

Each man by his banner according to the insignias of their father's household... shall they camp. (2:2)

Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 2:7) teach that signs/insignias in the form of a flag and a color represented every leader of a *shevet*, tribe. Each banner contained a color similar to the color of the precious stones that were upon the heart of *Aharon HaKohen (Choshen HaMishpat)*. *Rabbeinu Bachya (Shemos 28:15)* demonstrates how each tribe's color and stone underscored a unique attribute and strength of that tribe's progenitor. For example, Reuven's color was red. This symbolized his strength of character in not being embarrassed to confess his wrongdoing with regard to Bilhah's tent. Interestingly, Binyamin's color was an amalgam of all the colors of each individual tribe. Thus, Binyamin's banner fused the hues of all the previous eleven tribes. His stone was the *yashphei*, which, when the letters are broken up, become *yesh peh*, there is a mouth. *Chazal* say that this (*Bereishis Rabbah 71:5*) alludes to Binyamin's unique ability to remain silent, despite "having a mouth," when he could have spoken. He was well aware of what the brothers did to Yosef; yet, he chose to remain silent and not inform his father. They attribute this quality to his genetic makeup; it was inherent to him because he was the son of *Rachel Imeinu*, who also did not divulge information to which she was privy.

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, explains the fusion of colors which was Binyamin's signature and its connection to his unique hallmark of silence, when, indeed, he had much to say. Imagine a generation blessed with many *gedolim*, Torah giants, each one brilliant in knowledge, in addition to his own unique attributes. Yet, one *gadol* is their senior, and he towers over them. When these *gedolim* convene to discuss a pressing issue, each one will voice his perspective on the situation. When focusing the decision concerning what position to take and present to the community at large, however, they will all defer to the senior *gadol*. His outlook will prevail; theirs will be overshadowed.

It is specifically at such a juncture that a younger, up-and-coming *gadol* will have an advantage over his more experienced peers. Others do not call upon him to voice an opinion. He can and does, however, listen intently to everyone's opinion, and he is able to form his own opinion based on a fusion of their collective ideas. He remains silent, until that day on which he will be the giant over giants, and his opinion will matter most. He will then present a perspective honed from years of listening to the opinions of others. His attentive silence reaches fruition when he demonstrates his uncanny global view.

Binyamin was the youngest of the brothers. His youth granted him the opportunity to listen, absorb and store away for the future. *Yeish peh* – he had a mouth; yet, he wisely chose to remain silent. His flag contained all the colors; he imbibed everyone's opinion, preserving it for the proper time and place.

When we listen to the wisdom of great individuals, be it through their words or their writings, and

then integrate those insights into our own thinking, we create a synergy of ideas. This process not only enhances our personal understanding, but it also contributes to a collective brilliance based upon an amalgamation of diverse perspectives. By listening to others, we enhance the intellectual playing field. Last, a culture of attentive listening nurtures stronger connections between people, because it makes people feel valued. Nothing can do more for a person's esteem than giving him the respect of listening to what he has to say.

Many people have stories to tell, observations to share, but no one seems to want to listen. In a bustling neighborhood, a young *kollel* wife with some time on her hands befriended an elderly woman who had nothing but time. The young woman visited with her, and, suddenly, the elderly woman opened up with amazing stories of her life: her husband who was gone; her children who were too busy to listen; her grandchildren who hardly knew her. Through their conversations, the young woman discovered a rich tapestry of experiences that bridged generations. The woman shared the challenges that she confronted, and the fortitude and resilience forged by faith in Hashem that allowed her to prevail over them. In the end, two people benefitted: the elderly woman finally had someone who would listen and value what she had to say; and the young woman who, by listening, became more aware of others and what they had to offer. Her faith and convictions in Hashem strengthened, and she developed her empathy for others.