

## **And let your brother live with you. (25:36)**

With regard to the above, *Chazal* (*Bava Metzia* 62a) quote a debate between Bar Petora and Rabbi Akiva. Two men are traveling in the desert. It is hot, and they are thirsty. The problem is: They have only one water canteen. If one of them drinks the water, he will live, but his friend will die. If both drink the water, they will both die. Bar Petora says that it is better for both to drink and take their chances that a miracle might occur, than one drink and watch his friend die. Rabbi Akiva disputed this ruling, citing the above *pasuk*, "Let your brother live with you" – your life takes precedence over your friend's life. The *Chafetz Chaim* added (*Ahavas Chesed*) that the concept of one's life taking precedence applies only to his life. His wealth, however, does not take precedence over his fellow's life.

*Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*, relates a story which, on one hand, demonstrates the overwhelming sense of *chesed*, kindness, manifest by a *yeshivah* man who eventually became a distinguished *Rosh Yeshivah*, but leaves us wondering how he had ignored the *pasuk's* directive to save his life first. It was post liberation; World War II was over, but the Jewish suffering had not ended. Huddled together in a DP (Displaced Person's) camp, the survivors were more concerned about where they would get their next rations than setting up schools for the young children who had somehow survived the war. They were not many, but pockets of children existed, and, if they did not receive a Jewish education, their religious conviction and observance would be inadequate. Certainly, they had not been spared in order to turn their backs on Hashem.

*Rav Galinsky* worked together with *Horav Gershon Liebman, zl*, who later became *Rosh Yeshivah* of Novoradok in France, where he ultimately established forty Torah institutions. Together, these two intrepid *Rabbanim* went through the DP camp offering and begging parents to enroll their children. It was not easy, and they expected to receive backlash from the secularists, but, when they encountered open hostility from an observant Jew, they were thrown for a curve. Indeed, it was the representative of the religious community who viewed *Rav Galinsky* with suspicion. "Who sent you?" (He was concerned about who was behind the schools. He was aware of varied approaches to education, based upon the student's background and affiliation. Was it *chassidish*, *litvish*, modern, *heimish*? Until he knew what would be the *derech halimud* and under whose aegis the school would be, he was not prepared to support it.)

*Rav Galinsky* replied, "It is under the aegis of *Hashem Yisborach!*" The man countered, "If that is the case, I do not need you. I have a direct line to the Almighty." "If that is true, then you must have done something to address the religious needs of the children" was *Rav Galinsky's* rebuttal. The man said that he had not done anything for them. "How can you say that you are the religious representative if you have done nothing to save the children from heresy?"

The man saw that he was bested, yet he persisted. "Who is supporting your endeavor?" he asked. "It is a private initiative under the direction of someone whom you probably never heard of; *Rav Gershon Liebman.*"

As soon as he heard the name, the man's entire tone took an about face, "If *Rav* Liebman is behind you, I will support anything you want. I am yours. You see, I know *Rav* Gershon from the camps." The man then related an incredible, moving story.

"In the concentration camp, we had two constants: hunger and forced labor. If one survived these two, he had a chance to deal with the multiple challenges to his physical and emotional health. These, however, were the immediate concerns to which the Jewish inmates by the droves were succumbing. They went out every day to participate in hours of brutal forced labor in the bitter cold or in the scorching heat, to return at the end of the day for their meager rations, consisting of a small slice of stale bread and a cup of watery soup. This is all we had for the entire twenty-four period – day in and day out. Many died from the hunger. Others succumbed to the brutal labor. Every morning, some did not wake up, their hearts giving out. Sadly, these conditions caused others to lose their minds and fight for that slice of bread – even if it meant taking it from another wretched prisoner. [Obviously, we may not judge, because we have no idea the extent of their suffering.] Indeed, I looked contemptuously at someone who stole his fellow's bread, but *Rav* Gershon would admonish me, saying, 'Do not judge another person until you are in his place.'

"One morning, we woke up to see that another one of our block friends could not arise from his bed. This was a sign that his end was near. The man murmured something, but we were unable to make out his words. He was a *talmid* of *Yeshivas Pinsk*, but here he was a prisoner like us all. We rushed to the food line because we knew that, if he did not eat soon, he would no longer have to eat. I looked back and saw *Rav* Gershon standing over the man and patiently giving him sips of soup drop by drop. The man was able to swallow some of the soup, but the rest dribbled down the side of his mouth. He opened his eyes and showed signs of life. We just stood there watching *Rav* Gershon feeding the man. What else could we do?

"When the soup was finished, *Rav* Gershon tore the slice of bread into tiny pieces and fed them to the man one-by-one. He held his hand over the man's mouth, so that he was compelled to swallow. Finally, by the time *Rav* Gershon had finished, the man was revived and sitting up.

"*Rav* Gershon did not eat that day. He needed that slice of bread and water for himself, but he was not going to let someone die if he could prevent it. For a person like that, I will do anything."

Inspiring story. We are left with a question: Was *Rav* Gershon acting appropriately by endangering his life, so that the other Jew could live? What about *V'chai achicha imach*? Your life comes first. I think the answer lies in the understanding of *v'chai* – you should live. *Rav* Gershon felt that to watch another Jew die, for him to live when he might save another Jew, is simply not living! *Rav* Gershon did put his life first, but he could only live if his friend lived. This was the way in which he understood the *pasuk*.