

Living With Faith **By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz**

In this week's parsha, we learn about one of the great days in the history of Klal Yisroel. They were finally redeemed, for as the Ramban explains, the redemption from Mitzrayim would not be complete until they had set up the Mishkon and the Shechinah had a home among the Jewish people.

But the joyous day that celebrated the consecration of the Mishkon did not go as planned. The two eldest sons of Aharon Hakohein, great men in their own right, transgressed a commandment of Hashem and were consumed by a holy flame.

The Torah tells us that in this time of public and private grief, Aharon remained silent: "Vayidom Aharon." Moshe offered him words of consolation and Aharon did not respond verbally. His only response was silence.

It was the greatest day in his life, when he was finally able to perform his avodah service with the assistance of his sons. Suddenly, without warning, two of his sons were snatched from him. The great orator, who was appointed by Hashem to be Moshe Rabbeinu's spokesman, did not utter a word.

The Chofetz Chaim would say that the word "vayidom" is derived from the word "domeim," which means an inert object such as a stone. Not only did Aharon not speak of his pain and tragedy, but he did not flinch and it was impossible to notice anything about him from looking at him.

How did he do that? How was he able to remain silent and composed in an unplanned moment of great personal tragedy?

His ability to remain in full self control, without betraying any mourning or sadness, was due to his complete faith in Hakadosh Boruch Hu. He knew that everything that happens in our world is because Hashem wills it so, and certainly, if it took place in Hashem's house, so to speak, Aharon knew that it was from Hashem. And if it is from Hashem, then it is good.

For his faith as expressed by his silence, he was quickly rewarded.

In our individual lives, we experience periods of challenges and tragedy, ups and downs regarding health, relationships and finances. As we discussed last week, the people of faith are always at peace, no matter what they are facing away from public view, for they know that it all comes from a merciful Creator, who wants what is best for his creations.

We don't have to understand everything, and there is much that we are confronted with in life that we don't grasp, but we can't let that get us rattled or get us down. We accept what Hashem has done and wait until another day to comprehend what it's all about.

Following the Holocaust, there were two courses of action for survivors. Their harrowing experiences left many forlorn and broken. They lost their will to live and felt that Hashem had forsaken them. And who could blame them? They couldn't recover.

But there were people whose emunah was stronger, and although they had lived through those same experiences as the people who became depressed and lost, they put their lives back together, established new homes, and found things to celebrate as they went on to live productive lives of "vayidom," neither complaining nor becoming immobilized by their multiple tragedies.

Far be it from us to comprehend what they lived through or to judge the people who were subjected to sub-human abuse, but we can learn from their examples. Each one of those people, from the simple Jews to the venerated leaders, is a hero to our nation. Together, they rebuilt and resurrected a decimated people. Their bodies were ripped apart, their families were destroyed, they were penniless and lonely, but their souls remained whole and pure.

When the news is too awful to bear, when death befalls people young and dear, when fire consumes good people at a time marked for joy, it is a time of "vayidom," thousands of years ago and today. With superhuman strength and hearts tough as steel, it is a time of "vayidom."

Whatever life does to us, we must remain whole and unbroken. Sometimes, the temptation is to fall apart and break down. If we can rise above our experiences in a state of "vayidom," we can bounce back and resurrect ourselves, triumphing despite many setbacks. Of course, it's easier said than done. Oftentimes, we need the help and reassurance of good people to keep us on track, but survival and endurance beat the alternative.

I am reading a fascinating new book dedicated by the Werdiger family and published by ArtScroll/Mesorah about the rebbe of Ger, the Beis Yisroel, written by my dear friend, Yisroel Besser. Though I study Sefas Emes, I am not a Gerrer chossid, but the book fascinates, as it traces the rebbe's life through his daunting challenges to what he was able to build as he practiced vayidom on his great losses.

It was a mission that he took over from his father, the Imrei Emes, who led legions of chassidim in der heim. Most of them perished during the war, while he was miraculously saved and brought to Eretz Yisroel. When he met the Belzer Rebbe, Rav Aharon, for the first time after they each suffered crushing losses, they sat in a room and not a word was spoken. Vayidom. Then, finally, breaking the silence, the Belzer Rebbe offered some words of consolation to the Gerrer Rebbe.

The Imrei Emes responded and said, "Belzer Rov, we will have to start from the beginning."

And that was what they both did.

The weakened Imrei Emes set about rebuilding his chassidus, bringing together shattered, broken, grieving people, and uniting them.

Upon his passing, his son, Rav Yisroel, was tasked with continuing the mission. Instead of becoming broken at the loss of his wife, children, and close members of his family, as well as what had consisted of his entire world, newly crowned as rebbe, he set out to resurrect and rebuild an entire world that was decimated. His chassidim were people who had the will to live sucked out of them, and others who could barely deal with what they had seen and experienced in Poland's ghettos and camps.

It was at the Seder and Rav Yisroel Alter was reading the words, "Yachol mibe'od yom. I would have thought that the obligation to discuss leaving Mitzrayim begins when it is still light out, by day, but when the posuk, discussing the obligation of the Seder, states, 'Ba'avor zeh,' we derive that the mitzvah of recounting our exodus from Mitzrayim is only when matzah and maror are before us, which is following nightfall, when it is dark out."

The rebbe stopped and observed that perhaps people might think that the obligation to believe in Hashem is only when it is light and everything is clear and positive, but when everything is dark and gloomy, and enveloped by sadness and tragedy, the obligation to believe and serve Hashem is not in effect. Therefore, the posuk says that even when sitting at a table with the poor man's bread of affliction and bitter vegetables in front of you, we are still obligated to serve Hashem and appreciate what we have.

With a transplanted generation of broken, suffering souls, the Beis Yisroel set out to build people, to give them a will to live, to carry on, to dream, to excel, and to build homes, families and futures. At a time of darkness and pain, he showed them how to rise ever higher, lighting their neshamos with the fire of Kotzk and Torah and avodah, so they could climb on a path of gedulah and gevurah.

In a generation that could have easily fallen into despair after losing so much, experiencing so much pain and grief, transplanted into a new country, and overwhelmed by crushing poverty, he brought reasons to celebrate and showed them how they could live lives of simcha with a redeemed faith in themselves and in Yiddishkeit.

The Beis Yisroel once confided to his gabbai that he viewed it as his mission in this world not to put up large buildings, but rather to help people build ehrliche Yiddishe homes. Instead of being consumed by emotions of sadness and mourning, he used those emotions to help people who had been overcome, live once again.

The book is laced with anecdotes of how the Beis Yisroel accomplished his mission. It is a source of chizuk for people going through rough times and good ones. We all need little

reminders of what we are about, what it means to be a Yid and how we can make the world a better place. It gives us a new respect for our parents and grandparents and the storms they weathered as they developed and brought up families such as ours, continuing the golden chain of Yiddishkeit that stretches through centuries of good – and not-so-good – times.

Everyone can use some inspiration. We should always be on the lookout for seforim and books such as this that provide inspiration in our darkening world. Mibayis and michutz, from inside and outside, we are under attack. Hashem has allowed our enemies to become emboldened, and they march in the world's capitals calling for our scalps, accusing us of genocide and other crimes. People are afraid to walk in the streets, as they see fearful days ahead. America is safer and better off, but with an unfriendly administration and leading political and media figures speaking against us, those who seek to do us harm find strength in the changing attitudes and climate.

Our own brethren are now after us, whipping up old canards and new ones against Torah observers and those who dedicate their lives to Torah study. They aim to rid our community of its political power, punish its school-aged youth, and institute crushing financial penalties against Torah causes. They don't appreciate the foundations of Yiddishkeit and fail to study history and the fate of the countries that have sought to force Torah scholars to forsake the Torah they dedicate their lives to. To struggle for Torah is not new to us. It is in our DNA. Being mocked by people who have veered from the path of Yiddishe life is also, quite sadly, nothing new.

Our forefathers, gedolim and leaders of the past generations have showed us the way. When others measured their strength in chariots and swords, we drew close to Hashem Yisborach. He protected us then and will protect us now.

When beset by financial problems or those involving health, shidduchim, schools or children, we would do ourselves well to remember and be inspired by the lesson of Aharon Hakohein in this week's parsha and by all those who have gone before us.

At the root of our belief is that everything that happens to us – and that means everything, every single thing – is from Hashem. Nothing happens by itself. No arrow hits us without being sent by Hashem.

Our task in life is "Vayidom," to accept it with love and heart and strength.

Doing so will enable us to persevere and live lives of happiness and success as we wait for Hashem to send us Moshiach. May it happen very soon.