

And Aharon fell silent. (10:3)

The *Ramban* notes that Aharon maintained his silence only after first breaking into sobs. The *Abarbanel* disagrees, asserting that Aharon did not react to the tragic death of his sons. In an attempt to defend the *Ramban*'s position, the *Chasam Sofer* explains that while Aharon did weep, he cried in response to his sins which he felt precipitated the tragedy that befell his sons. Aharon's silence was a sign of acceptance, of inner peace, of profound faith in the Almighty. Aharon's silence reflected his serenity at accepting the Divine decree issued against his sons. How did he gather the fortitude to accept in silence, to acquiesce to such difficult terms? From where did he conjure up the inner strength to remain serene in the presence of such tragedy? What makes it more incredible is that Aharon lost his sons on a day that was exceptional, a day marked for glory, joy and excitement. This only served to exacerbate his pain. Yet, he endured and accepted in silence. How did he do it?

The answer to this question -- the response to all situations where our people have suffered devastating blows, tragic, heart-breaking misfortune with courage and resolve -- is found in a profound thought from **Horav Eliezer Zisha Portugal, zl**, the *Skulener Rebbe*. As a young man the Rebbe did everything within his power to bring Jews closer to their faith. In fact, he would convince young men not to join the Romanian army lest they become lost to Yiddishkeit in the harmful environment. Instead, he encouraged them to go to a *yeshivah* where they would study *Torah* and strengthen their faith. As it would be, someone reported the *Rebbe's* "seditious" activities to the authorities, who promptly arrested him. He was thrown into a dirty cell, bereft of any amenities for maintaining cleanliness or hygiene. The *Rebbe* was a frail, sickly man, who would not be able to survive very long in this cold, dirty dungeon.

What could he do to maintain his sanity under such horrible conditions? He began to *daven*. The *Rebbe's kavanah*, concentration, during *tefillah* was legendary. He prayed for hours with incredible devotion, entreating the Almighty on behalf of His people. In this extraordinary predicament one can imagine that he poured out his heart with even greater fervor and emotion. He enunciated every word with the greatest passion, the entire *tefillah* constituted a lesson in *avodas Hashem*. The *Rebbe* was troubled by the meaning of "*Baruch She'omar*": "*Blessed is He Who spoke and the world came into being; Blessed is He Who speaks and does; Blessed is He Who decrees and fulfills.*" He had recited this prayer countless times over the years. Suddenly, he was bothered by the word "*gozer u'mekayeim*", "*He decrees and fulfills*". This phrase did not belong in the *tefillah*. It did not fit in. This prayer praised Hashem for all the wonderful, positive things he was doing for us. The phrase, "*gozer u'mekayeim*", seems out of place. A *gezeirah*, decree, is usually an edict that carries with it harsh ramifications. Why then would the fact that Hashem decrees and fulfills His decrees be mentioned in the *tefillah* in which we thank him for something about which we rejoice?

After some thought, the *Rebbe* noted another meaning to "*u'mekayeim*". In addition to meaning "to fulfill", it also means who sustains, who endures, who perseveres; this interpretation gave the phrase an entirely different perspective. There are times when, for reasons beyond our

understanding, Hashem must issue a decree against an individual. This decree can have a devastating effect upon the person. How can he "make it" through all the suffering that was assigned to him. The answer is, "*Baruch gozer u'mekayeim*". While it is true that Hashem makes the *gezeirah*, He is also "*me'kayeim*", He gives succor and strength to the person to persevere. Hashem sustains the individual, giving him the fortitude to endure the crisis that has challenged him. The *Rebbe* realized that while he was the victim of a serious decree, Hashem would sustain him and enable him to prevail over his torment. His attitude changed and he was released from his predicament a few days later. Every year on the anniversary of his release from prison, the *Rebbe* would recount this episode in his life and explain to those assembled how Hashem sustains those who are true objects of his *gezeirah*. He taught people not to be broken by events that challenge them, because Hashem gives one the strength to overcome.

Hashem gave Aharon the ability to overcome the challenge, to triumph over the pain, to accept the tragic loss with courage and faith and to go on. In truth, it is only with such Divine assistance that one can "make it".