

## And the sons of Binyamin. (46:21)

The Torah goes on to record the names of Binyamin's ten sons. *Rashi* (ibid 43:30) quotes *Chazal* that Binyamin named each of his sons for some element of Yosef's tragedy. For example: *Bela*, because Yosef was *Nivla*, swallowed among the nations; *Becher*, related to *be'chor*, first born, which Yosef was to Rachel *Imeinu*; *Shavui*, because he was taken captive. In this unique manner, Binyamin immortalized Yosef's memory. Thus, he ensured that every time he called his children, Yosef's character, his ordeal, and his greatness would come to mind.

A vital truth is underscored herein. A person dies twice: Once when his body is laid to rest; and again when his memory is forgotten. If his life continues to resonate in the words and deeds of others, however, he never truly dies. A *rebbe* who has inspired students is remembered via his students reflecting his teachings. Indeed, the truest form of *zikaron*, memorial, is neither one that is etched in stone, nor an elaborate memorial service/*seudah*. The purpose of memory is not to recall events, but to transform how we live. *Targum Onkeles* translates *zachor*, remember, as *hevei de'chir*. As the *Gerrer Rebbe* would translate it – *Zei a gedenker*, be a symbol of the memory. We must reflect in our demeanor that we remember *Shabbos*, *Amalek*, and *Kabbolas HaTorah*. It is insufficient to simply talk about it; one must represent it. Thus, to remember a parent in the most elevated manner is not by repetition of his name, but by living a life that reflects his values and magnifies his achievements.

In a story attributed to the *Chafetz Chaim*, the sage visited a family of mourners who were grieving a loved one. They lamented bitterly that their loss had created a permanent tear in their hearts; their loved one was gone forever. The sage pointed to a candle burning nearby and remarked, "Look at that flame. As long as it is used to kindle other candles, its fire never dies. Similarly, with a *neshamah*, soul. If you take the lessons imparted, and achievements of the *niftar*, deceased, and continue to live your lives in accordance with them, his light continues to burn brightly."

A man who had lost his entire family in Europe, once confided, "My gravestone is not the one in the cemetery, but rather, the table where my grandchildren sing *zemiros*, *Shabbos* hymns." The truest remembrance of parents is not verbal, but visceral. It is not what we say about them, but what we become because of them.

I attended a memorial service recently in which the children of the deceased remembered him as a loving father who would spend time with them vacationing and going to sporting events and restaurants. They elaborated concerning his favorite foods, his mannerisms, his habits. Will any of this be remembered over time? No. Had they focused on his character, acts of lovingkindness, sacrifices, faith and overall adherence to Torah – it would be something of value worthy of perpetuation. By focusing on a person's achievements, we not only pay tribute to them, but we also continue their mission.

Binyamin memorialized what was important about Yosef, thus preserving his greatness. Some

memories matter, because they lay the foundation for the next generation. As each of Binyamin's sons grew up, he realized he had a connection to his uncle, a connection which empowered him to continue his legacy and make it his own.

A monument is one way to remember. People visit the grave, stare at the numbers and read the inscription. For some, it is a lengthy, poetic allusion to words of *Chazal*, allowing the reader to develop an appreciation of the deceased in his mind. In other instances, we see two numbers: birth date; and day of death -- with a dash in between. The sum total of our lives is the dash in between the numbers. We all have numbers; we all have a dash. How we fill in and give meaning to the dash defines our life. The following poignant story is bittersweet: sad, because it is tragic; yet, in some manner, sweet, because a father who suffered immensely throughout his life was finally able to get some form of closure.

*Gehinnom*, Purgatory, has seven levels, and Chaim Shapiro, like so many of his co-religionists, experienced each one. Between the concentration camps, ghettos and forced marches, Chaim had seen it all. When the war began, he had a beautiful family consisting of his wonderful wife and eight children.

Within a year, he was left bereft of his wife and seven of his children. He was liberated from Buchenwald together with his surviving son, Baruch, only to wallow for three years in the Displacement Persons camps. Finally, in 1948, they were able to join a group of immigrants, destination: *Eretz Yisrael*.

Baruch Shapiro was not about to sit idly while the country was fighting for survival against overwhelming odds. They were fighting against an enemy that had no human scruples, one whose animus toward the small group of Jews bordered on primal, blind rage, a fury which emanated from a deep, spiritual darkness. (It is always the ones who preach religion and their belief in a Supreme Being who act out their vitriol all in the name of religion.) Having no training whatsoever, but a deep-rooted desire to do whatever he could for his brothers and sisters, Baruch became a soldier. He did well, even receiving a commission as an officer and a medal for bravery.

Any parent or spouse dreads the delegation that is compelled to deliver sad news. When Chaim saw the delegation walking slowly in unison up to the door of his house, he did not wait for them to read the telegram to deliver the sad news. He took the telegram, crumpled it up, sat down and wept for the last and only remaining member of his family.

The next day, mourners, hundreds of Jews, most of them who knew Baruch Shapiro only through reports of his heroism, gathered together at Mount Herzl, site of the military cemetery, to grieve together over the loss, to strengthen themselves over this terrible tragedy. This was not just another funeral; this was the end of a family. A father who had lost his beautiful family in the fires of the Holocaust was now burying his only remaining member. With Baruch's passing, Chaim Shapiro's legacy – his future – came to an end. Thus, it came as a shock to everyone that, as the

coffin was lowered into the ground, Chaim Shapiro began to sing.

Everyone thought that he had become unhinged. The army chief of staff walked over and put his arm around him. After all these years, tragedy upon tragedy, Chaim had finally cracked. They expected hysterical weeping, banging his chest, screaming – but singing, this was insane. Chaim looked at the people and, in a calm voice, explained his behavior.

“You all know I have been to *Gehinnom* and back, having suffered a loss the likes of which people cannot imagine. In one year, I have lost over seventy members of my extended family – until it was just Baruch and I. I have no place to mourn them, no grave, no monument – nothing – just memories. They are gone. All that is left of them is the ashes strewn in the skies of Europe.

“Baruch, my remnant, my last child, has suffered a death which I cannot understand. Baruch did not die just because he was a *Yid*. Baruch died fighting for our People. Baruch died so that another generation of brothers and sisters would have a homeland in which to live. Baruch has a grave. Is this not reason to sing? “

Chaim continued singing, and soon began grabbing the hands of others to dance with him. Soon, three hundred people who had come to join Baruch in mourning all began to sing and dance – until the sun set.

One who visits that cemetery and goes to the 1948 section will find the lonely grave of Baruch Shapiro. When we think about his story and the manner in which his father chose to remember him, we realize what is so special about our People. *Mi k'Amcha Yisrael!*