

Noach, the man of the earth, debased himself and planted a vineyard. (9:20)

It seems that the Torah is censuring Noach for planting the grape vine, drinking the wine which he made from its grapes, and then becoming inebriated. While becoming drunk and losing cognitive control is reason for rebuke, what did he do wrong by planting the grape vine? *Rashi* defines *vayachel* as debasing himself by craving wine so much that he planted a vineyard. In any event, his craving got the better of him. Is this activity so odious that Noach is considered to have debased himself? Furthermore, should we not take Noach's emotional well-being into account? He had just witnessed the obliteration of the entire world population (except for his family). Wine gladdens the heart, relieving some of the pain and pressure which accompanies such a tragedy. The grief must have been overwhelming.

Horav Simchah Wasserman, zl, explains that Noach's error was his deference to his overwhelming grief when he should have instead moved forward with rebuilding the world. He would have time to grieve at a later date. Now, the need for rebuilding and generating growth should be the motif. Instead, rather than involve him in re-construction and renewal, he sought a way to console himself. What was lost – was gone. Now was the time to look to the future and build.

This does not suggest, by any stretch, that Noach should have ignored his grief. After a tragedy, rather than spend one's time grieving, he should be active and channel his grief into action and growth. We see that following the loss of Sarah *Imeinu* our Patriarch, Avraham *Avinu*, rose up from his grief, purchased the *Me'oras HaMachpeilah*, and secured the future of his legacy by arranging for Yitzchak *Avinu's* marriage to Rivkah *Imeinu*. Grief must be balanced with practical steps, necessary for building and ensuring continuity.

David HaMelech fasted and prayed fervently when his infant son, born to him from Bas Sheva, fell gravely ill. He supplicated Hashem for the child's recovery, his *emunah*, faith, never wavering one iota. When the child passed away, however, David immediately ceased his recurring ritual, washed and went to pray, accepting Hashem's decree. He explained that, while the child was alive, he had hope for his life. Once it was obvious that the Heavenly response was negative, it was time to move forward and execute his responsibilities as the nation's monarch.

In contemporary times, many people who have suffered catastrophic losses have found solace and strength by channeling their grief into projects that benefit others. Thus, while grief is a natural and vital response to loss, a time comes when one must rise from his mourning and attempt to transform personal tragedy into a catalyst for positive change and growth.

We have no shortage of stories which bespeak fortitude and resilience following adversity. The Jewish people have long been known for their spiritual mettle and ability to move on, rather than

surrender to grief. Over the years, I have written many such stories. I recently read a story in Rabbi Shlomo Landau's new book, "Flashes of Greatness," that not only captivated me, but it also made my heart soar with pride to have the good fortune of being a member of *Mi k'Amcha Yisrael*, Who is like Your nation, Yisrael?

A while ago, in a community in central New Jersey, two young teenage girls lost both of their parents shortly one after another. Being left bereft of one's parents is tragic at any age. It is exponentially heartrending when the orphans are teenagers at the cusp of life. A friend of the family opened up her home following the passing of the second parent, so that the girls should not be relegated to sitting *shivah* alone. People came and went, for the most part, because it was the correct thing to do. Sadly, the tragedy was inexplicable and beyond words. To comfort the mourners was a challenge for even the most gifted and articulate speaker.

Late one night, after the guests had left the *shivah* house and the girls and their hosts were preparing to retire for the evening, they heard a soft knock at the door. Normally, times are posted for visitation and, while the times are usually flexible, late at night is usually a respected time.

The host opened the door and was confronted by a woman wearing a face mask. Before he had the opportunity to inquire as to her purpose in visiting so late, she said, "I am a Jewish woman from Brooklyn, and I apologize for coming so late, but could I please speak to the girls for just a few moments?" The host asked the girls, who acquiesced, probably more out of curiosity than concession.

The woman began by once again apologizing for her late arrival, "I have an explanation for both my appearance and tardiness. Less than a year ago, a fire broke out in my house on Friday night. The conflagration devastated my life, as it took the lives of seven of my children and left me seriously injured; hence, the face mask. Words fail to portray the overwhelming, crushing grief which enveloped me. Aside from the emotional pain, I was dealing with serious injury. Getting in and out of a car is extremely painful. This is why I arrived so late. The kind woman who drove me was very cautious, making certain to avert any bump in the road."

It was at this point that the host interjected a comment, "You must have been quite close to the deceased to have made such an arduous trip in your physical condition."

The woman replied, "Actually, I never knew either one of their parents. It was only after someone shared the heartrending story with me that I decided that I had a unique opportunity to comfort these girls and give them an element of hope for a brighter tomorrow.

I immediately set about looking for someone who could enable me to get to the *shivah* house. "

The woman was on a roll. She was fired up and passionate concerning the message she sought to convey to the girls. She said to the girls, "You have just sustained a tragedy of epic proportion.

Losing a parent at a young age is unusually traumatic. Losing both parents is a devastating trauma which can be life altering. Can anyone promise you that it will get better? Can anyone guarantee you that one day you will once again have joy in your life? I think that the answer is affirmative. How do I know? I went through a horrific loss. Does anyone fathom my loss? Yet, I am here tonight sharing my pain and my hopes for my and your future. Truthfully, in the beginning, I could not believe that I would ever smile again. Wherever I walked, I saw one of my children. Nonetheless, I believed with deep faith in Hashem that He would not forsake me, that He would support me throughout my travail. I will not deceive you and say that it has been easy. It has been very difficult, but every day it has become easier. Every morning when I arise, I look forward to a better day than yesterday. It has been almost a year, and I am finally seeing a spark of light breaking through the darkness. Yes, I am able to comfort you—I am able to give you hope.”

The woman sat there for a while and talked her heart out. In the end, she felt better herself and happy that, in some manner, she was able to make a dent in the girls’ pain.

We Jews do not wallow in grief. We channel our emotions and thoughts to positive innovation. Our people endured the most unspeakable horrors and emerged strong, because we believe that Hashem orchestrates everything for our betterment. We know that He will stand with us through thick and thin, granting us the strength not to waver. When we declare, *Mi k’Amcha Yisrael?* Who is like Your people, *Yisrael?* we should emphasize the *Amcha*, Your people, because this is from Whom we draw our strength: from You, Hashem.