

THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK!

PARSHAS MISHPATIM

Your words are powerful. You have the power to make a difference in someone else's life.

The Torah "singles-out" a few individuals to whom we must show special care and sensitivity in our verbal dealings with them. We must speak to them with extra sensitivity. These individuals are widows, orphans, and converts to Judaism. This dvar Torah will focus on a convert and will teach a lesson relevant to everyone.

❖ **The Ramban feels** that the need to speak to converts with extra sensitivity, is perfectly logical. A convert is new to Judaism. He may feel defenseless and vulnerable. The Torah reminds us that our ancestors in Egypt also felt no one would come to their aid until Hashem helped them. We too must help and treat a convert with extra care.

❖ **Rashi's explanation** is a bit puzzling. Rashi says, as the familiar saying goes, "People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones". If you verbally distress a convert, he can also make **you** feel bad by saying, "You **too** come from descendants who were converts".

Imagine you are a CEO of a major company. Someone wants to make you

feel bad, so he says, "Your ancestors, over 2,000 years ago were converts. Do you really think this CEO, who is on top of the world, could care less; will he now feel bad

about a smudge on his lineage from 2,000 years ago?

Apparently, he will feel bad, according to Rashi. Whether this realization is conscious or subconscious, he will feel bad.

*"You shall not taunt
or oppress a
stranger, for you
were strangers in
Egypt."
(Shmos 22:20)*

We now have a beautiful new insight in the sensitivity we must show, not only to converts, but to everyone. An innocent remark may cause unhappy feelings deep in a person's heart. We must always be careful in how we speak to our parents, children, siblings, friends, and everyone we meet.

Make the right choice; make sure your words bring happiness to others.

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.

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