

Moshe went and spoke these words to all of Yisrael. (31:1)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* first sealed the new covenant with all of *Klal Yisrael*. Then, he went from tribe to tribe to bid farewell to each of them. *Ramban* teaches that it was more than a mere “good-bye.” He came to console them regarding his imminent death. It was critical that their sadness concerning his departure from this mortal world not becloud the inherent joy accompanying the sealing of the covenant. Let us attempt to grasp the depth of our quintessential leader’s actions on the last day of his mortal life. This was the day that the punishment resulting from the *mei merivah*, waters of strife, was to be carried out. Surely, Moshe had this on his mind. He was acutely aware of the reason for his inability to enter the Land. He was quite aware of how it all had started. Yet, the only thing on his mind was to console the people. One would think that such a day would be the time for personal spiritual introspection.

Moshe obviously cared more for the people than he did for himself – which is the hallmark of a true Torah leader. *Horav Meir Tzvi Bergman, Shlita*, explains that, indeed, Moshe was addressing his spiritual needs prior to leaving this world. How: The greatest *z’chus*, merit, by which to end one’s life is to reach out and hearten *Klal Yisrael*. Helping another *Yid* is the ultimate mission in our lives on this world. As *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, writes (preface to *Nefesh HaChaim*), “A person is created *l’hoil l’achrianei*, to facilitate others. *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl* (grandson of *Rav Chaim Volozhiner*), was a *gaon* in Torah and equally in acts of *chesed*. He represented the alignment of Torah erudition with acts of kindness at its pinnacle. The extent that he went to help those in need was legendary. His home was a veritable thoroughfare, open to all, regardless of background or religious affiliation.

Once a group of distinguished *rabbanim* met at *Rav Chaim’s* home to discuss matters of great import for *Klal Yisrael*. They brought up the fact that one of the most brilliant scholars of the generation, *Horav Eliyahu Chaim Meisel, zl*, *Rav* of Lodz, was heavily involved in all acts of *chesed* – to the point that (they felt) his *chesed* impugned his Torah scholarship. (This was not an issue of *lashon hora*, because it was probably germane to the topic of conversation.) When *Rav Chaim* heard their statement, he became upset and spoke up, “A *Rav* who does not close his *Gemorah* to perform acts of *tzedakah* and *chesed* – even when the *Gemorah* is open in front of him, it is considered as if it closed! However, the converse is also true – a *Rav* that does close his *Gemorah* when the need to perform an act of *tzedakah* or *chesed* arises – even if it is closed – it is considered as if it is open.”

Chazal (*Sotah* 14a) teach: “Torah begins with an act of lovingkindness and ends with an act of lovingkindness.” This refers to the skin garments Hashem fashioned for Adam and Chavah and to Hashem burying Moshe *Rabbeinu*. *Rav Bergman* posits that the same idea applies to Moshe’s Divine agency for Hashem. All the great wonders and miracles which Hashem wrought through Moshe all began with Moshe’s extraordinary display of *derech erez*, respectful demeanor, not to do anything that might infringe on his brother’s *kavod*, honor. Until Hashem’s call to Moshe, Aharon had been the nation’s leader. Moshe refused to do anything that might offend his brother.

Likewise, on the last day of his life, Moshe went throughout the nation to bid each *shevet* farewell. He made each and every Jew feel good. What could be a better and more exalted way of leaving this world after a life well lived?

Horav Nochum Zev Ziv, zl, was the son of the *Alter m'Kelm*. Following the *petirah*, passing, of his brother-in-law, *Horav Tzvi Hirsch Braude, zl*, he became the head of the famed *Talmud Torah* of Kelm. Needless to say, such a position was not merely inherited; *Rav* Nochum Zev was a mussar personality of the highest order. He represented Torah refinement, coupled with extreme sensitivity to the needs of others. A brilliant educator, he taught by example, maintaining the elevated level of Torah and *mussar* for which the *Talmud Torah* was known. Kelm cultivated *menuchas hanefesh*, calmness of spirit, the primary focus of a student's life. This *menuchas hanefesh* was reflected in how one spoke and how he acted. Think, and think again, before you speak or act. Nothing should be spontaneous, but an expression of complete control. Calm, unhurried, reflective were terms which defined a student of Kelm. Confusion was the antithesis of spiritual success. Obviously, one who maintained such composure did not allow for anger or indolence. In order to implant such qualities in his students, one must himself reflect *menuchas hanefesh* at its highest level. This aptly describes *Rav* Nochum Zev.

No one is more frightened than when he is confronting death. Regardless of how much one speaks about being "ready," "I've had a good life," no one is ever prepared. Thus, no greater test of *menuchas hanefesh* exists than the ability to encounter death in the face and maintain one's complete composure. Apparently, our quintessential leader represented this quality. *Rav* Nochum Zev's passing from this world was a lesson in how *mussar* can mold a person to become a footstool for the *Shechinah*. It was never about him – it was always about others. While we might overlook the quality at such a frightening moment – *Rav* Nochum Zev did not. In fact, the way he prepared for his departure from this world and his total self-abnegation bespeak an individual of an otherworldly genre.

Rav Nochum Zev was *niftar* on *Erev Shabbos*. Thursday evening, he understood that the end was imminent. He made arrangements – not for himself – but for others. First, he spoke with his daughters, each one a refined personality, and comforted them. He explained that this was the way of the world and begged them to maintain composure. He next called for the *baal agalah*, wagon driver, who transported people for a living. He explained that, during the tumult surrounding his passing, the family would forget to inform his sister, widow of *Horav* Tzvi Hirsch Braude. She had a serious mobility issue and was unable to leave the house without assistance. He gave the man money to travel to her home, bring her to the funeral and then return her home. [In another version of this story, it was his daughter, Freida, who had difficulty walking.] This is how a *tzaddik* -- whose entire life was dedicated to the service of others -- maintained his composure and continued his considerate kindness until the very last moment.