

In Mourning

By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

The heart refuses to accept and the hand cannot write what the mind is trying to process. A young *rosh yeshiva*, scion to a royal family and traditions, groomed his entire life for the position he attained and was excelling in, was suddenly taken from us. Widely respected and beloved, his tragic passing has left so many gasping in sadness and grasping for support.

As Rav Shmuel Yehudah Levin said in his final *seudah shlishis shmuess*, moments before his sudden passing, the *Maharsha* discusses that the 21 days that comprise the three-week period between *Shivah Assur B'Tammuz* and *Tisha B'Av* are days of judgment comparable to the 21-day period between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

We began these days of *mishpot* with shocking *din*. We are *davening* for so many sick people, beseeching Hashem that they be granted a *refuah sheleimah*, but for Rav Shmuel Yehudah *ben* Rav Avrohom Chaim, we were not given the opportunity.

Dodi yorad legano lilkot shoshanim. Hakadosh Boruch Hu plucked him from our midst.

V'einenu ki lokach oso Elokim.

The *Gemara* in *Yevamos* (117a) discusses the *posuk* (*Mishlei* 27:19) which states, "*Kamayim ponim el ponim, kein lev ha'adam el ha'adam* – Just as water reflects the image of the person who is looking at it, so too, the heart of a person is reflective of the person's attitude to the person he is dealing with."

Rabi Yehudah says that the *posuk* is referring to the study of Torah.

Rashi explains that Rabi Yehudah is saying that a student's success in absorbing his *rebbe's* Torah is dependent upon the way the *rebbe* treats his *talmid*. If the *rebbe* treats his *talmidim* with love and care, their learning and growth will be on a much higher level.

The *Rambam* in *Hilchos Talmud Torah* (5:17) states that a *rebbe* must be careful with his *talmidim* and must love them.

Rav Shmuel Yehudah was a quintessential *rebbe* to his *talmidim*, selflessly giving of himself for their betterment. Each *talmid* felt like a son, loved by a *rebbe* who cared for him. He was always available for his *talmidim*, always learning with them and encouraging them to grow in Torah and *avodah*.

The *Gemara* in *Moed Koton* (25b) states, “*Ki noch nafshei d’Rabi Yaakov ischamiyu Kochavi b’yemomah* – When Rabi Yaakov was *niftar*, stars were visible by day.” Perhaps we can explain that after the passing of Rabi Yaakov, the efforts he put into his *talmidim* became evident as they shined. The *Gemara* was praising Rabi Yaakov that he had raised such great *talmidim* that each one grew to be a star.

We recently *lained Parshas Chukas*, which begins with the *halachos* of *parah adumah*. Rav Ami taught (*Moed Koton* 28a) that the *parsha* of *parah adumah* follows the discussion of the passing of Miriam to demonstrate that just as the *parah adumah* brings forgiveness, so does the passing of *tzaddikim*.

Many question why the passing of *tzaddikim* is compared to the *parah adumah*, which cleanses from *tumah* but does not forgive. Why is it not compared to any of the various *korbanos* that are intended for *kapporah*?

In his *hesped* for Rav Tzvi Hirsh Rabinowitz, the son of Rav Yitzchok Elchonon Spector and his successor as Kovna Rov, Rav Yitzchok Yaakov Rabinowitz (no relation) of Ponovezh, offered the following explanation:

He cited the *Mishnah* (*Parah* 3:11), which states that the ash of the *parah adumah* was divided into three portions. One was saved *l’mishmeres*, one was used to sanctify *kohanim*, and one was used to sprinkle upon those who had become *tamei* and needed to be purified.

He said that when a *tzaddik* passes away, he leaves behind three distinct inheritances. The first is his *neshomah*, which will remain under the *Kisei Hakavod*. This is akin to the *eifer l’mishmeres*. The second is the *chiddushei Torah* he leaves behind for the *kohanim*, meaning the *talmidei*

chachomim and *rabbonim* who dedicate their lives to Torah and are compared to *kohanim*. Their third inheritance is their *middos tovos*, which all of *Klal Yisroel* can inherit from them to study and follow in their ways.

And finally, he said, another reason that *misas tzaddikim* is compared to *parah adumah* is because to receive forgiveness through the other *korbanos*, the supplicant doesn't have to perform any action; everything can be done by the *kohein*. But in order to be purified by the *parah adumah*, the person who became impure must perform an action with the *eifer haparah*.

Rav Itzele Ponovezher explained that in order to receive the *kapparah* that is available upon the passing of *tzaddikim*, we must do something. We must actively work on ourselves to adopt the fine *middos* and acts of the *tzaddik* whose passing we mourn.

Rav Shmuel Yehudah Levin was such a person, leaving behind much Torah for his *talmidim* and *talmidei chachomim* to study, and fine *middos* which everyone can learn from and emulate, as his *neshomah* has gone to rest under the *Kisei Hakavod*.

This week, we *lain Parshas Pinchos*, which begins with the enduring *kana'us* of Pinchos. The same act that caused others to become so traumatized that they didn't know what to do caused Pinchos to be bold and courageous. His *kana'us* lives on for all time as one of passion and commitment, epitomizing the instincts and reactions of a servant of Hashem.

The *parsha* continues with a count taken of each individual Jew in *Klal Yisroel*. Each person has a mission. Every person has a *tachlis* in the world and it is our job to realize that.

Pinchos took a stand when others did not, and in so doing formed a covenant with Hashem.

The *parsha* reinforces this message with the counting of the *Bnei Yisroel*. Every Jew counts. Everyone can do what Pinchos did, acting as a lone soldier, demonstrating the strength of character and devotion to bring glory to Heaven. Each individual has intrinsic value. The counting reminds every person that he has the ability to make a difference. You matter. Every person matters.

The *avodah zarah* of *Baal Peor* diminished man and caused him to believe that humankind is a small being with limited abilities that he is unable to face or overcome (see *Chasam Sofer* in this week's *parsha*). Thus, the *yeitzer hora* reduces people to the level where they think they are inconsequential, their actions are inconsequential, and whatever they think or do has no meaning or importance.

Pinchos maximized his abilities and withstood the entreaties of the *yeitzer hora* to stand by the side and let someone else do what had to be done. He realized his *shlichus* and with *achrayus* acted upon it.

It is because of Pinchos and people like him in every generation that our nation has endured to this day.

Rav Shmuel Yehudah was such a person. He stood out because of his sense of *achrayus*, as he carried out his *shlichus* of *harbotzas Torah*. He cared about every *talmid*. He cared about everyone in his *yeshiva* and in his city. Following in the footsteps of his great father and grandfathers, he didn't sit off to the side and only concern himself with his own *dalet amos* and growth in Torah and *mussar*. Rather, he was *makriv* himself for the *tzibbur*.

Shekulah misas tzaddikim k'sereifas Bais Elokeinu. Klal Yisroel now adds a new tragedy to the long litany of *tzaros* that occurred during the Three Weeks. We have lost a young *rosh yeshiva* in the prime of his life, who brought up many hundreds of *talmidim* and propelled them to excel and realize their *shlichus* as he was becoming increasingly involved in *inyonei haklal*. Many saw in him a future national leader.

Every Jewish tragedy has its roots in the *churban*, which we mourn during these weeks of sorrow. We mourn the destruction of the *Botei Mikdosh* and mourn the passing of Rav Shmuel Yehudah and recognize what we are lacking. We look into ourselves and dedicate ourselves to fulfilling our own individual *shlichus* of being *marbeh kevod Shomayim* and growing in Torah and *middos*. We do not get deterred as we seek perfection and success.

Kol hamisabel al Yerushalayim, anyone who mourns the destruction of the holy city and the *Bais Hamikdosh*, *zocheh veroeh b'simchasah*, will merit seeing its joy. Those who appreciate *gadlus*

baTorah and are respectful of their *rabbeim* and *morei derech*, *roshei yeshiva* and *rabbonim*, in their lifetimes; those who mourn the passing of *talmidei chachomim* and feel the pain of their loss, indicate that they are serious about their *shlichus* in this world and will be *zoche* to grow and excel in Torah and *avodah*, helping prepare the world for *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*, when we will be reunited with the *neshamos* that now rest *tachas Kisei Hakavod* and celebrate the rebuilding of the *Bais Hamikdosh*.

Tehei nishmaso tzerurah betzror hachaim.