

He shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. (17:13)

The Torah commands us to cover part of the blood of the kosher birds or non-domesticated kosher animals that he slaughters. The *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that the *shoresh*, root, of this *mitzvah* is in the relationship between the soul of the slaughtered animal or fowl and its blood. Blood is the life source of the living animal, thus, it is fitting for us to cover the soul and hide it from the eye prior to consuming its meat. When we eat the meat with the blood exposed, we acquire a tinge of cruelty in our souls. In other words, to have a meal of meat or fowl, while the life source of this “meal” lays exposed, indicates a lack of compassion. For the members of the nation for whom compassion is one of its three primary characteristics, this is considered inappropriate behavior.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates a powerful story which underscores the character trait of compassion, which is a priority and a critical component of the Jewish DNA. This vignette demonstrates to what extent the *middah*, attribute, of *rachmanus*, compassion, is inherent in a Jew, to the point that at the very last moment of his life he chose to thank his brethren, to grace them with one last act of compassion.

An elderly Jew, a G-d-fearing Torah scholar, had been interned in Auschwitz in his younger years. He witnessed countless brutalities, acts of cruelty, executed by demons in the guise of human beings, acts that one would never believe could be perpetrated by man. Yet, they were. Although it was many years after the war, and he was living comfortably with his family in America, the brutality and heinous cruelty which he had witnessed continued to haunt him. In all public venues he acted like anyone else. Every *Yom Tov*, however, when the *Kohanim* blessed the congregation, he would act in an unusual manner, by covertly leaving the *shul* shortly before *Bircas Kohanim* and retuning just as the *Kohanim* concluded their blessing.

One day, the *Rav* of the *shul* decided to ask his elderly congregant why he did this. The man was willing to share his story with the *Rav*: “*Rebbe*, you are well aware that all of the members of my original family were sacrificed in Auschwitz. I, together with a group of inmates, decided one *erev Pesach* that we had nothing to lose. Our families had all been murdered by the Nazis. We might as well have one last spiritual ‘fling.’ We were going to bake *matzos* and eat them at the makeshift *Seder* which we were going to conduct.

“We did it! One man was able (over a period of days) to obtain a small amount of flour. Another obtained the necessary utensils to form, roll and bake the three prize *matzos* that we succeeded in making. We were even able to obtain a small amount of wine. We all gathered together and began to recite the *Haggadah* from memory. We were a group of broken shards, whose only joy in life was being celebrated with the recital of the *Haggadah* in anticipation for the eating of the precious *matzah* that we had prepared. Suddenly, the door burst open, and in walked the camp commandant. When he saw what was going on before his very eyes, no words could describe his fury. ‘Who is responsible for this outrage? I will kill you all unless you tell me who is behind this!’ he screamed at us. Meanwhile, he had already moved over to my close friend, selecting him as his

sacrifice. 'You! You are the one that is behind this rebellion! Did you think that you could get away with it?' he screamed. 'I will shoot you in front of your friends, so that they will not forget the punishment meted out to one who mutinies against us!'

"As the Nazi held the gun to the head of my friend, he had a moment of decency (if such a word could even be used in connection with such a blood thirsty savage), 'Do you have a last request before you die?' he asked. The Jew replied, 'Yes, I do. I would like to speak with my brothers for two minutes.' The Nazi permitted him to speak. Moments before he was to die, our brother turned to us and said, 'Today is *Yom Tov*, and I am a *Kohen*. I would like my last living act on this earth to be *Bircas Kohanim*. I would like to bless you for the last time.' Before we could realize what was happening, he raised his hands and declared, *Yevarechecha Hashem v'Yishmiracha*! We responded with a loud resounding *Amen*! He cried; we cried. He blessed; we said '*Amen*.' The Nazi came over to him and shot him in the head. He fell down to the ground, blood pouring out of the wound. As long as I live I will never forget that moment. My friend's last act on this world was to care about us, to bless us with Hashem's protection.

"The war ended a few weeks later. I was a broken shard of my former self. It had gotten so bad that I had decided to renege my Jewishness. I would no longer adhere to our religion – not after what I had experienced. Every time that I was about to execute that act, however, to perform the transgression that would sever my relationship with *Yiddishkeit*, my friend's *Bircas Kohanim* appeared before my eyes. His love, his compassion for us – I could not turn my back on him. This encouraged me and gave me the strength to continue to remain steadfast in my commitment to our religion. Nonetheless, whenever the *Kohanim* raise their hands to recite the *Bircas Kohanim*, I have to leave. The scene brings back painful memories. I do not want to weep in the *shul*; so I go out and weep quietly in the hall."

Rav Zilberstein observes that exclusive of the unusual heroic act of compassion evinced by the *Kohen*, we derive from this incident how one experience can forever remain imbedded in someone's mind for a lifetime – inspiring him positively, and ultimately being the catalyst for maintaining his fidelity to Hashem.

Parents spend time, money and exert every effort to imbue their children with the proper *hashkafah*, outlook, in life. They want their children to grow into the consummate *bnei Torah* and *bnos Yisrael*. They pray and weep, so that they merit to receive *Yiddishe nachas* from their offspring. Yet, not all succeed. Why? While I do not have the answers, one thing is certain: If parents personally maintain a lifestyle that is obverse to what they expect of their children, they are undermining their own efforts. The best medium for inculcating a child with the proper Torah values is to set an example by personally living such a lifestyle. "Do as I say – not as I do" is counterproductive and sends a destructive message. While it is difficult to alter one's personal lifestyle, it indicates how much a parent really cares about his/her child's spiritual and moral growth. One can hardly expect better from the son than to be a reflection of his father.