

A Letter of Consolation

(BY RAV SHLOMO WOLBE, THE ALEY SHUR)

To my dear and beloved sons and daughters,

The purpose of this letter is to console you for when I will not be with you anymore. A person does not know when his time will be up, but the day will come (May Hashem bless me with long life) when my place at home will be empty, and you will be orphans.

My beloved, I have seen many orphans, most of whom find themselves in darkness without hope. Some are jealous, thinking, "Others have parents, but not me." Others feel that their world has tumbled down. Few are able to strengthen and brace themselves and to eventually elevate themselves after the tragedy in their lives. I therefore came to the conclusion that before one can comfort a mourner, it is essential to teach him how to deal with the situation. I hope I succeed in this endeavor, and may you understand these words so that they illuminate your lives.

The key to the mystery of life is faith in the true G-d, the Creator of the Universe! It is G-d's power that keeps the world going, even each and every blade of grass derives its sustenance from the Creator and surely each human being. This spirit of life is the essence of everything, and the most important part of a person is his spirit and soul.

I trust that I have raised you to have faith in G-d. I now encourage you to strengthen your faith and to realize that this is also the secret to the mystery of death! If life would be over for a dead person, it would be difficult to comfort a mourner. But that is not so! Although the body passes away, the person continues to exist!

Our great teacher (Rav Yeruchem Levovitz of Mir) wrote: "Death should be understood as one who moves from one city to another. This is the real truth. Your father has not died, may his memory be blessed, for he is alive. He has merely moved. To the understanding person there is even more to say. The deceased is now even closer to you than before for now there are no separations."

One who has faith is able to deal with the concept of death. The truth is that the deceased is alive! He is aware of everything, and he is close to his relatives at all times!

However, I realize that you will still be bothered by his seeming absence. Children are accustomed to seeing their parents, asking for advice and being helped. Even after they move away from home they rely on and know that they can always turn to their parents. Who can fill this void?

But, think it over, my beloved ones. If you really loved me when I was with you, and if your love was not just superficial, you can always picture me in front of your eyes. You will know what I would have said and how I would have advised you. As an example, we see what our Sages say about Yosef Hatzadik; that he withstood temptation because of the vision of his father before his eyes.

Use the vision of your father to give you strength and encouragement. Keep in mind: The essence of a person is the spiritual, and that part continues to live! Another point. All people feel an urge to come closer to mitzvos and good deeds at a time of mourning. Even those who were

non-observant come to say Kaddish, they put on a tallis and tefillin and pray. What is the reason for this?

There is a deep reason. Our Sages teach that there are three partners to every human being: his father, his mother and the Holy One, Blessed be He. A child is used to seeing only his father and mother. The third partner is invisible to him. However, when the physical partners leave this world, there is an inner feeling in the person that pushes him closer to the third partner.

One whose faith is strong tells this in a concrete way: "My father and mother (may) have left me but Hashem is always there."

The truth is: The physical parent was merely a messenger from the Heavenly Father. Now that the physical father's job is over the child's relationship to his Heavenly Father becomes stronger.

This is the most important message to bear in mind, for all people at any age: to strengthen one's faith, to sense Hashem's Providence, to realize how Hashem guides and leads a person daily and provides all his physical and spiritual needs. You will not lack anything if you keep your faith strong!

Through faith one will be consoled. Normally, a person is surrounded by his family, his teachers, his friends—all of them help him to maintain his life properly. However, when a relative passes away, may Hashem spare us, one of the supports has been removed.

The process of Nichum Aveilim to comfort the mourners, is to help replace the missing support, to raise his spirits and to help him continue.

Now my beloved ones, come closer to each other, help and encourage each other; your friendship should be wholesome, faithful, amidst the love of Torah and of those who study Torah. Always be willing to learn and improve. Hashem will surely comfort you and help you continue . . . Be strong in emunah (faith) and in Torah, build for yourselves loyal homes with the aim of fulfilling Hashem's mitzvos. Your actions shall then serve to benefit me, as our Sages say: When one's children observe the mitzvos it is considered as if the father has not passed away. This is my advice and last request of you.

My Beloved Ones: Have faith and your faith will be fulfilled, and may your lives be successful forever!

With love,

Your father

"And the day of death (is better) than the day of one's birth." (Ecclesiastes VII, 1)

To what can this be compared? To two ships that were in the ocean laden with merchandise. One ship was coming to port, the other was leaving. People were praising the ship coming into port. Others stood by amazed and said, "Why are you praising this ship and not the other?" In reply they said to them, "We are praising the incoming ship since we know this ship has departed in peace and arrived at its destination in peace. But what the future will bring to the ship that has just begun its journey we do not know. "So it is with a person who is born: we do not know the nature of his future deeds. But when he leaves this world we know the nature of his deeds. (Yalkut Shimoni)