

You will be left few in number. (28:62)

The *Klausenberger Rebbe, zl*, made his home first in New York following the tragedies that he endured in the European Holocaust. Not to sit idle, he understood that his purpose in life at that time was to give comfort to the survivors and build for the future. He set himself to establish institutions of Torah and *chesed*. Institutions are not built on dreams. He knew that soliciting funds was a vital part of his mission. To this end, he was prepared to travel to other American cities in search of supporters to help him realize his dreams.

During one of his fund-raising trips, he was traveling by train, sitting in the corner of the car, reciting *Tehillim*. The train stopped at a station to allow travelers to disembark and others to alight the train. A middle-aged gentleman, clearly unobservant, entered the car in which the *Rebbe* was traveling and sat down across from the *Rebbe*. He noticed the *Rebbe* reciting *Tehillim* and could not refrain himself from speaking out.

“You are still wasting your time reciting *Tehillim*? I came from a city of righteous men like you. Indeed, I was spiritually quite distant from them. Yet, they all perished and I survived! All of the observant, G-d-fearing, good Jews died, while I lived. Can you explain that? That is when I decided that this was not for me.”

The *Rebbe* listened to the man and suddenly broke out in bitter weeping. The man was visibly upset, “Why are you weeping?” The *Rebbe* looked at the man and amidst his copious tears, said, “I, too, was the last of my family and my community. We had the finest and the greatest individuals whose entire lives revolved around serving the Almighty; yet, they all were murdered and I survived. Should I not weep?”

When this newly-assimilated Jew (he had previously been raised in an observant home) took note of the *Rebbe*’s reaction, his extraordinary humility, he, too, began to weep to the point that he buried his head in the *Rebbe*’s loving embrace – as both continued to mourn the many who were no longer able to weep. This experience altered what had become the man’s downward spiral descent and brought him back to his pre-World War II level of observance.

The man was inspired by the *Rebbe*’s humility. I think the *Rebbe* was intimating another message to this man. So many righteous Jews perished, and only a handful survived. Does this mean that the survivors were more worthy? Absolutely not! Hashem has His reasons. One thing is for certain: if Hashem allowed one to live when so many had died, then He obviously expects something of the survivors. “We have a mission!” the *Rebbe* was telling the man. “Otherwise, why should we live, when so many others – more worthy than we– died? He expects us to carry on, to rebuild, to inspire, not to weep and mourn. He certainly does not expect us to renege our *Yiddishkeit!*”

After the tragic passing of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon *HaKohen*’s two older sons, Moshe *Rabbeinu* informed Aharon, Elazar and Isamar, Aharon’s two other sons, that they were to eat the *Korban*

Minchah. Although an *onen*, mourner prior to the burial of the deceased, was not permitted to partake of *Kodoshim*, sacrificial offerings, Hashem had said that this day was to be different. The wording of the *pasuk* is ambiguous: “Moshe spoke to Aharon and to Elazar and Isamar, *banav ha’nosarim*, his remaining sons” (*Vayikra* 10:12). What is the meaning of “his remaining sons”? Is it not obvious that, if Aharon had four sons, of which two died, the other two were “his remaining sons”? Is there a purpose in underscoring their sequential position, as *nosarim*, remaining?

I believe it is *Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita*, who explains this as Moshe’s way of saying: “You are the survivors. Therefore, your responsibility is greater. Your mission is no longer about ‘you’; it is also about ‘them’ – your brothers who were unable to complete their mission.” Survivors have a dual mandate – their own and that of those who did not survive. *Klal Yisrael* is a nation of survivors. *B’chol dor va’dor omdin aleinu l’chaloseinu*, “In every generation there arises those who would annihilate us.” Some survive – others do not. The survivors must remember that they must carry two sets of responsibilities. This is critical, because if you do not care about your personal responsibility to the *klal*, community, at least care about those who did not make it.

I think this might be homiletically expressed via the words *Va’yaamod bein ha’mesim u’bein ha’chaim*, “And he (Aharon *HaKohen*) stood between the dead and the living” (*Bamidbar* 17:13). Following the plague that killed some of Korach’s supporters, while the rest became ill, it was Aharon whose incense prevented those who were ill, but still alive, from allowing the illness to take its course and kill them. He stood between those who were gone and those who were ill – but not gone. Perhaps, we might say that Aharon was teaching us that, even when we stand with the living, we may not forget about those who did not survive. They paid the ultimate price; they made the ultimate sacrifice.

When one is absorbed with his own good fortune, his health, he often loses sight of those who did not fare as well, who did not come home. I write this *Erev Shavuot*, two and a half months into the insidious plague that has wrought havoc on so many lives. The tragic stories that we all carry with us are numerous. The images of individual’s who have suffered, families torn apart, are still before our eyes. Some worry about the inconveniences they have endured, their physical, emotional, economical and spiritual difficulties. Nonetheless, they are still talking. They are alive to complain and reminisce. There are sadly many who no longer have this opportunity. Children complain about inconvenience. Other children are too sad to complain, because they no longer have anyone to whom to complain. This is my take on standing *bein ha’mesim u’bin ha’chaim*. Never lose sight of those who have less, who are less fortunate, who did not make it.

The following story is a classic. I made an attempt to locate its source, but was not successful. I will have to relate it from memory. A young couple were blessed with a son and, on the eve of his *bris*, they disagreed concerning the name they wanted to give their son. The husband wanted to name his son after his grandfather who had been a distinguished Torah scholar. His wife refused – not because she had issues with the grandfather -- but because she was uncomfortable giving her son that name. They were a G-d-fearing couple, so they decided to seek the sage advice from a *gadol*,

Torah giant – (I believe it was *Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl*).

They presented their case. The *Rav* listened, then asked the mother to divulge what it was about the name that made her uncomfortable. She replied that, in the apartment building in which they presently lived, there was a woman who had lost a son by the very same name. She understood that his name did not cause the other child to leave this world prematurely. The mother explained that she did not want her son to have this name because she was certain that one day her little boy would run around, and she would have to call him loudly through the building. She feared that the other mother would hear the name of her lost child being called throughout the complex, and it would renew her pain and sadness. She did not want to give her son a name that might cause pain to an already afflicted mother. The *Rav* agreed. *Va'yaamod bein ha'meisim u'bein ha'chaim*.