

## You are children to Hashem...you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person. (14:1)

Being Hashem's Chosen People, His treasure in this world, carries with it immense responsibilities. Being *banim la'Makom*, children to the Almighty, is not an attribute one can ignore. We are, therefore, adjured to exert constraint when we are confronted with the passing of a loved one. The pagans mutilated their bodies in an expression of grief. Such manifestations of the depraved behavior that reigned in antiquity are strictly forbidden. In the *Talmud Sanhedrin*, *Chazal* relate that when Rabbi Akiva came upon the coffin of Rabbi Eliezer, he beat his flesh until he broke the skin and began to bleed profusely. He began to wail, "My father! My father! I have much money, but I have no money changer." *Rashi* explains Rabbi Akiva's analogy. He was implying that he had many halachic questions to ask, but he no longer had an individual who could elucidate the law and respond to his questions. *Tosfos* questions Rabbi Akiva's overwhelming display of grief. He was wounding himself, which is apparently prohibited by the *Torah*. They respond that for the sake of *Torah*, it is permitted. In other words, since Rabbi Akiva was grieving over loss of a source of *Torah* knowledge, he was permitted to exhibit excessive grieving.

**Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl**, explains the logic behind *Tosfos*' statement. He cites *Sforno* and *Daas Zekeinim*, who explain that we should not be overwhelmed by the feeling of loss which we experience upon the passing of a loved one. This is because we still have our Father in Heaven who is our closest and most distinguished relative. This realization should provide us with comfort and support, as we encounter the challenge of our bereavement. This idea, however, applies only in regard to the loss of a relative. Knowing that our Father in Heaven is always present is the greatest source of comfort. When Rabbi Eliezer passed away, however, Rabbi Akiva became bereft of his *rebbe*. Who was he to turn to with his questions in *Torah*? Who would provide his spiritual sustenance? Who would help him grow in *Torah*? Suddenly, he felt distanced from the true Father - Hashem.

Our relationship to Hashem is manifest through the medium of *Torah* and *mitzvos*. We become closer, clinging to Hashem, as we perform His *mitzvos* and study His *Torah*. We merit eternal life through this process. When Rabbi Akiva's *rebbe* passed away, his growth in *Torah*-study became stunted. It was an eternal loss! For such a loss, there are no parameters of grief. Indeed, the *Ramban*, in his lament for his *rebbe*, *Rabbeinu Yona*, writes that nothing in this world could comfort him. His only consolation was that one day he would also pass on and once again meet his *rebbe* in *Olam Habah*. This is how great teachers grieved for their *rebbeim*. In those times, they understood the true role of a *rebbe* and accepted his all-encompassing influence on us.