Jewish Tribune – Achrei Mos

**Silent Comfort**

Several years ago, friends of mine were sitting shiva for their mother. She was a very special lady and had died relatively young. After the shiva one of the children mentioned that the visitor who gave them the most comfort was the legendary and much missed Dayan Lopian ztl.

When I asked them what the Dayan had said that gave them so much nechoma, I was startled by the reply. They told me that he had said nothing. He came in to the shiva, sat down and burst into tears. He cried for several minutes, composed himself, said the words of **המקום**, and left.

No words, but just genuine empathy and sharing in their pain.

Our parsha begins with familiar words. וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה, Hashem speaks to Moshe. This takes place after the death of Nodov and Avihu, the sons of Aharon.

If you read the opening pesukim carefully, you will notice something strange. What exactly does HKBH say in the opening possuk? In the next possuk, which is prefaced by a new וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה, HKBH gives clear instructions, and His words are very clear. But what does Hashem say in the opening possuk of our parsha?

The answer is – nothing! HKBH says nothing.

And perhaps that is exactly the message. The most comforting message is not what is said, but just being there and empathising.

And perhaps this is what is behind the halocho brought in Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 376,1), אין המנחמים רשאים לפתוח, עד שיפתח האבל תחלה – those visiting the shiva house to comfort the aveilim should not speak until the aveilim speak first.

One of the most painful shivas I visited, was where parents lost a child. The parents were beyond heartbroken. What was striking about the shiva was that it was totally silent. The silence was broken only by the sound of footsteps of people coming in and out and the whispered the words of **המקום**. Perhaps the parents were not ready or able to even speak but some comfort was hopefully given by the large numbers of visitors.

Halocho also dictates that the conversation at a shiva should focus on the virtues of the person who has passed away. It is not the place to discuss politics, the weather or anything else.

Before going to a shiva, I have always felt that it is important to give thought to what connection you had with the niftar or nifteres. Are there any memories that the aveilim would appreciate hearing?

I was gratified to find that Rav Wosner ztl **(שבט הלוי** חלק ב סימן ריג) cites a Zohar which makes exactly this point.

בזוהר הקודש (פ' קרח ע' קע"ו) משמע דקודם שנכנס לנחם צריך לסדר עצמו דברים איך ובמה לנחם

The holy Zohar implies that before one enters to comfort,

it is necessary to organise oneself and think what and how one can say to offer comfort.

In reality, some people do get nervous when going to a shiva, especially when the room goes quiet, and everyone turns to you as you utter what suddenly becomes the longest sentence in the world.

But as in other areas, we are enjoined to imitate HKBH.

**מה הוא רחום וחנון, אף את תהא חנון ורחום**

Just as He is merciful and gracious, so too you be merciful and gracious

**(תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת פאה פרק א הלכה א)**

And the opening of this week’s parsha teaches us how to do so. Sometimes it is not the words we say, but our very presence and genuinely sharing another person’s pain that counts.

May we all merit to enjoy only happy times, sharing simchas in good health, with each other.

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