

## May Hashem, G-d of spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly. (27:16)

*Horav Mordechai Ilan, zl*, comments that, although Moshe *Rabbeinu* was acutely aware that his sons were not worthy successors to his mantle of leadership, he nonetheless asked for them to succeed him. *Chazal (Midrash Tanchuma)* relate that Hashem countered that Yehoshua, his primary student, who never left his side, would succeed him. Why did Moshe ask if he knew the answer? Moshe sought to underscore that sons do not inherit a Torah position solely due to pedigree. One must be worthy to be a leader. Torah leadership is not transmitted by inheritance, but by substance and distinction.

Furthermore, the Torah leader must focus on *l'chol basar*, "all flesh," all people, not just a select few who are fortunate to be accepted into the inner circle. His focus on them should be *Elokei ha'ruchus*, "G-d of spirits," which *Rav Ilan* interprets as infusing *kol basar* with *ruchniyus*, spirituality. A leader's mission is to elevate his flock spiritually. To *shmuess* and be friendly with them might be the manner through which he breaks down the wall that separates him from them, but, once he gains access to them and earns their trust, it should be all "business": raising their spiritual ambitions.

A truly great leader is one whose heart pulsates with feeling for others. The *Gerrer Rebbe, zl*, the *Pnei Menachem*, was such a leader. His heart flowed with love and compassion for every Jew – *chasid* or not. He comforted the broken-hearted even before they had the state of mind to articulate their emotions. He read between the lines of their letters, and he heard what they did not have the fortitude to express.

At times, his thoughtfulness was expressed with a minor act of a few well-placed words. Once, a family came to the *Rebbe* to petition a *brachah*, blessing, for a member who was scheduled to undergo a difficult and complex surgery. The *Rebbe* gave his blessing, and he immediately rose from his chair, walked to the closet and returned with an expensive bottle of wine, "This will be opened at his *seudas hodaah*, feast of thanksgiving, over his full recovery. This small gesture was indicative of the *Rebbe's* thoughtfulness. The family left filled with hope that things would work out.

A Jew in Yerushalayim had a problem. He had no connections, no *protektzia*, to get his special needs son into a *yeshivah*. As he went from one *yeshivah* to another, each one gave him the run around, simply because he was not "connected." (Sadly, this occurs more often than we care to acknowledge – and not only in the Holy Land!) It appeared that no one cared; no one was willing to give up their precious time to listen and attempt to help a Jew in need. Meanwhile, the boy was remanded to staying at home and not receiving a proper education. Finally, someone said, "Why not go to the *Pnei Menachem*? He helps everyone. He has a big heart. You have nothing to lose."

The *Yid* had tried it all. He might as well try one more person. How shocked he was when he saw

how the *Rebbe* took notes and gathered information. He seemed really to care. This alone made a world of difference to the man. The *Rebbe* said, "Return in a few days. Hopefully, I will have a positive answer for you." A few days passed, and the man returned to the *Rebbe* who informed him: "It has all been taken care of. Call this number and inform them who you are. Your son has been accepted in the *yeshivah*."

Surprisingly, sharing in someone's pain is easier than sharing and participating in their joyous occasions. Taking an interest, feeling someone's pain, often assuages one's personal guilt. Partaking in someone's joy is more demanding for some. "I just do not have the time or interest" is an often used excuse. The *Pnei Menachem* would often exhort others to find it within themselves truly to rejoice in the joy and celebrations of others. He based this on the words of the *Chidushei HaRim*, his great-grandfather and founder of *Gerrer Chassidus*, who wrote on the invitation to his grandson's (*Sefas Emes*) wedding invitation: "The *minhag*, custom, in *Klal Yisrael* is to rejoice in the *simchah*, joy, of others in order to plant love and friendship in the hearts of one another, thereby accustoming oneself to truly rejoice in another's good fortune. This is the *kiyum*, fulfillment, of the *mitzvah* of *V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho*, Love your fellow as yourself." Indeed, when the *Rebbe* heard of a *simchah*, the throbbing of joy in his heart was visibly palpable.

The *Pnei Menachem* felt a consummate bond with all Jews. Everyone was family. A *Rebbe* to tens of thousands of *chassidim* values every minute of his time. Thus, when he attended a *simchah*, he did not remain long. His was quality time, making sure that those whose celebration it was would see that he felt a kinship with them, a partnership in their joyous occasion. In the brief time that he spent there, he made sure to leave an indelible impression on the *baalei simchah*.

Due to his heavy schedule filled with tremendous responsibilities, the *Pnei Menachem* would often not be invited to *simchos*. Those close to him did not want to impose on him to attend. He surprised them with his presence anyway, claiming that a good friend does not wait for an invitation. He would often share a powerful insight regarding the passage in the *Talmud* about *Kamtza* and *Bar Kamtza*. Apparently, a man who was friends with *Kamtza* and enemies with *Bar Kamtza* made a feast. He sent his servant to invite *Kamtza*, his friend, to the dinner. The servant erred, and, instead, invited *Bar Kamtza*, who came and was promptly ejected by the host. This led to a bitter revenge on the *rabbinic* personalities who witnessed the disgrace of *Bar Kamtza* and ignored it.

The *Pnei Menachem* added that *Kamtza* was at fault. As a good friend of the host, he should not have waited for an invitation, but he should immediately have gone on his own – a move that would have prevented the entire debacle. Friends neither wait nor require an invitation. It is their *simchah* as well.