

I have been diminished by all the kindnesses... for with my staff I crossed this Yarden. (32:11)

At first glance, with a cursory reading of the *pasuk*, one is availed a window in Yaakov *Avinu's* "rags to riches" story. He crossed the *Yarden* alone with nothing but his *makel*, staff, and today he is blessed with a large, productive family and all the material assets that he needs! *Targum Onkelos* adds a twist to the translation of these words, which gives us pause to reconsider what the Patriarch is saying. *Arei yechidi avris yas Yardena ha'dein*, "I crossed this Yarden alone." Yaakov was not lamenting his economic state, but rather his emotional one, the loneliness that engulfed him as he confronted the many crushing adversities to which he was subjected. He was alone, with no one with whom to share his emotions, his pain, his fears. Yaakov's journey was suffused with tears, his only companion was his staff, which "listened" to his pain. It never left his side.

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, paints a powerful image of Yaakov's pain, his groans and endless tears. His staff ameliorated his loneliness. This *makel* became the *Briach Ha'Tichon*, the Middle Bar, that was seventy *amos* long and miraculously wound its way through the walls of the *Mishkan*, unifying and supporting the walls. The staff that absorbed Yaakov's tears, his cries, his groans, was "rewarded" to become the symbol of miracle that supported the *Mishkan*. This was not the end of the staff's "career." Yehoshua, Moshe *Rabbeinu's* successor as the nation's leader, crossed the *Yarden* with this staff. The holiness and sincere prayer that were suffused in this staff enhanced its sanctity and gave it the capacity to be the medium for even greater miracles.

Moshe and Aharon *HaKohen* carried the staff. David *Hamelech* carried this staff when he battled Goliath. This staff accompanied every *melech*, king of *Yisrael* until the *churban Bais Hamikdash*. The *Yalkut (Chukas 20)* teaches that *Melech HaMoshiach* will carry this staff with which he will strike the nations of the world into submission.

Rav Zaitchik explains that the unique staff transitioned into becoming the holy staff that accompanied the nation from its nascency until it became concealed following the destruction. The tears of pain and loneliness sanctified it. Our Patriarch's pain elevated this staff to greatness.

I have an interesting observation concerning reaching out to one who is alone. The staff is an inanimate piece of wood. It neither speaks nor hears. It is just "there." It relieved Yaakov's pain and loneliness just by being present alongside him. Listening non-judgmentally conveys the message: "I genuinely want to know and care about how you are feeling. I empathize with what you are going through." Validations such as, "I feel for you" and "I am saddened that you are suffering," go a long way to relieve one's sense of loneliness. Just indicating to the person that he does not have to suffer alone can make a world of difference. At the end of the day, one size does not fit all; there is no perfect thing to say. This is why listening and being present can ease a person's pain to the point that it is bearable. After all, he now knows that he is not alone.