

## **Their father Yaakov said to them, “I am the one whom you bereaved! Yosef is gone, Shimon is gone, and now you would take away Binyamin? Upon me has it all fallen!” (42:36)**

Yaakov *Avinu* had experienced two tragedies with the loss of two sons: Yosef and Shimon. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, explains that Yaakov was addressing his sons from a practical, Torah-oriented perspective. It is quite possible that the “disappearance” of the brothers is unrelated. There is, however, one common thread between them: both tragedies directly affected Yaakov. He was left bereft of both sons. If things happen repeatedly to someone in a similar manner and he cannot see a clear reason why they should occur, he should not place himself into a position in which it could occur once again, until he develops some insight into its cause. He should view the repeated fact as a sign, an ominous warning that something in his life just might be wrong.

When a person experiences what might be termed as a *klop*, slap, from Hashem, again and again, he should introspect, asking himself: Am I acting properly? Am I observing *mitzvos* the way I should? Am I behaving properly with my fellowman, my immediate family? If after going through this checklist he found that he has led an exemplary life, then *Chazal* say he should blame his troubles on *bitul Torah*, wasting time from Torah study, or studying Torah with an attitude of indifference. If he is so perfect that he cannot find any failing whatsoever in his Torah study (there are such people), he should accept these troubles as *yissurim shel ahavah*, afflictions which Hashem brings upon a person out of a sense of profound love for the individual. Thus, his sins – or minor infractions – are cleansed in this world, allowing him to enter *Olam Habba* in a state of spiritual purity.

Regrettably, there are individuals whose arrogance misguides them into thinking that life's troubles are G-d's test of their spiritual mettle. They will proclaim, “I will hold my head up high! I will fight this! I will persevere!” What they do not realize – or, perhaps, refuse to confront – is the notion that G-d is not testing them, but rather, speaking to them, telling them to change their lives: Something is wrong; this is not a time for arrogance, it is a time for *teshuvah*.

The *Baal Akeidah* interprets Yaakov *Avinu's* statement as a lesson to his sons: “Yes, you are grieving. You lost two brothers. It is a tragedy, but it does not compare to a father's pain. I lost two sons!” I think what we derive from here is that people's reactions to tragedies are not the same. Parents, spouses, siblings, children, and friends – each of these individuals have their own personal and unique relationship, closeness and reaction. Therefore, one must keep their unique emotions in mind.

*Malbim* and *Sforno* interpret Yaakov's reaction as a declaration of taking personal blame – “The onus of guilt is on me.” Their reasoning, however, is different. *Malbim* attributes Yaakov's

expression of guilt in Yosef's "death" to himself: "I sent him to Shechem, a place of danger. I will be held similarly accountable for Shimon's being taken captive. Ultimately, if I allow Binyamin to leave, and something happens to him – it will all be my fault. Thus, I dread the punishment in store for me."

*Sforno* takes a different approach. Yaakov takes the blame because he is the **father**. His sons argued among themselves, but **they** were not punished. **He** was punished. This indicated that he was being held accountable for the sons' sins. The fact that there was sibling rivalry, envy and contempt for Yosef, is a blemish on Yaakov's *chinuch*, education. He did not raise his sons properly. Had it been purely the fault of his sons, **they** would have been punished, or their own children would have been punished. Since, he was the one who lost two sons, it appears that the punishment was directed at Yaakov. It seems to indicate that something was lacking in his parenting skills.

In the *Talmud Yevamos* 63b, *Chazal* relate that when the *Chabbarim*, evil and contemptuous Persians – who had no respect for the Jews – came to Babylon, they enacted three decrees. The third one seemed illogical: They began exhuming the dead. *Chazal* said this was punishment for the Jews who had begun to amuse themselves by participating with the Babylonians on *Chabbarim* holidays. Consequently, Hashem "provided" the Jews with an opportunity to mourn. The question is obvious: Why should parents who have passed away be subjected to further anguish with the exhumation of their bodies, just because their children were acting inappropriately by celebrating gentile holidays?

*Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl*, explains that, regrettably, the parents are held liable for the sins of their children, because they are at fault. Had the parents respected *Shabbos* and held it in its proper esteem – had they beautified their home for *Shabbos* – generating an atmosphere of spirituality and joy, then their children would have maintained a much different attitude toward Judaism. They would have seen and sensed the holiness of *Shabbos* and the beauty of Jewish life. They would have had no reason to gravitate to other religions, to celebrate with the *goyim*. Unfortunately, when children see their parents' indifference to *shul* attendance, and how they treat *davening* as a drag, to the point that they talk all the time, or when they count every minute until *Shabbos* concludes, then they are not only poor role models but they cause their children irreparable life-long harm.

In the *Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah* 63:10) *Chazal* teach that a father must address his son's spiritual needs until he reaches thirteen years of age. At that time, he should recite the blessing, *Baruch sheh'p'tarani mei'ansho shel zeh*, "Bless that He relieved me of this (source of) punishment." There is a debate among the *poskim* whether this blessing should be recited *b'Shem u'Malchus*, articulating Hashem's Name – as we do in all blessings. *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, explained the reasoning behind the one who contends that Hashem's Name **not** be mentioned. If the father's education of his son had been lacking or inappropriate, then the father should **not** recite the blessing. One can make the blessing only if he is truly absolved from liability, by having executed his responsibilities to the fullest. If the father failed his son, then the father is

held responsible for whatever the son does in life which is counter to Torah-orientation. He is at fault because he was the first line of defense. He should have provided a solid Torah education, and supported this education through his personal example.

I know things can – and do – go wrong, even in the finest of families. Parents cannot always be blamed, but they are the first ones who are scrutinized. They are the source of a child's education, either by example or by provision.

One's children are **always watching**. They hear everything that goes on at home and are indelibly impacted by both negative and positive activity. When a father is involved in contentious strife, the children are affected. They learn that *machlokes*, controversy, is permissible. After all, "my father does it." When a father is late coming to *shul*, and, when he is there he does nothing but talk incessantly, the children learn that *shul* and *davening* are jokes. When a father manifests little respect for Torah scholars, including his children's *rebbeim*, the children learn to be disdainful of Torah. It all begins at home. The flip side, of course, is that the positive impact also begins at home. When parents act appropriately, respectfully and joyfully, it rubs off on their children. The first line of defense is usually the responsible party.