

## It was on the eighth day, Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons and the elders of Yisrael. (9:1)

Thrice daily, we recite the prayer, *Al ha'tzaddikim v'al ha'chassidim v'al ziknei amcha Bais Yisrael v'al pleitas bais sofreihem*, "(May Your mercies be aroused) upon the righteous, upon the pious, upon the elders of Your People, the House of *Yisrael*, upon the remnant of their sages." We must recite this prayer with consummate *kavanah*, intention/devotion. *Chazal* understood the value to the Jewish People of these varied leaders, without whom we would not exist as a people. We rely on them, and we are unable to function without them. Therefore, it is our obligation to pray for their continued good health. Interestingly, in the text of the blessing, the phrase *amcha Bais Yisrael*, "Your People, the House of *Yisrael*," is used only with regard to *zekeinim*, elders. We do not connect *amcha Bais Yisrael* with *chassidim* or *tzaddikim*. Why is this?

**Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita**, explains that a *chassid* or *tzaddik* is able to lead an insular life, far-removed from the hubbub of the community. Not so the *zakein*, elder, to whom the community looks for inspiration and guidance. He does not have the luxury of closing his door, shutting his phone, making himself unavailable. He is "public property," the domain of *Klal Yisrael*. He does not live for himself – he lives for *Klal Yisrael*.

The *Mashgiach* made this distinction when he eulogized *Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl*, referring to the revered *Rosh Yeshivah* as *Rabban shel kol Klal Yisrael, zakein shel Klal Yisrael*, the quintessential *rebbe* of all of *Klal Yisrael* and its elders. He represented the last remnant of the *yeshivah* world of Pre-World War I days.

On the eighth day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*, Moshe *Rabbeinu* summoned Aharon, his sons, and the elders of *Klal Yisrael*. He instructed them concerning the *korbanos* that were to be brought. Aharon sacrificed an *eigel*, calf, as a sin-offering, and a ram as a burnt-offering. The people sacrificed a he-goat as its sin-offering. *Toras Kohanim* explains that Aharon's *eigel*, calf, was sacrificed to atone for the sin of *eigel*, Golden Calf, while the people's he-goat atoned for their participation in the sale of Yosef (when they slaughtered a goat and dipped Yosef's tunic in its blood). The *Mashgiach* explains that *mechiras Yosef* is the source of all of the sins that occur between a Jew and his fellow man. Why is it that these *korbanos* were offered specifically during the *Chanukas ha'Mizbayach*, the inauguration of the Altar?

**Horav Yosef Zundel Salant, zl**, explains that the underlying sin of *mechiras Yosef* was that the brothers did not seek counsel and sage advice from Yaakov *Avinu*, who was the living institution of *daas Torah*, the wisdom as derived from Torah study. They should have consulted with Yaakov. He was the preeminent leader of the generation. Likewise, when *Klal Yisrael* sinned with the Golden Calf, they, too, did not bother to consult with the *zekeinim*. Had they first turned to them and listened to their advice, they would not have built the Golden Calf. Had we listened to our *zekeinim*, history would have been written differently.

Commenting on the term *ziknei Yisrael*, elders of *Yisrael*, the *Midrash* quotes Rabbi Akiva who compares *Klal Yisrael* to a bird. As a bird cannot fly without wings, so, too, *Klal Yisrael* cannot function without its elders. A bird without wings can live. It cannot, however, fly. It cannot soar. Likewise, *Klal Yisrael* can exist without its elders. It cannot, however, grow. *Klal Yisrael* remains lost on the ground, groping for a foothold, something that will catapult them upward. Without *zekeinim*, we lose our ability to achieve greater and more profound levels of *kedushah*, holiness. Our elders are the individuals to whom we look for direction, motivation and stimulation, so that we may grow correctly in order to realize our individual inherent potential.

The *Mashgiach* notes that, with the passing of *Rav Shach*, we have lost: an institution; the preeminent Torah giant and leader of our generation; the individual who personified *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of G-d, at its apex; the *daas Torah*, wisdom of the Torah as expounded by our sages. *Rav Shach* was all of these – and more. There is one point, however, that the *Mashgiach* feels must be emphasized in order to truly capture the essence and depth of the tremendous loss of *Rav Shach* truly. Our generation became orphaned! We are left bereft of the individual who represented the generation's "parent."

**Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl**, explains that the concept of being orphaned does not mean that no one is taking care of the orphan or that he is alone in the world with no one to fend for him. This is untrue, since we are blessed with a number of social services and *chesed* organizations who do nothing but look out for and address the needs of those unfortunates who are alone. An orphan is someone who has no one who knows about his unique needs. A mother knows what her child needs. She is acutely aware of what makes her child sad and what cheers him up. A father battles to the point of self-sacrifice to see to it that his child's needs are satisfied. Thus, a child who is left bereft of his parents is an orphan, despite all of the wonderful people who reach out to him. He has people who care about him, but he does not have his parents – who know what he needs and what makes him happy. No organization can replace a parent.

With the passing of *Rav Shach*, our generation lost the one individual who knew and understood our needs, who cared and fought for us, who loved each and every Jew like his own child – yet would not compromise on the integrity of our *mesorah*, heritage, regardless whom he was compelled to challenge. He was a father and mother, a loving parent. This is what *zekeinim*, elders, represent, and this is why we as a nation cannot function without our *zekeinim*.