

These are the heads of their fathers' houses: The sons of Reuven... the sons of Shimon... These are the names of the sons of Levi. (6:14-16)

Is there some distinction to the names of Levi's sons? Apparently there must be, since concerning Reuven and Shimon, the Torah merely says: "the sons of," without mentioning the word *shaimos*, names. Why does the Torah not emphasize the "names" of Reuven and Shimon's sons? The *Shlah HaKadosh*, *zl*, explains that *Shevet Levi* was unique among the brothers in that they were not enslaved together with the others. This troubled them, since they wanted to share in their brothers' pain and empathize with their plight. What did they do? They gave their sons names which brought the bitter exile to mind: Gershon, "for they were strangers in a land which was not theirs"; Kehas, because the Jews' teeth were "blunted" as a result of their slavery; and Merari, to be reminded that the Jews' lives were "embittered" by the Egyptians. The *Shlah* concludes with the idea that we should derive from here that it is essential that every Jew empathize with, and be sensitive to, the affliction of his fellow. No Jew should be left to suffer alone.

Many stories highlight the attitude of our *gedolim*, Torah giants, to the plight of their fellow Jew. These stories address the physical pain which can affect a person and the empathy of others towards them. The following episode, however, presents us with a completely different ordeal, one in which the "sufferer" does not recognize his tribulation and probably does not even care. Yet, a Torah giant empathized with the situation in a telling manner, indicating his unusual sensitivity to the spiritual and physical status of all Jews.

Horav Menachem Tzvi Berlin, Shlita, related that he once visited *Horav Eliezer M. Shach, zl*, following *Shacharis*. The *Rosh Yeshivah* had just returned home. The *Rav* was, thus, surprised that *Rav Shach* was not eating breakfast. He inquired of his revered *Rebbe* why he was not eating breakfast. He added that he would wait to discuss his issue until after the *Rosh Yeshivah* had eaten.

Rav Shach said that he did not eat between 8:00 and 8:30am. He had accepted upon himself not to partake of food during these thirty minutes, because this is the time when hundreds of thousands of Jewish children begin school in *Eretz Yisrael's* secular institutions, starting their day without even reciting *Krias Shema*. He felt the pain of their *neshamos*.

Do we feel the pain experienced by the *neshamos* of our alienated brethren? Do we even think about it? I guess that is the hallmark of a *gadol*: perceiving the pain that no one else senses. Their perspective dwarfs the way we look at the world.