

“Aharon shall bear the judgment of the Bnei Yisrael on his heart constantly before Hashem.” (28:30)

The *Kohen Gadol* wore the *Choshen Ha'Mishpat*, Breastplate, over his heart. Aharon *HaKohen* was selected by Hashem to be the first *Kohen Gadol*, the progenitor of the *Kehunah Gedolah*. *Chazal* tell us that Aharon merited this distinction because of a unique quality which he exemplified – the character trait of “*nosei b'ol im chaveiro*,” bearing the yoke with his friend. While to empathize with others, to be sensitive and feel their pain as well as their joy, is a character trait that should distinguish **all** Jews, it was Aharon who set the standard for this *middah*.

Regarding Aharon's relationship with his brother, Moshe, it says in *Sefer Tehillim* 133:1, “Behold how good and how pleasant is the dwelling of brothers, moreover in unity.” Aharon was sincerely joyful when Hashem selected his younger brother, Moshe, to be *Klal Yisrael's* leader. Indeed, his benchmark was his unquestionable love for **all** Jews – regardless of their stature, pedigree or financial status. His joy for Moshe was as if it were his own. Certainly, it is easier to feel a friend's pain than to share his joy. Jealousy is a difficult mountain to transcend. Aharon showed the way for others to emulate.

We must learn to see our own face in the face of our fellow man. His needs should be our needs. We should feel for him as we feel for ourselves. Aharon's heart encompassed the hearts of others. His heart was large – large enough to be sensitive to the needs of others. Hence, Hashem selected him to be the first and ultimate standard-bearer who would wear the *Choshen Ha'Mishpat* over his heart. The holy ornament, which atoned for the shortcomings and indiscretions of Jews, rested on the heart of he who felt for other Jews.

This quality has been the hallmark of our *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah leaders, who have distinguished themselves in more than their encyclopedic knowledge of Torah. I have selected two short stories from the vast repository of narratives which illustrates this *middah*.

The *Ponovezher Rav, z.l.*, once visited a wealthy philanthropist who supported many Torah institutions. Regrettably, he was far-removed from Torah observance. The *Rav* asked the man, “How did you come to support Torah so magnanimously when, in fact, you yourself are far-removed from a Torah way of life?” He responded with the following:

“I was wild as a teenager and consequently, was not accepted in a number of *yeshivos*. My parents sent me to apply for placement in the *yeshivah* of the *Chafetz Chaim* in Radin, Poland with the hope that I might get accepted there. Well, I was not accepted. I could not stay in the *yeshivah* overnight, but to go home at that time of night was not possible. The *Chafetz Chaim* graciously offered me a bed in his home.

“To call it a home would be an overstatement. It was a two-room shack. In fact, the *Chafetz*

Chaim gave me his own bed! It was cold and dark. Apparently, he was very poor. He had no heat, or electricity.

“I was young and used to a warm bed. It was very difficult to fall asleep because of the cold. The *Chafetz Chaim* came into the room as I pretended to be asleep. He took off his long jacket that he was probably going to sleep in himself and covered me with it.

“I never forgot that night and the *Chafetz Chaim’s* gesture. Since then, I have become very wealthy. Regrettably, Torah observance was not something to which I wanted to commit. But the feeling of being cared for and loved by a total stranger – a Torah leader – never left me. That one act of kindness touched me like nothing else. Therefore, whenever a Torah institution approaches me for a donation, I gladly oblige. I give from the heart, because the *Chafetz Chaim* gave to me from his heart.”

The second story was recently published by *Rabbi Paysach Krohn*. I think it is a classic. *Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, z.l.*, once asked a close *talmid*, disciple, to drive him to *Kever Rachel*, the tomb of Rachel. As they traveled out of *Yerushalayim*, *Rav Chaim* began to think of all the people for whom he would pray. He had a list which included the sick, those who were grief-stricken, the childless, and the financially challenged. As he was going through the list, he began to cry. It was a soft weeping – at first – but then it became a loud sobbing that resounded throughout the car.

They arrived at *Kever Rachel* and *Rav Chaim* got out of the car, composed himself and entered the hallway leading to the *kever*. As he approached the *kever*, *Rav Chaim* once again began to sob bitterly, crying out, “*Mamme! Chaimke is dah!*” – “Mother, Chaimke is here!”

Rav Chaim began to recite numerous *kapitlach*, chapters, of *Tehillim*, mentioning the names of those for whom he prayed. He wailed as he closed his eyes, visualizing each one. Then he called out, “*De Ribbono Shel Olam hut gezocht Mamme, as du zolst nit veinan, ubber ich Chaimke zog, vein Mamme vein!*” – Hashem said to you, ‘Mother, do not cry’, but I, Chaimke, say to you, ‘Cry, Mother, cry!’”

He was referring to the famous *pasuk* in *Yirmiyahu*, 31:15, where Hashem tells Rachel to restrain herself from weeping. For the *galus*, exile, is only temporary. *Klal Yisrael* will one day return joyfully and reclaim their land.

On the return trip to *Yerushalayim*, someone queried *Rav Chaim*, “If Hashem instructed Rachel not to cry, why did the *Rosh HaYeshiva* supplicate her to cry?”

Rav Chaim’s response was archetypical and defined his character. “A father can make demands of his daughter. He can tell her, ‘Do not cry!’ A son, however, can tell his mother, ‘Mamme, please cry!’”

He felt their pain and anguish. He cared – and he cried. The brilliant *Rosh HaYeshiva*, *rebbe* to thousands, cared about every Jew – from his contemporary to the “little guy”, from the brokenhearted widow, bereft of her husband and with a houseful of orphans to feed, to the girl who was having difficulty in finding her mate. That was *Rav Chaim*.

What should leave a powerful impact on us is the manner in which the *Rosh HaYeshivah* related to Rachel *Imeinu*. She was not an abstract figure, Matriarch of *Klal Yisrael*, who lived a few thousand years ago. She was his mother – here and now! He felt that way and communicated his feelings in that manner. What a lesson for us! He related to Rachel *Imeinu* as if to his very own mother. Is it a wonder that his prayers were heard?