

And by all the strong hand and awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Yisrael. (34:12)

This *pasuk* seems to comprise Moshe *Rabbeinu's* epitaph. Indeed, if there were to be an inscription on his tombstone, it would be the words of the above *pasuk*. *Rashi* explains that the *mora gadol*, awesome power, refers to his shattering of the *Luchos*, Tablets, when, upon descending the mountain, he confronted the revelry, debauchery, and rampant idol worship that had overtaken his spiritually lost nation. Moshe made a statement for all time: The Jewish People could not survive on a diet of mixed allegiances; it was either to be Hashem or a life of lewd idol worship. They could not have both. A nation that was wrapping itself around a molten god had no business with the *Luchos*. While no one questions this verity, we wonder if it was necessary for Moshe to respond so emphatically to the Golden Calf. Just holding onto the *Luchos* and refusing to give them to the people should have been sufficient. True, it would have been less dramatic – but would it have been less effective? Was there a need for such decisiveness?

Apparently, the people needed a climactic, striking, and never-to-be-forgotten expression of displeasure – but why? Many a commentator has used his pen to answer this question, explaining that Moshe's message was powerful and for all time. Perhaps we might suggest that it was the nature of the people receiving the message that gave the message such urgency and significance. I came upon this idea as I was about to write an appreciation of a dear friend and colleague, *Rabbi Sholom Ziskind, zl*, in honor of the tenth *yahrzeit* of his untimely passing. I was perusing *Surviving Galus*, a collection of Rabbi Ziskind's homilies, and came upon the following story, which might very well characterize him.

During the fierce fighting in Jenin, the Commander-in-Chief of the Israeli Army, General Shalom Mofaz, came to inspect his officers in the area of the battle. Gathering the commanders and officers for a briefing, he noticed that one of his major generals, Avraham Gutman, had a long rip down his army shirt. He asked Major General Gutman about the tear and was shocked to hear that Gutman's mother had died a day earlier and that this was his *kriah*, tear of mourning. General Mofaz immediately ordered him to leave his post and return home to sit *shivah*, observe the seven-day mourning period.

Not one to be insubordinate, Avraham Gutman atypically refused his Commander-in-Chief. He explained that he had originally volunteered to join his unit upon hearing that they had been called up to serve in Operation Defensive Shield. Within a few days, they were deep in the fray, fighting in the terrorist enclave in Jenin. On the second day of battle, as he was speaking with the regional commander, Eyal Shalein, his cell phone rang. Seeing that the call was from his ninety-two year old mother, he picked it up. Under normal circumstances, his family had strict instructions not to contact him while he was in maneuvers. The call from his mother was a mystery, something must be wrong.

His mother said, "I called to tell you two things: The first is that, as a commander in the field, you have an overriding responsibility to bring your soldiers back home safe and sound." Then she paused for a moment and said, "Remember, Avraham, you are my revenge on the Nazis." With that, she hung up. Several hours later, she quietly passed from this world. Avraham left the battlefield to attend his mother's funeral. His mother was a woman of strong will and character. She had survived the terrors of the Holocaust, came to the Holy Land and raised a proud family of committed Jews. When Avraham's family observed his unusually pensive mood at the funeral, they assumed it was due to a mix of grief and battle fatigue. They were taken aback when he announced that he was not remaining at home to sit *shivah*. "I am returning to battle," he said. "I have no other choice. This was Mother's last request." He understood the deeper message of his mother's phone call.

As a forty-four year old reservist, Avraham Gutman did not have to go into battle. He went as a result of his sense of responsibility. He stayed due to his sense of mission. He was following his mother's imperative. What drove him to such unequivocal commitment? What drives many of us to stand up to the most difficult challenges with fierce single-mindedness, with an unfaltering sense of commitment to Hashem, His Torah and its values?

Perhaps, the following Torah thought from **Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita**, will explain this phenomenon. The Torah (*Vayikra* 10:12) relates Moshe's talk with Aharon *HaKohen* and his two sons, Elazar and Isamar, following the tragic deaths of Nadav and Avihu. "And Moshe spoke to Aharon and to Elazar and Isamar, the children of Aharon, who remained." The words "who remained" seem to be superfluous. Aharon had four sons, and two died; obviously, two remained. What is the significance of *ha'nosarim*, "who remained"?

The *Mashgiach* explains that this term implies an added responsibility placed upon Elazar and Isamar. They were survivors, and those who survive when others perish have the enormous responsibility of guaranteeing that the Torah will endure in ensuing generations. The survivor carries a double responsibility on his shoulders: his own, and that of those who did not make it. The survivor must look himself in the mirror and reflect, "I am here, and others are not. Life cannot go on as usual. I must make up the difference." The survivor may not brook compromise, because he is not working for himself alone. He carries the added weight of the others who did not survive.

Rabbi Ziskind was a child of Holocaust survivors; thus, he always felt a personal added obligation to carry out his and their missions. He was his parents' revenge on Hitler.

Returning to our original question concerning why Moshe acted so definitively in conveying his message to *Klal Yisrael*, we suggest that this was a nation of survivors. They had survived the Egyptian slavery, the liberation, the Splitting of the Red Sea. When one is a survivor, he has no room for negotiation, no room for error, no place for compromise. The Torah which he must transmit to the next generation must be pristine, free of any taint of alien worship. Therefore, Moshe shattered the *Luchos*. The nation of survivors must be wholly devoted to Hashem, without

allegiance to any other entity or figment of their imagination.

Dear Readers:

When I realize that *Peninim* made its first appearance twenty-three years ago, I am truly humbled by its enduring success. *Chasdei Hashem ki lo samnu, ki lo chalu rachamav*. It is truly a *chesed Hashem* to succeed in conveying Torah-true thought in a manner that is accepted throughout all elements of the Jewish spectrum of faith. What started out as a small-town weekly *parsha* supplement has mushroomed into a commentary that has worldwide acceptance and appeal.

While my name is more publicly identified with *Peninim*, its success is due largely to the individuals who are involved with its weekly preparation. Their efforts are hereby recognized, with overwhelming gratitude and appreciation. I do this annually, and, while it might seem redundant, I think gratitude should never be taken for granted, and appreciation is never superfluous. Indeed, it should be repeated often.

I have the privilege of once again thanking *Mrs. Sharon Weimer* and *Mrs. Tova Scheinerman* who prepare the manuscript on a weekly basis. It takes great patience, and, at times, creative ingenuity to read my illegible scrawl and understand what it is I am trying to say – especially when some of the words are missing. *Mrs. Marilyn Berger* continues to do an amazing job of editing the copy, making it presentable and readable to the wider spectrum of the Jewish community. She often tells me when I veer too much in either direction away from the center. My dear friend, *Rabbi Malkiel Hefter*, sees to it that the final copy is completed, printed, and distributed in a timely and orderly fashion.

Over the years, *Peninim* has developed its own network of distribution. While the constraints of space do not permit me to mention each and every person who sees to it that *Peninim* is distributed in his or her individual community, I will highlight a few. It was *Baruch Berger* of Brooklyn, New York, who came to me originally, requesting that he be able to distribute *Peninim* in his community. He later became ill, hindering his ability to continue his *avodas ha'kodesh*. As his illness progressed, Baruch was compelled to halt his activities, but the *z'chus* is all his. It was just two years ago, shortly before *Rosh Hashanah*, when Baruch's pure *neshamah* returned to its rightful place *b'ginzei meromim*. May the *limud ha'Torah* which he initiated be for him an eternal *z'chus*. *Avi Hershkowitz* of Queens, New York, and *Asher Groundland* of Detroit, Michigan, distribute in their respective communities. *Shema Yisrael* network provides the electronic edition for the worldwide distribution. A number of years ago, *Eliyahu Goldberg* of London, England, began a "World" edition. Through his efforts, *Peninim* receives extensive coverage in England, France, Switzerland, South Africa, Hong Kong, South America and Australia. Eliyahu goes so far as to Anglicize the text to make it more readable in the United Kingdom. *Rabbi Moshe Peleg*, Rav of Shaarei Zedek Medical Center, prints and distributes *Peninim* throughout the English-speaking

community in *Eretz Yisrael*. Kudos to *Meir Winter* of Monsey, New York, and *Moshe Davidovici* of Antwerp, Belgium, for including *Peninim* in their internet edition of *Divrei Torah*. May the *mitzvah* of *harbotzas Torah* serve as a *z'chus* for them to be blessed *b'chol mili d'meitav*.

My wife, Neny, has been supportive in more ways than I can enumerate. Sharing with me all of the agonies and ecstasies of writing, her support and encouragement have been indispensable. She avails me the peace of mind to write, regardless of the time or place – whether convenient or not. Her “early morning” editing is a weekly ritual in our home. Her careful reading of the manuscript – her excellent suggestions, as well as her keen eye for typos and poor punctuation – is literally the last word on my manuscript before it meets the copy machine. To this end, and for so many other considerations too numerous to mention, I offer her my heartfelt gratitude. I pray that we: are both blessed with good health; merit that Torah and *chesed* be the hallmarks of our home; and continue to derive much *Torah nachas* from our children and grandchildren.

Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum