

It was at that time that Yehudah went down from his brothers. (38:1)

The *Midrash Tanchuma* explains the juxtaposition of Yehudah's marriage, upon the loss of his wife and two sons, and upon the incident of Yosef's sale, with Yehudah being the one to inform Yaakov *Avinu* of Yosef's death. Hashem said to Yehudah, "You have yet to father children; thus, you do not know what raising children and losing them means, the accompanying pain and sorrow. Yet, you were the one to inform your father that a wild animal had killed/torn his son apart. You must now experience the pain of losing a child. Therefore, you will marry and father two sons, whom you will subsequently bury. Then you will realize the pain that you caused your father.

Horav A. Henach Lebowitz, zl, expounds on this *Midrash*. It may be implied from *Chazal* that the reason Yehudah had no qualms about informing Yaakov about Yosef's tragic (fictional) encounter with a wild animal was that Yehudah did not know what it meant to have – and then lose – a child. Despite Yehudah's greatness, his peerless wisdom and distinction of being second to Yaakov in Torah knowledge, without personal experience he was unable to empathize properly. Yehudah had to experience firsthand the pain that Yaakov had experienced.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* asserts that we must always give a person the benefit of the doubt and judge a person positively, because we rarely know their true situation. People put on a positive front, but deep down they are churning with pain.

Chazal (Pirkei Avos 2:5) teach, *Al tadin es chavercha ad she'tagia limkomo*, "Do not judge your fellowman until you come to be in his place." The secular world has a well-known adage, "Don't judge a man until you've walked a mile in his shoes." It is not as if *Chazal* require secular support; the purpose of the quote is only to demonstrate that this idea is expressed by an accepted maxim. We often look at a person and decide that they are doing well, because, for all appearances, they are. We do not realize that we are looking at a snapshot of their present state, without taking into account what has taken place before or what has led to their present state. We should not judge people in black and white, because, in reality, the world contains so much gray. Indeed, unless one has lived exactly as the person he judges, has had similar responsibilities, has experienced the same challenges, he is not in a proper position to judge.

Ad she'tagia limkomo, "Until you come to be in his place," may be taken literally to mean, "In his geographical position, his locale." Every person has a background, a place in which he grew up and spent his formative years. Before we judge someone, we must take into account: his background, family, friends and associates. Early childhood experiences (both positive and negative) can be critical factors in setting the patterns for the development of one's personal destiny in life.

Furthermore, do not judge from afar. Move up close in order to develop a better perspective of a

person. Distance creates illusions. A person's identity appears different when we get closer to the scene. When we set ourselves apart from the community, from the person we judge, we risk clarity, and, unless we can put ourselves in exactly the same position as the person we are judging, we should not judge.

Tagia is related to *yegia*, which means toil, labor. Perhaps *Chazal* are teaching us that we may not judge until we have expended the same effort to reach the same position as did the person whom we are judging. We have difficulty understanding why a person acts in a certain manner. We are envious of an individual's position, wondering how he achieved what he did when we are still busy climbing the ladder. How often do we take into account the travail, obstacles and many challenges this person had to overcome before he made it to the top? Would we be willing to do the same? We question a person's behavior and decisions, wondering why they are so obstinate or inflexible. Do we know what they went through, the various experiences, hardships and challenges until they achieved distinction? Perhaps this is what is meant by "Walk a mile in his shoes." We do not know what kind of shoes he had when he walked that mile. They could have been old and worn out, ill-fitting, torn with holes, allowing water to penetrate or pebbles to cut the skin. His *yegia*, toil, should be a critical part of our judgment process.

Horav Tzvi Hirsch Rabinowitz, zl, was the son and successor of the venerable *Kovner Rav, Horav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, zl* (children often changed their family name to avoid conscription into the Russian army). Shortly after he married, his wife was diagnosed as clinically insane. She was hospitalized. The doctors who treated her declared that she would never recover. The young *Rav* had one option for freeing himself from the marriage: *heter meiah rabbanim*. Since a man may marry more than one woman (Biblically), under extreme situations, the rabbinical courts which would normally uphold the *cherem*, ban, declared by *Rabbeinu Gershom*, prohibiting a man from having more than one wife, would permit a man to secure the permission of one hundred rabbis to take a second (added) wife.

The citizens of Kovno suggested to their *Rav* that he avail himself of this dispensation. Prominent citizens visited him to encourage him to do what any other man in his position would do. He demurred. "Absolutely not," he said. He was not without a reason. He explained, "If I were to remarry, and my first wife would (by some remote chance) become cured, this would lead to behavior inappropriate for a *Rav*" (Having two wives would not look good on his resume. He would be allowed to stay with his second wife, but would be compelled to divorce his first wife, who would now be stuck.)

"To avoid this predicament, my only option would be to remarry and pray to Hashem that He heal all sick people – except for my first wife [After all, he could not have her become cured and come home.] Thus, my only out would be to call on Hashem not to heal all of the sick people of *Yisrael*. This I cannot do."

There is no question that everyone in Kovno was rendering judgment against their *Rav*. Some

lauded him; others excoriated him; still others must have thought he should be committed. No one bothered to think of the pain and anguish that he was experiencing. They were too busy judging. His *yegia* meant very little to nothing to them.

End of the story: *Rav* Rabinowitz continued praying for his wife to be healed together with all of the sick people of *Yisrael*. This went on for decades until she passed away – having never left the hospital. He never gave up on her. He never turned his back on her. He did not remarry until after she died. He lived alone for decades, because he would not force himself to limit his prayers for sick people. He exchanged his happiness for faithfulness to his wife. His integrity was the product of *yegia* – pure toil. Yet, people probably judged him. What did they know?