

"And Yaakov rent his garments ... and (he) mourned for his son many days ... and he refused to be comforted." (37:34,35)

Yaakov *Avinu's* behavior seems to defy *Chazal's* dictum concerning mourning. *Chazal* state that Hashem enables human beings to cope with death and that the image of the deceased will fade from the mind of the mourners after a period of twelve months. Yaakov refused to be consoled over Yosef's disappearance. He continued to mourn him for many years. Furthermore, we are taught that one should not overindulge in mourning. Why then did Yaakov continue to mourn Yosef, refusing to be consoled by his family?

Horav Moshe Mordechai Epstein z.l., differentiates between personal loss and communal misfortune. When a person dies, he is mourned by his family and close friends. As time passes, however, this expression of loss dissipates. This is the "natural" effect of time. As the memory of the loved one slowly begins to fade, so does the pain and sadness begin to recede. Hashem imbued our psyche with this feature so that we would be able to continue on after the death of a loved one.

Yaakov, however, was not simply responding to a personal loss. Yosef's disappearance and presumed death was a national tragedy. Because he was a brilliant son and student, Yaakov had transmitted to Yosef all of his *Torah* knowledge. Yaakov saw in Yosef special qualities that would enable him to spread the wisdom of Hashem and inspire the spiritual development of *Klal Yisrael*. He was destined to carry on the mantle of leadership of his people. His death brought about an abrupt end to the transmission of the spiritual legacy of *Klal Yisrael*. The tragedy that Yaakov mourned was not only of a personal nature. A national catastrophe of such immense proportion cannot be alleviated, even with the support and sympathy of family and friends.