

their fellow-man and not begrudge him a place among themselves where he can live, and live like a human being; he has no other letter of recommendation than his human countenance, nobody to introduce him but God, Who presents him to you as His child, and says: 'He is like you, may he do as you do—grant him equal rights—he is My child, My earth is his home; I have called on him, just as I called on you, joyfully to fulfil his task as a human being; do not curtail that right of his, do not spoil his joy of life, do not abuse his helplessness; show that you feel that your soil is God's soil, and that man is God's child.' Though others may discriminate against the Jew and not recognize you, the 'stranger,' as a human being—you, as a Jew, a son of Israel, must not fail to recognize every stranger as a human being! In *Mitzrayim* you learned that God protects the stranger—it was as the protector of the stranger against the native's oppressive arrogance, as the protector of Right against Might, that God first revealed Himself to you; show that you are a Jew—hold the stranger sacred.

And widow and orphan. The husband and father dies and, dying, pictures his wife without a friend, his children without a father. Into whose trust can he give them? God takes the lonely ones under His protection and says to human society, which in itself never dies, be a friend to the widow, a father to the orphan; and every individual into whose orbit they come must bear his share in the execution of that communal duty.

But if both society and the individual, instead of considering orphan and widow as given into their trust by God, see in them, who are deprived of friend and provider, all the more easy prey to their power, force them off their path of life, rob them of their livelihood and darken their life with suffering and grief, then God, Whom they have forgotten, will rise and show that He is the Friend of the widow and Father of the orphan, and that those are least helpless who seem to be it most.

But not only the stranger, and the widow, and the orphan—women, servants, the poor, every dependent person, everyone who is unhappy or suffering, they are all under the special protection of the Almighty, Who defends the right of the weak against the power of the strong.

There is no distinction whether the widow and orphan be rich or poor, whether the orphan has lost father or mother; as long as the orphan cannot look after his own interests, he is considered an orphan in this respect. You may be severe in educating an orphan when this is necessary for his own good; but even then you should be gentler than with others, as the orphan is more impressionable. The same applies to anyone poor, dependent, or unhappy (Ch. M. 228).

380 But do not imagine that you can sin only by deeds, that you are law-abiding if you merely refrain from afflicting and oppressing your

neighbour by deeds, from harming a human being by your actions; for also with the word, the fleeting word, the word with which you have been endowed to do great good, can you inflict more injury, strike more surely, destroy happiness and contentment more irreparably than with violent, malignant action.

God has made sensitive man's soul, capable of being pained by every harsh touch, and yet He created this tender, sensitive instrument so that it may be the holder of the most sacred blessings of the human being, of honour and serenity, respect and love, of every enjoyment that life can provide, of every worth-while feeling of happiness, and of every emotion which links man to life and to his fellow-men. As long as it exists clear and serene within the human being, so long will he remain happy, however hard he may be hit by external events. But once it is wounded and saddened, and its peace disturbed, then the human being becomes sick and withers like a crushed flower. You should hold sacred man's inner sanctuary, consider it as God-given soil in which to plant your most beautiful blessings, wisdom and solace, love and kindness. And for this purpose you were given that most noble gift—the word.

But if you turn into a sharp and lethal weapon this word which is destined to bring life and blessings; if you seek pleasure in mocking the inexperienced and less intelligent, in deceiving and embarrassing him instead of teaching and correcting him; if you ridicule the unfortunate whose troubled mind is longing for comfort from your lips, and overwhelm him with useless reproaches; if you put your brother to shame in front of others even for the purpose of correcting him; if you degrade your brother's personality by calling him bad names; if with icy scorn and fiery disdain in your barbed words you shoot sharp arrows into your brother's heart and rejoice in his discomfiture—oh then, do not dare to look up to heaven! God sees your brother's heart convulsed by the daggers of your words, frozen under your icy scorn, humiliated under your ridicule. With Him the rejected soul will find refuge, to His Throne tears always find the door open. And you? The Almighty is just!

Youth and maiden of Israel! You to whom God's gift is still pure, whose hearts have not hardened, watch your word, keep it pure and devout, so that no heart may bleed, wounded by your word. Again, above all, watch it in your dealings with the unfortunate, the poor, dependants, servants; for doubly do they feel the slightest suggestion of scorn, indeed, their tender heart often feels a sting where you would not suspect one. And above all the female heart! Remember the teachings of our wise men who list as prohibited according to the prohibition of *ona'ah* (vexation): teasing, deceiving, embarrassing, needling, ridiculing; mocking, jesting with, and calling names, and then add: graver even than injury by action is vexation by words. The former only affects