

## **Who is the man who built a new house... and who is the man who has planted a vineyard... and who is the man who had betrothed a woman... who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house. (20:5,6,7,8)**

The Torah's sensitivity toward all Jews – regardless of background, personal status, or self-imposed emotional baggage – is evidenced in this parsha. Prior to the nation's leaving for battle, the *Kohen Gadol Mashuach Milchamah*, High Priest anointed specifically for the purpose of leading the people in battle and serving as their spiritual advisor during this stressful time, made a declaration telling the troops that anyone who was not emotionally fit for fighting in a war should return home from the battlefield. The emotional toll on a person during such a period of adversity is enormous. If a soldier's mind begins to wander to his new home, vineyard or bride, his mind is not focused on the battlefield. This could prove a danger to both him and his fellow soldiers. A lack of enthusiasm on the part of one soldier can have a devastating effect on the morale of an entire unit.

The Torah addresses four individual types who leave the battlefield, three of them having recently experienced a new milestone in their lives. The thought of not being there to share in its fruition – or knowing that someone else will – can preoccupy a soldier's mind, so that he is mentally not in a fighting state. *Rashi* teaches that, actually the first three are sort of a cover up to allow the fourth soldier, the *yarei v'rach ha'leivav*, the one who is fearful and fainthearted, to make an easy exit without calling much attention to his self-generated incapacitation.

Concerning the definition of he who is fearful and fainthearted, the *Talmud Sotah* 44a presents a dispute. Rabbi Akiva feels this is in reference to the truly fainthearted, cowardly person, who, due to his diffidence, will generate a sense of fear in the unit. Someone who lacks faith in Hashem's ability to deliver him from trouble has no business on the battlefield. He will adversely influence others. Rabbi Yosi *HaGalili* contends that fearful and fainthearted refers to one who has sinned and fears the negative implications of his behavior. Such a person feels himself unworthy of Hashem's favor. In order to protect the dignity of the fainthearted, the Torah also freed the three others, so that when the sinner or the coward went home, people would assume that he was one of the "good guys," one of those fellows who had just betrothed his wife, built a home, or planted a vineyard.

Without saying more, we now have an idea concerning to what lengths the Torah will go to protect the feelings of a person who is either a coward or a sinner. Neither of them is very worthy, but the emotions of each are to be considered nonetheless. Imagine, if that year had been a boon year for real estate, enabling more people to build new homes. The agricultural system was in its prime, and more and more people were planting vineyards. The *Shidduchim* crisis for some reason seemed to ease up on families, extorting fewer demands in order to allow their children to get married. Thus, if so many people had left the ranks of the army to cover up for the few fainthearted individuals, it would have left a large deficit in the armed forces. Yet, the Torah says that a

person's feelings take precedence. He must be protected. If it means allowing a few thousand soldiers to leave, so that a few cowards or even sinners should not be embarrassed, then, so be it. We are different than the rest of the world. Our Torah does not deal in numbers of soldiers, but in sensitivity to each and every individual Jew.

**Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl**, explains this further. The *Sifri* rules that the one who fears for his sins should return from the battlefield lest, due to his lack of merit, he might become a casualty of the war. If he does not return, it may be because his sense of shame over having committed a sin is so intense that he is willing to chance being killed in battle, rather than to confess to his sinful behavior! Hashem wants the Jewish soldier to know and to feel the frustration and pain, the shame and remorse, that overwhelm one who has sinned. He feels terrible; he is all broken up, but he is still not willing to let anyone know what he did. This is why others must leave, in order to provide a cover-up for the sinner.

*Rav Zaitchik* supports his claim that the fainthearted sinner is willing to die rather than confess his sin. Concerning the first three soldiers to return from the field, the Torah gives a reason: *pen yamus ba'milchamah*, "lest he die in battle." It does not write this concerning the sinner. Why? Because he is not afraid of death! He would rather die than be embarrassed!

We now have somewhat of an idea regarding the extent of sensitivity we must demonstrate towards others. The Manchester *Rosh Yeshivah*, **Horav Yehudah Zev Segal, zl**, was a *gaon* in *mussar*, brilliant ethicist; he was also a *gaon* in kindness. Reading his biography exposes the reader to the true meaning of *nosei b'ol im chaveiro*, "Sharing his fellow's burden." The *Teshuvos Chasam Sofer, Orach Chaim* 166, writes: "When a *tzaddik* worries and turns and feels compassion towards his fellow, he turns his full attention to his suffering; the *tzaddik's* anguish is so great that it is literally like the anguish of the person himself. Due to this phenomenon, Hashem relieves that person of his suffering, for He demonstrates mercy towards the suffering of the *tzaddik*." In other words, Hashem heals the sick person, because He does not want to cause undue pain to the *tzaddik*.

Sensitivity towards another person's pain and joy was one of the hallmarks of the *Rosh Yeshivah*. Many people care and are sensitive, but they do not always act with thoughtfulness. He thought about everything. Every moment of his life was brilliantly and meticulously thought out, so that, whatever he did for others was wholesome and without blemish. For instance, he was once attending a *sheva brachos* dinner in honor of a young couple with whom he was close. It was a festive meal accompanied by much singing and music. During the meal, his host received a call from a single woman who had endured many unsuccessful years of dating, to no avail. She was single and miserable. She put on a lovely show, but it was all show. Inside, she was falling apart. The host asked if the *Rosh Yeshivah* would mind speaking with her. Apparently, she was a close family friend of the host, and he cared deeply for her plight.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* readily agreed to speak with her, but insisted on speaking by extension phone

from another room. He was concerned lest the young woman be aggravated by the sounds of wedding music accompanied with lively singing. The host cared and the *Rosh Yeshivah* cared, but the *Rosh Yeshivah* thought about every single aspect of the girl's feelings.

I conclude with a letter sent to the *Rosh Yeshivah's* family shortly after he passed away. It is not an unusual letter, but it does convey a specific message concerning the unique needs of those who are less fortunate than others. The letter was written by a woman who had been widowed for many years. "I have been a widow for twenty-one years. Most people do not realize that what is missing most for a person who is alone is the warmth and caring of another human being. This is where the *Rosh Yeshivah* excelled. His genuine warmth and concern were comforting. His initial, 'How are you?' and his inquiry about my health, livelihood and other pertinent matters in my life always engendered within me a feeling that someone cared about me. It also enabled me to have the strength to continue carrying my burden. His readiness to listen to my problems at any time and to give them his utmost attention was quite unique.

"His *brachos*, blessings, were an inspiration. When I would call him before *Yom Kippur*, he always took time from his busy schedule to offer his blessings. My eyes were never dry after hearing his heartfelt *brachos*. It gave me strength for all of *Yom Tov*. I cannot express in words the emotions I experienced at that moment.

"I do not know how I could have managed without his emotional support and guidance all of these difficult years. Though my life is, *Baruch Hashem*, easier now, I still find it hard to continue without his help."

When people are alone, they just want to know that someone cares about them. Is it too much to ask each of us to be that someone?