

## Noach begot three sons, Shem, Cham and Yafes. (6:10)

Noticeably, Cham, who was Noach's youngest son, is placed out of sequence. One would expect the three sons to be placed in the Torah in accordance with their birth order. In a response to a query posed by his *chassidim*, the *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, addressed this question. Apparently, one of his *chassidim* fell prey to the external winds of change, and, in a short time, he left the fold. Since he had originally been one of them, the *chassidim* attempted to persuade him to return. When talking failed to effect a change in his behavior, they decided, or so they thought, that including him in their gatherings would make a difference. Sadly, they were wrong. They asked the *Rebbe* why their efforts had not produced positive results. He explained, "The Torah positions Cham between Shem and Yafes because the brothers thought that by having Cham with them, they would have a positive influence on him. Alas, they were wrong. Cham remained Cham even in the presence of his righteous brothers."

A person changes when he wants to, often after he has gotten everything out of his system. *Mussar shmuesen*, ethical discourses, opening up one's home, *kumzitz* singing – among the many attempts we utilize to convince someone to return – all help. Until the person is prepared to make an intelligent decision not based upon emotion, however, he will not completely leave his non-observant fantasy. He might be unhappy with the way he was treated when he had questions about observance; or he might be just plain angry at an individual, and he is taking it out on Hashem and the entire religious community; or he is just simply mixed up and is dealing with issues, many of them self-contrived. We should never give up and never become angry. Patience, coupled with even more patience – regardless how much it rankles you, is the way to go. Reciting *Tehillim* is vital. Would we act differently if he were physically ill? There is really not much difference. One illness is physical; the other is emotional.

Knowing how to speak to someone in such a situation requires extreme sensitivity and tolerance, which might be hard to demonstrate if the fellow is a family member or close friend. We seem to have greater tolerance for outsiders than for our own family. The hurt is greater when it is close by. The following story, culled from Rabbi Yechiel Spero's latest volume on *Pirkei Avos* [The Eternal Wisdom of *Pirkei Avos*] is inspiring, as it shows how a master whose love for all Jews, together with his understanding of the issues plaguing them, came into play to help return a young man to his roots.

The *Rambam* (*Hilchos Deios* 1:6) and the *Ramak*, in his *Tomer Devorah*, exhort us to follow in Hashem's ways – *Mah Hu af atah*. Hashem is patient and tolerant, to the point that, even when someone sins against Him, he receives the strength and ability to maintain his disloyalty towards Hashem. The *Klausenberger Rebbe, zl*, was a giant in Torah erudition. He also possessed uncanny sensitivity to Jews of all stripes. He suffered greatly during the Holocaust, as his entire family had been murdered. Following the war, he went throughout the DP camps reaching out to his fellow survivors with love and respect.

One freezing wintry night, the *Rebbe* traveled to Montreal to celebrate a *chanukas habayis*. His driver was not familiar with the streets (before GPS and Waze); they looked all over for someone who could give them directions. True to form, however, the city was snowed under, the temperature was well below zero. No normal person would be taking a walk out tonight.

After driving up and down the various streets, they chanced upon a bareheaded fellow who had braved the elements. He gave the outward appearance of a native of Quebec, a Province where French is spoken alongside English. The driver attempted to communicate with the man, to no avail. Suddenly, the *Rebbe* exited the car, walked over to the man and began to speak to him in *Yiddish*. It seemed bizarre to see a *chassidic Rebbe*, bedecked in all his *chassidic garb*, striking up a conversation with a man, who, for all intents and purposes, appeared to be anything but Jewish. Yet, they were conversing in *Yiddish*. Fifteen minutes later, the *Rebbe* had directions, and they went on their way.

Fast-forward thirty years, when that same driver was in Montreal for an event. Being that he had been the *Rebbe's* driver for years, the people peppered him with questions about the *Rebbe*. When someone asked him to share a special story about the *Rebbe*, he related what had taken place that wintry night thirty years earlier. He emphasized how the *Rebbe*, with his boundless love for Jews and his penetrating understanding of what made each one tick, was able to assuage the feelings of a Jew and bring him closer to *Yiddishkeit*.

From the back of the room, a *Chassidishe*-looking fellow called out and asked to be heard, "I want to explain to you how the *Rebbe* intuitively knew that the man who was walking on that frigid night was a co-religionist. It was not *ruach Hakodesh*, Divine Inspiration; it was not a miracle. It was extraordinary perception born of love, empathy and an uncanny comprehension of people. The *Rebbe* realized that the only person who would be walking outside on such a miserable night would be an angry Jew – a Jew who was in deep pain – a Jew who had lost everything, and, as a result of his anger, had discarded his *yarmulke*. Why else would he walk bareheaded? He was making a statement, which an astute, caring person would be able to perceive."

The *chassid* said, "I know that story well, because I am that person. The fifteen-minute warm, non-judgmental conversation with the *Rebbe* started me on my journey back to *Yiddishkeit*."

Patience, understanding, tolerance, empathy, warmth and care achieve what nothing else will. If we want those who are estranged from *Yiddishkeit* to return, we must love them – regardless of their behavior.