot perform one Commandment, when in so doing he violates another.

A different exemption is built in: the verse says "with him." The Mishna says in Bava Metzia 32a: "if [the owner] goes and sits down by himself, and claims, 'since you have the Commandment, if you want to unload it, unload it' -- [the other party is] exempt, since it says 'with him.'" The Torah doesn't want another person to take advantage of your Mitzvah. He has to do some of the work himself if he wants help.

Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Kotsk draws an important parallel. The Talmud says that "in the direction that a person wishes to go, they guide him." If a person wants to rise spiritually, G-d promises to help. But, says the Kotzker Rebbe, that's the point -- He promises to help, not do the whole job. A person must begin, and make an effort.

Not much is required: G-d promises that if we simply open the eye of a needle to let Him through, He will open the entire world. A small effort leads to tremendous rewards.

It is Elul, when G-d "comes close" to hear our prayers. It is a special time for growth. If we make even the most modest efforts to move up, all the more so will G-d help us to rise!

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Yaakov Menken