

Then Yehudah approached him. (44:18)

Yehudah made an impassioned plea to Yosef, whom he still thought was the Egyptian viceroy. He was polite, but firm. He was even willing to exchange himself for Binyamin. One thing was not negotiable: Binyamin. He must be freed. *Chazal* (*Midrash Rabbah* 93:6), comment that, in his address to Yosef, Yehudah was prepared for three courses of action: war, appeasement and prayer. Concerning war, we see that the undercurrent of Yehudah's plea was his willingness to use force, if necessary, to effect Binyamin's release. From his choice of words and respectful demeanor, it is clear that Yehudah was prepared to have a peaceful resolution to the incident. Concerning prayer, however, we see no indication of Yehudah praying.

In his *Pri Tzaddik*, *Horav Yitzchak HaKohen*, zl, quotes *Horav Menachem Azaria*, zl (an esteemed *Kabbalist*), who teaches a lesson concerning one's discourse with another fellow. When one makes a verbal request for assistance from another person, he should simultaneously be speaking to Hashem (in his heart), beseeching Him for Heavenly assistance. Unless Hashem is in favor of his request, nothing will come of it.

With this principle in mind, *Rav Tzadok* explains Yehudah's dialogue with Yosef. On the surface, Yehudah articulated his plea to Yosef. In his heart, however, unbeknownst to any spectator, Yehudah was praying to Hashem. He knew that success or failure is determined by Hashem. Yosef was only an agent of the Almighty. When we closely analyze Yehudah's words, this idea becomes apparent. Yehudah said, "My master, may your servant speak of a matter in the ears of my Master (Hashem). Have no anger upon your servant, for you are like Pharaoh." When Yehudah said the words, my Master, he was not only speaking to Yosef. It may have appeared and sounded like that, but actually in the deep recesses of his heart, he was also supplicating Hashem.

We often find ourselves in situations in which our mind has convinced us that it is only a specific person who can help us. This occurs more times than we care to admit. We must remember that absolutely no one can help us if Hashem does not deem it so. He alone decides our fate. Thus, when we turn to someone for help, we should offer our supplication to Hashem to guide His agent to our benefit. We may overtly articulate our request to a human being, but our heart echoes these same words to Hashem.

We all have certainly heard a popular *Yiddish* idiom: *Der mentch tracht un Gott lacht*, "Man thinks (plans), and G-d laughs," or, "Man proposes, and G-d disposes." In his commentary to *Bereishis* 37: , *Ramban* writes, *Ha'Gezeirah amitis v'ha'charitzus sheker*. "The decree (from Hashem) is true, but the effort is false." In other words, we go through the motions of endeavoring, of planning, of dreaming and conjuring up wonderful goals which we plan on realizing. Hashem does not necessarily see it our way. Therefore, whatever we do, we must factor Hashem into the equation, because, if He is not in agreement with our goals/plans, they will be false, will not be realized.

Does this mean that we should just sit back and do nothing? Absolutely not. We should endeavor,

but never lose sight that the end result is determined by Hashem. Actually, there is something we should do: reach out to every Jew possible to introduce, explain and inspire them about Judaism. To say that if Hashem wants them to return, they will, is abnegating our responsibility as Jews.

A number of years ago, a group of American businessmen visited *Eretz Yisrael*. These were some of the wealthiest, most powerful heads of Fortune 500 companies. Among them was Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks. As part of their itinerary, they visited Meah Shearim, where a meeting was arranged with the esteemed *Rosh Yeshivah* of *Mir Yerushalayim*, *Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zl*. This group was unaware that the *Rosh Yeshivah* suffered from advanced Parkinson's disease, leaving him physically debilitated and not in control of his limbs. When he "walked" in, the group was embarrassed for imposing on him.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* noticed the men averting their eyes in order not to stare at him. He banged his palm on the table and said, "Gentlemen, look at me! Look at me now!" They complied somewhat reluctantly. "Who can tell me what we learn from the Holocaust?" The men were not prepared for this, so their answers were ad lib, not very well thought-out. They responded with the standard responses: "We will never forget!" was one limp reply. The *Rosh Yeshivah* indicated his disapproval with this answer. Another one said that we should never be a bystander or act with indifference to such evil. The *Rosh Yeshivah* was still dissatisfied. He saw that these men were clueless as to the lessons to be gleaned from the greatest tragedy since the destruction of the *Batei Mikdash*.

"Let me teach you a lesson about the essence of the human spirit," the *Rosh Yeshivah* said. "During the Holocaust, our people were subjected to the most heinous, brutal and debasing persecutions. Some were murdered outright, while others were sent to concentration camps, where they suffered immeasurably before being brutally murdered. They were crammed like animals into cattle-cars and transported for days without food or water. When they finally arrived at the death camps, those who had survived the onerous trip arrived weak and broken. Men were separated from women and lined up for a selection that would determine their immediate fate. Those who were singled out to live were then shoved into crowded, filthy barracks, where one in six men was issued a blanket.

"Now we come to the defining moment, the instant that distinguishes an elevated human spirit from the ordinary. Would the man who was issued the blanket keep it for himself to be sure that he stayed warm, or would he spread it over five men to keep them warm as well? My friends, this is when our people showed their indomitable Jewish spirit. Every man was sure to spread his blanket over five of his brothers! This was when we learned the power of the human spirit."

The *Rosh Yeshivah* rose from his seat and looked at his guests, "My friends, go back to America and spread your blankets over five others!"

Returning to our original question: If man's endeavor is "false"; if the consequences of our actions

are decided by Hashem – what do we do? Share the blanket over others. Just continue reaching out and performing acts of loving-kindness. *Chesed* makes the difference in one's life – both for the beneficiary and for the benefactor.