

And they sold Yosef to the Yishmaelim for twenty pieces of silver. (37:28)

Twenty silver pieces amounts to five *shekalim*, the same amount we use to redeem our firstborn sons. *Chazal* teach us that this amount of money atones for the brothers' sin of selling Yosef. Additionally, since each brother's share of the "take" amounted to two *dinarim*, the equivalent of a half-shekel, Jews annually give a half-shekel for the upkeep of the *Bais Hamikdash*. Since we no longer have the *Bais Hamikdash*, the *Machatzis hashekel*, half *shekel*, is contributed annually on *Purim* to charity.

The *Shivtei Kah*, brothers who sold Yosef, represent *Klal Yisrael*. Thus, the onus of their guilt is on the heads of each and every Jew. It thus makes sense that we all contribute a half *shekel* annually. According to the first opinion, however, that only one who has a firstborn boy gives five *shekalim*, it would seem that a small minority of Jews are obliged to carry the weight of guilt for everyone else. Is this right?

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, explains that there is a different aspect to remembering the sale of Yosef, specifically at such a heightened moment of joy as a *Pidyon Haben*. A family is blessed with a firstborn boy. Everyone is ecstatic, their hearts filled with joy. It is especially at this moment that one should take a step back and think. It really is not all that good. Although we may be happy with this present *simchah*, in the large picture of life it is not that good. The Jewish people are still suffering in *galus*, exile. We no longer have the *Bais Hamikdash*. When did the origin of our troubles begin? With Yosef *Hatzaddik*. Had we not sold him, we would not have been relegated to go down to Egypt. One thing led to another, but, it started with a few silver coins for which we traded away a brother. This will minimize the joy, because, as long as we do not have our Temple, there is no real joy. There is always something missing.

David HaMelech writes in *Sefer Tehillim* 137:6, *Tidbak leshoni l'chiki, im lo ezkireichi, im lo aaleh es Yerushalayim al rosh simchasi*. "Let my tongue adhere to my palate, if I fail to recall You, if I fail to elevate *Yerushalayim* above my foremost joy." At the moment of intense joy and uplifted happiness, it is incumbent upon us not to forget *Yerushalayim*, which is in mourning for its Temple and its people. As the *chassan*, bridegroom, is about to take his first step to the *chuppah*, when it is the most climactic moment of his life, ashes are placed on his forehead as a remembrance of *Yerushalayim*. Do not forget.

Rav Zaitchik implores us never to forget the plight of the unfortunate, those who have less, those who have lost, and those who never had. It is so easy to forget the pain when our mind is drunk with joy. The *Talmud Megillah* 28a states that Rabbi Zeira was asked, *Bameh he'erachta yamim*, "Why (for what merit) did you achieve longevity?" He replied, "I never showed anger in my home; I never walked in front of one greater than I." He concluded, "I never rejoiced in the stumbling of my fellow." This statement is enigmatic. Is not rejoicing in a fellow Jew's misfortune sufficient reason

for longevity? It is forbidden to rejoice in another's misfortune. Shlomo *HaMelech* writes in *Mishelei* 24:17, *B'nefol oyivcha al tismach*, "When your enemy falls be not glad, and when he stumbles be not joyous." This is what is written concerning an enemy! Imagine how one should act toward a friend.

Understandably, the various commentators elucidate this statement. *Rav Zaitchik* explains it practically. Certainly, *Rav Zeira* was not speaking about rejoicing over his fellow's misfortune. There is, however, another way that might be misconstrued as callous joy at another person's expense. A man marries off his only child; his daughter had become engaged to an excellent Torah scholar from a distinguished lineage. After a number of years of waiting patiently, a couple is finally blessed with a healthy child. These are wonderful reasons for celebration, and one should celebrate with abundant joy and share his good fortune with others. What if his neighbor has not merited to share in a similar wheel of good fortune as he? What if they just could not marry off their children; or, perhaps, their children had "issues" and *nachas* had eluded them; or, perhaps, they had no children? Can we imagine what is going on in his home as the block is overrun with cars, people going to and fro to wish *mazal tov*? In the neighbor's house, it is *Tishah B'Av*. Perhaps he does not show it as a result of his tremendous self-control, but his heart is hurting. He is in pain.

Rabbi Zeira was acutely aware of this. Thus, he never celebrated in such a manner that it would have a negative effect on his friend or neighbor who was less fortunate than he was.

Rav Zaitchik cites a *Yalkut Shimoni* that supports this idea and teaches us wherein lies the responsibility of a Torah leader. When Miriam *Ha'Neviyah* died, the well that had sustained the nation in her merit dried up. No more water from this well. The nation was thirsty. They needed water – soon. Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen* were sitting *shivah*, mourning their late sister. It was the low point in their lives, considering that the three had worked together, 24/7, for the last forty years. Now, Miriam was gone. One would think that they could take "time off" to reflect upon and mourn their loss. *Chazal* teach that the Almighty said to them: *Bishvil she'atem misablin aveilus, yamusu batzama?* "Because you are in a state of mourning, should the nation die of thirst?" Incredible! A leader does not have the "luxury" of sitting *shivah* when the nation has no water.

What about Miriam? She was the first catalyst that ultimately brought about Moshe's birth. She convinced her father to remarry Yocheved. She stood by the water and later encouraged Bisyah, Pharaoh's daughter, to employ Yocheved as Moshe's nursemaid. Did she not merit uninterrupted *shivah*? Why should her two brothers not have been permitted to mourn and weep over the tremendous loss which they had just sustained?

There is a time and place for everything. Moshe and Aharon's pain was personal; *Klal Yisrael's* needs were general and immediate. The nation's needs took precedence. We do not mix the two. One ends where and when the other begins.

Horav Avraham Grodzenski, zl, was the *Mashgiach* in Slabodka prior to World War II. He was a brilliant scholar and an exceptional person. The empathy he had for his students was legend. He was left a widower at a young age, relegated to raising a large family of young children by himself. It was the day that they arose from *shivah*. After sustaining a debilitating, crushing tragedy, he had to go forth and address the many needs of his family. His mind was overwhelmed. A knock was heard at the door. The *Mashgiach* opened the door to welcome a student who stood there, his smile brimming from one side of his face to the other. Unaware of his *Rebbe's* tragedy, the student came to notify him that he had just passed the *semichah*, ordination, test and was now ordained. *Rav Avraham* invited him in, and they began to dance. The joy emanating from the *Mashgiach's* face was palpable and sincere. Questioned later as to how he could do this, after just getting up from *shivah*, the *Mashgiach* answered, "It was his time of joy. How could I spoil it for him with my troubles?"