

If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him – proselyte or resident – so that he can live with you. (25:35)

In *Avos D'Rav Nassan* 2:43, we are taught that a poor man has eight names, eight frames of reference based upon his sad state of affairs. They are: *ani*; *evyon*; *miskein*; *rash*; *dal*; *dach*; *mach*; and *holech*. An *ani* is the standard name for implying his impoverished state. *Evyon* is derived from *taavah*, desire; a poor man wants everything, because he has nothing. *Miskein* means unfortunate, miserable, for he is humiliated due to his wretched state. *Rash*, destitute, means he has been left bereft of his possessions. *Dal* refers to being poor, meager. *Dach* is dejected and distressed. *Mach* means impoverished. *Holech* relates that his possessions have left him (walked). These are eight distinct descriptions for the misery of poverty.

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, understands *Chazal* as opening up a window for us into the psyche of the poor man. If we were to analyze his mindset, we would discover no less than eight forms of dejection. These are not simply synonyms or a play on words. Each descriptive word represents another adjective which expresses the wretched state of the poor man: eight forms of pain; eight types of shame. All of these emotions coalesce into his one bitter heart. In his mind, even if he possesses a hidden grace, it is buried beneath so many layers of melancholy and shame. He feels like a doormat that people ignore. People look through him as if he does not exist. All of these pent-up emotions become one amalgam of pain, which, when he cries out, is not merely one cry – but actually, eight varied emotions.

When the poor man emits a tear, it is not a single tear, but it should be multiplied by eight. Its intensity is eight times more than the tear of one who is not in his abject circumstance. If we were to measure his shame, it would be a humiliation on a scale which was eight times heavier.

Man is unable to discern between varied degrees of pain, shame and helplessness. Only Hashem hears the eight different sounds. Thus, He admonishes us to listen, to observe and hear the cry of the *ani*, poor man, for He is acutely aware of the distinction of his cry. Hashem will listen, because He hears it all, and He will respond. It is not one sound, one tear. It is a multifaceted sound, a torment of tears. It cannot – and it will not – be ignored. Hashem listens.

The Torah adds *ger* and *toshav*: the *ger tzedek*, convert, who has accepted all *mitzvos* and, hence, is a Jew to the fullest extent; and a *toshav*, resident, a non-Jew who has accepted the *sheva mitzvos bnei Noach*, seven Noachide commandments. The *halachah* that one should support his fellow applies to all. Why does the Torah underscore that one should support the *ger* and *toshav*? Perhaps, the idea of a *toshav* being included in the *mitzvah* might be novel, but a *ger* is *achicha*, your brother. What is the Torah teaching us by emphasizing the *ger* and the *toshav*?

In *Sefer Shemos* 23:9, the Torah states, “Do not oppress a stranger; you know the feelings of a

stranger.” We know what it means to feel left out of place. We were strangers in Egypt. In fact, we have been treated as strangers wherever we were – regardless of how much some of us have attempted to ingratiate and assimilate ourselves. Anyone who is a stranger is called a *ger*. The Torah wants us to remember our own roots. If we aggrieve the *ger*, he can counter, “You were no different.” The Torah demands sensitivity, which is the result of affinity. *Atem yidaatem nefesh ha’ger*, “You know the feelings of a stranger.” This is the criteria for helping a Jew in need: *atem yidaatem* – “you know” – you must feel his pain. The poor man who stands before you, tattered, disheveled, broken in spirit, nowhere to turn – you must feel his humiliation, as he stands in your kitchen gazing at the granite countertops, the marble floor, the sumptuous dinner which he just interrupted. Put yourself in his shoes – just for a day, as he goes around from door to door, relating his tale of woe, to which people either do not want to listen or might not believe. Imagine what he must feel like, and how much better he will feel when you give him a decent check, accompanied by a smile and good wishes.

The problem is that we do not want to get down and listen to his story, because it plucks at our consciences and invades our comfort zones. This is why the Torah tells us that when our brother turns to us for help – do not forget the *ger*. The same sensitivity that we must show to the *ger*, because *atem yidaatem*, “you know how it feels” – likewise, we must make every attempt to identify with the plight of our fellow Jew in need. We may not know his pain, but we should stop what we are doing to listen.

Horav Moshe Yechiel Epstein, zl, the *Ozhrover Rebbe*, was a unique individual. He was a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, with an encyclopedic knowledge of Torah and the the author of over thirty volumes of commentary covering every aspect of Torah. He wrote from memory, since the author, who was more or less blind, was as humble as he was great. He downplayed his greatness and led a simple life out of the limelight. His empathy for a fellow Jew was one of his hallmarks. He gave *tzedakah*, charity, with love, but, as the following episode indicates, he gave much more than money. He gave of himself.

The **Bluzhover Rebbe, zl**, related the following story: “I reached America as a destitute Holocaust survivor. The day after I arrived, the *Ozhrover* called and invited me to come live in his house. He said, ‘I did not merit going through all seven levels of the *Gehinom* of the Holocaust, as you did. I am, therefore, leaving my home and giving you my *shtiebel* and my *chassidim*, until you are properly settled.” Imagine, giving up one’s home, *shul* and followers to assist a penniless Holocaust survivor! This is the meaning of empathy.