

## You are children to Hashem, your G-d, do not mutilate yourselves and do not make a bald patch between your eyes for the dead. (14:1)

The *Baalei Tosfos* comment, “You are children to Hashem, your G-d; therefore, if your father of flesh and blood dies, do not mutilate yourselves, for you are not orphans, since you have a living father.” Every Jew should sense such a closeness with Hashem. Quoting this commentary, a *gadol* wrote the following to a woman who had sustained the tragic loss of her husband:

“True, you and your children have suffered a terrible blow, but, at the same time, you have received a Redeemer Who is closer to you than any other (being that she is now a widow and her children are orphans, they enter into a unique relationship with Hashem Who always listens to the cries of widows and orphans). You have a living Father Who is Omnipotent – everything comes from Him. Furthermore, He has promised you that, from this day onwards, you will lack nothing. Just call out, and He will answer. From Him, you will receive everlasting salvation.”

**Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl**, offers a similar commentary with a somewhat different slant. One who grieves excessively demonstrates by his actions that life without the deceased is unbearable. It is for this reason the *nusach*, textual version, of the blessing we give to a mourner is *HaMakom* (applying to Hashem Who is *Mekomo shel Olam*, the Place of the world. The world is within Hashem – not the other way around. He is the Place – the only Place). The concept of “place” is something stationary, immovable, concrete, stable. Hashem is the basis, foundation, upon which everything in the world rests. Thus, we say to the mourner: “You are children to Hashem. Nothing has changed. He is still here for you. He is the *Makom*, Place, which never changes – never forsakes – never leaves. Those around us may be taken and leave, but our connection to the Place, Hashem, has not changed – and never will.

In an attempt to explain the unique relationship that a son has with his father, and how this bond plays itself out in our relationship with Hashem, to the point that it precludes our excessive grieving over the loss of a loved one, I came upon the following story. I feel that the father/son relationship is underscored in this story. It illuminates for us why, when confronted with a circumstance of grief, we refrain from letting go of our emotions. We understand that what has occurred has Divine implication, thus, our unabiding faith in Hashem kicks in. How and why does this occur? Well, that is where the story plays its role.

Charles Blondin (real name Jean Francois Gravelot) was a famous mid-nineteenth century French tightrope walker, a fearless daredevil who captivated audiences throughout the world. His feats of daring were, at the time, the talk of the day, having established for himself a following bordering on hero worship. His most notable undertaking, which earned him a special place in history books, took place on September 14, 1860, when he became the first person to stretch a tightrope 1300 feet long, two inches in diameter and constructed entirely of hemp, across the Niagara River

connecting the American and Canadian sides. This young daredevil understood the appeal of the morbid to the masses (sadly, as society becomes more obsessed with the physical, having long rejected the spiritual dimension, this preoccupation with the aberrant and irascible has only become stronger and more overwhelming) and reveled when gamblers took bets on whether he would plunge to a watery death. On that bright, sunny morning, 25,000 people arrived by train and steamer and dispersed themselves on both sides of the Falls.

Blondin began his first walk across the rope slung 160 feet above the Falls. He walked across several times, each time accompanied with different acts of daring. Once, he walked in a sack; another time on stilts, a bicycle, in the dark and even blindfolded. One time, he even carried a small stove and cooked an omelet in middle of the rope!

A large crowd had gathered and watched with excitement how time and time again Blondin amazed the crowd with his daring. It was almost as if his feet were glued to the rope. They “oohed” and “aahed,” as he carefully took one dangerous step after another. One last time, he pushed a wheelbarrow filled with a sack of potatoes across the rope. The crowd let out a chant: “You are the greatest – the absolute greatest!”

Blondin stopped, looked at the crowd and asked for a volunteer; “Who is willing to ride in the wheelbarrow while I push him (or her) across the rope?” Suddenly, there was silence. No one said a word. Then the crowd began to clap and roar with enthusiasm. Nonetheless – no one was prepared to be the guinea pig, to sit in the wheelbarrow and be pushed across the Falls.

“Do you believe that I can push a person safely across the Falls?” he called out. “Yes!” was the resounding response. “Yes! You are the greatest tightrope walker in the world. We believe!”

“So, if you truly believe, let me have a volunteer to sit in the wheelbarrow as I push him across the rope.” Once again, there was silence. All the big talkers were nothing more than that – big talkers. The story goes that no one came forward.

Oh yes – there was someone who volunteered. Above the din, they heard a young voice call out, “Yes, Daddy, I will go with you across the rope.” Charles Blondin’s son volunteered to accompany his father across the Falls. He trusted him, because, after all, he was his father.

It is a great story, which illustrates a real-life picture of what faith actually is (or at least what it should be). There are those who “talk the talk” but are not willing to “walk the walk”. A son is different. He has an innate trust in his father. Thus, when a “son” loses someone that is close to him, he trusts that his Father in Heaven has His reasons for this decision. The pain is still there – and it will always be there, but the questions of “why?” and “how?” will be tempered. His grief will not be abated. It will, however, not be excessive, because it was his Father’s decision.