

That You say to me, “Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a suckling.” (11:12)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* implied with his words that if he were indeed their (*Klal Yisrael's*) father, he would have an obligation to somehow carry on alone. The *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, derives from here that the buck stops at the parents. No parent may shirk his/her ultimate responsibility and turn from his/her children – regardless of personal difficulties or the (at times) difficult nature of the child. *Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl*, gleaned from here that Moshe had the capacity to “carry” the entire nation. Obviously, this is a metaphor for his ability to care for and be sensitive to the needs of all Jews. From where did he draw this extraordinary sense of caring? How does one man take on the responsibilities of an entire nation? The *Rosh Yeshivah* cites *Shemos* 2:11, “Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens.” Moshe assumed responsibility for his brothers. How? *Nosan eino v'libo liheyos meitzar aleihem*; “He applied his eyes and his heart to their suffering to grieve with them.” (*Rashi*) *Yalkut Shemoni* adds, “He placed his shoulder beneath the load of each one and said, ‘If I could only suffer instead of you.’”

Moshe was not just a friend “on paper”; he worked alongside his people, because he felt their pain. Their suffering was his suffering. Thus, he could be *mishtateif*, share, with them. It was his pain as much as it was their pain. This is the defining obligation of a *manhig*, Torah leader; to feel the pain of his flock. Moshe exhibited this sense of carrying once again when the nation fought Amalek. He raised his hand Heavenward – and the nation became stronger. When he lowered his hand – Amalek had the upper hand. When Moshe’s hands grew heavy, they took a stone, upon which he sat, while Aharon and Chur supported his hands. Why did Moshe sit on a stone? Did they have no pillows, or something softer for him to sit on? *Chazal (Taanis 11a)* explain that Moshe said, “*Klal Yisrael* is enveloped with pain. I, too, will share in their pain.” Sitting on a soft pillow does not generate much pain.

Horav Michel Yehudah Lefkowitz, zl, exemplified the *middah*, character trait, of sharing in his friend’s pain. As a Torah leader without peer, he demonstrated that every Jew was his friend. Once, the wife of a *rebbe* became very ill. The doctors found a large tumor pressing on her brain. When *Rav Michel Yehudah* was informed of this sad development, he burst into such bitter weeping that one would think that a close family member had become ill. *Rav Michel Yehudah* conferred his blessing upon her, wishing her *hatzlacha* on the upcoming surgery. With unusual warmth and sensitivity, he attempted to assuage her fears. When she saw how emotional he had become upon hearing of her plight, coupled with his soothing words and blessing, her hopes for a successful recovery finally began to creep into her mind. Until then, she had been feeling negative. Knowing that a sage of such caliber and distinction cared about her, she felt more hopeful. The surgery was successful, and, after a three - week stay in the United States, she returned to *Eretz Yisrael* to begin the road to full recovery.

Great story – but there is more. One of the members of this woman’s family asked the *Rosh*

Yeshivah (Ponovezh l'Tzeirim), if the husband, who was a *rebbe* in the *yeshivah*, should take a sabbatical from teaching in order to help his wife in her recuperation process. The *Rosh Yeshivah* replied, "I, too, had a daughter that was gravely ill. Wherever I went, my pain was manifest in my sleepless eyes. At home, everyone was depressed; at the hospital, we received only negative reports. We had nowhere to turn for a glimmer of light, of hope – except for the *yeshivah*. My daily *shiur*, lecture, in the *yeshivah* afforded me light and comfort. The time I spent talking to Hashem in prayer was soothing. These two junctures during the day were the only rays of light that illuminated the otherwise darkness of my day. Do you want to take away from this young Torah scholar his only opportunity for 'life'? The Torah is a tree of life! This is his joy!"

After searching for stories that address the concept of sharing the pain of others, I came to the realization that in just about every story I read, the hero of the story was a Torah giant of encyclopedic knowledge and impeccable character. This does not mean that the average Jew does not think of others; rather, it underscores the notion that despite their full-time commitment to Torah scholarship, these *gedolim* took time off to help their brethren. Moreover, it is specifically such unique individuals who have the sensitivity to think of others and feel their pain.

Having said this, we go to the next story. It was 1948, three years after the end of World War II and the Holocaust, when a young eleven-year-old boy -- an orphan, who had survived Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen -- showed up with his aunt on the doorstep of the *Ponevezher Rav's Batei Avos* (orphanage) in Bnei Brak. This home was the center, the anchor where the orphans of the Holocaust who emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* received their first footing in normalcy, following the years of terror which they had experienced. Every child that crossed the threshold of *Batei Avos* was laden with emotional baggage, to which an adult far beyond these children's years would have great difficulty adjusting. Certainly, these children were overwhelmed. The team of individuals who devoted themselves to these children was the *eim ha'bayis*, mother/woman in charge of the home, *Giveret Munk*, and *Rav Gerendovitz*, who was also a psychologist. They had various assistants. All answered to the home's surrogate father, the *Ponevezher Rav, Horav Yosef Kahaneman*.

When the boy arrived, *Giveret Munk* immediately welcomed him with warmth and love. She gave him fresh linen, a pillow, blanket and a new pair of pajamas. The boy gulped down his dinner and left a small drop of food wrapped in a napkin for the next day. Used to starvation and never knowing if he would have food in the morning, the rule in the camps was to save a little for the next day – just in case. Following dinner, he retired to his bed and went to sleep wearing his dirty clothes and shoes. *Giveret Munk* was not about to say anything the first night. She understood the emotional baggage he was carrying. After four nights, however, it was time for a serious discussion. She called *Rav Gerendovitz*, who did not fare any better at convincing *Mutty* (his name) to change his clothes. Finally, they called the "father" of all the *yesomim*, orphans, the *Ponevezher Rav*, who pleaded, "*Mottele zeeskeit* (my sweet), why do you refuse to wash and change your clothes?" The child remained mute, refusing to respond even to the *Rav*. They had no other option but to turn to the *Chazon Ish*. Perhaps he would be successful.

They stood before the *Chazon Ish* – a man who literally counted every minute which was not spent in total immersion in Torah: “*Kavod HaRav*. We have a new child in *Batei Avos*, our *zeeskeit Mutty*. He arrived four days ago from Bergen-Belson (which was then a DP camp. I know – I was born there). He refuses to change his clothes and to put on a new pair of pajamas. He sleeps in his clothes (and shoes) and will not shower. Could the *Rav* speak with him?”

The *Chazon Ish* smiled and asked, “*Mordchele*, why will you not shower?”

“I refuse to get undressed. Every time I undressed (in the Concentration Camp), they (the Nazis) would take my clothes and replace them with their striped pajamas. I will not wear that again!”

All of those who heard this statement were shaken to the core of their beings. The *Ponovezher Rav* ran out, emotionally stricken by these words.

The *Chazon Ish* attempted to assuage Mutty, “Do not worry. Your clothes will be safe with *Giveret Munk*.” “No! I do not trust her.” “Fine, *Rav Gerendovitz* will watch over them.” “I do not trust him either” was Mutty’s reply. “Perhaps I will ask the *Ponovezher Rav* to watch your clothes.” Same response, “I do not trust him.” The *Chazon Ish* maintained his composure and said, “I will personally watch your clothes.” Silence. “If the *Rav* will watch my clothes, then I will remove them and shower.”

The *Chazon Ish* had succeeded. Mutty removed his filthy clothes and went to wash up. The *Chazon Ish* took off his *kapote*, long frock, and rolled up his sleeves, as did the *Ponovezher Rav*. They ran a basin of warm water and, after obtaining detergent, began to soak and wash Mutty’s clothes. After the initial water turned black, they brought more water. All of this was performed as both *gedolei Yisrael* were weeping incessantly. The younger staff members who had assembled asked if they could take over. The *Chazon Ish* replied, “*Mah pitom?* Absolutely not. This is our *mitzvah*.”

Mutty came out of the room wearing a new pair of pajamas. He immediately asked for his clothes. The *Chazon Ish* pointed to the clothes line where his clothing, including his *Tzitzis*, were washed and hanging to dry. “It will take all night for your garments to dry,” the *Chazon Ish* said. “I will watch over them. You can sleep in my home tonight.”

The *Chazon Ish* was no longer a young man. He never wasted a minute of his time. This young orphan needed him. He closed his *Gemorah*. Mutty took precedence. This lonely orphan became a premier *talmid chacham*, longtime member of the *Kollel Chazon Ish*. A revered father, grandfather to a large family – all because the *gadol hador* felt his pain. We never know whom -- or how -- we can help.