



## "IT WAS AN ACCIDENT!"

*Erev Shabbos Parashas Mishpatim Parashas Shekalim 5783*

Dear Parents,

One awe-inspiring facet of the Torah is the embedding of fundamental life lessons into *Mitzvos* that are apparently unrelated and seemingly have no pertinence to the majority of people. For example, to those unfamiliar, studying about an ox goring a cow seems to be of no relevance to their life.

*"...studying about an ox goring a cow seems to be of no relevance to their life."*

On the contrary, it is precisely a goring ox that can teach us and our children a basic rule for life. In this week's *Parsha*, the Torah tells us (*Shemos 21:28*) that a "goring ox" (one previously determined to be prone to goring – *Shor Muad*) that kills a person is put to death and the flesh of the goring ox that is put to death by stoning (even if it were somehow to be properly *shechted* (slaughtered)) may not be eaten. *Rashi* explains the *Pasuk* is also including deriving any benefit from the carcass of the perpetrating ox in the prohibition.

What message does such a *Halacha* convey to us non-agricultural, city-dwelling types? The *Sefer Hachinuch* (*Mitzvah 52*) explains the rationale behind the *Mitzvah* is to firmly entrench within our thinking and value system that anyone who directly causes something destructive or hurtful to take place is to be considered despicable in the eyes of *Hashem* and people. This even includes causing something accidentally, as in the case of an ox who has no free will or intelligence. By not allowing any benefit from the ox's remains, the Torah is helping us realize how abhorrent it is to be the cause of harm or damage to others. This realization will thereby encourage us to be extremely careful not to cause or do anything untoward, or damaging to others through our actions or words.

*"...how abhorrent it is to be the cause of harm or damage to others..."*

How often do we hear our children (or ourselves!) brush aside something harmful or hurtful they did with the claim that "it was an accident!" or "I didn't mean it." They might say "why do they have to be so sensitive," or "I was just kidding," as if that somehow removes any responsibility on their part for the harm they caused. We need to help our children hear the message that willful intent to harm is not the only reason why they must refrain from certain behavior. Claims of "I didn't do it on purpose" are limited in their effectiveness of absolving them of culpability for their inappropriate actions.

*"Our fellow humans all have the label "fragile" on them..."*

The Torah requires a higher sensitivity to the well-being of others and requires each one of us to take extra care to sustain our fellow's well-being and feelings. When a package says "fragile" on the label, we handle it differently, with more care. Our fellow humans all have the label "fragile" on them and it is our responsibility to convey that message to our children, as the Torah sets out the values we are to learn from and live by.

Best wishes for a wonderful *Shabbos*,

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Principal