



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS

Avos Perek 5 Mishna 7

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Our world is rapidly shrinking; borders are no longer what they once were. In our grandparent's times, very few people travelled further than the next town, and many did not even dare to go that far. You lived in the place where your parents lived, and it seemed that such was as it always had been.

Of course this was not strictly the case, especially for the Jews. There was always the odd pogrom, or inquisition to shake things up a bit, but it is surprising to note that even in times of upheaval, the Jews often returned to "*der alter heim*" after the dust had settled. Hardly anyone owned a passport, and only the most adventurous sallied forth into the wider world.

Today this is all the stuff of ancient history, and even close families are divided by seas. In Europe it is the rare *heimische* family that does not have some of their children living in either Israel or America. Families that would have never known each other do *shidduchim* through the medium of international *shadchanim*, and young people find that they are meeting students from almost every land whilst in yeshiva.

This is quite exciting but it has its difficulties as well.

Today you hear of all kinds of *tzaros* you never would have heard of in times gone by. Disasters that befall families on the other side of the world now distress everyone. Such and such has a relative living next door and his son is married to your friend's daughter. The phone rings and you hear your *Rebbetzin* speaking with that distinct voice that tells you this is not good news. You then learn of a tragic situation wherein someone has been diagnosed with a terrible illness. This particular person is living thousands of miles away, but his condition has an enormous impact upon you. The patient went to school with you all those thousands of miles away, and although time and distance has separated you, the pain is no less piercing.

Yes, the miracle of fast transportation and instant communication has shrunk our world greatly but with it has come the need to accept more and more heartache. There must be a quotient of just how much *tzaros* one can hear about without exploding, and if so, then in our times we must be hovering quite close to the edge.

There is an expression used in the secular world, “war fatigue,” which means that at a certain point bad news no longer shocks. You no longer feel distressed by the pictures of the war torn, nor are you distraught by stories of death and havoc. For a Yid this is not an option; we can never become too tired to care, or too jaded not to feel. For us every *neshamah* is part of our oneness, a *chalek Eloka mimaal*, “a part of Hashem’s essence from above.”

We, who have been taught by Holocaust survivors, have had to learn that there are no answers to all of life’s tribulations. They, who went through the gates of hell and rose above them to survive, knew a thing or two about life at the cutting edge. They have taught us that we cannot question, because we have no ability to understand the answers.

Last week I received a call from a dear friend who told me of a tragedy that had just occurred to the family of some close acquaintances. Suddenly without any warning a young mother was killed by lightning. No war, no suicidal bomber, just a freak of the weather. After a pause he told me, “You see, we must take some strength from all this. Hashem does run this world. When Hashem wants a *neshamah* returned, it happens. No war, no desperate illness, if in His infinite plan it is so ordained, it happens in the middle of the day in Boro Park.”

Our test is to accept that it is Hashem that rules this world. You, my dear reader, will think, *well sure that’s so, who else?* However, please, bear with me a moment. When things happen, when the clouds descend upon our lives, well, it is then that we have to accept this, and that is not always so easy.

The *mishna* tells us:

“A wise person does not speak before anyone greater than he in wisdom.” The Rebbe Reb Itzikel of Komarna learned here that “a wise person does not question Divine judgement; rather, he accepts all tribulations with love.” He is like Avraham who, when told to sacrifice his son, did not answer: “Yesterday You promised ... ‘in Yitzchak your seed will be called,’ so how can You demand his sacrifice?” Avraham accepted Hashem’s command for he understood that, “everything Hashem does, He does for the best.”

We see and hear so much today. *Heimische Yidden* truly live in a global village. No loss happens without its impact on others. This may well be the greatest *chessed* of these chaotic times. We have the ability to actually feel for those who live far away. All Yidden are somehow connected, and the pain of one is the hurt of all. We are not isolated by the borders of our cities or the boundaries of foreign lands. We are being called upon to live what this *mishna* tells us. In the face of Hashem’s wisdom there is no question, no place for doubt.

The Rebbe Reb Bunim points out that in *Tehillim* we see enumerated various misfortunes which Hashem may send upon man and concludes with the verse, “Who ever is wise, let him observe these things and let him consider the mercies of Hashem” (*Tehillim* 107). “From this,” says the Rebbe, “we learn never to lose hope in the midst of misfortune but to believe that it is truly meant for the good. Let us have fortitude and patience to await better days and we shall perceive that all was a sign of Hashem’s mercies.”

Yidden, we carry each other’s pain because we are one People. Hashem sees this, and being The giver of all light, He will not let us sink into despair. Perhaps by sharing in this way, and by not asking the questions, we draw closer to our ultimate redemption, at which time all will be revealed, and all will be light. The greatest of wisdom will be ours, the wisdom to accept.