

For Hashem's portion is His People; Yaakov is the measure of his inheritance. (32:9)

In his commentary to *Bereishis* (28:12), *Ramban* explains the message of Yaakov *Avinu's* vision of a ladder whose legs were in this world and whose top cap reached into the Heavens. He explains that every aspect of the universe has angels (going up and down) who are Divine agents, dispatched by Hashem to supervise and be involved in the workings of the world and its inhabitants. Hashem stands above the ladder and Himself manipulates everything that involves His children – the Jewish People. This process is called *Hashgachah Pratis*, Divine Providence.

The story is told that one day the holy *Baal Shem Tov* was walking through a forest with his students. He stopped for a moment to point out a leaf that had just blown off a tree, that had floated down to rest upon the sun-dried earth. He said to his students that the falling of the leaf at that moment was no happenstance. Rather, it had been Divinely orchestrated for a purpose. When he saw his students looking at him incredulously, he directed one of them to lift up the leaf. He did so, and there beneath the leaf was a worm, dying in the summer heat. The fallen leaf had generated new life into this worm, by landing at this specific place, at this specific time. Hashem governs the world at every moment of our lives.

Indeed, a fallen leaf that had been tossed around by the wind and moved from one place to another to land in a specific place, was an agent of Hashem sent to resuscitate the worm. It is not for us to question, to ask why, only to accept that it is all part of Hashem's Divine Plan – as is everything that occurs. The most inexplicable things meaning in due time, as attested to by the following incident:

An elderly woman (whom we will call Mrs. Goldman) was a resident in a health care facility for the aged. For all intents and purposes, she was in good health. Thus, it was a shock to her son (who made a point to visit her twice weekly) to receive a call from the director of the home to report that, sadly, his mother had passed away during the night. Shimon (also a random name) was bowled over. As the only son, he had had a special relationship with his mother. With great sadness, he made arrangements to have his mother's body taken to the local funeral home where a proper *taharah*, purification, would be made by the *Chevra Kaddishah*, Jewish Burial Society, followed by burial in the family plot. His mother had been a private person, so a large crowd did not attend her funeral. Only her few remaining friends and members of the community who either knew her or were close to Shimon's family were present.

During the *shivah*, seven-day-mourning period, Shimon's cell phone rang. Lo and behold, it was his mother, "Where have you been these last few days: no visit, no phone calls?" Words cannot describe the shock and relief, the low and high, experienced by Shimon during that phone call. His first call was to the director of the home. First of all, how could this have happened? The people in charge were intelligent and quite capable of reading. Such an error was almost unforgivable.

Second, if the deceased was, in fact, not his mother, then someone else with a similar name had passed away. Her next of kin must be notified.

The director explained the apparent similarity in the names of the two women, who incidentally had been housed in the same wing, two rooms from one another. He now had the difficult task of conveying the sad news to the son of the “real” deceased. He made the call and explained to the son, whose impatience was evident from the tone of his voice, “Why are you bothering me with news about my mother?” he asked. “I am a busy man, and I do not have a premium of time to waste.” Clearly, this man did not harbor an abiding love for his late mother.

The director continued, “About ten days ago, your mother became ill and, despite the efforts of the physician and staff, your mother passed away. Another woman in the same wing bore a similar name. By mistake, we buried the right person, but with the wrong name. Veritably, nothing can be done; your mother received a fine, traditional funeral and burial. We are sorry for your loss and for the unpleasant manner in which the news has been conveyed to you.”

The son’s reaction was totally unlike what the director had expected. No screaming; no finger pointing; just seething anger. Shockingly, the anger was not directed at the facility’s administration, but rather, at the deceased. “Tell me something,” the son asked. “Was she buried in a Jewish cemetery?” “As I told you earlier, she was availed a traditional funeral and buried in a Jewish cemetery,” the director said, hoping to assuage the man’s anxiety. “Did they say *Kaddish* for her?” The director replied, “Of course. Everything was carried out in a *halachically* correct manner. She was even lovingly and admirably eulogized. They even sat *Shivah* for her.”

Suddenly, the son began muttering to himself, “She won. She was right, and I was mistaken. I thought I would have the last word, and, ultimately, she did.” “Is something wrong?” asked the director. “Let me explain,” the son replied bitterly. “From the moment that my mother became a resident in the nursing facility, the two of us fought. I informed my mother that I believed in nothing – not in G-d, not in religion, not in an Afterlife. I promised her that if I have my way, she will not be buried in a traditional manner and in a Jewish cemetery. I would have her corpse donated to the local medical school, so that science can benefit from her death. She begged me to reconsider. I said, ‘No way. Religion has no place in my life.’ One day, she cried out to me, ‘Fine, if you will not concern yourself with me, then our Heavenly Father will take care of me! He will see to it that I receive a proper burial in a Jewish cemetery.’ I guess I erred, and she was right. She won,” the son said, this time quite shaken. He hung up the phone as he muttered, “I will have to reconsider my life.”