

Upon the completion of the days of her purity... she shall bring a sheep within its first year for an elevation/burnt offering, and a young dove or a turtledove for a sin-offering. (12:6)

The *Baal HaTurim* notes that, throughout the Torah, *turim*, young doves, are mentioned before *bnei yonah*, turtledoves, except for the *korban* of the *yolodes*, postpartum sacrifice, when *bnei yonah* precede *turim*. He explains that the *korban* which the woman brings at the end of her *yemei taharah*, days of purification, consists of a single bird – either a *tor* or a *ben yonah*. The nature of the turtledove (which also goes by the name mourning dove) is that, when it is separated from its mate, it mourns it and refuses to mate with another. Therefore, it is more appropriate to take a *yonah*, dove, than “break up” the turtledoves.

Horav Zaidel Epstein, zl, would be amazed by this statement. Does any other religion manifest such empathy for the “feelings” of a bird? The Torah is hereby teaching us: You must care about others – regardless of their status or pedigree. Even a simple creature obliges us to care. How much more so a *tzelem Elokim*, a person who is created in the image of Hashem?

This idea is expressed by the concept of *nosei b’ole im chaveiro*, carrying the yoke together with his friend, or – in simple terms – empathy. A well-known quote from Theodore Roosevelt is, “No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.” We cannot overstate the importance of empathy. Genuine concern for our fellow is a prerequisite for meaningful relationships. People are more receptive to a person’s knowledge or expertise after they are convinced that he genuinely cares about them. The emotional connection and understanding one shows towards people can greatly influence how much they value and engage with his knowledge.

The basis for *mitzvos bein adam l’chaveiro*, between man and his fellowman is *V’halachta biDrachav*, “You shall walk/emulate His ways” (*Devarim* 11:22). Hashem interacts with our world by sharing our pain. He is *nosei b’ole im chaveiro*, shares our burden.

This was evidenced during the Revelation that accompanied the Giving of the Torah on *Har Sinai*. *Klal Yisrael* was privy to an awesome spectacle: “They gazed upon the G-d of *Yisrael* and, beneath His feet, was the form of a sapphire brick and the essence of the Heavens in purity” (*Shemos* 24:10). This was no ordinary brick. *Rashi* explains that the brick lay before Hashem throughout the many years that the Jewish People had been slaves to Pharaoh, were forced to work with bricks. This vision (which is beyond our grasp) revealed one primary attribute of Hashem. He is *nosei b’ole im chaveiro*. He shares in our burden.

As the root of all *mitzvos bein adam l’chaveiro*, *nosei b’ole* is considered one of the most difficult *mitzvos* to carry out properly, because it demands that one *mamash*, actually, feel his fellow’s

pain. Our world contains many *baalei chesed* and even more “do-gooders,” but how many really feel, sense the pain of their fellow? In order to understand this, we must become acutely aware of what transpires in the mind of one who has just: sustained a tragedy; received bad news or been devastated by a grave diagnosis that affects him, his spouse or a member of his family. These are merely some of the general difficulties people experience – each in accordance with his/her personal ability to tolerate and overcome adversity. (Hashem gives us only what we can manage.)

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, explains that, when someone is confronted with adversity, he is unable to (truly) deal with it alone. He feels a sense of overwhelming and debilitating loneliness. He posits that, quite possibly, these pangs of loneliness cause him even greater pain than the actual suffering that he is presently experiencing. Previously, he had been on a par with his circle of friends, but now he is different, alone, isolated by his challenge. When he loses his equal footing with others, he becomes overwhelmed with crushing solitude. Each person’s concept of adversity is endemic to his individual personality. For some, underachievement in the economic/material sphere can destroy their self-esteem. A spiritual decline can also have a devastating effect upon a person.

Nosei b’ole does not mean only to share in their pain. Joy is not meant to be celebrated alone. When my friend is happy, even if I feel that he is getting carried away over something which is basic and does not require hoopla, I must share with him because this is a milestone *simchah* for him. It is the “him” factor which should concern me. If he wants to make a big to-do, then I must acquiesce and join him.

The *Chazon Ish* lived in Bnei Brak during World War II. A group of survivors, girls alone in the world, bereft of their families, arrived in Bnei Brak, where they were placed in a home. They were lost in a world that had gone mad. They had no idea whether their families had survived, or, like so many others, had perished in the Holocaust. They were broken-hearted girls who had to attempt to jumpstart their lives with no familial footing. One of the girls had become engaged. This was an incredible *simchah*, joyous occasion, and all the girls broke out in song. They were so happy for their friend. A man happened to enter the home while they were dancing and singing. He went to report this to the *Chazon Ish*, thinking that it was inappropriate for the girls to sing like that. The *Chazon Ish’s* reaction was classic: “What! They are singing? *Baruch Hashem* they are able to sing!” He felt their pain and shared their joy.

Nosei b’ole, sharing the yoke, may not necessarily “lighten” the load. The mere knowledge that one is not experiencing the adversity alone, however, makes it more bearable. Our collaborative efforts lighten the load in some way. *Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl*, observes that, as long as one Jew in the world is suffering and in pain, the joy that we experience is incomplete. [I would go so far as to suggest that this idea is flawed. If my friend is in pain, then my joy is not real joy.] The *Rosh Yeshivah* derives this idea from the *mitzvah* of *bris milah*. *Chazal (Mishnah Nedarim 3:11)* teach that if not for the *mitzvah* of *milah*, Hashem would not have created the world. Hashem blessed it with thirteen covenants. *Milah* is an atonement. The day that Avraham *Avinu* circumcised

himself was *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. The eventual *Geulah HaAsidah*, Future Redemption, will be realized in the merit of *Bris Milah*. Thus, one would expect the day of a *bris* to be one of unprecedented joy. Nonetheless, despite all the reasons for this being an extraordinary festive experience, we do not recite the *b'rachah* of *She'ha'simchah b'Me'ono*, "in Whose abode is this celebration" (as is recited in the *bentching* of a *Sheva Brachos*). The stated reason is: *tzaara d'yenuka*, the infant is in pain. At a moment of heightened joy, we must not forget that a young infant is in pain. Although he will not remember the pain he endured, his subconscious is well aware. To ignore his pain is to dull our senses.

One might think that, in the pursuit of a *mitzvah*, everything goes. Even then, every action that we take must be considerate of the emotions of anyone who might in some manner be adversely affected. The head of a *gemach*, free-loan association, presented the following *she'eilah*, *halachic* query. He had lent someone a sum of money to be paid back in three months. The allotted time had arrived, but the man (there was no question concerning his need or integrity) claimed that he was unable to pay back the loan at this time. He asked for an extension. The lender (head of the *gemach*) wanted to be able to refuse the request. He had a *frum*, pious, reason based upon the *Chafetz Chaim* who teaches that every loan one makes is a separate *mitzvah*. Thus, he felt that, by collecting the money, he would have the opportunity to lend it to someone else, thereby fulfilling another *mitzvah*. The borrower was in dire straits. He had no money to feed his family. Yet, this *tzaddik* who wanted to fulfill another *mitzvah*, demanded payment! What is more outrageous is that he had the temerity to seek a *halachic* ruling!

Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, was wont to relate an incident which took place concerning the *Arizal*. *Eliyahu HaNavi* intimated to the *Arizal*, "Come with me. The time has come to proclaim the *Geulah*, Final Redemption." The *Arizal* replied, "Give me a few moments, so that I can notify my wife that I am leaving with you." He quickly ran and informed his wife and returned post haste to the spot where he had met *Eliyahu*. Too late. The prophet who would herald the Redemption was gone. During those few minutes the *Arizal* had forfeited the opportunity to be a part of the leadership that would welcome *Moshiach Tziddkeinu*.

Rav Yisrael added a caveat to the story, "*Nu*, what do you think? Was the *Arizal* anguished over this? Was he distraught over the few minutes that cost him the greatest opportunity of his life? Absolutely not! It is forbidden to cause any sort of pain to another Jew – and this is certainly true concerning a woman. If a *mitzvah* or an unparalleled spiritual experience comes at the expense of slighting a fellow Jew, he does not perform it. Our brother's/sister's feelings take precedence.