

And he shall take off his garments, and put on other garments. (6:4)

In his *Sipurei Chassidim*, *Horav Shlomo Y. Zevin, zl* (cited by *Imrei Shammai*) relates that *Rav David Tzvi Chein*, a *Chabad chassid*, who was *Rav* in Chernigov, was scheduled for his *yechidus* (private interview with the *Rebbe*, during which the *chassid* seeks guidance and inspiration) with *Horav Shmuel, zl*, of Lubavitch. He arrived late, so he decided that he would wait outside the *Rebbe's* study. In that way, when the *Rebbe* would leave, he would quickly ask his question. He was late, and he had to return to Chernigov. As he was waiting, he was joined by the *Rebbe's gabbai*, aide/attendant, who had brought a change of clothes for the *Rebbe*. Apparently, after the *Rebbe* spent a session of *yechidus* with a number of *chassidim*, he perspired heavily and required a new set of clothing.

The *gabbai* had a problem with this, "The entire *yechidus* session lasts an hour. Why should the *Rebbe* perspire so much?" *Rav David Tzvi* did not respond (probably because he knew the attendant would not understand). When he did not reply, the attendant asked again, this time even louder, "Why does the *Rebbe* perspire so much?"

It was at this point that the *Rebbe's* door opened, and the *Rebbe* stuck out his head to respond to his attendant, "I am dismissing you from your position effective immediately. Please go home, and I will continue to send you your wages each week. By the way, why is it so difficult for you to understand why I perspire profusely? In the course of one hour, I had *yechidus* with 25 people. If I am to counsel a person properly, I must experience his adversity as he himself experiences it. In order to achieve this reality, I must divest myself of my garments and don his garments. (In our present-day vernacular, "I must step into his shoes.") When the time comes for me to render my advice and guidance, I must remove his clothes and put on my clothes. I can hardly give him my advice while I am still dressed in his clothes. Now, would you not also perspire if you did this 50 times? (25 times removing his clothes and putting on the petitioner's clothes and then doing it over again for the guidance portion of the *yechidus*)"

What a powerful story. A Torah leader must empathize – he must sense the pain of each Jew. Veritably, it takes a very special person actually to feel someone else's pain. No two people are the same, thus making it impossible to feel someone else's pain – as he feels it. One can, however, take note, see the pain written all over his face; his eyes; his body language. One can see another in pain and what he sees motivates him to act. When we see someone else in pain, we feel bad, but that is not enough. Our friend will not get better simply because we feel bad for him. We must do something about it, and, if we cannot change his circumstances, then we should at least be supportive.

A young couple had exhausted every avenue to achieve parenthood. Every specialist, every procedure – they had been there – they had tried that. Finally, the top specialist in the field of

reproduction told them that it was all fruitless. He had no scientific remedy for their problem. The husband did not give up. He planned to petition the *posek hador*, pre-eminent *Halachic* arbiter, of the generation, *Horav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, zl*, for his blessing. He proceeded to the home of *Rav Shlomo Zalmen*, who listened and asked for some time to mull over the problem. A short while later, *Rav Shlomo Zalmen* came out and said, "I tried, but was unsuccessful. I am sorry, but I am unable to give you the news that you want to hear." The young man broke down in tears and left. As he was sitting in his apartment a few hours later, the young man heard a faint knocking at his door. He opened the door to greet *Rav Shlomo Zalmen*, who had walked over and climbed the many steps to this man's apartment. *Rav Shlomo Zalmen* looked at him and said, "I could not help you, but there is no reason that I cannot sit and cry together with you." This is the meaning of empathy. Even when one is unable to help solve the problem, he is able to ease some of the pain just by being present and showing that he cares.

On the day of the wedding of *Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz's* youngest son, as everyone was preparing to leave for the wedding, the *Rosh Yeshivah* took time off to meet with a *bachur*, *yeshivah* student, who was having difficulty finding his designated match. *Rav Chaim* spent an entire hour speaking, encouraging, guiding this young man. He continued his conversation with him even as he walked to the *monit*, taxi, that was to drive him to the wedding hall. Did he have nothing else to do today – of all days? *Rav Chaim* told the *bachur*, "Today I am marrying off my youngest son. It is a day of unparalleled joy for me. With whom do I want to share the joy? With you! I am thinking of you today!" Need I say more?

Horav Mordechai Poragremonsky, zl, was wont to say: "To feel pain when one's friend confronts adversity is the sign of a *mentch*, decent human being. To feel joy when he experiences joy requires one to be a *malach*, angel!"