

“Ask your father and he will relate it to you.” (32:7)

Parents are always there for us – or, at least, they should be. They advise, direct, guide and offer support and comfort – when necessary. Parents provide our most enduring form of support, being there for us even after they are no longer here in this world. How often does one go to the cemetery and “unload” his troubles to his parents and leave somewhat relieved? We entreat them to be *meilitz yosher*, intercede, in our behalf – and they do. I recently came across a poignant story which illustrates this phenomenon.

The story is about a young girl who fell victim to the dread typhus epidemic which raged through the Bergen Belsen concentration camp. Tens of thousands succumbed to the disease. Indeed, the young girl, whom we will call Leah, was given up for dead, so severe were her symptoms. Yet, she refused to give in. She fought as the fever raged. She was determined to live. Afraid that if she lay down she would soon die like so many others, she wandered around the camp, delirious, stumbling over the bodies of the dead and dying. However, the time came when Leah could no longer go on. Her feet refused to carry her any farther.

As she struggled to get up from the cold, wet ground, she noticed a hill veiled in gray mist in the distance. Leah felt a strange sensation come over her. Suddenly, the hill became a symbol of life, a token of hope. She felt that if she reached that hill, she would live; if not, she would die of typhus. There was no way she was going to give up.

Leah attempted to walk toward the hill. As she dragged her feet, she felt she was getting closer to her lifeline. Every step increased her hope; every inch made life a closer reality. As she neared the hill, it took on a new form – it began to look like a huge grave. Nonetheless, the mound remained Leah’s symbol of life, and she was determined to reach it. She crawled on her hands and knees, scraping off the skin. The blood flowed from her wounds – but she moved on toward that strange mound of earth that had become the essence of her survival.

Long hours passed, and she finally reached her destination. With feverish hands, bloodied from her terrible ordeal, she touched the cold mound of earth. With her last ounce of strength, she crawled to the top of the mound and collapsed. She just lay there, tears flowing freely down her cheeks. These were no ordinary tears. This was the first time she had cried in the four years since her imprisonment in the camp. She cried because she finally felt that there was hope. She began to cry out for her father, “Papa! Papa! Please help me, for I cannot go on like this any longer!”

Suddenly, she felt a warm hand on top of her head. It was her father gently stroking her head just as he used to place his hand over her head every Friday night when he *bentched*, blessed, her. The hands were comforting and warm. She began to weep with greater intensity as she told her father that she could not go on. She had no more strength to live.

Her father listened as he held her head in his hands. He did not *bentch* her; instead he told her,

“Do not worry, my child. The end of the war is near. You will manage to survive a few more days, for the liberation of the camps is soon to come.”

This “meeting” occurred on Wednesday night, April 11, 1945. The first British tank entered Bergen Belsen on Sunday, April 15th.

The British took whatever survivors there were to the hospital in the British zone. Leah was one of them, she was extremely weak – but alive, as her father had promised. She recovered from typhus and soon returned to Bergen Belsen. Only then did she learn that the huge mound of earth in the big square, where she had spent that fateful night of April 11th, was really a huge, mass grave. Thousands of victims of the Nazi murderers were buried beneath that mound. Among them was Leah’s father, who had died months earlier. Leah now realized that on that night when she triumphed over death, she had been weeping on her father’s grave.