

Don't Be A Snake-Person

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Toras Avigdor Junior

Adapted from the teachings of Rav Avigdor Miller z"l

"I have a question," said Shimmy, as they finished reading *possuk yud zayin*. "Why does the Torah say *וְלֹא תוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת עֵמִיתוֹ*, when we just said *אַל תוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו* just a few *pesukim* earlier in *possuk yud daled*? Doesn't it basically mean the same thing, that you shouldn't charge a person too much money for something or lie in business?"

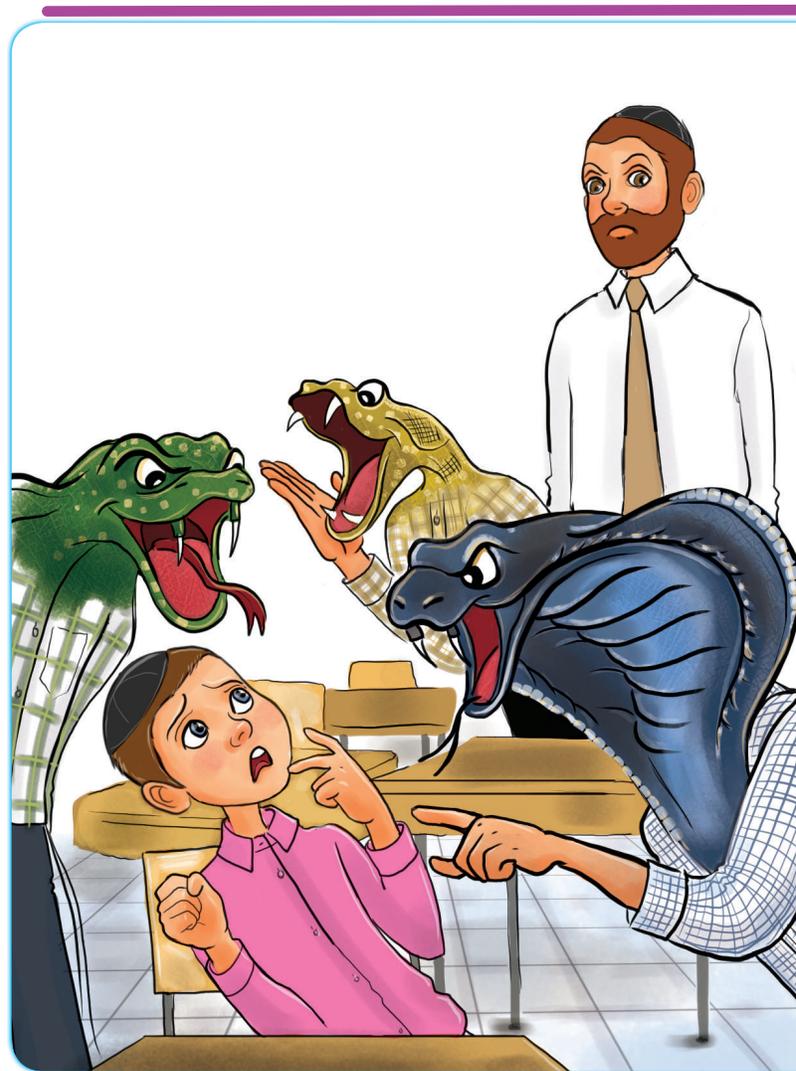
"You mean like the man who sold Yanky his shirt?" said Ezzy with a snicker.

The whole class ooked at Yanky, who had indeed come to cheder that day with a bright pink shirt. Everyone giggled. Yanky's face turned a deep red and he mumbled "I need a drink" and ran from the room.

The boys were quiet as they looked up and saw Rebbi Cohen's disappointed face.

"Boys," said Rebbi Cohen, "I'm shocked! And especially so right after Shimmy just asked that question!"

Everyone looked confused. They realized it was wrong to laugh at Yanky, but what did it have to do with Shimmy's question?



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Rebbi Cohen continued, “the Gemara explains that the second possuk is **not** saying the same thing as the first posuk. The first possuk is saying not to hurt someone **in business**. But this possuk is telling us that it is an aveirah to hurt somebody with **words!**

In fact, the Gemara says that hurting someone with words is **worse than hurting him in business!** That means if you have two people: one is a ganev who steals from others, and the second is an extremely honest person, but says mean things to others, the ganev is the better person!

“There was a long discussion about this in sefer Toras Avigdor from Rav Miller ztz”l, and I’ll tell you about another Gemara he brings there. But first, let me ask you: do you remember when we went on a trip to the zoo to see the amazing animals that Hashem created? Now do you recall which animal the zoo worker said was the scariest? Not the big lions or the tigers, no. It was the snake. Why? Because if you accidentally walk past a lion or tiger when it is full, it will usually not do anything to you, since they are not hungry they won’t attack. But a snake? Even if the snake just ate a big meal. If you cross his path, he is liable to bite you for no reason.

“The Gemara says that *l’asid lavo*, Hashem is going to put on a show for us to watch. But this won’t be a cute little show for kids. In this show, Hashem is going to bring **all** of the wild animals onto the stage. All of the animals will be on one side, while the snake will be on the other. And the animals will start yelling at the snake, ‘You rasha! Why did you bite and attack people for no reason? You didn’t gain anything from that - why

did you do it? We only attacked people when we were hungry - but you? You just did it stam for no good reason at all!’

“So the snake will answer: ‘why are you attacking me? There’s someone even worse than me!’ And the snake will point at **us**, the people in the audience, and say ‘look at those *reshaim* - those people who said not-nice things about others for no good reason!’

“Hashem made me a snake and gave me the instinct to bite. But people have *bechira* - they knew there was nothing to gain by saying mean things about each other and yet they did it anyway.”

Rebbi Cohen paused before continuing. “Now Yanky happened to tell me this morning that his mother is colorblind - she bought him that pink shirt thinking it was green! But Yanky didn’t want to hurt his mother’s feelings so he wore it to school anyway. But look what you did when you made fun of him and laughed at him. He must have felt like a person who, רְחֹמָא לְצִלָּן, was thrown into the snake pit at the zoo, surrounded by vicious, venomous snakes, attacking him from all sides. Can you imagine what that must feel like?”

The boys looked quietly at the floor. They had never thought about it this way. Yanky felt terrible pain because of them and they didn’t even gain anything from it.

At recess the boys all went over to Yanky one at a time and apologized for making him feel bad. And they promised themselves to try to never be a vicious snake who attacks for no reason.

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