

You shall be glad with all the goodness... you and the Levi. (26:11)

When the Jew celebrates his good fortune, he must see to it that the *Levi*, who does not have a designated portion in *Eretz Yisrael*, is included. *Rashi* comments that the *Levi's* dispensation concerning the *Bikkurim*, the first fruits, applies only as long as the *Leviim* do not plant produce in the designated *Arei Ha'Leviim*, cities set aside for the *Leviim*. If his plantings yield produce, he must take the first fruits and bring them to the *Bais Hamikdash*. Implied from this *halachah* is that, even though *Shevet Levi* was not enslaved in Egypt as were his brethren, he is still able to pronounce the phrase, *Va'yareiu osanu ha'Mitzrim va'yaanunu, va'yitnu aleinu avodah kashah*; "The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us and placed hard work upon us" (Ibid. 26.6). How can they say this? They did not work, because even Pharaoh understood that a segment of the nation must be released from work, since their very existence was based upon their adherence and commitment to Torah study.

Horav Aizik Ausband, zl, derives from here that the *middah*, character trait, of *nosei b'ol im chaveiro*, carrying the yoke with his fellow Jew, means more than simple empathy for another fellow who is going through a difficult time. It means feeling another fellow's pain – as if it were my own pain. When my brother suffers – I suffer. He carries the yoke with his friend, because it is his yoke as well. We now understand why the *Levi* can say the words *Va'yareiu osanu ha'Mitzrim*, "The Egyptians mistreated us," because *Shevet Levi* participated in the affliction through their empathy, such that it became their affliction. The *Shlah HaKadosh* writes: "*Shevet Levi* and *Levi ben Yaakov* did not actually work side by side with his fellow Jew. Due to his sincere feelings of wanting to share in their pain and exile, however, he (*Levi*) gave his sons names which coincided with and alluded to the exile. *Gershon*: we are sojourners in a land which is not ours; *Kehas*: they blunted our teeth; *Merari*: they embittered our lives. They sought every which way to participate in – and personally feel – the pain.

In order to feel another Jew's pain, it is crucial that we listen (acutely) to him. At times, it is what they say and how they say it, or it can also be what they do not say. Regardless, unless one listens, he is unable to "hear" the pain in their voices, and, subsequently, help them. *Horav Shlomo Freifeld, zl*, was noted for his ability to connect almost immediately with Jews of all types and walks of life. *Reb Eliyahu Essas*, one of the original Russian refuseniks, who succeeded in catalyzing the opening of doors for Jews in the Soviet to return to their faith, came to hear *Rav Shlomo* when he spoke in *Yerushalayim*. *Reb Eliyahu* walked into the room in which *Rav Shlomo* sat, surrounded by his many students. *Rav Shlomo* took one look at him, and tears welled up in his eyes. The *Rosh Yeshivah* rose and embraced him. *Reb Eliyahu* later told his student, "I had a sense that this Jew understood all the suffering that I had endured in my life." He cared.

Shortly after being diagnosed with the illness to which he eventually succumbed, a student got married in a city in the Midwest, a few hours plane trip from New York. While the student longed to

have his revered *Rebbe* at the wedding, he knew that, in his weakened state, it would be very difficult. The *Rosh Yeshivah* insisted on attending and participating. He attempted to conceal his pain when he danced with the *chassan*, a brilliant smile illuminating his sallow features. *Rav Shlomo* explained his reason for making the trip, despite its toll on his health.

“Regardless of where I am, I will be in pain. At least in this way, I can be *mesameach*, bring joy, to a *chassan*.”

Rav Shlomo not only listened more deeply than others, but his vision penetrated their souls to the point that what he saw differed from that which others would see. *Reb Amos Bunim, zl*, was a lay leader, a *ben Torah*, who was close with *Rav Shlomo* and his *yeshivah*. *Reb Amos* once entered the *bais hamedrash*, and the *Rosh Yeshivah* pointed to a teenager sitting on a bench. “Do you see that boy?” he asked. “I do,” replied *Reb Amos*. *Rav Shlomo* asked again, “Do you see him?” Again, *Reb Amos* replied that he did indeed see him. “No,” *Rav Shlomo* exclaimed, “you see a long pony tail and a ripped T-shirt... You are not seeing the *neshamah*!” He saw what others did not see because he looked for it.

Rav Shlomo offered a powerful insight into the “dialogue” that ensued (or should have) between *Yosef* and his brothers. The Torah dictates that, after *Yosef* accused his brothers of being spies, he said that the only way to prove their innocence was to produce their youngest brother, *Binyamin*. The brothers realized that nothing just happened; there is a cause and an effect. They apparently were being punished for the treatment of *Yosef*. However, they acknowledged guilt only concerning their lack of listening to his pleas. Then one said to another, “Indeed, we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us, and we paid no heed; this is why this anguish has come upon us” (*Bereishis* 42:21).

Ramban asks the obvious question: Where do we find any indication that *Yosef* pleaded with them? The *pasuk* describes the sale of *Yosef* without mentioning anything about his pleading with them.

Rav Shlomo explained (and this answer characterizes what kind of person he was). He asked, “Who says that they heard?” Sometimes one can hear something, but it does not register. To him, it is nothing more than background noise.

“Surely, *Yosef* pleaded with them. Who would just sit there and do nothing as his life is being manipulated? The problem was not with *Yosef*, but with his brothers. They did not listen. They were so intent on selling *Yosef* and being rid of him that they completely ignored his begging them to reconsider. It was only now, after they saw that they were being punished for something, that they introspected and realized that they had not listened to *Yosef*'s pleas.” He had this insight because he understood what it meant to listen.