

Fear not, Avram, I am a shield for you. (15:1)

We are referred to as *Bnei Avraham Avinu*, children of the Patriarch Avraham, because we inherited from the father of our people a national character trait. The *Chiddushei HaRim* writes that the term *Magen Avraham*, shield of Avraham, is a guarantee from Hashem that the *nekudah*, characteristic, which defined Avraham would be bequeathed to each and every one of his descendants. The Patriarch was referred to as Avraham *Halvri*, because he stood his ground on one *eiver*, side, while the rest of the world was on the other side. This applies to Avraham's ability to withstand societal coercion, family pressure and the challenges and trials of life, both at home and in exile. The strength of character which Avraham evinced is intrinsically imbued within the psyche of each and every Jew. We are *Ivrim*, off to one side, who neither seek, nor require, public acclaim. We do our "thing" regardless of its acceptance by the greater society and culture in which we live. No other nation has endured our trials and tribulations, and not only survived, but thrived, holding our heads high with pride and devotion to Hashem. Yes, we are different, but so was Avraham, and we are his descendants.

Avraham *Avinu* used every ounce of strength to spread the word of Hashem to a world steeped in paganism. He taught them about monotheism, to worship the one G-d Who created, rules and guides the world. He was relentless in his commitment. Even when it became difficult due to the Heavenly-induced trials that he endured – and from which he emerged triumphant – he continued his work, because he was focused on spreading the *d'var Hashem*. Can we say the same? Is our devotion real, or is it limited by our comfort zone?

An elderly Holocaust survivor devoted himself selflessly to seeing to it that *Yeshivas Ponovezh* was kept clean. He did everything within his ability to maintain the pristine, positive atmosphere of the physical structure. Indeed, his "work" was his life, having lost his wife and children to the Nazi murderers. Understandably, every once in a while the memories of what had been overwhelmed him, when he realized what could have been. During such moments of sadness, he would fall into a melancholic state that overtook him. Only after he visited the saintly *Bais Yisrael, zl*, of Ger, who consoled him, was he able to calm down.

Simchas Torah 1958, the students of Ponovezh were dancing with great passion and fervor in honor of the festival commemorating the annual completion of the Torah. In the center of the dancing, inspiring everyone to elevate their dancing and singing to a greater level, was the venerable *Ponovezher Rav, zl*. The elderly Jew mused to himself, "If only my sons would be alive, they, too, would be among those who were dancing. Instead, they are buried somewhere in Europe." The more he reiterated this thought and how they had lived, that they would have been counted among the scholars of the *yeshivah*, the more emotional he became, and tears began to roll down his face. He could no longer contain himself, and he cried to the *Ponovezher Rav*, "*Rebbe*, where are my sons? Why were they taken from me? They could have grown into great *talmidei chachamim!*"

His cry – and the bitter weeping that accompanied it – brought a halt to the dancing. The *Ponovezher Rav* had not been spared from tragedy. He, too, had lost everyone except for one son. The *Rav* began to weep, and he cried out to the elderly *shamash*, “For them (the martyrs), it is not necessary to cry. They are ensconced in a far better world, basking in the glow of the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence. For whom should we cry? For us! We have to ask ourselves where we are holding in our mission as Jews. How much more could we achieve? Every moment of life is a Divine gift for a reason – to act and accomplish for *Yiddishkeit!* For us, we must cry!”

The *Ponovezher Rav’s* response applies to all of us. Avraham *Avinu* taught us that nothing stands in the way of a Jew’s mission. We answer to a Higher Power. If this means being on one side against everyone else – so be it. it is part of our national DNA.