



To Call YOU Father

Dear Rabbi Heschel,

I read your interesting chizuk article in Inyan magazine. I was hoping to find something in it referring to the passing of a spouse. Chazal say that the loss of a spouse is felt more keenly than the loss of a parent. I wondered whether in future articles you are going to describe the special bond between husband and wife.

Personally, my wife passed away some eight weeks ago after almost 50 years of happy marriage. My strong feelings of emunah and bitachon do not take away my constant sense of loss and sadness.

I miss her greatly and was hoping to hear some words of chizuk from you.

Thank you for your moving letter.

I read it again and again, wondering what possible thoughts of *chizuk* are appropriate to write in response, and *davening* that the *Ribbono shel Olam* grant me the wisdom to know how to reply.

The feelings you are expressing echo those expressed by some of the greatest *tzaddikim* of previous generations. When Rebbetzin Sarah, *a"h*, the wife of the Ruzhiner Rebbe, *zy"á*, was *niftar* on Acharon shel Pesach 5607/1847, the Rebbe was inconsolable. He told a close Chassid that he had still hoped that his final resting place would be in Eretz Yisrael; however since his wife (whom he referred to as "*plag gufa* — half of the *guf*," was now buried in *chutz laAretz* (bringing a *niftar* to Eretz Yisrael from Europe was not an option in those years) it must mean that the other half, that is, the Rebbe himself, would be buried in *chutz laAretz* as well.

Rabi Akiva Eiger, *zt"l*, in a letter written shortly after the *petirah* of his first wife, describes how he fell physically ill from grief over the loss he had suffered. For the bond between a husband and wife is a unique spiritual connection, and the *petirah* of a spouse is a crushing, devastating loss.

However, like the relationship between children

Q & A

and a parent, the connection continues even after the *petirah* of one of them.

On more than 20 occasions I accompanied my mother, Rebbetzin Chanah Heschel, *a"h*, to be *mispallel* at the *kevarim* of my father and grandfather, the Rebbes of Kopyczynitz, *zy"á*, who are buried side by side in the old *beis hachaim* in Teverya. I noticed that while she would recite *Tehillim* and tearfully *daven* at each *kever*, she would generally spend much more time murmuring quietly at the *kever* of my grandfather than at my father's, and I found this to be puzzling. I knew that my mother was a devout *chassidiste* of her father-in-law, who in turn held her in great esteem and entrusted her with the some of the most important and delicate missions. I would have understood if she had divided her time equally, but the contrast was surprising.

I once asked her about it.

"A husband has responsibilities to a wife," she told me. "It doesn't take me so long to remind Tatti of his general responsibilities [to *daven* on her behalf]. I don't have to go into details. But to Rebbe-Zeide (which is how she reverently referred to my grandfather) I have to mention each thing separately..."

Some time ago, when in the course of a conversation with a prominent Rav whose wife was *niftar* at a relatively young age, he mentioned to me that although a number of years had passed since her *petirah*, he still learned *Mishnayos* every day in her memory. More than the words he used, the tone of his voice made it clear that the deep spiritual connection with his wife was still ongoing, as he continued to do it on her behalf.

Chazal and the *poskim* make it clear that with time, the anguish of a loss gets somewhat easier to bear. Yet the sense of loss continues to be keenly felt even with the passage of years and decades. However, the knowledge that the living can do much on behalf of the *niftarim*, and they in turn continue to be *meilitz yosher*

for those they've left behind, is for many a source of comfort and strength.

There is one additional, vital concept to consider:

Shortly before the *petirah* of Harav Moshe Zev Feldman, *zt"l*, *Rosh Yeshivah* of Imrei Emes, he, while suffering terrible pain, gave a very moving explanation of the *passuk* in *Tehillim* (104:26), "You formed this *livyasan* with whom to sport." Why did the *livyasan* merit this distinction, which no other creature had? *Chazal* (*Bava Basra* 74b) teach us that Hashem originally created a male and a female *livyasan*, but since these creatures had the ability to destroy the world, Hashem killed the female. The male *livyasan* was then left a "widower," alone in the world, so Hashem told him, "You are not alone, for I am with you."

The *Ribbono shel Olam*, the Source of all kindness, is not only the Father of orphans and defender of widows, but he is a Companion — so to speak — of anyone who is lonely.

• • •

While I was growing up, my father was caring and gentle, but a somewhat aloof parent to me. During my teenage years I had some difficult periods, and while he tried to be of help, I felt that he never really understood me.

After my marriage, my husband and I were often hurt by the fact that my father — who was always financially comfortable — never offered us any serious financial assistance, even when we made it clear to him that we were really struggling.

My father was recently niftar, and my feelings of grief are intermingled with feelings of resentment toward him. I feel that he never was really there for me.

I feel guilty about feeling this way. How do you suggest I deal with it?

One of the great tragedies of our times is the impact American culture has had on Torah Jews in the way we perceive our parents. As Torah Jews, our relationship with our parents should be about what we do for our parents, not about what our parents do for us.

Clearly, an essential part of *chinuch* is not only to shower our children with love and warmth but to try our utmost to understand and connect with their emotions. That is the way I was raised and that is the *mesorah* I received from my mentors. At the same time, it must be underscored that we must never confuse our mission as parents with how we should view *our* parents.

I know that what I am about to write may elicit some

**THE RIBBONO SHEL
OLAM, THE SOURCE OF
ALL KINDNESS, IS NOT
ONLY THE FATHER OF
ORPHANS AND DEFENDER
OF WIDOWS, BUT HE IS
A COMPANION — SO TO
SPEAK — OF ANYONE WHO
IS LONELY.**



angry emails, but the truth needs to be said: *Our parents owe us nothing. We owe them everything.*

As the *Sefer Hachinuch*, whose author was one of the *Rishonim*, explains, our approach to the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av va'eim* should be to "take to heart that our father and mother are the cause of our being in the world, and hence it is truly fitting to honor them in every way and give every benefit we can to them, because they brought us to the world..."

Our parents were the conduit through which the *Ribbono shel Olam* brought us to this world, and therefore we owe them a great debt of gratitude. Every good deed we perform, and everything we accomplish, is because of them.

There are many compelling reasons why a parent chooses not to give material support to a married child, and many reasonable explanations why parents are unable to offer moral support or make a child of any age feel that he or she was "there for him or her."

But in reality, the premise that we are somehow entitled to all these things and we need to find excuses why we didn't receive them is mistaken. *Kibbud horim* is about giving to our parents, not about getting from them. Once we manage to internalize this concept, so many hard feelings would evaporate and so much *agmas nefesh* would be avoided.

This will also allow you to focus on all that your father *did* do for you, instead of what he didn't do, and instead of being upset, your heart will be filled with gratitude.

One additional note: Contrary to what some assume, the most important element in a successful relationship isn't what one person receives from the other. It is what he gives to the other. This is true even when one of the parties is already in the Next World.

I suggest that you try to undertake, *bli neder*, to do something extra for your father's *neshamah*. Whether it is reciting a *perek Tehillim*, dropping a quarter in a *pushke*, or lighting a candle, there is much you can do for him. Through doing for him, you will be able to evoke strong feelings of *ahavah* toward your father, which in time will help you to overcome the unwarranted feelings of resentment you carry in your heart. ■

Questions can be submitted via email to aheschel@hamodia.com or by calling 718.853.9094 Ext. 254 and leaving a voicemail.

Rabbi Heschel is a son of the Kopyczynitzer Rebbe, Harav Moshe Mordechai, z"ya. A writer and public speaker on inspirational topics, he is a longtime *chizuk* columnist for *Inyan*.

**I KNOW THAT WHAT I
AM ABOUT TO WRITE
MAY ELICIT SOME
ANGRY EMAILS, BUT
THE TRUTH NEEDS TO
BE SAID: OUR PARENTS
OWE US NOTHING.
WE OWE THEM
EVERYTHING.**

