

## **And Aharon was silent. (10:3)**

Aharon HaKohen received schar, reward, for his silence and acceptance of Hashem's decree. As a result of his silence, Hashem rewarded him with a "private" detailing of the mitzvah/prohibition against Kohanim entering the Sanctuary after having imbibed an intoxicating beverage. We are taught that every punishment and reward coincides middah k'neged middah, measure for measure, with the sin or mitzvah that catalyzed it. What is the middah k'neged middah whereby Aharon's silence led to a private hearing of the mitzvah? The Bais Aharon quotes Chazal (Berachos 60a), "One must bless on bad (sad) tidings, as he does on good (happy) tidings." One must accept sad tidings with joy. The mere fact that Aharon HaKohen was silent means that he accepted the judgment. It does not, on the surface, indicate that he felt good about it. It is quite possible that silence is the result of overwhelming sadness and depression. Chazal, however, state that the Shechinah, Divine Presence, does not rest upon a sad person. It only rests upon a person who is filled with joy that accompanies mitzvah performance. Thus, since Hashem convened a "meeting" with Aharon, he must have been filled with joy. Otherwise, he would not have merited Hashem's Presence. Thus, the middah k'neged middah was the meeting, which was the consequence of the simchah, joy, expressed by Aharon in accepting Hashem's decree.

In contrast to Aharon are those who, unfortunately, react negatively to any mishap or circumstance which alters their comfort zone. I am not talking chas v'shalom, Heaven forbid, about tragedy; I am referring to any situation that creates a change in people's status quo, such that they descend into serious depression and melancholy in a manner inappropriate to the challenge that confronts them.

The following incident took place about one hundred and fifty years ago. While the actual story is wellknown, it is the exposition that is attendant to it that redefines the incident, altering our perspective of it. In the city of Vilna lived a poor shoemaker by the name of Zelig. He was a simple Jew who asked for and required very little. He was an honest laborer who earned the barest minimum, yet never complained. He was always satisfied with his lot – even when he could barely place food on the table for his family.

One day, Zelig inherited a small fortune from a distant uncle. Overnight, Zelig was able to live comfortably. While he did not splurge, he moved to a larger home and he now had money for all of those things that his family had dreamed of, but were well aware were out of reach due to their financial constraints. Zelig was a tremendous baal tzedakah, sharing his newly-begotten wealth with those less fortunate than he was. Within a short time, he no longer sat in the back of the shul. As a person of means, he was invited to sit oiben un, up front. His opinions mattered, and, before long, he was appointed as Rosh Ha'kahal, president of the congregation/community.

Zelig's son was an excellent Torah scholar, and now, due to his material abundance, he was no longer restricted in the area of shidduchim, marriage partners. The Rav of the community was honored to take Zelig's son as a husband for his daughter. To be chosen by the Rav of the community as his son-in-law was no simple distinction. It was a great honor, both for Zelig's son

and for Zelig. With great anticipation, both families awaited that auspicious day when their families would unite in the marriage of their children.

The day arrived, and the entire community showed up for the wedding. It was a beautiful and impressive affair. Zelig did not hold back in spreading his joy among the guests. It was a very emotional moment when, following the chuppah, the guests lined up to pay their respects to the parents of the chosson and kallah. There always has to be that one person who, due to his negative character traits, begrudges another Jew his good fortune. This instance was no different, as a member of the community who remembered when, not so long ago, he would bring his torn shoes to Zelig to have them repaired. It just bothered him to no end that Zelig was now the recipient of such good fortune and that he was on the receiving end of the line of well-wishers. This spiteful, sullen person walked up to Zelig, and, in front of everyone, held up a torn shoe and asked, "Tell me, Zelig, is it worth fixing this shoe, and how much will the repair cost me?"

Everyone stood there in great shock. No one said a word. Suddenly, Zelig turned white and passed out. Doctors were called and emergency resuscitation was administered, but alas, it was too late. In a few moments time, the wonderful simchah, joyous occasion, was transformed into a room filled with grief and mourning. The father of the chosson, who just minutes earlier had been reveling in extreme joy, now lay dead – the victim of an ignominious, unpardonable act carried out by a very sick man, whose envy had gotten the better of him.

Word of this despicable act of murderous aggression reached the ears of Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, who was shaken by it. He did not settle down until he had established his Bais HaMussar, bais hamedrash for the study of character traits and ethical refinement. He felt that, unless one studies and focuses on ethical character refinement, he could fall into the abyss of murder, as evinced by what had occurred in Vilna. This is the part of the story that is well-known. The sefer, Chaim She'Yeish Bo, quotes Horav Nota Tzeinvirt who wondered what precipitated the establishment of the Bais HaMussar. Surely, it was not the actions of the despicable creature who had insulted a fellow Jew, hurting him so devastatingly that he died as a result of the insult. Such a person is unique in his evil. He is not a standard wicked person. His actions are so vile and reprehensible that it is almost impossible to believe that another person would be so despicable that, due to his actions there was a necessity to establish a bais ha'mussar. A deeper reason must have prompted Rav Yisrael to act so decisively.

He therefore suggested that the basis for the bais ha'mussar was not the abuser, but rather, Zelig, the man who died as a result of the abuse. How does a person die as a result of being humiliated? Why was he so bothered by the embarrassment that he sustained? He was a wealthy and successful member of the community. His son had just married the daughter of the Rav. His life was filled with roses. Why did he care what people may think? Why faint because an evil person acted outrageously? Why was he so bothered? Why was his self-image so fragile that the slightest insult could catalyze his death?

How many people go through life suffering from one form of trouble or another? For some, it is the challenge of poverty; others suffer because of their children; yet others feel excluded from the community due to their lack of scholarship. Nonetheless, they live life to its fullest, swallow their pride, experience their pain quietly, without fanfare, without calling attention to themselves. They might not walk around with their heads held high as if they have no cares in the world, but they certainly do not walk around morose and sullen. If a person can become so affected by an insult; if a person is unable to see the positive in life – then there is serious need for a *bais ha'mussar*. Overreacting is a sign of a lack of faith.