

I thought I knew what it meant to be an orphan.

My father was a simple man. He knew how to read the siddur, how to follow the leining, and not much in the way of what we would consider to be higher learning. Nonetheless, he had a few key beliefs he wanted to impart to his sons. The non-Jewish world would probably call these ideas anachronistic, but that would not have bothered my father. He would say, "OK, I'm anachronistic".

One idea was that it's a man's responsibility to provide a *parnasah* for his family. To make an honest living - emphasis on honest - to provide for his family; and give whatever is left to charity. When a man gets married and has children, it is more than just a few more people in the bedrooms. It is a new bryah called a family -- and the man is responsible for guiding this new unit.

One of the other beliefs he gave over to his sons seems anachronistic even to us. The idea? Men don't cry - at least not in public. They just don't. They have a responsibility to be strong for their families. Just like they have to provide an income for their family, they have to provide the leadership for their family so that all the members of the family can feel that there's a steady hand at the helm. That way, he told us, the family would always feel safe. Or at least safer.

My father was *niftar* at a very young age, 50 years old. I thought at that time I knew what it meant to be an orphan. I tried not to cry in front of anyone. My wife was expecting a child that year and we had one older child who had extensive special physical needs. I did not want to burden my wife any more than necessary. Keep a steady hand at the helm for the wife and children. I cried, but only in private.

I had frequently sought my father's advice on various matters, but now when I automatically thought of contacting him, I would have to quickly shake my head. I can't do that. I thought I knew then what it was meant to be an orphan.

My mother lived another 26 years after that. She never really got over my father's death, and it affected her the rest of her life. When she was *nifteres*, it was little less than two weeks before the wedding of my daughter. It was a hectic time in our house, to say the least. But I didn't cry -- at least in front of anyone. I was in *shloshim* during the *sheva brochos*, so I could not attend the actual meal. I had to wait somewhere else and only come into the *sheva brochos* room for the speeches. So I went to five different places until I found a store that could embroidery words on an apron. I bought an apron and I embroidered on it "Father of the Bride." And when I wasn't in the room for the sheva brochos, when I was hovering somewhere else, people would just see the cute apron and not be concerned. I didn't cry - and everybody saw my cute apron, and nobody worried. In private, I cried. But I was a steady hand at the helm. Now, with no mother or father, I thought I knew what it meant to be an orphan.

Rebbe was well known for his many outstanding accomplishments in service of klal yisroel. But few people outside the yeshiva understand how much Rebbe -- and the hanhala and rabbeim -- cared for and about their talmidim. When I first arrived at the yeshiva I was a newly married *yungerman* and probably just a little too *chutzpah-dik* for my own good. I cornered Rebbe and asked him several questions in hashkafa. Rather than look like he wondered who this new guy was that expected answers on one foot, he immediately offered to learn Nefesh HaChaim with me b'chavrusa every morning after davening. The Jewish world is ringing his phone off the hook with demands for klal yisroel and please come here and please write this and please help here and, oh yes, the yeshiva needs this and that -- on top of his regular shiurim and sedarim every day in the beis medrash -- but wait, a new guy in the yeshiva is interested in this, and he thought his time would be well-spent learning extra with me. I still

have a hard time believing it. After a while I had commitments that resulted in my not being able to continue the chavrusa. What a fool I was! I should have moved mountains to make sure I could be there. I'll regret losing that chavrusa time the rest of my life.

Rebbe stayed with me throughout my life. I could write a book about everything Rebbe did for me. He was sandek for my sons, and regularly reached out to see how I was doing. The first chasunah I made for a daughter of mine, Rebbe came. Already elderly and moving with difficulty, his son accompanied and assisted him. I thanked him profusely for coming, and he simply replied: "What's the sheilah? You're *shelanu*."

When my parents were gone I realized that even without them I still had Rebbe. I had somebody to come to my chasunahs, somebody to seek advice from, and I had somebody to be a model of what a Telzer *Ben Torah* should be. It saddens me that I imagine I did not always live up to his expectations. He had been the last member of the original hanhala that opened Telshe Yeshiva Chicago XX years ago. The chairs had different occupants now, but Rebbe was always in his chair. The world was a safer and better place with Rebbe there.

Now with Rebbe gone, who will I turn to? Who will come to my children's weddings? Who will I turn to for advice? Who will correct my p'shat in a *k'tzos*? Who will I look to emulate the ways of life? I am the oldest member of our extended family, and it is a scary thought. I always had Rebbe over my shoulder to make sure I stayed connected to the avodah of being a Ben Torah. Now when I turn over my shoulder to ask somebody, my father is not there and my mother is not there. And now Rebbe is not there.

This afternoon when I told my wife and children that Rebbe was gone, I tried not to cry. Steady as she goes, keep the helm even. But it didn't work. I cried in front of other people. There was nobody to correct me -- they were all gone. What will I do now?

I thought I knew what it meant to be an orphan. Today I really know what it means to be an orphan.