

## Damages and Salvation

The Gemara in tractate *Shabbos* (31b) provides a beautiful description for each order of Mishnah. The order of Mishnah that we call *Nezikin* deals with laws of damages, monetary issues, and court proceedings. It is described there as *yeshuos*, “salvations.” Why characterize the study of laws of damages as “salvations”? Avoiding damaging another person’s property seems like elemental human decency. Why would the laws about torts and damage payments be considered redemptive?

Commentators answer based on a lesson of the Ramban. The Ramban taught that initially the world was a peaceful place. When man was first created and situated in the Garden of Eden, all creatures were naturally peaceful. No animal would harm another. Human sin caused all of nature to change. Man is the soul of creation. When Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge he brought a lowly character to all. His stature was reduced due to his sin. Just as he fell, all creatures became more violent and aggressive, and beings began to harm and damage each other.

The study of *Nezikin* entails the discovery of Jewish laws about damages. The nature of this study is that it moves swiftly from intellect, to heart, and finally to action. One who studies these laws finds himself becoming more sensitive and considerate toward others. Once we are careful not to damage another person’s property,