

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

Our relationship with Hashem demands that we adhere to a strict code of discipline, as expressed in the *Torah* and interpreted and expounded by our *Torah* leadership. The discipline of *Torah* governs our entire life. The *Torah* addresses every aspect of life's endeavor. We are called *banim la'Makom*, children of the Almighty. Can there be a greater appellation, a more honored relationship? Such closeness, however, also carries with it an inherent responsibility. When one mourns a loved one, thus confronting his own mortality, a Jew manifests great discipline. *Halachah* designates time limits during which one may and should express his grief. *Halachah* dictates for whom one mourns, as well as the duration of this mourning.

For a father and mother, *r"l*, one mourns an entire year, while for other close relatives the specified period is thirty days. It would seem that the allotted times are somewhat confused. After all, while the loss of a parent is certainly a tragedy, it is, however, the way of the world. Generations come, and generations go. Young people grow into adulthood, have families, and eventually pass on to a better world. While one should mourn and feel the terrible loss of a parent, it is truly different than the loss of a contemporary such as a sibling, mate or a child *r"l*. Should not the prescribed mourning period be even greater than for a parent? This is not a natural occurrence. Thus, the time frame for expressing one's grief should be commensurately extended.

Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, makes a profound observation in response to this question. When a parent passes away, another link in the chain that stretches to Har Sinai is severed. The son or daughter suddenly becomes one more generation removed from that unparalleled experience, from *Matan Torah*. For that loss, one grieves an entire year.

We derive from this remarkable statement that the underlying motif behind mourning is totally different from what we might have in mind. One does not grieve only because of his personal loss. He mourns his spiritual distancing from the *Torah*. This is a concept that is foreign to most people. We understand a parent's presence in a different light. Parents provide the bridge to a previous generation - one that brings us closer to the Almighty. Our relationship with our parents is no longer just a mundane flesh and blood affiliation, it is a spiritual experience. Honoring one's parents takes on a new meaning. We give respect to an institution, not just to an individual. Indeed, we honor our parents because of what and who they are, not merely as a consequence of their relationship to us.