

After the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died. (16:1)

The *Midrash* says that when Iyov heard about the tragic deaths of Aharon *HaKohen's* two sons, he said, *Af l'zos yecherad libi v'yitar mimkomo*, "Even for this, my heart trembles and it leaps from its place" (*Iyov* 37:1). Iyov had suffered as no other man. He believed that he did not deserve to suffer such extreme pain and misery. He felt that had led a virtuous and pious life, and had not done anything wrong – certainly nothing of the caliber to warrant such serious punishment. Iyov claimed that the physical/emotional pain of losing his children and his possessions paled in comparison to the mental anguish of losing his exalted standing among his peers. He was devastated, and could not find any reason to justify his pain. Iyov's friends attempted to present reasons for his punishment, all of which Iyov vehemently refuted. He maintained that he had done no wrong.

At the end of *Sefer Iyov*, a new participant enters into the debate – Elihu ben Barach'el. This young man becomes incensed with the failure of Iyov's friends to give Iyov a satisfactory cause for his suffering, thus allowing him to justify his self-righteousness. Elihu begins his explanation by saying that while Iyov may have valid questions, he must understand that one cannot argue with Hashem. For this reason alone he is wrong. Man may ask questions, but he cannot engage Hashem in a debate as if he were the Almighty's equal. One addresses Hashem in the form of a request or a prayer, but never as an argument or critique.

Having said this, Elihu alludes to what happened to Nadav and Avihu, citing Aharon's non-reaction – *Va'yidome Aharon*, "And Aharon was silent" (*Vayikra* 10:3). Here Iyov posits that no one had ever suffered as he did, and that no one had accepted – albeit grudgingly – his lot in life as he did. Now he hears about Aharon *HaKohen*. This created within him the sensation of, "My heart trembles, and it leaps from its place." He begins to delve deep into his own reactions, wondering if there ever had been any justification for his questions. Perhaps all of his issues are the result of a lack of *emunah*, faith, in Hashem?

The question that glares at us is quite simple: Based upon the historical timeline of Iyov's life, he lived either during Moshe *Rabbeinu's* period or later (according to one of eight opinions noted in the *Talmud Bava Basra* 15a/b). Thus, he was certainly aware of the tragedy that had befallen Aharon's sons, as well as Aharon's unusually noble reaction to this calamity. Why now – all of a sudden – after Iyov himself had sustained the loss of his sons and other miseries, did he begin to tremble? Why had he not trembled earlier – before he became a partner in suffering?

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, derives a practical lesson from here. One does not really feel someone else's pain until he himself has suffered in a similar manner. That is human nature.

After Iyov himself suffered greatly, he was able to appreciate Aharon's reaction to a similar tragedy. When he perceived the incredible strength of character exhibited by Aharon, his

unequivocal faith in the Almighty, his ability to accept the hand of strict justice without uttering a word of complaint, *Iyov* began to tremble. He realized that his questions/arguments were wrong.

Zachrah Yerushalayim yemei anyah u'merudeha, “*Yerushalayim* recalled the days of her affliction and sorrow” (*Eichah* 1:7). Simply, this means that, while in exile, the nation recalled the *churban*, destruction, that precipitated their present affliction and sorrow. In its commentary to *Eichah*, the *Midrash* defines *merudeha* as being derived from *marod*, to revolt/rebel. Thus, the *pasuk* is interpreted in the following manner: In the days of her affliction, the nation came to acknowledge and remember its revolts against Hashem. *Rav Zaitchik* explains that when life is good and filled with joy, it is impossible to speak with the person concerning his past failings and iniquities. He is on cloud nine, and no one can penetrate his smug feeling. He believes he has done no wrong; therefore he is firm and resolute, and continues doing his own thing. He ignores the signs that indicate future concern. Everybody is wrong, except him. After all, look, he has it made! Furthermore, he is unable to listen to the pleas of those who are suffering, whose lives are filled with constant misery. Someone who has it good cannot taste the bitterness experienced by one whose life is a constant challenge.

When the tables are turned and the errors of the past come to haunt him – when all those “innocent” iniquities prove to be not quite so innocent and its payback time – then he sees and understands the plight of others. When the high and mighty begin to fall, they are suddenly blessed with eyes that see and with ears that hear the pain of others.

It is difficult to feel the cold when one is in a warm room; to understand hunger when one has just had a six-course dinner – to be sensitive to the needs of others when one seems to have it all. One winter, when the city of Brisk had no heat, its *Rav*, *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*, left his heated home and stayed in the *shul*. He explained, “I cannot feel their cold as long as I am in a warm home.”

Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, was a legend in his empathy for a fellow Jew. No favor received ever went unrequited. No Jew’s pain was ignored. He did not alleviate their pain – he personally felt it. Rabbi Paysach Krohn related a classic *ha’koras ha’tov*, gratitude, episode, in which we learn how the *Rosh Yeshivah* acknowledged and paid back a favor he had received many years earlier:

It was a cold, dreary, rainy day in Bnei Brak. *Rav Shach* was well into his nineties and very frail. Yet, he asked his grandson to arrange a car for him, so that he could travel to a town near Haifa. The grandson was not happy about this request, claiming that the *Rosh Yeshivah* was in ill health and too weak to go out in the inclement weather. The *Rosh Yeshivah* was adamant. He had to attend the funeral of a certain woman.

It took two hours to reach the cemetery. The grandson figured it would be a large funeral if his grandfather was making such a supreme effort to attend. He was wrong. There was barely a *minyana*, quorum, in attendance. A small group of elderly men and women who had braved the cold,

wind and rain, stood in solemn respect around a freshly dug grave, It was truly a sad experience. Apparently, the woman had had no children, and the few remaining relatives and some neighbors gathered together to pay her their final respects.

When the funeral was over, the venerable *Rosh Yeshivah* recited *Kaddish Yasom*, the Mourner's *Kaddish*. He stood there a few moments in the pelting rain and simply stared at the grave. His grandson attempted to take him to the car, but *Rav Shach* was not yet ready. It almost seemed as if he wanted to remain in the cold rain and get wet. Finally, shivering and shaking, the *Rosh Yeshivah* signaled that he was ready to return.

Clearly, this entire day – beginning with his grandfather's request to attend the funeral and standing out in the cold – stymied *Rav Shach's* grandson. He expressed his incredulity. The response came by way of a story, which speaks volumes about *Rav Shach's* perception of the *middah*, character trait, of *ha'koras ha'tov*, gratitude.

When *Rav Shach* was a young boy of twelve, a *yeshivah* for select *illuyim*, brilliant students, opened. There was no dormitory, and food was scanty. The older students slept on the benches of the *shul*, while the younger ones found a place on the floor. *Rav Shach* was by far the youngest student. Despite his youth, he was granted a place on a bench. This attests to his brilliance and dedication.

While the conditions were tolerable in the spring and summer, the harsh winter brought its challenge. There was no heat. It is difficult enough to sleep on a hard floor, a cold floor is almost impossible to sleep on. A few months of this physical deprivation was getting to the budding young scholar. After all, he was only a "kid." What made things worse was the letters that arrived from his uncle, a prosperous blacksmith, asking his nephew to join him in the business. The young boy ruminated over the offer. Veritably, he wanted to learn and dedicate his life to Torah, but if he froze at night and, as a result, could not sleep, then he could not learn. He might as well become a *frum*, observant, prosperous professional. He decided to give it one more day before making a decision.

That morning, a woman came to the *yeshivah* with a small wagon filled with blankets. Apparently, her husband was a blanket salesman, who had tragically been killed in an accident. She was here to donate the remaining blankets to the *yeshivah* students. *Rav Shach* was one of the fortunate recipients of a blanket. It made a world of difference for him, and it played a critical role in keeping the young boy in *yeshivah* that winter.

End of story? No. *Rav Shach* went on to become the *gadol ha'dor*, preeminent Torah leader of the generation. That woman, regrettably, had a sad life. She never remarried. After moving to *Eretz Yisrael*, she settled in Haifa. She died as she lived: quietly, without fanfare. "This is why I attended her funeral," *Rav Shach* said to his grandson.

"But why did you keep on standing there after the funeral was over, getting soaked to the skin?"

the grandson asked.

“It has been so many years since that incident, and over time one tends to forget. I wanted to remain out in the cold, so that the frigid sensation that gripped me **then** would inspire me **now** to pay the proper gratitude for her gift.”