

Peninim On The Torah

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Parashat Shemot

Come let us outsmart it lest it become numerous....and it too, may join our enemies. (1:10)

Chazal tell us that Pharaoh had a council composed of three advisors, Bilaam, Iyov, and Yisro. Bilaam was the one who suggested the diabolical scheme to enslave the Jews. Iyov remained silent; he was later punished for his silence with ordeals of terrible pain and anguish. Yisro fled Egypt, rather than acquiesce to the evil advice. He was rewarded with the promise that his descendants would one day sit in the Sanhedrin. This well-known Midrash assumes a new meaning when one considers the nature of each of the three advisors and the inconsistency of their advice with his own personal character.

Bilaam was as arrogant and egotistical as he was evil. He had the power to curse entire nations. He could cast anyone under his evil spell. Why did he fear the Jews to the point that he initiated the scheme to destroy them?

Iyov, a pacifist, was the symbol of loving-kindness and human decency. He could not tolerate evil; he would never turn his back on oppression. Yet, what did he do when the tragic decree to enslave an entire nation was made? He remained silent! Is that consistent with his nature? Is this the response we would expect from a man of his noble stature? Is silence the type of reaction one would expect from a man whose life was dedicated to humane causes? How could he tolerate the screams of the Jewish infants as they were cast in the river?

Yisro, the great philosopher, epitomized justice and truth. Was he acting in accordance with his nature? A man who had served - and subsequently rejected - every pagan idol, who had fought for integrity and justice, would be expected to decry such an evil decree. He should have protested vehemently, endeavoring to rescind the decree. Yet, what did this paragon of virtue, this noble fighter for justice do when he heard the tragic decree enacted against the poor Jews? He ran away! Is this type of behavior consistent with Yisro's character?

In light of the above, Horav Yosef Zundel Salant, z"l, infers a significant lesson. Hashem told Avraham during the Bris bein Ha'besarim that one day his descendants would go into exile. When Hashem issues a decree, nothing stands in the way of its fulfillment. Hashem's plan functions beyond the realm of the "consistent" and the "typical." Bilaam, who would typically not regard Bnei Yisrael as a national threat, acted strangely and advised Pharaoh to kill the Jewish boys. Iyov, whose essence could not tolerate cruelty, remained silent. Yisro, the fighter for justice, fled the country. Nothing can stand in the way of Hashem's decree. Indeed, the Egyptian exile and ensuing liberation is incongruous with the natural course of events. Once again, Hashem is manifested as the creator of "nature" as we know it.

And they appointed taskmasters over it in order to afflict it with their burdens. (1:11)

By inflicting hard labor upon the Jews, the Egyptians' goal was simply to destroy their dignity, to hurt them emotionally as well as physically. Horav Shimon Schwab, z"l, comments that the purpose of placing taskmasters over the Jews was to degrade and humiliate them, to convey to them that they could not be trusted to perform their job adequately without supervision. They were telling the Jews that they were crude and undignified; their integrity was lacking and their work ethic unsuitable. Is there anything worse than such a loathsome form of emotional abuse? Indeed, the intention of the Egyptians was to debase and degrade the Jews, to destroy their will so that they would become worthless human beings devoid of hope and aspirations. This, suggests Horav Schwab, is the underlying meaning of the pasuk in Sefer Devarim 26:6, *ugrhu*"

"ohrmnv ub,ut "And the Egyptians did evil to us." "Vayareiu" - "And they made us look bad." They portrayed us as evil people; lazy ne'er do-wells, living off the Egyptians; people who could not be trusted. They maintained that we had no sense of allegiance to the country that admitted us and cared for us. They asserted that we were interested in taking over and dominating the Egyptian populace. When such foolishness is reiterated enough times, people begin to believe what they have heard. We can understand why the Egyptians reacted in such a manner.

They embittered their lives with hard work...All their labors that they performed with them were with crushing harshness. (1:14)

We memorialize the bitterness of Egypt, the harsh labor and persecution, with the marmor, bitter herbs, which we eat on Pesach night. Chazal teach us that while there are a number of vegetables that are suitable for the mitzvah of marmor, leaf lettuce is preferred. Among the vegetables, leaf lettuce provides the most apt comparison with the type of labor to which the Egyptians subjected the Jewish people. At first, the Egyptians convinced the Jews to work with them. Later on, they embittered their lives with harsh labor. At first, the lettuce seems almost sweet to the palate, but subsequently, its bitter taste is manifest. This reason for preferring leaf lettuce for marmor, is enigmatic. We seek to remember the bitterness of the Egyptian exile. Yet, we eat a vegetable that recalls the "sweet" beginning of our bondage. Is the memory bitter or sweet?

Horav Yosef Zundel Salant, z"l, notes two forms of suffering. One type of suffering is inflicted upon a person by others. This is undoubtedly difficult to bear, but it is more tolerable than the pain and suffering that is self-inflicted when one has become complicitous in creating his own misery. Had the Egyptians originally conscripted the Jews into slave labor without pretext, the Jews might have been able to accept the concept of bondage, as painful as it would have been. The circumstances preceding the Egyptian slavery were different. The Jews had never thought their "good" friends and neighbors would actually enslave them. The sweetness compounded the bitterness, for the Jews had participated in bringing the misery upon themselves.

Perhaps this is the idea behind the custom of dipping the marmor into the sweet charoses. We recall the bitterness with which we lived as a result of accepting the Egyptian blandishments. The Egyptians smiled at us, making us feel good. Our own insecurity led to our ultimate torment. If we would only learn a lesson from the message of the marmor, it might prevent other tragedies from occurring--even in our own time.

And Pharaoh commanded his entire people saying, "Every son that will be born--into the River shall you throw him." (1:22)

Pharaoh thought that the way to prevent the emergence of a Jewish leader was to drown all baby boys. Indeed, his astrologers had told him that the downfall of the Jewish savior would be effected through water. As a result of this decree, Amram, who was the gadol ha'dor, the spiritual leader of that generation, separated from his wife, Yocheved. Ostensibly, all Jewish men followed suit. Rather than bring boys into the world to be drowned by Pharaoh, they left their wives. Miriam, however, yet a young child, challenged her father Amram's decree. She claimed that his decree to separate was far worse than Pharaoh's, since he was also preventing the birth of girls. Moreover, Pharaoh was a mortal king, whose decrees would not outlast him. Amram was a tzaddik whose good deeds would protect him and his progeny. The piercing words coming from this young child made a powerful impression upon Amram. Consequently, he remarried Yocheved, and Moshe Rabbeinu was born.

Let us take a moment to analyze what happened. One would assume that we are presenting the greatness and influence of a determined, but young, child. After careful perusal, we may note, comments Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, shlita, that the real credit should be attributed to Amram. He truly distinguished himself. The gadol ha'dor, the leader of hundreds of thousands of people, made a decree, and an entire nation accepted his word and followed his example. Along came a little girl, his daughter no less, offering an insightful critique of his edict. What did this great leader do? Did he laugh it off? Did he ignore the little girl? No! He accepted her constructive criticism, annulled the decree, and remarried his wife! This represented true greatness! He did not argue; he did not attempt to present "his side" of the story, his reasoning for issuing the decree. He simply accepted Miriam's reproof. We must question what went through Amram's mind. What originally motivated him to make the decree, and what was it about Miriam's analysis of the circumstances that inspired him to rescind his order?

Let us begin by analyzing Miriam's critique; "Your decree is worse than Pharaoh's." What is the decree to which she is referring? Amram made no decree; he merely responded to Pharaoh's decree to kill the Jewish boys. We must, therefore, say that Miriam addressed an issue that went to the very foundation of Klal Yisrael's existence. It is, in fact, an issue we must confront even today. Amram was about to nullify, or at least put "on hold", a mitzvah of the Torah. The Torah commands us to "Be fruitful and multiply;" it is the first mitzvah of the Torah. To ignore this mitzvah is to ignore the Torah--the foundation of our existence! Never has Klal Yisrael been without the Torah. We have never abandoned the Torah, despite the cruel pogroms, the persecutions and catastrophes to which we have been subjected as individuals and as a nation. It is the basis of our life! Therefore, how could Amram say, "Separate from your wives"? This was Miriam's critique. Amram was, by example, issuing a statement: If the situation warrants it, if the lives of your children are put in danger, then do not have children. Miriam questioned, "Is this not, however, contrary to the Torah which remains with us during the most trying circumstances?" If the Torah commands us to have children, how could Amram decree, by example, that the situation in Egypt overrides the Torah? Klal Yisrael has undergone so many trying ordeals in their history, but never have they forsaken the Torah. Was Pharaoh's decree any worse than the pogroms, the Inquisition, and the Holocaust that we survived as a nation--because we adhered to the Torah?

This poignant--but compelling--critique prompted Amram to rescind his order to the Jewish men to separate from their wives. We never know when the innocent words of a young child can leave a remarkable impression. Perhaps we do not listen well enough.

Every son that will be born, into the River shall you throw him. (1:24)

Chazal tell us that Pharaoh's astrologers foresaw that the Jewish savior's downfall would occur as a result of water. They were even able to pinpoint the exact day on which Moshe would be born.

Pharaoh's own daughter, who found Moshe, took him home and raised him in the royal palace. Following the advice of his astrologers, on the day that Moshe was born, Pharaoh issued an edict to drown all male infants upon birth. The astrologers claimed that the threat of a Jewish savior had been averted. They were, of course, wrong, since Moshe's death was not caused by drowning, but rather by his involvement in the waters of Merivah. We may question the astrologers' actions. Since the sign that they saw actually alluded to another situation, how could they assume that once Moshe was placed in the Nile River, the sign from Heaven had disappeared? Obviously it was still present. Were they so myopic that the sign which they presumably saw yesterday had disappeared today--if it was alluding to something else? How could they say that they did not see the sign when it was apparently still there?

Horav Elyakim Shlesinger, shlita, infers a profound lesson from the astrologers' "myopia." A person can receive a clear vision from Heaven, yet, if his perspective is distorted, he will either not see, or he will misinterpret the message. A person sees what he wants to see. One who wears blue-tinted glasses will always see blue, regardless of the actual color. His vision is tainted by the tint! As far as the astrologers were concerned, the downfall of the Jewish savior would occur with his drowning in the Nile River. Nothing else mattered, and no other sign would change their erroneous interpretation. Myopic vision is very often not related to vision of the eyes!

And she gave birth to a son. She saw that he was good and she hid him for three months. (2:2,3)

Rashi attributes Yocheved's ability to conceal Moshe Rabbeinu at home for three months to the fact that he was born prematurely - six months after conception. Hence, the Egyptians had no reason to search for a baby. When the nine-month period was up, she was forced to hide him in the water. Hashem could have saved Moshe Rabbeinu in any manner that He chose. He arranged for Moshe to be born prematurely, so that he would be home with his mother for three months. Then he was taken away from her, only to be returned to her later on in Pharaoh's palace.

Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, infers from here a profound lesson in the chinuch, educational development, of a child. The formative years of a child's education have a profound effect upon his future. In order for Moshe Rabbeinu to emerge as the quintessential leader of the Jewish People, it was essential for him he be conceived in kedushah, sanctity. The well-known Midrash describes Amram's dialogue with his daughter, Miriam, after Pharaoh decreed that all male Jewish offspring were to be put to death. Amram felt that all marriages should be dissolved. As the leader of the Jews in Egypt, he divorced Yocheved, an action which everyone imitated. Miriam contended that her father's "decree" was worse than Pharaoh's, since Pharaoh's decree only affected the boys, while Amram's decree adversely affected all Jewish children! Indeed, Miriam Ha'Neviah prophesized that her mother would give birth to the savior of the Jewish People. How could Amram do this? Amram deferred to his daughter and remarried Yocheved, for the specific purpose of fathering the future leader of the Jewish People.

Moshe Rabbeinu was conceived and born in sanctity and purity with mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice. He needed exposure to the kedushah of Amram and Yocheved's home. Even that did not seem to be enough. Hashem created the situation whereby Bisyah bas Pharaoh herself would bring Moshe Rabbeinu, the infant she had rescued, to Yocheved to raise him in Pharaoh's palace. The environment in which Moshe grew up infused in him the sanctity and purity essential for the one who was destined to be Klal Yisrael's leader.

Indeed, Moshe Rabbeinu's early environment played a pivotal role in his educational development. Torah education begins at home from birth. Children reflect the attitude, practice and commitment that their parents manifest. Torah is a spiritual entity. A Torah environment infuses a person with a sense of spirituality regardless of his intellectual appreciation of Torah. In the Yerushalmi Yevamos 6, Chazal relate that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya's mother placed his crib in the Bais HaMedrash from the day that he was born, so that he would absorb the spiritual atmosphere. She kept him there so that the only sounds his ears would hear would be the sounds of Torah. Is it any wonder that he developed into the great Tanna that he was? Moreover, we see the dedication to chinuch, Torah education, that his mother exhibited. To place an infant in the Bais Hamedrash for the purpose of "listening" to Torah indicates a unique appreciation of the essence of Torah. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya proved his mother right.

It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren...and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man. He went out on the next day and behold! Two Hebrew men were fighting. (2:11,13)

Moshe grew into a position of responsibility. He became ready to minister to the needs of his people. Horav Zeev Weinberger, Shlita, feels that Moshe had two distinct goals in mind when he began to serve Klal Yisrael: His first objective was to expunge the evil that the Egyptian environment had engendered. Second, he sought to correct and bring back the Jewish People. The occurrences related in the pesukim on the two days that Moshe "went out" to his brethren demonstrate these two facit.

On the first day, Moshe encountered an Egyptian beating a Jew. He immediately "corrected" the problem, as he smote the Egyptian. Purging the evil would not be that difficult. Raising Klal Yisrael from the depths, imbuing them with a sense of kedushah and taharah, charging them with their mission on this earth, created a greater challenge. The very next day, Moshe went out and encountered two Jews fighting with one another. If the actual discord between two brothers was not bad enough, the reaction of the one who was striking the other demonstrated to Moshe how far they had strayed. One individual challenged Moshe. He rudely and disdainfully said, "Who appointed you as a ruler over us? Are you going to slay me as you slew the Egyptian?" This was none other than Moshe's nemesis, Dasan, the man whom he had saved the day before from the murderous blows of the Egyptian! When Moshe realized the nadir of evil which this remark represented, he understood how difficult it would be to bring the Jewish People to the spiritual plateau necessary to merit their liberation.

To fully comprehend the profundity of Moshe's concern, Horav Weinberger explains that when Moshe saw that there were Jews who had no compunction about informing on another Jew, who would go to the Egyptian authorities and endanger the lives of others, he was filled with apprehension. There is nothing as low as an informer who would deliver another Jew to the gentiles. In his commentary, the Arizal explains the words of the Haggadah, "anus al pi haDibbur," compelled by Divine decree. Regarding the decree that Klal Yisrael be relegated to galus Mitzrayim, exiled in Egypt, he interprets the word "dibbur" as "speech." The exile was a result Bnei Yisrael's defective speech. They used their G-d given power of speech to distort, disparage, and inform on other Jews. Thus, the redemption of Pesach, which is an acronym for "peh-sach," the mouth speaks, occurred because Klal Yisrael corrected their speech by elevating and sanctifying the words which came out of their mouths. This grave concern caused Moshe to flee Egypt. He perceived that on his own, his success would be negligible.

Horav Weinberg takes another approach towards explaining Moshe's two encounters and his initial response. The Midrash seems to view these two encounters as sharing a single motif. When Moshe went out and saw the intensity of Jewish suffering - to the point that an Egyptian had no qualms about publicly beating a Jew, he reacted by killing the Egyptian. The next day he went out and saw two Jews

fighting with each other. A lesser person would have reacted passively. He would have quieted the two so that the Egyptians would not take advantage of knowing that the Jews were not getting along with each other. Moshe did not react this way. He was a leader who did not shy away from controversy. He did what he had to do regardless of how unpopular it might be. The obligation to rebuke, to reproach when a wrong is committed, transcends social acceptance, be it from the gentiles or even from our own people. Unfortunately, the prevalent attitude that existed then seems to plague us to this very day.

Moshe was shepherding the sheep of Yisro...he guided the sheep into the wilderness. (3:1)

The proof that Moshe had the ability to become Klal Yisrael's leader was his ability to shepherd his father-in-law's sheep. Chazal relate the remarkable compassion he exhibited towards the tired and thirsty sheep. Hashem said to him, "You have such empathy towards the sheep belonging to human beings. By your life, you will shepherd My sheep, Yisrael." While this Midrash is well-known, it is important to take a moment and note the stories recounted by the Torah that demonstrate Moshe Rabbeinu's sense of compassion. Indeed, as Horav Yitzchak Goldwasser, Shlita, points out, there is a specific sequence to the Torah's narrative. He indicates that Moshe's character developed commensurate with his acts of compassion. The more lowly the subject of his compassion, the more spiritually uplifted Moshe became.

The first story in the Torah tells of Moshe's encounter with an Egyptian beating a Jew. The act of violence that the Egyptian was about to commit would have destroyed not only a physical life, but it would also have cut short the Jewish neshamah's, soul, stay in this world. The Egyptian was depriving a neshamah of preparation to enter Olam Habah. By shortening its lifespan, he was decreasing its opportunity for a greater portion of Olam Habah. Moshe displayed a noble compassion for the plight of the Yiddishe neshamah.

The Torah records the following incident to demonstrate Moshe's sympathy for the physical body. He encountered two Jews who were quarrelling. Their quarrel had escalated into a physical confrontation. Moshe quickly intervened, putting an end to the fracas.

In the third occurrence, Moshe saved Yisro's daughters from the hands of the Midyanite shepherds. His sensitivity towards all people, regardless of race, established his level of compassion on yet a higher plane. It was evident that Moshe did not have selective sensitivity. He was moved to action whenever he perceived that someone was suffering.

In the last case, the Torah shows that Moshe's empathy was truly unique. He cared for every creation. He treated animals that were thirsty or tired with tenderness. We derive from here that one must progress step by step through the levels of compassion. Some individuals demonstrate incredible concern for the plight of animals, while ignoring the difficulty experienced by humans. The Nazis were devoted to their dogs, but had no qualms about sending Jewish children to their deaths in the most cruel and heinous manner. Character refinement must be developed progressively, stage by stage, in each individual.

Hashem told Moshe..."to return to Egypt, as all the men who are seeking to kill you have died. (4:19)

Perhaps the people who disparaged Moshe, who went out of their way to inform on him to Pharaoh, were no longer a problem, but Pharaoh himself was still alive. He surely was not likely to embrace Moshe with love and friendship. Horav Yonasan Eibeshitz, zl, who suffered greatly from slanderers, asked this question. His response was one to which he could relate only too well. It appears, said Rav Yonasan, that the disparaging comments and slander of Jews such as Dasan and Aviram, were even more dangerous than Pharaoh's sword.

What a truism! Anyone who has been the hapless victim of character assassination will confirm this statement. Defamation of character destroys lives. It makes victims of entire families. Its effect can last for generations. Indeed, it really is more treacherous than Pharaoh's sword.

Hashem said to Aharon, "Go to meet Moshe"...and he went and encountered him at the mountain of G-d, and kissed him. (4:27)

Regarding Aharon's encounter with Moshe Rabbeinu, the Midrash cites the pasuk in Tehillim 85, "Chesed v'emes nifgashu, tzedek v'shalom nashuku," "Kindness and truth have met; righteousness and peace have kissed."

Aharon is the symbol of chesed; Moshe represents emes. In the second part of the pasuk, tzedek is the virtue which characterizes Moshe, while Aharon is defined by the virtue of shalom. Horav Elimelech Moller, Shlita, infers from this pasuk that an individual creates his name by his actions and deeds. Thus, when Aharon and Moshe met, it was an encounter of emes and chesed - tzedek and shalom. Moshe and Aharon were so closely identified with their individual attributes that these traits became their essence, the very name by which they continue to be distinguished.

We find a similar idea regarding Shifrah and Puah -- or Yocheved and Miriam. They were the two Jewish midwives who were moser nefesh, prepared to sacrifice themselves, to sustain the Jewish male babies. Chazal tell us that Shifrah was given this name because she was "mishaperes es ha'velad," "she made beautiful the child." Puah received her name as a result of "poah u'medaberes v'hoga le'velad," "she called aloud and spoke and murmured to the infant." This does not mean that they were "nicknamed" in accordance with their functions. On the contrary, these names defined their essence. They were Shifrah and Puah precisely because their whole objective in this world was to act with mesiras nefesh on behalf of the Jewish children.

Chazal tell us that Klal Yisrael were redeemed from Egypt in the merit that they did not change their "names." They came down to Egypt with the Hebrew names they were given, and they left with those same names. What is so unique about the fact that they did not change their names? While it indicates a definite respect for tradition, should this merit their liberation? Horav Shlomo Yosef Zevin, zl, explains that a name defines one's essence. Adam Ha'Rishon was able to give names to all the animals because he understood the basic qualities and the individual nature of each. Indeed, when Moshe asked Hashem, "When Klal Yisrael will ask me what is His Name, (referring to Hashem), what will I say?" Hashem answered, "Eheyeh asher Eheyeh." What Moshe was saying was, "How can I give them Your Name?" A name describes one's essence. How does one describe Hashem's essence? It is far beyond the scope of mankind. We only know Hashem's metzius, the existence of Hashem is a reality." Hashem responded, "I will be what I will be." Hashem will always be there. His metzius, existence, is a reality that is eternal.

Klal Yisrael did not alter their names. Their essential character, their Jewish essence, did not change. While they might have become acculturized to the Egyptian lifestyle and they certainly picked up some of the influence, their Yiddishe neshamah, their atzmius, did not change. They might have acted like Egyptians in many ways - but in character and belief they remained Jews. They did not change their names.

And these are the names of the Bnei Yisrael who were coming to Egypt with Yaakov; each man and his house had come. (1:1)

In the Mechilta, Shemos, 18,11, Chazal note that the first and last letter of the word Mitzrayim, Egypt, is a "mem." A detail, however, distinguishes between these two ""mems." The first mem has a little opening in it, while the final mem is a square, completely closed. In response, Chazal comment, "It is much easier to get into Egypt than to get out." Horav Moshe Swift, zl, in his inimitable manner, takes this remark further: It is easier to discard old observances; it is easier to dismiss old traditions and practices than to bring them back. Just speak to those who try to retrieve some of the practices we have lost. In Egypt, we had the opportunity; it was easy to enter and acculturate ourselves into Egyptian society. It was simple to drop our observances, ignore our past traditions, and put an end to the heritage of our ancestors. However, there is no easy exit from Egypt. To retrieve the things that we have lost, to retrain an assimilated generation, to try to regain Yiddishkeit as our only way of life, is so much more difficult.

Hashem redeemed the Jews from Egypt, however, because they did not assimilate. After all is said and done, despite the various shortcomings that led to their exile, they still managed to earn liberation. How did they do it? How did they manage to exit Egypt? The answer lies in the pasuk; "These are the names of Bnei Yaakov who are coming to Egypt." It was always ha'baim, "were coming." They always felt that they had just arrived. They were settled in Egypt merely temporarily. Indeed, as far as Bnei Yisrael were concerned, they were "ha'baim Mitzraymah," with a "hay" at the end of the word, rather than the prefix "lamed," l'Mitzrayim. Egypt remained open to them. They always thought about leaving. The door against assimilation, representing the escape from spiritual elimination, never closed, because "es Yaakov," the spirit of their Patriarch was vibrant in their minds and hearts. They never had the audacity to sever themselves from their father's tradition. As Horav Swift notes, in no other parshah in the Torah do we find the concept of "Elokai avoseichem," "the G-d of your fathers." Their father and the Ribbono Shel Olam were always on their minds. An individual might transgress; but it is entirely another matter to divorce himself from his heritage, so that in his foolish mind he is convincing himself that he is not transgressing.

Whenever Klal Yisrael has confronted a new "move," a new home -- either by choice or by force - we have had to assure ourselves that the "mem" has remained open. If we are to save our children; to retain our values and ideals; to be sure that we do not become a statistic to assimilation; if the chain of tradition is to remain strong, we must assure that, "Elokai Avoseichem nirah eilai," "The G-d of your fathers must appear before us" - at all times. While we certainly are not dismissing the need to modernize with the times, this option should only apply to our external facades. Our tradition, however, must be "b'ruach Yisrael sabbo," in the spirit of the Klal Yisrael of old, as transmitted throughout the generations. Only by building on the foundations of the past can we be assured of a healthy spiritual future.

Nachlas Tzvi addresses the pasuk, "A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef" (Shemos, 1:8). He interprets into this pasuk the idea that children, regrettably, often seek to sever their ties with the past. He explains that Pharaoh saw that the new generation of Jews acted as if they did not know Yosef; thus, he followed suit. If the Jews do not acknowledge their past spiritual leadership, should we expect the gentiles to recognize them? It is especially noteworthy that it was "Yosef" who was not known. Yosef was the paradigm of the Jew in galus, exile, who resisted temptation and withstood the winds of assimilation. If the Jews of that generation were to attribute their acculturation to the Egyptian way of life -- to the pressures of the exile -- Yosef would provide a contrast to their excuse. He lived and thrived in Egypt; he was accepted and respected by Egyptian society. Yet, he remained true to his faith, never once sacrificing his ideals on the altar of assimilation. Pharaoh saw that Klal Yisrael did not know Yosef. Why should he?

Nachlas Tzvi cites a poignant, but powerful, story that conveys this message: Many of us wake up and decide to return to the path of our ancestors, to reestablish and reaffirm our ties with the heritage that we had disdained. Alas, for some it is too late. The story is related that a Jew was once traveling on a bus from Yerushalayim to Tel Aviv. As he sat on the bus, a woman approached him and asked, "What time is it?" As he continued reading his sefer he told her it was twenty minutes to six. Five minutes later, the lady once again approached him to ask the time. He responded that it was a quarter to six. After another few minutes, the lady came over again to ask the time. Somewhat frustrated, he responded that it was twelve minutes to six. When she came over a few minutes later and once again asked the time, the Jew asked her impatiently, "Why are you so obsessed with what time it is?"

The lady responded with the following story: "My parents were Holocaust survivors. I was their only child. They did everything to provide me with a strong religious education. Regrettably, my friends who were far from observant had a stronger influence on me, and I rejected the Torah way of life. My parents pleaded with me; they cried bitter tears, to no avail. I was not to be moved. My parents died of great agmas nefesh. They were grief-stricken that their only child had rejected the Judaism for which they had lived and so many had died. These last few nights, my mother has been appearing to me in a dream, imploring me to repent and change my way of life. I have continued in my resolve not to give in; I am not becoming observant. Last night, my mother appeared to me once again, telling me that she would like to "meet" me. We made up to "meet" at a certain building precisely at 6:00 o'clock. I am now on my way to meet my mother, and I cannot afford to be late!"

Hearing the incredible story, the Jew decided to exit the bus at the same stop and follow the lady to witness her encounter with her mother. How was the mother's neshamah, soul/ spirit, going to meet her living daughter? The bus arrived at the stop at three minutes to six, and the lady ran off the bus in search of her mother. She ran so fast that she did not realize that the traffic light above the street which she was crossing was malfunctioning. As she crossed the street, not realizing that the traffic was moving at its usual speed, she was struck by a car and fatally injured. Suddenly, the Jew who was horror-stricken to see this lady's body flung in the air, heard a heart-wrenching cry: "Mama!" It was six o'clock.

Behold, the people of Bnei Yisrael are greater and stronger than us. (1:9)

While the Jews were certainly growing in numbers, their influence and power far exceeded their quantitative growth. Indeed, is this not true in contemporary times? We are a minority in the free world, but our influence is strongly felt throughout. The Jews have made their mark in every realm of human achievement. From the sciences to humanities to the world of finance, we have made significant and lasting contributions. If this is the case, why was Pharaoh so concerned about his Jewish citizens? Accompanying the Jewish power and influence, a humility innate in the Jewish character has coupled with a dedication to serving our "host" country. Loyalty is a trait that is truly becoming a Jew. Throughout history, we have maintained a balance of trust and fidelity as citizens in whichever country we have lived. Pharaoh certainly knew that the Jewish People were his greatest asset: Why did he fear them?

Horav David Feinstein, Shlita, suggests that the answer may be found in Pharaoh's own words: "pen yirbeh," "lest they become many." Pharaoh was afraid that the Jews would multiply or -- even worse, as Horav Feinstein interprets the word "yirbeh" -- lest they become great. Pharaoh feared the Jews might lose their humility, that the power and influence would cause them to become arrogant. Indeed, they might become so haughty that they would develop designs for greater power. Even his throne was no longer safe from the "power-hungry" Jews. Pharaoh's paranoia overcame his ability to think rationally.

Had he not been such a cruel king he would have realized that treachery is antiethical to the Jewish persona. Pharaoh viewed the Jews as he viewed his own people. An Egyptian with even a fraction of a Jew's power presented a danger for Pharaoh. His paranoia overcame whatever common sense he might have possessed. His myopia did not permit him to see beyond his own treachery. Regrettably, things have not changed much since that time. The Jew who is successful is still scorned, albeit in private and with class. When we win our prizes as a result of talent, hard work, intelligence and, of course, Hashem's blessing, we are envied and disdained. We will never be accepted - but that is to our ultimate advantage.

And they became disgusted because of Bnei Yisrael. (1:12)

Rashi comments that the Egyptians became disgusted with their lives. We must understand what effect the Egyptians' self-evaluation and personal feelings had on the bondage to which the Jews were subjected. Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, zl, derives from here a profound lesson, which gives us great insight into the psyche of those who oppress others. One does not persecute others unless he feels that his own life has little value. One who appreciates life, and is happy with his lot in life, develops positive feelings of self-worth. His outlook for the future is filled with optimism and hope. Thus, he will also hold dear the lives of others. One to whom life has no meaning and value, who looks at himself in the mirror and sees only bitterness and dejection, will humiliate and take advantage of those weaker than he. The Egyptians were disgusted with their own lives. Therefore, they had no qualms about destroying the lives of the hapless Jews.

The Egyptian exile is paradigmatic of all future exiles and oppression. The prevalent attitude and emotional composition of our Egyptian oppressors serve as a foreshadowing of the typical personality of anti-Semites throughout history. The self-loathing that characterized the Egyptians is a trait we can expect to find inherent in those who abuse others. We should bear this in mind when we attempt to circumvent anti-Semitism by assimilating ourselves to be more like those who vilify us. We will not change them by rejecting the one feature that distinguishes us from the rest of the world: the Torah.

Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe by the river...she saw the basket among the reeds and she sent her maidservant and she took it. (2:5)

Rashi cites the Midrash that interprets "amasah" (maidservant) as "her arm." She extended her arm and, miraculously, it became long enough to reach the basket. Once a group of distinguished Rabbis and communal leaders in Lublin, Poland, were convened to discuss a pressing matter of life and death proportions confronting Klal Yisrael. At one point, one of the leaders said, "This matter is of overriding concern. Perhaps it is too weighty an issue for us to decide alone." Present among the group was Horav Meier Shapiro, zl, who, noting that the enthusiasm of the meeting was dying down and soon all would be lost, ascended the podium. With great feeling, he exclaimed, "My colleagues, please listen to me for a moment. Regarding the pasuk that says that Pharaoh's daughter stretched out her hand to fetch Moshe, Chazal explain that once she stretched out her hand to retrieve Moshe, Hashem caused her hand to elongate miraculously to save Moshe. We must endeavor to understand what Pharaoh's daughter had in mind when she stretched out her hand. Obviously, she knew that her hand would never reach the distance to Moshe. Was she waiting for a miracle to occur?

"We see from here," he continued in a passionate tone, "that a person must do what he must do and leave the results up to Hashem. Even if his goals are far beyond the scope of human achievement, he should place his trust in the hope that which should be - will be. One should never be me'yaesh, give up hope, and claim defeat before he even begins to do anything. Therefore, my friends, while our goal may seem to us farfetched and unattainable, we must do all that we can and leave the rest to Hashem.

With His help we will triumph over adversity and overcome all odds."

The Alter Mi'Novardek, zl, was want to say, "I never think about whether I can confront an undertaking, but, rather whether I should do it. For, if I am obligated to do something, I will be able to do it." This approach kept him going, overcoming challenge after challenge. Never did his faith wane; his spiritual endurance remained resolute. During World War I, when many yeshivos closed due to a lack of food or housing, so that yeshivah students were forced to undergo hardship just to stay alive, he proclaimed, "Mi l'Hashem eilai," "Who is for Hashem (shall come) to me!" He assured anyone who would come to study in his yeshivah that he would not be conscripted in the army. He succeeded beyond belief. Hundreds upon hundreds of young men thronged to study Torah in his network of yeshivos. He triumphed because of his faith; he succeeded because of his mesiras nefesh, total devotion, to the point of self-sacrifice.

He went out on the next day and behold! Two Hebrew men were fighting. He said to the wicked one, "Why would you strike your fellow?" He replied, "Who appointed you as a dignitary" ... Moshe was frightened and he thought, "Indeed the matter is known" (2:13,14). Rashi first provides the simple meaning of the pasuk: Moshe feared that the killing of the Egyptian had become known. In an alternative exposition, he explains that Moshe had been puzzled. Out of all of the seventy nations of the world, what characteristic of the Jews warranted that they be tyrannized with crushing labor. Horav Shlomo Margolis, Shlita, appends this pshat, exposition, with an insightful thought. Moshe did not simply see two people -- or even two Jews -- fighting with one another. He saw Ivrim, people who represent the nation that is resolute, whose fortitude gave them the strength of conviction literally to challenge the world. They stood on one "eivar," side, and the rest of the world stood on the other side. It is at a time such as this that one would least expect "Ivrim" to quarrel. A nation who knows what persecution and affliction really mean should -- at the very least -- not fight internally. Yet, this is what Moshe saw: two Ivrim fighting with each other. He understood why Klal Yisrael was in galus, exile. He was able to reconcile the bitter persecution and terrible affliction to which the Jewish people had been subjected. It was all coming together. When a nation does not have achdus, unity, and a people -- despite tragedy after tragedy -- cannot learn to get along; when Ivri fights Ivri, brother challenges brother, we have exile! Moshe understood. Regrettably, until today still do not understand.

They embittered their lives with hard work,.....All their labors that they performed with them were with crushing harshness. (1:14)

In the Talmud Sotah 11b, Chazal give us an insight into the avodas perach, crushing/harsh labor, to which the Egyptians subjected Klal Yisrael. They invented their tasks, giving the men work that was usually performed by women and vice versa. This seems enigmatic. If a man is forced to perform a woman's work, is that to be considered crushing and harsh? It may not be his style, but it certainly is not heartless. The Ozrover Rebbe, zl, derives from here that any form of labor that is not habitual for an individual is, in effect, considered avodas perach. The difficulty arises from the fact that it is unusual and not his natural form of labor. Whenever one is directed to go against his grain, he is being brutally subjugated. He cites the Rambam in Hilchos Avadim, 1:6, who says that one who imposes upon his slave to labor only for the purpose of demonstrating to the slave that he belongs to him - in order to assert that he is a slave who must serve his master -- is subjecting the slave to avodas perach. His intention is to humiliate and demean the slave, not to seek benefit from his labor.

We now understand why the Egyptian galus, exile, is considered to have begun with the birth of

Yitzchak Avinu. The Patriarch had what one might call an "easy life." With the exception of the incident regarding the wells, the Torah does not record anything in Yitzchak's life experience that would be considered galus-like in nature. Why, then, is the exile counted from his birth? Yitzchak was subjected to living in proximity of the Pelishtim, a pagan, immoral nation. It was counter to his nature for Yitzchak, the Olah Temimah, perfect sacrifice, the individual who achieved the zenith of spirituality and holiness, to be relegated to living near such a base nation. For him, this constituted exile! Therefore, the four hundred years of exile that was decreed against the Jewish people could be counted from the birth of Yitzchak.

The Jewish People were in Egypt for two hundred and ten years. Hashem counted these years as the exile years, thus, he redeemed them after this term was completed. When we think about it, were all of these years a time of travail for the Jews? In Seder Olam Rabbah, it is stated that the Jews suffered for eighty six years, beginning with the birth of Miriam. Why, then, do we begin counting the exile from the moment Yaakov entered Egypt? According to the above thesis, when one is compelled to perform an endeavor that goes against his very nature, or to live in a place that is contrary to his nature and religious conviction, it is crushing and demeaning; he is essentially in exile. Yaakov came with his family to a land known for its immoral and iniquitous lifestyle. For people of such spiritual nobility and holiness to be exposed to such an experience is demoralizing. Shevet Levi might not have been forced to labor as his brothers, but he was certainly subject to the demeaning experience of living in Egypt. That alone, for someone of Shevet Levi's spiritual plateau, is devastating.

This remains an important lesson for us all. Any endeavor that goes against the nature and will of an individual is a crushing experience. Therefore, when one is dealing with people, he must be sensitive to their habits and natural proclivities so as not to impose upon them in such a manner that would be destructive and ultimately self-defeating.

Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observedm their burdens. (2:11)

Although raised in the splendor of Pharaoh's palace, exposed constantly to the antisemitic vitriol that was undoubtedly a part of the daily conversation, Moshe Rabbeinu remained the son of Amram and Yocheved. He did not become an Egyptian prince; he remained a Jew, proud of his heritage, empathetic with his brethren, compassionate for the downtrodden, broken slaves. He did not merely identify with his People through lip service; he went out to them. He wanted to observe their suffering and grieve with them. He was a true "noseh b'ol im chaveiro," one who carries the yoke with his friend. He sought to be a part of their persecutions.

Horav Simchah Zissel, zl, m'Kelm observes that Moshe's empathy extended beyond the larger community. He also demonstrated his sensitivity to the needs of the individual when he rescued a Jew from the murderous hands of his Egyptian oppressor. In another incident, when two Jews were fighting with each other, Moshe intervened. Moshe's efforts were not limited only to his country. Even in Midyan, when he saw the Midyanite shepherds abusing Yisro's daughters, he came to their rescue. He even gave water to their sheep.

When Hashem appeared to Moshe through the Burning Bush, He was thereby conveying a message: imo anochi b'tzarah, I am with him in his pain. Hashem empathizes with the oppressed, the downtrodden, the persecuted.

Furthermore, out of the eighty years of Moshe's life preceding his first meeting with Pharaoh, the only episodes of his life that the Torah finds worthy of inclusion are those in which his empathy for another Jew is manifest. This demonstrated the essence of Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership capabilities.

Moshe Rabbeinu finally achieved his primary vocation -- "Moshe was a shepherd" -- taking care of Yisro's sheep. Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, observes that this is the zenith of Moshe's career to this point in his life.. He attained the position of roeh, shepherd. All of the previous incidents in his life, the sensitivity, the caring, the empathy, all climaxed at this moment-he became a shepherd. Our greatest leaders were shepherds. Yaakov Avinu and David Hamelech were both shepherds. The Midrash tells us that one day a young sheep ran away to drink water from a stream. When he was found, Moshe came over and apologized, saying, "I did not realize that you were thirsty. You must be tired from the running, I will carry you." When Hashem saw this, He said, "You have compassion to lead the sheep, by your life, you will lead My sheep: Klal Yisrael. We derive from here that when the leader, the elder, the parent, the teacher, apologizes for a slight error, it is not merely a lesson in humility -- it comprises a prerequisite for leadership. One who apologizes is sensitive to the other's feelings. He is, thereby, strengthening his friend. He empathizes. He is ready to lead.

When Hashem asked Moshe to go lead the Jews from Egypt, Moshe refused. Where was his empathy for his oppressed brethren then? For seven days, he refused; for seven days, his brethren suffered. Where was his sensitivity? Chazal tell us that Moshe refused to lead out of a sense of respect for his older brother, Aharon. Yet, we still must ask: If Hashem Himself makes a request and the lives of hundreds of thousands of Jews are at stake, does Moshe have the right to delay their liberation and refuse Hashem-all because of his sensitivity towards Aharon?

We see from here, maintains Horav Yaakov Beifus, Shlita, the extent to which one must concern himself with his friend's sensitivities. Moshe Rabbeinu would absolutely not do anything that might impinge on his brother Aharon's esteem. Hashem would take care of Klal Yisrael. Moshe would not lead if it meant hurting his brother. Furthermore, we derive from here that the end does not justify the means. Even if the entire nation was waiting, it did not warrant hurting another Jew's feelings. A mitzvah should not be performed through the medium of an aveirah, sin. Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, cited by Rabbi Peysach Krohn tells a poignant story which underscores this idea. Reb Nachum was the baal tefillah, chazzan, on the Yamim Noraim, High Holydays, in the shul, in which Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, was the rav. To be selected for such an eminent position in such a prestigious shul was truly a distinctive honor. It happened one a year, several weeks prior to Rosh Hashanah that Reb Nachum took ill and died. Naturally, everyone mourned the passing of their dear friend, a Jew whose moral rectitude matched his beautiful voice.

After the period of mourning had passed, the elders of the congregation approached the rav and asked him what they should do to secure the service of a chazzan whose penetrating voice would inspire them as Reb Nachum's did. Rav Yosef Chaim told the people not to worry-they would have a baal tefillah in due time. A few days passed. It was five days to Rosh Hashanah and still there was no mention of the appointment of a new chazzan. Indeed, they were getting somewhat apprehensive that at such a late date this position had not yet been filled. A few days later, they approached the rav again, only to receive the same answer: when the time arrived, they would have a baal tefillah.

On Erev Rosh Hashanah, they still had no baal-tefillah. The members of the shul were getting slightly impatient, to say the least. They could not contain themselves any longer. "Rebbe," they demanded, "tomorrow the chazzan will stand before Hashem, imploring Him on our behalf, and as yet we do not have a chazzan." The rav responded in his calm voice, "I told you that you have nothing to worry about; tomorrow you will have a chazzan."

Tomorrow came around, and there was a sense of anticipation in the air as everyone waited to see who Rav Yosef Chaim would "produce". Shacharis was concluded, followed by Krias ha'Torah, the Torah

reading; the shofar was about to be blown, and there was still no chazzan. All eyes were on the rav. Suddenly, he arose from his seat and went over to Reb Nochum's son. He bent over him and said, "You are to fill your father's place: you will be the baal tefillah."

The young man was stupefied. He had never considered the idea that he would be asked to lead the Mussaf. He began to protest, "I am not prepared: I did not look over the davening. How can I go up to lead the congregation?" Rav Yosef Chaim responded in a soothing voice, "Do not worry. You have listened to your father daven for years. Go up there; it will all come to you. I am sure that you will do well." The young man listened to the rav and went to the bimah, lectern, to daven, to the consternation of the congregation.

After Mussaf, a group of esteemed lay people went over to Rav Yosef Chaim and respectfully asked him why he sent an avel, mourner, to lead the services. It clearly states in halachah that a mourner does not lead the services on Shabbos or Yom Tov.

The rav looked at the group and responded, "Perhaps you do not realize, but Reb Nachum's widow was with us today in shul. Can you imagine the grief and sorrow that she is feeling, especially on this day when her beloved husband was usually the chazzan? Imagine the pain she would have sustained if someone else had davened the tefillah that her husband had led for so many years. Her tears and anguish would be heard and felt by all. To minimize her grief, I sent her son to take his late father's place. Perhaps the nachas of seeing her son at the bimah might in some way mitigate her pain. We are admonished by the Torah to be sensitive to the needs of a widow. I felt that appointing Reb Nachum's son to daven outweighed the law that prohibits a mourner from leading the tefillah on Yom Tov. Indeed, for the sake of the widow there was no one else." It takes a great individual of the calibre of Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld to act with such empathy. It takes a great person to think of the small things, because what might seem small to some of us is actually very big in the eyes of others.

And say to him (Pharaoh), "Hashem, G-d of the Ivriyim, Hebrews, happened upon us. (3:18)

Hashem instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to approach Pharaoh on behalf of the Jewish People. This is the first time that an address is to be made to a gentile king in the name of the Jewish People. We find the plural derivative of the word Ivri in a form, Ivriyim, with two 'yudin,' which never occurs again. Elsewhere, it is always written as Ivrim. Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, posits that the character which is defined by the word Ivri is herein underscored. The word, "Ivriyim," emphasizes not only the character that marks the people as a whole, but one which characterizes each individual member. The word Ivri was first used in connection with Avraham Avinu. He had the courage and fortitude to leave the whole world b'ever eched, one side, while he stood firm in his belief in Hashem-on the other side. Ivriyim bespeaks the nature of his descendants. They, too, have inherited his unique courage and conviction.

Hashem instructed Moshe to make his demand on behalf of the Ivriyim, thereby implying the notion that in each individual Jew the entire nation is represented. Each single Jew has the courage and tenacity to stand alone, if necessary, against the whole world, to represent and even carry on the Jewish nation himself. The gentile nations are quite often described by a picture of an animal. It is their symbol of strength. Conversely, Klal Yisrael is pictured as a tree. An animal can be killed with one movement, a shot or a stab. A tree, however, reproduces itself, giving every part of it the possibility of representing the continuance of life of the whole unit. Even if the root is severed -- a branch, a twig, or a bud -- it is quite sufficient to revive the destroyed plant, granting it continued existence.

Moshe said to Pharaoh, "We are Ivriyim-not Ivrim." The spirit that moves me to speak is not within me alone, but in the elders and in the lives of every individual Jew. We do not let ourselves be destroyed. We endure, because in every individual spirit, the courage and the determination of the whole is

reproduced. Klal Yisrael is a collective unit, composed of individuals who each are a microcosm of the totality.

I am not a man of words.....for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech. (4:10)

Moshe Rabbeinu implored Hashem to send someone else to Pharaoh. He claims that his speech impediment would make it very difficult for him to express himself effectively and to articulate his demands. It is interesting to note that Moshe felt that his impediment would only be problematic in his dialogue with Pharaoh. What about Klal Yisrael? How would they react to a leader who could not communicate in a clear and effective manner? Apparently, Moshe Rabbeinu was not concerned about the Jews. They were not so vacuous and shallow to judge a person only according to his external qualities. They surely were more interested in his inner qualities and virtues than in his proficiency as a speaker.

Yet, one cannot ignore the fact that one's external characteristics weigh heavy on the average person. It takes a rare individual to overlook outward appearances and to focus upon one's inner essence. Our gedolim, Torah giants, were very concerned with another person's Feelings. Their sensitivity towards a fellow Jew was paramount. Indeed, the greater and more illustrious the gadol, the more sensitive he was to the needs and emotions of his fellow Jew. Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl, was one of the greatest Torah leaders of the past generation. His broad scope of Torah knowledge was matched only by his love and sensitivity towards his fellow Jews. As the leader of pre-World War II Europe, his concern for his People, from the great to the simple Jew, was legendary. He was once walking down the street accompanied by a number of his students when he met a man who asked him directions to a given street. Although this street was at the other end of town, totally out of Rav Chaim Ozer's way, the gadol ha'dor took the man by the arm and together they walked a half-hour to the man's destination.

Afterwards, his students asked Rav Chaim Ozer why he went out of his way, especially in light of the rav's weakened physical state. He could just as well have given him the directions. At worst, the man would have asked someone else along the way to guide him.

Rav Chaim Ozer turned to his students and said, "Did you not notice that this man had a speech impediment? Did you not notice his embarrassment when he asked me for directions? If I had not have gone with him, he would have been forced to stop elsewhere and once again ask directions. I would then have been the cause for him to once again be self-conscious and humiliated. In order to circumvent a Jew's humiliation, I was willing to go out of my way." It is such incredible little sensitivities that form the cornerstone of such a great man.

So they appointed taskmasters over the nation in order to afflict it with their burdens. (1:11)

In order to understand fully the meaning of geulas Mitzraim, redemption from Egypt, it is essential that we have a clearer conception of the shibud, slave labor, to which the Jewish People were subjected. Pharaoh was a cruel despot whose goal was to demoralize and dehumanize the Jewish people who were propagating by leaps and bounds. Simply subjecting them to hard labor would just not be an effective response to his problem. Chazal teach us that Jewish slaves built the two great treasure cities of Pison and Raamses on soil which was totally unsuitable for construction. Indeed, as soon as a building was erected, it would topple over. Another opinion contends that as the work progressed, the building was swallowed up in the quicksand-like earth. Why would Pharaoh initiate a project that was doomed? Why would he waste the free labor of millions of workers, to say nothing of the tons of raw material that he

was wasting?

Horav Avraham Pam, zl, suggests that this is the meaning of "I'maan anoso b'sivlosam," "to afflict it with their burdens." Pharaoh understood that hard work, even back-breaking labor, was something with which a person could learn to live, as long as he had the ability to enjoy the fruits of his labor. When a person toils and slaves, however, but receives no sense of satisfaction from the completed task - in fact, observes the destruction of the fruits of his labor - he is then being subjected to the most demeaning torture. Nothing demoralizes a person more than seeing everything for which he has slaved become rubble. This was Pharaoh's diabolical goal: to see to it that the Jews derived no fulfillment from their toil. He was willing to lose so much as long as the Jews could not gain anything from their work. This is evil at its nadir. Rav Pam applies this idea to parents and rebbeim, Torah teachers, as well. Parents toil endlessly in an attempt to support their families. The daily pressures, the inevitable crises, together with the regular dosage of tzaar gidul banim, the pain of raising children, all contribute to rendering parenthood an extremely difficult task. Yet, if the children grow into G-d-fearing Jews whose commitment to Torah and mitzvos is unequivocal, then it is all worth it. If, unfortunately, the converse occurs, and the children do not turn out as we had hoped, there is no greater source of pain and distress.

Likewise, in the world of education, it can all be worth it: the energy expended, the sacrifice of a more lucrative career, dealing with difficult students and parents; and devoting oneself to a profession which is far from glamorous and not yet held in its proper esteem. If one succeeds and produces students that are a credit to the rebbe and Am Yisrael - it is all-worthwhile. If one does not succeed, however, the feelings of frustration and regret are extremely difficult to manage. Now, if we can only get our children and students to appreciate this perspective, life would be much easier.

But the midwives feared G-d. and did not do as the king of Egypt ordered them, and they caused the boys to live. (1:17)

The midwives not only refused to kill the Jewish infant boys, they went out of their way to sustain them. The Torah relates to us what gave them the strength of character to challenge Pharaoh's decree and to risk their own lives: yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. Without yiraas Shomayim, they would have been like anyone else - scared, victimized, willing to do anything to stay alive, even to kill innocent babies. This has been the case throughout history. We do not have to go as far back as the Egyptian exile to support this idea. Let us turn back sixty years to the black period in our history known as the Holocaust. Let us examine the American response to rescuing the hapless Jews of Europe, and we will see that the various approaches to relief and rescue were determined largely in accordance with the religious orientation of the individual. At a time when millions were dying, only the united efforts of the Jewish groups could have an impact upon the events. Regrettably, the chasm that existed along ideological lines hampered the efforts for rescue and cost countless Jewish lives. American Jews clung stubbornly to courses of action dictated by their loyalties. The assimilated Jew focused on government policy and the greater war effort. In his eyes, his Jewish brothers who were being gassed and burned took a back seat to the war effort. There were individuals whose goal of a Jewish State took precedence over Jewish lives. Most of the Orthodox community was involved in a concerted effort to save their European brethren. At times, the battles between the groups were bitter. The Orthodox were denigrated and abused, called backwards and archaic, their patriotism and allegiance to the United States questioned. By the end of 1945, however, the Orthodox activists had developed a sophisticated and efficient rescue apparatus that was far more successful than any action sponsored by the American Jewish establishment. They worked, they persevered, they risked their lives - and they succeeded, because they feared G-d. Their fear of G-d was the primary motivating force in their relentless dedication to saving Jewish lives. This factor and their overwhelming love for their fellow Jew set them

apart from their secular counterparts. The Germans learned a lesson in persecution and mass murder from Pharaoh. The Egyptian king was cunning. He chose the wife and daughter of Amram, the leader of the Jews, to help him exterminate the Jewish infant boys. Indeed, they were the first Judenrat. Pharaoh explained to the midwives that to extinguish the life of a fetus was only abortion - not murder. He threatened to kill them if they did not comply. In reality, according to Jewish law, what Pharaoh was asking of them was permissible, since he would have surely killed them for not complying with his orders.

Yocheved and Miriam were confronted with a difficult decision. Should they refuse Pharaoh and forfeit their lives, or should they commit "abortion" which might be permissible in this case since their lives were being threatened. They decided to place their trust in Hashem and firmly resolved not to kill the Jewish boys.

The Germans followed Pharaoh's example by appointing Jews to deal with their own brethren. In response to the Nazi's incessant threats, the Jews had to decide which was the lesser evil: to cooperate with the enemy and, thereby, perhaps lessen the cruelty using the offices of the Judenrat; or refuse to join and let the Germans do their own dirty work.. (This is not the place to discuss the halachic issues and ramifications involved in this decision.) Indeed, many leaders of the Judenrat risked their lives to save their brethren. Regrettably, for the most part they did not succeed and were themselves subjected to cruel punishment.

After all is said and done, yiraas Shomayim was the sole differentiating factor between those who saved Jewish lives and those who did not. The observant Jew, whose heart and soul is filled with awe of the Almighty and love for his fellow Jew, is the one we can count on to place Jewish lives above his personal commitments, ideologies and patriotic feelings, and even his own life. He responds to a higher call - the word of Hashem.

The Aushwitz-Birkenau death camp also had a team similar to Yocheved and Miriam, who risked their lives on behalf of their People. They were Tzila Orlean of Bais Yaakov and her student, Tillie Rinderly. In her book, "To Vanquish the Dragon," Mrs. Pearl Benish, a Holocaust survivor and witness, gives the following account: The Bais Yaakov girls were a close-knit group who avoided high positions in the camps at all costs. They preferred hard manual labor, maltreatment and beating, walking for miles in the worst weather - anything to avoid helping the Nazis torment other Jews. These two young women were different. They accepted the challenge and took positions in the camp administration with the hope that they might help, rather than hurt, the Jewish inmates. Tzila became head nurse in the camp infirmary, and Tillie served as secretary. Both positions, although extremely dangerous, served as vehicles in saving Jewish lives. These two young women daily walked a tightrope between life and death.

Tzila Orlean was a brilliant woman who had the respect of even such Nazi murderers as the infamous Dr. Mengele and Dr. Koenigal, the commandant of Block 10. She was the nucleus who inspired all those around her. She preached chesed, loving kindness, to others. She was like a magnet, drawing scores of women who needed help and encouragement in their moments of distress. She and Tillie would devise various methods and strategies for rescuing fellow inmates from under Dr. Mengele's nose. They were not alone. Doctors, non-Jewish inmates, secretaries, even some of the German camp personnel, lent assistance out of a sense of respect to these special women. Their hearts were open to everyone. Having no fear, they did what had to be done, regardless of the mortal danger to themselves.

Tillie Rinderly was young, hardly eighteen, with a soft, angelic countenance. Under other conditions, she would have been at the threshold of a happy life; instead she became the "white angel of

Aushwitz." Unseen by the ever-watching eyes of the sentries, she would go from block to block during the night, bringing much needed supplies and medicine to the inmates. She would "relieve" the infirmary of injections and hard-to-find medicines just to make life a bit easier for the hapless inmates. She brought water to the fever-stricken and sugar to the typhus victims lying half-dead on the floor. Back and forth, all through the night, the "white angel" went, giving sustenance and succor to the ill and infirm. At times, she would even give away her own bread ration or cup of water. She seemed to subsist on nothing. They might have called her an angel, but - in truth - she soared much higher than any angel in Heaven.

These women were part of an elite group of Jews whose fear of Heaven dictated their every movement. They feared nothing and no one, because they answered to a Higher Authority - Hashem.

Moreover, behold, he is going out to meet you and when he sees you he will rejoice in his heart. (4:15)

Chazal teach us that Hashem overlooks no good deed, however natural or insignificant. The Midrash views Aharon's sincere joy at meeting his brother, and celebrating his appointment as leader and spokesman for the emerging Klal Yisrael, as an act of great nobility. Indeed, it states that had Aharon realized that the Torah took note of his joy at Moshe's good fortune, he would have greeted Moshe with drums and danced. In other words, had Aharon known that his natural, sincere feelings of brotherly love and joy was significant enough to be recorded in the Torah as a lesson for eternity, he would have done even more than he had already done. Chazal continue, deriving a lesson in derech eretz, proper conduct, from Aharon's actions: a person carrying out a mitzvah should do so with a happy heart. They express a similar thought in regard to Reuven and Boaz. If Reuven would have known that Hashem would write about him, "Reuven heard and saved him (Yosef) from their hands," he would have put Yosef up on his shoulders and carried him to his father. Furthermore, if Boaz had known that Hashem would write about him, "He pinched up a bit of grain for (Rus)," he would have brought fattened cows and served her. Obviously, this Midrash demands elucidation. These great tzaddikim were not the type whose actions were influenced by the plaudits they received. They did what had to be done. They were capable of performing great deeds - and if in these three incidents they only did so much, it was because they ascertained that this is what was warranted at the time. How would an awareness of Hashem's high regard for them and their actions change what they felt should be done? Did they not always act in accordance with the demands of the situation?

Horav Meir Bergman, Shlita, cites what he heard his father-in-law, Horav Elazar Menachem Man Shach, zl, say in regard to this Midrash. Aharon HaKohen appraised and scrutinized every one of his actions. Despite being a great Navi, prophet, in his own right and also Moshe Rabbeinu's older brother, his natural humility overrode any feelings of envy he might have harbored over Moshe's appointed role as savior of the Jews in Egypt. Moreover, in his great self-effacement, he even went out to greet and pay respect to Moshe with a heart filled with sincere happiness. However, his constant introspection impeded him from expressing his feeling of joy through music and dancing. He was unsure of himself. Was it for real? Would such an exhibition of joy be sincere, or would it be tainted, an empty, insincere display that did not veritably reflect his true inner emotions. Because he was not sure, he kept his joy silent, his emotions concealed from the world.

Had he known that Hashem would write about him a testimony to his untarnished integrity, he would certainly have gone out to greet Moshe with dance. Aharon was unsure of the integrity of his actions. How far are we from this concept?

Horav Bergman extends this idea further as he explains the rest of the Midrash which focuses on Reuven and Boaz's dilemma. Reuven was concerned. How could he take upon himself the

responsibility to save Yosef if his brothers had rendered a halachic decision against him? They were righteous scholars who had even included the Shechinah in their deliberations. Who could say authoritatively that Reuven was right and the brothers were wrong? Perhaps he was not a hero but, simply, a rebel who was undermining the power of Bais Din?

If he had known, however, that Hashem would write about him, "Reuven heard and saved him from their hands," attesting to the integrity of his rescue, he would not have thought twice about putting Yosef on his shoulders and carrying him to his father.

Boaz's action may be viewed through the same prism. When he asked his servant, "To whom does this woman belong?" the servant was slightly taken aback. Boaz was not one to ask about strange women. Chazal say that Boaz was impressed with her wise conduct: She would glean two stalks at a time - not three - in accordance with halachah, Jewish law. The Alshich Hakadosh explains that the servant privately questioned Boaz's motives and thus his oblique answer, "She is a Moabite woman," was his way of telling Boaz, "You cannot marry her. Besides, because of your stature, there really is no Jewish woman that is suitable for you."

Boaz was humble and pure in spirit. He took the hint. He always made sure his behavior met with the approval of those who looked up to him. Now was no different. He questioned his motives; he introspected his intentions. Was he being truly altruistic or carried away by a young woman? Thus, when he called Rus to eat and she sat at one side, away from the men, he gave her only a token amount of food, for he was distrustful of his personal motivation. Hence, he would not allow himself to do more.

Had he known, however, that Hashem would later write about his conduct with praise, declaring his purity of heart to future generations, he would have undoubtedly have run and "brought her fattened calves and fed them to her."

We now understand the rationale behind Reuven, Aharon and Boaz's actions. Yet, the Midrash seems to criticize them for not doing the mitzvah wholeheartedly. If they had a good reason for their actions, why are they criticized? Horav Bergman explains that these great individuals acted with constraint precisely because they were great. Men of diminished spiritual stature, less respectful of the Divine Majesty, less in awe of the Heavenly Throne, might have acted with greater tolerance, but are these giants of Torah to be rebuked for their immense veneration? Horav Bergman responds affirmatively, explaining that people of such stature redefine the word "wholeheartedly." Although the self-distrust and consequent actions which Reuven, Aharon and Boaz exhibited, were motivated by greatness, meticulous integrity and objectivity - something is still missing from the picture. In the final analysis, they still did not act wholeheartedly. There was something missing in their avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. For however much a person should scrutinize and distrust himself, when a mitzvah presents itself, he should act with a pure heart and trust in Hashem - regardless of his personal doubts. This is the underlying meaning of the pasuk, "B'chol derachecha de'eihu; v'hu yeyasher orchosecha," "In all your ways know Him, then He will straighten your path." If "in all your ways you know Him," desiring that everything you do be in accordance with His will, then whenever a mitzvah presents itself, He will give you the fortitude and understanding to carry out your duty truthfully. We have to act, and Hashem will "straighten" our path.

She opened it, and saw him, the child, and behold! A youth was crying... This is one of the Hebrew boys. (2:6)

A child, a youth: Is it a child or a youth? Chazal ask this question in the Talmud Sotah 12b. The Torah calls him a yeled, child, and it calls him a naar, youth. Which is it? He is a child, but his voice is that of a youth. Chazal seem to imply that Moshe Rabbeinu's voice had the maturity of that of a young boy. We wonder at the Torah's expression, "This is one of the Hebrew boys." Why could the Torah not have simply said, "This is a Hebrew boy." Why does it say, "One of the Hebrew boys"? Furthermore, what do Chazal mean when they say that Moshe Rabbeinu cried like a youth? How does a youth cry?

Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, explains that the difference between a child's tears and that of a youth lies not in the sound but in the reason for the tears. A child cries when he is in pain or in need. The child cries only for his personal reasons - nothing else. He still lacks the understanding that one also cries for the hurt sustained by others. The youth, however, understands that others also have pain, and he expresses his empathy with them through his own tears. A youth cries when his parents are in pain, while a child does not recognize the pain, nor does he understand the need to empathize with others.

Moshe Rabbeinu, the infant floating upon the water, was in personal danger. His life hung in the balance. At any moment, his precious basket could capsize, and he would perish. It is, therefore, no wonder that he would cry - he was in danger. What shocked Pharaoh's daughter was the fact that even after she rescued him from the water, he continued to cry. She now realized this child was not crying for his own petty needs. This was a youth who had an acute understanding of the circumstances that confronted his People. Moshe Rabbeinu, the child/youth, cried for Klal Yisrael as he empathized with their pain.

The future leader of Klal Yisrael studied his circumstances. While it was true that he was miraculously saved, what about the tens of thousands of other Jewish boys who did not merit this miracle? Can they be ignored? This is implied by the pasuk, "She opened it and saw him" - after she took Moshe out of the water, after he was saved, she saw that he was still crying. Then she realized that this was no ordinary child - this was a youth, a mature young man, crying for his People. We now understand why the Torah writes, "This is one of the Hebrew boys." Moshe Rabbeinu cried for the other Jewish babies whose lives were still in danger. He had the body of a child, but he cried with the wisdom and maturity of a youth.

And he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man...He turned this way and that and saw that there was no man...He went out the next day and behold! Two Hebrew men were fighting...and he thought, "Indeed, the matter is known." (2:11,12,13,14)

Horav Azariah Figu, zl, says that Moshe Rabbeinu's first impression of his Jewish brethren worried him. He went out and saw an Egyptian beating a Jew. His first reaction was to look around to see if there were any other Jews around to help. He was shocked to see that *ein ish*, "there was no man." There were Jews, but they did not seem to want to become involved -- or perhaps they did not care. Moshe could not believe this sense of indifference to the plight of another Jew. He attributed their lack of involvement to the fact that Jews shied away from controversy. If Jewish men saw any type of dispute brewing, they would immediately leave. They stayed away from the fight between the Egyptian and the Jew, because they stayed away from fights - period. While they were certainly wrong, this principle at least provided Moshe with a justification for the Jews' inaction.

The next day, however, Moshe was confronted with an anomaly that refuted his prior understanding of the community. He saw two Jews quarrelling with one another. "Jewish people fighting with one another?" How could this be?" wondered Moshe. He then realized, "Indeed, the matter is [now] known." Regrettably, the problem confronting the Jewish People was their moral hypocrisy. When a Jew was struck by an Egyptian, they cowered in indifference. "We are not permitted to use force," they

claimed. This might have been negotiable had it been true. It seems, however, that when Jew was fighting Jew, the rules changed. They rained blow upon blow upon each other, as those very same people whose righteous indignation did not permit them to interfere forcibly when their brother was being beaten by an Egyptian demonstrated no moral reluctance in beating a Jew, when the antagonist was another Jew. It is truly unfortunate that this anomaly has not changed with time. What a sad commentary on Jewish life, when brothers exhibit a more positive attitude to the outside world than they display towards each other.

And now, go and I shall dispatch you to Pharaoh and you shall take my people, the Bnei Yisrael, out of Egypt, (3:10)

Hashem assures Moshe of success despite the odds, the apparent hopelessness of one man triumphing over the strongest power in the world. That is mesiras nefesh, dedication to the point of self-sacrifice, of Klal Yisrael. One endeavors whatever he can on behalf of his people who are incarcerated. The Skulener Rebbe, Horav Elazar Zushe Portugal, zl, was like that. Nothing stood in his way in his mission to rescue Jews who were in need. He was in Chernowitz, which was under Soviet dominion, in order to assist Soviet Jews who had smuggled themselves across the border in to Romania. Furthermore, it was much easier to get papers to enable them to go to America or Israel. The Jews were caught and immediately found guilty. The punishment was imprisonment in Siberia or a quick bullet to the head. The Rebbe was indefatigable; nothing stood in his way. "I will get them out - regardless!" he exclaimed.

The colonel who was in charge of the border guards lived in Chernowitz and knew the Rebbe well. The Rebbe had won him over many a time with heartrending entreaties on behalf of his brethren. The last time he was there the colonel had told him, "This is the very last time you will bother me. If you come again on behalf of your Jews- I will kill you!"

Nonetheless, when the Rebbe was notified about a family of nine people that had been captured, he immediately undertook the daunting and dangerous task of rescuing them. Nothing worked, not even a hefty bribe. They were adamant; these people were to serve as an example for others. There was still one avenue to be employed: the Rebbe would go to the colonel and beg, regardless of the imminent personal danger involved. Jewish lives were in danger and that was more important than his life. His family begged him not to go. "How can you risk your life like this?" they asked. He responded, "It is not clear that he will take out his wrath against me, but one thing is for sure, their lot is sealed unless I am able to do something in their behalf."

The Rebbe approached the colonel's house with trepidation, climbed up the steps and knocked on the door. When the colonel saw who stood at his doorstep, he was overcome with anger. He grabbed the Rebbe and threw him down the stairs. The Rebbe was hurt badly, yet, with extreme difficulty, he was able to get up. With the little strength he had left, he once again climbed the stairs and knocked on the colonel's door.

The colonel opened the door and could not believe his eyes. There stood the Skulener Rebbe, dirty, bloodied, clothes torn - but with defiance in his eyes. "I must speak to you, colonel!" the Rebbe said, with tears streaming down his face. The colonel listened: the Rebbe begged, he cried, as he depicted the bitter plight of this hapless family. The colonel's hardened heart could not ignore the selfless pleas, the heartfelt emotion of the Rebbe. His devotion to others at the expense of his own health impressed the colonel. The family was freed. Mesiras nefesh triumphed.

Stretch out your hand and grasp its tail. (4:4)

Hashem prepared Moshe Rabbeinu with signs/miracles to demonstrate to Pharaoh His powers. He was to take the *Mateh Elokim*, holy staff -- given to him by Hashem -- and throw it before Pharaoh, and it would become a serpent. He was then instructed to grab the serpent's tail, and it would turn back into the *Mateh*. We wonder why Hashem insisted that Moshe grasp the serpent by its tail? Does the tail have significance?

The *Kli Yakar* views the entire miracle as a simile, a lesson about *Klal Yisrael*. The signs that Hashem chose were certainly by design. Each one had a symbolism; each one served as a lesson to Pharaoh.

The *Mateh Elokim* that was transformed into a lowly serpent signified *Klal Yisrael* at its nadir. At first, it was a proud nation, standing erect and firm as a staff. During its tenure in the moral filth of Egypt, living in an environment where debauchery was a way of life and sin was a matter of choice, they fell to the depths of depravity - symbolized by the lowly serpent, standard bearer of evil. It slithers on the dirt and makes its home in its filth. Indeed, as the serpent was punished and degraded as a result of its involvement and promotion of *lashon hora*, evil speech, so, too, were the Jews in Egypt deposed from spiritual distinction because there were informers and slanderers among them. How does one remedy such a situation? How can *Klal Yisrael* rise from the depths to enjoy spiritual superiority once again? How can the serpent once again become the staff of G-d? They must rebel! It is incumbent upon them to straighten themselves, so that they no longer bend to the lowliness of Egyptian culture.

This is not, however, Hashem's way. His thoughts are quite different from ours. Hashem instructed Moshe to grasp hold of the serpent's tail - not to raise its head! Do not straighten yourselves out. On the contrary - take hold of the tail. When *Klal Yisrael* has descended to the nadir, then the salvation for which they thirst comes. *Me'ashpos yarim evyon*, "He raises the needy from the dust" (*Tehillim* 113). When the *evyon*, the one who is in dire need, falls to the depths, to the lowest level of spirituality, then, Hashem lifts him up and places him with those who are in the appropriate spiritual plane.

What appears to the human eye as the end, the apogee of the spiritual rope, is in itself the springboard for our salvation. Hashem knows that we cannot do it alone and He, therefore, assists us in return. He spiritually resuscitates us, because we have lapsed into a coma in which we no longer can fend for ourselves. It is specifically when it appears the most bleak that the seeds of hope and salvation are about to germinate and produce fruit.

Moshe said to Hashem, "...I am not a man of words...for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech." (4:10)

Rashi teaches us that for seven days Hashem spoke to Moshe, attempting to convince him to go to Egypt and instruct Pharaoh to permit the Jews to leave his country. Seven days is a long time, especially when Hashem is talking. Moshe refused; he felt he was not worthy, because he had a speech impediment. How could he speak to Pharaoh if he had difficulty communicating orally? Moshe Rabbeinu used this excuse for seven days until Hashem finally became angry with him. Hashem said, "I will be with you, so you have nothing to worry about." Yet, Moshe did not want to give in. Why did Moshe refuse to go? Was his speech the problem? He should have asked Hashem to rectify his impediment. Hashem should have taken away Moshe's speech deficiency, and he would no longer have had an excuse. Apparently, Moshe wanted to retain his challenge. Hashem respected Moshe's wish and left him as he was. Why? Why was Moshe so obsessed with retaining his speech impairment?

Horav Zaidel Epstein, *Shlita*, explains that Moshe's impediment came as a result of a miracle that was performed for him, a miracle that had saved his life. Moshe did not want to forget this episode in his life, so that he could always feel a sense of gratitude to Hashem. Chazal teach us that Moshe was favored by Pharaoh and shown great affection. As a young child, Moshe would take Pharaoh's crown

and play with it, even placing it on his own head! Seeing this, Pharaoh's advisors became concerned lest this child be the one, the future leader of the Jews whom they feared. There was a dispute among the advisors concerning how to deal with this child. Some said to kill him; others said to burn him. Yisro said that the child had no designs on Pharaoh's throne. He was merely an ordinary child with no special intelligence. He suggested a test to determine Moshe's level of intellect. They placed a bowl of gold and a bowl of hot coals in front of him to see to which one he would gravitate. Moshe, being of superior intelligence, was about to touch the gold when the angel Gavriel came and pushed his hand into the hot coals. Moshe immediately took his hand still holding the hot coal and placed it in his mouth to cool off the burn. Understandably, he burnt his tongue, causing his speech impairment.

Moshe did not want to forget this incident. His speech impediment represented his deliverance from a near-death experience. He never wanted to forget Hashem's benevolence. Hashem respected Moshe's wish and allowed him to remain this way.

Come, let us outsmart it. (1:10)

One of the most notorious incidents that occurred after World War II was perpetrated by secularists who were in charge of an absorption camp, Atlit, on the outskirts of Haifa. Here, groups of Jewish youths, mostly survivors of the Holocaust and Soviet Russia, were subjected to unimaginable mental and physical cruelty with one goal in mind: obliteration of Judaism. These children - mostly orphans from frum, observant, homes in Poland - were sent to Palestine through the auspices of the youth Aliyah division of the Jewish Agency, via Tehran. Hence, the name Yaldei Tehran. It was during the terrible incursion against the Yaldei Tehran that Rav Moshe Blau and Rav Moshe Porush came to the Brisker Rav, zl, to consult with him regarding the correct action to take to save these children from spiritual annihilation. When the Brisker Rav heard what was happening, he began to scream and cry uncontrollably. He enjoined them to do everything humanly possible to save the children. Seeing the Rav respond with such intensity, Rav Moshe Blau was concerned for his health. "Why does the Rav scream so much? It is not good for his health. Anyway, screaming is not going to solve the problem," said Rav Blau.

The Brisker Rav replied, "Whether screaming helps or not is not the issue. When it hurts, one screams. To hear about the tragedy hurts!" He continued by elucidating the Midrash that says that three advisors sat with Pharaoh to guide him concerning the decision about the "Jewish Problem": Iyov, Yisro and Bilaam. They each reacted differently and were punished accordingly. Bilaam, who advised Pharaoh to kill the Jewish boys, was himself killed. Yisro escaped. Because he fled, his descendants sat in halachic arbitration in the Lishkas Hagazis, Chamber of Hewn Stones. Iyov, who was silent, was punished by having to endure severe pain.

A person is repaid in the exact manner, measure for measure, as his actions. Hashem will repay accordingly the individual who gives charity to a poor man with a smile and shares his wherewithal unbegrudgingly with others. Bilaam and Yisro received their due middah k'neged middah, measure for measure. Bilaam advised to murder the Jewish boys, so he himself was later killed. Yisro was wealthy and famous. He was revered and exalted by all of Egypt. He turned his back on fame and fortune and ran away. For this, he was granted the great distinction of having descendants that arbitrated and adjudicated Jewish law. What, however, was the middah k'neged middah of Iyov's punishment? What relationship is there between pain and silence?

The Brisker Rav explained that Iyov had many reasons for keeping silent. He was acutely aware that he could not change the decree; therefore, screaming would be to no avail. Iyov felt that if he would not succeed in averting the decree, he might as well remain silent and be politically correct. Perhaps, he would be able to help the Jews later on.

Therefore, Hashem punished him with severe pain, so that Iyov would cry out in agony. Does crying out allay the pain? Does the pain diminish when one cries? No, but when it hurts, one cries. Any person who is in anguish cries out, because it is the normal reaction to pain. Likewise, when Iyov heard the terrible decree, it should have hurt to the point that he could not remain silent. Why did he not cry out? Apparently, the decree did not cause him sufficient anguish to invoke a scream. Therefore, Hashem gave him cause to scream.

But as much as they would afflict it, so it would increase. (1:12)

The Midrash interprets the pasuk in the following manner: Ruach Hakodesh omeres kein, the Holy Spirit is saying, "You say - pen yirbeh, lest it will increase, but I say - kein yirbeh, just so, it will increase." I once heard a homiletical rendering of this Midrash. You, enemies of Yisrael, think that your evil decrees will have an effect on increasing the pen, perhaps/the doubt factor, within the Jewish mind. You think that the more pain, the greater the persecution, the more intense the anguish, that the Jew will give up hope, will fall into apathy. You are wrong! I say - kein yirbeh, the kein, yes, the Jew's unequivocal commitment and unbreakable bond with Hashem will only get stronger and more enthusiastic.

We have seen this idea demonstrated throughout the millennia. The more they have persecuted us, the greater and more steadfast was our dedication to Torah and mitzvos. They said "Pen"- and we responded, "Kein!"

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the first was Shifrah and the name of the second was Puah. (1:15)

The Midrash cites a dispute between Rav and Shmuel as to the identity of the midwives. They both agree that Yocheved, Moshe Rabbeinu's mother, was one of them. Their point of contention is in regard to the second midwife. Was she Miriam, Moshe's sister, or Elisheva, the wife of Aharon Hakohen? Perhaps there is a message to be derived herein. Moshe Rabbeinu, the quintessential Jewish leader, the only human being who knew Hashem face to face, was truly a unique individual with exemplary character traits, leadership qualities and a sanctity that paralleled the Heavenly beings. His parents must have had an incredible zchus, merit, to have such a child. Moreover, whose "gene" did he inherit?

The Torah tells us that Hashem rewarded the midwives by making for them batim, houses, a term that denotes families or distinguished offspring. While Amram was a distinguished scholar and the undisputed leader of the generation, it seems that he was a pacifist. We do not see him taking steps to impede Pharaoh's genocidal activities. He was resigned to doom. Thus, he discouraged any further procreation. He decided that Klal Yisrael should not bring new Jews into a world of suffering and death. Pharaoh cannot kill what does not exist. The image we have of Moshe is in direct contrast to that of Amram. Moshe burst on the scene proactively, exhibiting opposition to the man in whose palace he was raised.

It seems that Moshe inherited his activism and leadership role from his mother, who not only frustrated Pharaoh's efforts to decimate the Jewish male population, but even raised funds and collected food to sustain the impoverished Jewish mothers. Moshe was her reward. Furthermore, if we are of the opinion that Elisheva was the other midwife, we can understand from whom her grandson, Pinchas Hakohen,

received his legacy.

I suggest that there is a great lesson to be derived from here. Scholarly pursuit has been our mainstay throughout the generations. We are the people of the book, not only in character, but also in demeanor. A Jew must take a stand for his people. Activism must be secondary to Torah ideals and values, but without Torah activism, indifference and apathy will reign.

Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens. (2:11)

Moshe Rabbeinu did not simply empathize with his persecuted brethren. Rashi says that *sam libo*, he applied his heart, to sensitize himself to their pain. He wanted to feel what they felt. In order to perform *chesed*, loving kindness, in the correct and proper manner, one must attune himself to his friends' needs, to those areas wherein he senses a deficiency. Even if he may not be on the same "wave length" as I, my act of kindness must address what my friend needs - not what I might need.

I recently read an exceptional example of this form of 'chesed' cited by Rabbi Yechiel Spero, in his recent publication, "Touched by a Story." Rav Shraga Wollman, the Mashgiach of Yeshivas Mekor Chaim is the Baal Musaf for the Yamim Noraim. He has a unique ability to capture the essence of the day, and to convey its crucial message to all those assembled, as he inspires their tefillos with his melodious voice and fervent devotion. On Yom Kippur, he returns to the amud to lead the Neillah service. His passionate rendition and his beautiful voice turn the Bais Hamedrash into a sea of prayer. This particular Yom Kippur, when our story took place, was no different.

Well, it was no different as far as the davening was concerned. There was something strange, however, about the Tallis Rav Shraga was wearing. It was not his. It was an old, tattered Tallis that he must have picked up somewhere. Was there something wrong with his own Tallis?

Neillah was concluded and the crowd broke into a joyous dance, singing *l'shanah habaah b'Yerushalayim*. This was followed by *Maariv*, and everyone began to leave for home. The question regarding the strange Tallis kept gnawing at a few people, until one of them decided that he would question Rav Shraga about why he had used this old Tallis.

At first, Rav Shraga refused to answer, attempting to avoid the question. The more he dodged the question, the more his friend pestered on, until Rav Shraga had to reveal the truth. He explained that shortly after *Mussaf*, as he walked back to his seat, he noticed an elderly woman whose husband had passed away that year. As he wished her a "*Gut Yom Tov*," he noted that she was unusually depressed. She acknowledged that widowhood was not pleasant and that she missed her husband terribly. She was used to his company, especially on Yom Kippur. As she spoke, tears welled up in her eyes.

Rav Shraga then thought of an idea. He asked the woman if he could borrow her husband's Tallis for Neillah. This way, when she would gaze down on the Chazzan, she would see her late husband's Tallis. What greater remembrance could there be of her husband? This would bring her comfort and encouragement. Perhaps this Tallis was not as nice as his own, but what it represented was certainly more beautiful.

Chesed means identifying with another person's needs as if they are your own. Thus, if one's needs do not presently conform with those of his friends, he abnegates his own feelings for his friend. The following story concerning Horav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, zl, the venerable Rosh Hayeshivah of Chevron exemplifies this idea. It was 1929, and Klal Yisrael had sustained one of the most alarming atrocities of the Twentieth Century. A band of blood-thirsty Arabs, their hatred for the Jews elevated to a frenzy by their accursed leadership, ran through the streets of Chevron, murdering men, women and children in cold blood. Twenty-five students of the Chevron yeshivah gave up their lives that fateful

day Al Kiddush Hashem, to sanctify Hashem's Name. The Rosh Hayeshivah, Rav Moshe Mordechai, became physically ill as a result. His feelings of personal responsibility for the murder of his students never really left him. He took his fatherly feelings of guilt with him to the grave, never recovering from the tragedy.

His clarity of vision, however, never waned. The Rosh Hayeshivah, whose love for his talmidim, disciples, was legendary, never forgot his mission in life. It was the last day of his earthly existence and Rav Moshe Mordechai lay in bed, unable to move, surrounded by his closest students and his children. He asked that everyone but his son leave the room. When everyone had left, Rav Moshe Mordechai turned to his son and said haltingly, "My dear son, I know my time to leave this world draws close. One of the talmidei ha'yeshivah, students of the yeshivah, is to be married tonight. I ask you that tonight, regardless of what happens today, you will encourage the rest of the students to attend the wedding and dance with joy and enthusiasm. I do not want this young man's wedding to be marred in any way."

An hour later, the Rosh Hayeshivah returned his soul to its Maker. Thousands of Jews from all areas of the Jewish spectrum attended the funeral. Rivers of tears were shed for the man who loved all Jews and whose love was reciprocated. The funeral concluded right before shkiah, sunset, at which point Rav Moshe Mordechai's last request was announced to the talmidim. How could these broken students, bereft of their loving and exalted mentor, dance at a wedding? That is exactly what their rebbe had wanted. Indeed, that is what their rebbe epitomized. That evening, the crushed young men of the yeshivah, their eyes red with tears - the pain in their hearts still fresh and hurting - rejoiced at their friend's wedding, because that is what their rebbe wanted.

These are the names of Bnei Yisrael. (1:1)

The Torah repeats the names of the tribes who went down with Yaakov Avinu to Egypt. Chazal consider this mentioning of names as a form of praise. Sforno explains that a man's name carries great significance. It is an indication of his stature, an index to his very essence and character. This is demonstrated by the mere fact that the Torah views him to be worthy of honorable mention. The Torah does not reward just any person. He must be noteworthy, deserving emphasis. The Shivtei Kah were a beacon of light throughout their lifetime to the point that as long as they survived, the people of their generation could not be degraded. After their passing, however, even the righteous among their children were not considered to be equally worthy in the eyes of Hashem and man. Chazal teach us that the names also allude to the redemption from Egypt. How are we to understand this, since the tribes were given their names many years before there was any thought of descending to Egypt?

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, explains that apart from the overt qualities and attributes of the tribes, they also possessed hidden abilities and virtues which emerged under necessary circumstances. Their names described their characters, but their characteristics were manifold. When, earlier in Sefer Bereishis, the Torah lists the tribes, they were a free people, living under idyllic circumstances in the vicinity of Yaakov, an atmosphere that resonated with sanctity. Their lives were structured, meaningful and purposeful. Egypt was a totally different world for them. It was a corrupt and immoral society in which debauchery and degeneracy reigned supreme. They did not have Yaakov to guide and protect them. They had to call upon their hidden resources of character and virtue to work overtime, to shield them from this repugnant environment. By naming the tribes once again in this new milieu, the Torah is lauding the individual's ability to adapt to, and to deal with, every situation. They serve as standard bearers and examples of how to live under adverse spiritual conditions and how to confront the

pressures of galus, exile.

Rashi remarks that by recounting the names of the tribes after their demise, the Torah indicates Hashem's great love for them. They are like the stars which Hashem brings out and takes in by number and name. He counts and enumerates them when they "come out" and again when they are "gathered in." This statement begs elucidation. If the indication of Hashem's love is the fact that their names are recounted posthumously, why does the Torah first begin by relating their names and then - later, in the sixth pasuk - mention the fact that they had passed on? Should the Torah not have first informed us of their passing before relating their names?

Horav Gifter explains that once we take into consideration their comparison to stars, we will understand why their names are specifically related prior to their deaths. Our ability to view the stars is restricted to nighttime, for when the sun rises, its light blinds us from seeing the stars. The stars continue their illumination; our capacity to see them, however, is impeded. Our inability to see the stars' light does not detract from their function. The same is true of the righteous. Although their passing from this world puts an end to our relationship with them, they are still present. We may not be able to see them, but their impact via their legacy continues to inspire and to guide us.

People count their possessions for two reasons: after a loss, one takes stock of what he no longer possesses; one may also count that which he continues to own, because this item brings him great satisfaction.

If the Torah had related the tribes' names after their deaths, we might be led to think that the Torah was lamenting their loss, mourning over what was no longer. This, however, is not true. The righteous continue to impact the generation, even after they are gone. The Torah is counting what it cherishes and values. Despite our inability to see them physically, they live on.

We may add that this idea does not apply only to gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders. There have been simple committed Jews throughout the generations whose sterling character and unflagging devotion to Torah and mitzvos have inspired many. Much of the Torah environment we enjoy today is the result of the toil, blood and tears of dedicated laymen, who, together with the Roshei Yeshivah who survived the Holocaust, built Torah on these shores. Their legacy lives on in the thousands upon thousands of committed Torah Jews who are their beneficiaries.

Yosef died, and all his brothers and that entire generation. (1:6)

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains why the Torah finds it necessary to add that the members of the entire generation, the seventy souls that descended to Egypt with Yaakov Avinu, also died. He says that each and every member of that generation had a certain nobility to himself. As such, they were held in great esteem by the people. As long as they lived there was no slavery, for the Egyptians could not enslave someone whom they respected. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, notes that as long as one acts in a distinguished manner, if he maintains an elevated sense of self-respect, if his ethical character reflects nobility, he is shielded from falling into the abyss of iniquity. Sin is similar to slavery. In both cases, one is subjugated to a master. In the latter, it is to an earthly master; in the former, it is to the yetzer hora, evil inclination, which takes a chokehold on him.

We find a similar idea expressed by the Sefer HaChinuch in regard to personal hygiene. One who is not clean is more likely to act in a sinful manner. Regarding the prohibition to break a bone of the Korban Pesach, the Sefer HaChinuch remarks that a distinguished person does not act in an undignified manner, such as breaking bones. He does not think thoughts similar to those which fill the mind of a person who is on a lower echelon. Dignity has its demands on a person. Thus, one who appreciates and

values his own nobility will not denigrate himself with sin.

The Midrash teaches us that Pharaoh guilefully ensnared the Jews. He did not immediately force them to work for him. He first offered the Jews the opportunity to work with him, to assist in making bricks. He would pay them a small sum for each and every brick. Their desire to earn money drove them to work hard the first day, preparing many bricks. When Pharaoh saw how many bricks the Jews had made the first day - for money, he placed this number as a tax upon them - without pay. Whoever was not able to produce this quota was whipped and humiliated.

The members of the tribe of Levi refused to compromise themselves for money. They knew that one day they would carry the Aron HaKodesh. Therefore, they declined to sell themselves for money. They prepared excuses: illness; an injured leg; a pain in the arm or shoulder. They maintained their dignity and self-respect, not falling into the Egyptian trap. The Egyptians could not enslave the tribe that put honor above money.

What a powerful lesson for us to digest. A positive self-esteem empowers one to fend off the blandishments of the yetzer hora. It protects him from sin. What about gaavah, arrogance? Should one not fear that self-esteem will lead to the sin of haughtiness? He who understands the definition of self-esteem realizes that it is much different from gaavah. Self-esteem is based upon the realization of one's abilities, his potential. Vanity is the sense that one should be admired and exalted for what he has already done. Self-esteem looks to the future; arrogance rests on the laurels of the past. Great people act based upon what they know they can achieve. Arrogant people only talk about their accomplishments. A person with a healthy self-esteem does not feel compelled to talk - or hear - about himself constantly. Indeed, arrogance is an escape for the individual who has negative feelings about himself, and tries to override his inner feelings of worthlessness. As psychologists have noted, however, the baal gaavah is never satisfied. His feelings of incompetence are delusional and, thus, not prone to responding to therapy. He must raise his self-esteem in order to realize his potential. This will be his ultimate cure for gaavah and his greatest protection from sin.

Rav Zilberstein concludes with a plea for Torah Jews to act in a manner commensurate with the nobility they represent. When one acts in a plebeian manner, he denigrates not only himself, but the Torah that he should reflect. This action results in chillul Hashem, a desecration of Hashem's Name. He relates an incident concerning a young Torah student, who was noticed arguing with a taxi driver over a few pennies. The bachur felt he was overpaying; the driver felt he was justified in his charges. The issue is not who was right and who was wrong. The mere fact that a young Torah scholar would argue with a taxi driver over a few pennies was in itself a chillul Hashem. Ultimately, this was regrettably demonstrated when the driver cursed the young man and all the people "like him."

Was it worth a few pennies? Perhaps to some of us it is a matter of principle. We might ask ourselves: Is it principle or stubbornness? Furthermore, is our principle worth a chillul Hashem?

And Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens. (2:11)

Moshe Rabbeinu's empathy served as an example for others to emulate. He could have easily closed his eyes to the anguish of his brethren. He was an adopted Egyptian and could thus have separated himself from them. He did not, however, do that. He went out to his brothers and suffered alongside them. Furthermore, when we consider the translation of "vayigdal Moshe," "and Moshe grew up," we note that shouldering responsibility for another Jew, empathizing with his plight, is a vital component in maturity. Growing up means growing out, thinking and caring beyond oneself. Moshe Rabbeinu led the way for so many who took the initiative and followed him. I recently saw a poignant story concerning Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, Rosh Hayeshivah par excellence, gadol hador, pre-eminent Torah leader of

his generation, who took the time and the effort at his advanced age, when he was physically frail and ill, to spend time with a family of little children.

One of his close talmidim, students, arrived at his apartment to speak in learning. As he walked in, the Rosh Hayeshivah said, "It is good that you came. Help me to prepare for an important visit I have to make." Rav Shach immediately rose from his chair, donned his frock and asked the student to bring him a bag of chocolate from the kitchen cupboard. He then proceeded to the door.

They went to another apartment building, and Rav Shach trudged up three floors to knock on the door of an apartment. Immediately the door opened, and three small children screamed, "The Rosh Hayeshivah is here!" The children were standing with cameras flashing, taking pictures of Rav Shach, as their mother stood there watching - with tears streaming down her face. When the children exhausted their film, Rav Shach opened his bag of chocolate, shared it with the children, and bid them good day - until next week, when he would return.

Understandably, the student was in a state of utter disbelief. On their way home he respectfully asked Rav Shach to explain what had transpired and why. The Rosh Hayeshivah explained that one of the siblings, a twelve-year old child, was gravely ill. The parents had to take the child to the United States for treatment. During their stay in America, the mother had given birth to another child, and returned to Eretz Yisrael, leaving the father in the States to oversee their sick child's treatment. Rav Shach explained that since he was privy to the facts in this situation, he felt that it behooved him to do whatever was in his power to ameliorate some of the stress in the home.

This story was related about an individual who never wasted a minute. Every moment was dedicated to Torah and mitzvah fulfillment. Yet, he made time to pose for pictures, because it would make the children happy. This was true gadlus, greatness. Moshe Rabbeinu, the quintessential leader of our people, led the way. He set the standard for empathizing with another Jew. In fact, as the Yalkut Me'am Loez relates, Moshe was the last one to cross the Red Sea. He determined that if he went in front, possibly only those near the front would be saved. He, therefore, remained at the end of the line to make sure that every Jew crossed over safely. A true leader thinks of himself last.

Moshe got up and saved them. (2:17)

Moshe Rabbeinu rescued Tziporah and her sisters from the Midyanite shepherds who would otherwise have taken advantage of them. Moshe's wife, Tziporah, later returned the favor, middah k'negged middah, measure for measure, when she circumcised her son, just before the angel would have taken Moshe's life. Every good deed that one performed is paid back to him accordingly. Hashem maintains a meticulous accounting of a person's actions, arranging that remuneration duly occurs. The following story related by Horav Chaim Kreisworth, zl, demonstrates this reality.

Rav Chaim was a student in a yeshivah in pre-World War II Warsaw that was typical of many yeshivos: there existed practically no material essentials in the yeshivah. Even beds were at a premium. In fact, most of the students slept on the cold floor. Rav Chaim was fortunate to have some kind of a bed, since he taught a class in the yeshivah, even though he was only seventeen years old. One day a young man came to study in the yeshivah. He was, unfortunately, blind, and had come to the city for treatments. During his stay, he was told to look up Chaim Kreisworth. He would see to his needs.

There was no place in the community to place him for an extended time, and since the yeshivah surely had no extra beds, Rav Chaim was happy to give up his own bed to this young man. This went on night after night: the young man would have a restful sleep in bed, while the man who was destined to be a Torah leader of exceptional stature, one whose Torah thoughts and directives would be shared with

thousands of students, slept fitfully next to him on the floor.

One fateful day, the Nazi beasts entered the yeshivah bais medrash with a list of the students. One by one, they called the students outside and shot them against the wall of the building. It was now Rav Chaim's turn to meet the executioner. His name was called, and a Nazi soldier came to accompany him outside. He now had two minutes to entreat the Almighty for a miracle.

Rav Chaim was a person whose emunah, faith, in Hashem was unequivocal. Regardless of the situation, he believed that there was always hope. He conjured up every bit of emunah and begged the Almighty to spare him. He cried and he prayed, as he walked slowly to what should have been his execution: "Hashem please have mercy on me. Remember the Torah I studied, and if the Torah is not sufficient to save me from death, consider the merit of chesed, the kindness I showed to the young blind student!"

They reached the wall of death where the bodies of the yeshivah students were piled up. The Nazi marksman looked at Rav Chaim, and then he began to stare with piercing eyes at the handsome young Torah scholar. Suddenly, for some inexplicable reason, the Nazi said to him, "Chaim, you are such a handsome young man. It is truly a shame to waste you here against this wall. I have a deal for you. I will make it appear as if I am aiming at you, but, actually, I will swerve the barrel of the rifle a few centimeters to the right, causing me to miss. During those few seconds that I will have to reload, run away as fast as your legs will carry you. By the time anyone realizes what has occurred, you will be saved."

Rav Chaim was saved, and all of Klal Yisrael had the guidance of an exceptional gadol baTorah for many years until his recent petirah, passing. The Nazi's actions were textbook miracle. There is no other way to explain what occurred. Rav Chaim's parting words sheds some light on this miracle: "See what a person can merit through an act of kindness. All of the Torah that I have been privileged to learn (and all of the Torah that he taught for over sixty years) was all due to the merit created by the chesed I performed for the blind young man."

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the first was Shifrah, and the name of the second was Puah. (1:15)

Rashi cites Chazal who say that Shifrah and Puah were none other than Yocheved and Miriam, Moshe Rabbeinu's mother and sister, respectively. Shifrah was given this name because she was meshaper, had beautified the newly-born infant. Puah, Miriam, was given her name, because she was poeh, had spoken soothingly, calming down the infant. We note that up until this point Yocheved and Miriam had not been mentioned by their real names. The only names by which we know them are names describing their interaction with the infant. One would think that such elementary and natural activity, something which is commonplace among women, would not draw attention to the extent that it be worthy of acknowledging with a name.

Horav Yerucham Levovitz, zl, the venerable Mashgiach of pre-World War II Mir, explains that names are important, playing a critical role in describing a person's essence. Therefore, when the Torah refers to Yocheved and Miriam as Shifrah and Puah, it is indicating that these names characterize them. A simple, everyday activity has the power to convey the essence of a person. This teaches us that in This World there are no minor actions or major actions. It is all based on the individual who carries out the activity. A great person lives and acts with greatness. Every activity is an indication of his

distinctiveness. A small person, on the other hand, can take the most distinguished activity and trivialize it, thereby distorting its significance. A great person earns a place in the Torah for the manner that she communicates with an infant. It becomes her benchmark, her signature.

We derive from here that the man defines the activity, rather than the action defining the man. Horav Chaim Kamil, zl, would cite from Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, that those who eulogize great Torah leaders by relating their everyday activities as stories and episodes in their lives - err greatly. These incidents are not just merely episodes; they were defining moments, which characterize the preeminence of these individuals. He cited the interaction in the Talmud Moed Katan 28a that occurred between Rabbi Chiya and the Angel of Death. The Angel of Death could not find a means of gaining access to Rabbi Chiya. One day, the Angel of Death appeared at Rabbi Chiya's door as a poor man asking for a slice of bread. Rabbi Chiya gladly gave him some bread. The Angel then asked, "The master has compassion on a poor man. Why does he not have similar compassion on "that man standing outside the door"? At that moment the door was opened and the Angel of Death displayed his fiery rod, thereby revealing his true identity, so that he was able to carry out his mission of taking Rabbi Chiya's life.

This story is mind-boggling. What similarity is there between giving a poor man a piece of bread and giving up his life to the Angel of Death? Evidently, when Rabbi Chiya gave a slice of bread to a poor man, it was more than a simple, kind gesture. He was giving a part of his life to the man. This is the level of sensitivity he manifest upon giving charity. Rav Chaim would add that to portray Rabbi Chiya as a man who was openhearted and gladly gave bread to the poor would be a grave error. He did not just give bread; he gave his life!

We now understand the profundity of Rav Yeruchem's statement: The individual defines the action. Rabbi Chiya transformed the act of sharing a slice of bread with a poor man into a lofty gesture. He gave with his heart and soul, tantamount to giving up his life. Likewise, one woman can "pooh pooh" an infant, and the act has little or no meaning, while another woman can do the exact same act; but it is an act of spiritual ascendancy that defines her character.

Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe by the river... she saw the basket... and she sent her maidservant, and she took it. (2:5)

The effect of one little gesture can be outstanding. Bisyah, the daughter of Pharaoh, stretched out her hand to an infant in the water. Did she have any idea who this infant was? Did it cross her mind that this infant would lead the Jews out of hundreds of years of slavery to her father? Did she know that this infant would become the quintessential rebbe of our People and the father of prophecy? Did she realize that, as a result of this gesture, she would be eternally famous, earning the gratitude of every Jew throughout the millennia? She certainly knew nothing. She acted because it was the correct thing to do. A baby is in the water: you save it. She would deal with the consequences later. Can we imagine what might have occurred, how history would have been transformed, had Bisyah not stretched out her hand to save Moshe? Certainly Harbei shluchim laMakom, "The Almighty has many agents," and His Divine plan will always succeed in being carried out. Bisyah, by her small gesture, became one of those fortunate agents.

Every Jewish child is a potential Moshe. We have no clue what his future might be, if given the proper environment and education. If the opportunity arises, as it did for Bisyah, one should follow her example and respond accordingly. While some sit around and call meetings or convene committees, others move forward and act. They will make the difference. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, would relate the following narrative to demonstrate the significance of early and immediate intervention. The Maggid,

zl, m'Dubno was once walking down the street when he chanced upon a poor blind man, dressed in tattered, old clothes, being led by a young boy. The average person would turn his head away from this despairing sight. The Maggid was not the average person. When he saw pain, he felt pain. While another person might have bemoaned the anguish that others sustained - and even have expressed his own gratitude to the Almighty for providing him with healthy eyes and a basic livelihood - the Maggid was not just "another" person. He immediately went over to the poor pair and queried them, "My brothers, where are you from, and where are you going?"

The blind man was too depressed to respond. He had had enough of "do-gooders" who eased their consciences with friendly salutations. He needed much more than a "good morning" greeting. The young boy, however, looked up to the Maggid with pleading eyes, explaining that his father had been sick for a while. He had lost his vision. His mother had recently succumbed to a grave illness. The hapless pair were alone in the world, with the young boy left to care for his father. The father was becoming agitated. "With whom are you speaking?" he asked his son in an aggravated tone. "Come, we must move on."

It was the Maggid who replied to the father's query, "Please, my friend, you will go soon. Tell me. Have you eaten yet today?" "No," answered the boy. "I am taking my father to the community soup kitchen, so that we can eat something, and then we will return home."

The Maggid said, "Come with me. I will prepare a meal for you that will be far better than anything you could get at the soup kitchen." The young boy's eyes began to tear with gratitude. The mere thought of a filling meal, a kind word, a smile from a benevolent rav was overwhelming. Even his father acquiesced gracefully to the Maggid's invitation. After the meal, when everyone was relaxed, the Maggid asked the pair, "Would you care to remain in my home as permanent guests? I will provide you with a warm, clean room, three nourishing meals a day - all for free. Moreover, the young lad will be enrolled in the local cheder, where he will study Torah in an environment that is best suited for him, both socially and spiritually."

The father was in a quandary. No one had ever been so nice to them. True, there had been individuals who were kindhearted, to a point. To be so selfless, however, to offer so much for nothing, this had never before occurred. The young boy was delighted. He thrived and began to smile again. With a brilliant mind and an insatiable desire to study Torah, he quickly excelled in his studies and rose above his peers. His father eventually succumbed to his many ailments, but left the world knowing that his ben yachid, only child, was provided for.

The young boy matured and become an erudite Torah scholar. His fame as a posek, halachic arbitrator, spread throughout the region. He accepted the distinguished rabbanus, rabbinic pulpit, in the city of Brodie. Yes, this young boy was none other than the saintly Horav Shlomo Kluger, zl. The Chafetz Chaim would conclude the story, "Can you imagine if the Maggid would not have made the gesture of inviting them to his house? Had he been just like everyone else, we might not have had a Rav Shlomo Kluger!"

Moshe grew up and went out to his brothers, and he observed their burdens. (2:11)

From the reading of the pasuk we may deduce that Moshe's "growing up" meant to leave the splendor of his palatial surroundings and enter into the world of responsibility, the world of sharing the pain with his fellow Jews. Rashi teaches us that Moshe's shouldering responsibility meant to "see their suffering and grieve with them." It was not enough to simply be aware of their pain. Raising awareness was not enough for Moshe Rabbeinu. Feeling their pain would motivate action. The Alter, zl, m'Kelm says that Moshe pictured in his mind the images of their slavery, to the point that he felt that he was with them,

suffering from their pain. Moshe hurt so much that when he complained to Hashem, he said, "My Lord, why have You done evil to this people?" (Shemos 5:22). How does one talk like this to Hashem? Indeed, Chazal tell us that the Middas haDin, Attribute of Strict Justice, wanted to strike Moshe, but Hashem intervened, saying, "Leave him be; he speaks for the pain of the Jewish People."

This was Moshe Rabbeinu. He felt their pain to the point that he complained to Hashem. Chazal tell us that his criticism was worse than the sin of mei merivah, striking the rock instead of speaking to it. Yet, Hashem overlooked Moshe's infraction because he spoke out for the Jewish pain. He reacted to the pain because he hurt. We derive from here that what might be viewed as a sin for a great person might actually be considered a laudatory act for someone who is spiritually less distinguished. Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, explains that an individual who is on a lower spiritual plane will invariably act in a manner commensurate with his spiritual proclivities and with his understanding of right and wrong. Thus, what he considers a praiseworthy endeavor may, in fact, be regarded for someone on a much higher spiritual plateau to be sinful. He interprets this into the Tefillah which we recite for geshem, rain, on Shemini Atzeres. We entreat Hashem in the merit of Moshe Rabbeinu who "hit the stone and water came forth." This is difficult to understand, considering that Moshe's act of striking the stone was viewed by Hashem as a grave sin, which ultimately was the basis for barring Moshe from entering Eretz Yisrael. How can Moshe's action be used as a merit for us?

Rav Neiman explains that while striking the stone was an error on Moshe's part, it was viewed negatively only in the context of his elevated spiritual status. For us, or anybody else, however, that action might have constituted a mitzvah! Klal Yisrael was famished. They needed water. Moshe responded accordingly, because when they hurt, he also hurt. Moshe's error was the result of an overwhelming love for - and sensitivity to the needs of - each and every Jew. For him, this act was tainted ever-so-slightly by a vestige of sin. For us, it would be a mitzvah. In that merit, we supplicate Hashem for water.

He saw and behold! The bush was burning in the fire but the bush was not consumed. Moshe thought, "I will turn aside now and look... why will the bush not be burned?" And Hashem called out to him from amid the bush. (3:2,3,4)

Moshe Rabbeinu's first prophetic vision consisted of a strange fire that was burning in a bush, yet the bush was not being consumed. His curiosity was piqued and he investigated this wondrous sight. Hashem then "introduced" Himself from amid the burning bush. Obviously, there is so much to be derived from this encounter. We will focus on a few of the lessons. The thorn bush is the lowest, the least distinguished of the various forms of vegetation that grow in the wilderness. Yet, Hashem chose to reveal His Glory through a burning flame in a lowly thorn bush. This conveyed a message to Moshe: Imo anochi b'tzarah, "I am with him/them in his/their anguish." Even when the nation has fallen to the nadir of depravity, to the lowest of the forty-nine gates of tumah, spiritual impurity, the people can rise up and merit Divine Revelation. The Jew, regardless of how far and how deep he has fallen, can always come back. The "light" is always on.

Conversely, there is another lesson to be derived from considering another perspective of this revelation. The greatest individual, one who has even risen to the point that he has been granted Gilui Shechinah, Divine Revelation, must know that he is still nothing more than a lowly thorn bush, who can just as easily sin with a golden calf. Did this not happen with Klal Yisrael? They experienced the miracles which catalyzed yetzias Mitzrayim, our liberation from Egypt. They stood at the foot of Har Sinai and received the Torah amid the greatest Revelation to ever occur. Yet, they quickly fell into the abyss of sin and worshipped the Golden Calf.

Chazal teach us in the Talmud Berachos 57a, that poshei Yisrael, Jewish sinners, are filled with mitzvos, like a pomegranate is filled with seeds. Even the Jews who are lowest on the spiritual totem pole, those who are referred to as a poshei Yisrael, still can perform mitzvos in order to achieve the status of a burning bush. Furthermore, as Horav Avraham Yaffan, zl, infers, one can be aflame with the fiery enthusiasm of Torah, he can be a sneh boeir baeish, fiery thorn bush, but still remain a bush. The lowly bush within him does not become consumed. Some, however, are able to pull themselves out of the muck and rise up out of the thorn bush.

The fiery bush that does not become consumed conveys another message. The Midrash says that the bush signifies Klal Yisrael; the fire represents Egypt. The lesson is: the Egyptians can burn us, but they cannot consume us. Klal Yisrael suffers throughout the millennia, but we are still here. We will not be consumed. The Alshich HaKadosh wonders why the Jewish People are compared to a lowly thorn bush? Is this metaphor not more applicable to the gentile world?

The Alshich explains that in Egypt, there was no distinction between Jew and Egyptian. The Jew had descended to the forty-ninth level of impurity. It reached the point that the Heavenly Angels could not discern between the two. "They are both idol worshippers," they said. There is, however, a distinction. Regardless of the Jew's descent into depravity, he is still a thorn bush. The thorns are part of a bush. They have roots. They connect to something, to a source. The inhabitants of the gentile world are like thorns - plain, loose thorns that become consumed in the fire. The Jews are a burning bush that continues to live. It burns, but it does not burn out. We have roots in our unique ancestry. We are firmly rooted in a foundation of holy Patriarchs and righteous forebears. Yes, we might have become like thorns, but we are still connected to the bush. We always have hope.

In support of these ideas, we find in the Midrash that Chazal relate that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha was once asked by a gentile why Hashem appeared to Moshe in a thorn bush. Rabbi Yehoshua immediately responded, "If He would have appeared in a date palm or a sycamore, you would have the same question." In other words, some people just want to ask questions. They are not interested in the answers. Regardless of this, Rabbi Yehoshua explained that the Almighty wanted to convey the lesson that every place, its lowliness notwithstanding, is filled with the Shechinah. There is no place anywhere in which the Shechinah is not to be found.

The Maharal m'Prague adds that this idea applies equally to people: there is no person that is not suited for Divine Revelation. As noted before, Klal Yisrael had descended to the forty-ninth level of tumah. Yet, they experienced the mora gadol, awesome power, which the author of the Haggadah interprets as Gilui Shechinah, Divine Revelation. This was the precursor to accepting the Torah. Every Jew, despite how low and how far away he might have fallen, can be privy to Divine Revelation.

Last, I recently saw an inspiring thought. In the Mechilta D'Rashbi, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says that there was another interesting phenomenon connected with the thorn bush. It had flowers blooming on it. Now, let us peruse our tumultuous history. There have been fires: the Romans; the Crusades; the Inquisition; the pogroms in Europe; the Cossacks; the Holocaust. Yet, throughout all of these infernos, the Jewish attitude towards our Torah and its study and dissemination never waned. In fact, it bloomed. Amidst the flames, the Torah, our lifeblood, kept coursing through our nation. It never stopped, and it never will.

And behold! A youth was crying. (2:6)

The Baal HaTurim writes that the youth was none other than Aharon, Moshe's brother. Miriam had placed him near the basket to watch his infant brother, Moshe. When Aharon saw that Moshe was crying, he was also moved to tears. This is a lesson for all of us. When another Jew is crying, it is reason for each and every one of us to cry. That is the meaning of empathy. To feel someone's pain means to be moved to express the same emotion that our friend is compelled to express. Children are like that. They feel for one another. Regrettably, as we mature and become independent, this is an automatic emotional response that we grow out of. Aharon HaKohen never did. He always empathized with other Jews. He became the individual appointed to wear the Choshen with the names of the Shevatim over his heart, because his heart beat with the pulse of the Jewish People. When he aged, his caring heart stayed young.

Horav Shalom Dov Ber, zl, m'Lubavitch, was deeply engrossed in study as his young son was sleeping in his crib in a nearby room. The infant began to cry, but his father was so involved in study that he did not hear him. The child's grandfather, the Baal HaTanya, lived one floor above them. He was also studying Torah. Yet, he was able to hear his grandson's cries. He went downstairs and discovered that the infant had fallen out of the crib. He picked up the infant, soothed and placed him back in his crib. Afterwards, he went over to his son and said, "Torah study should not be an excuse for not hearing the cry of another in need. Regardless of his age, you must hear their cries and reach out to him."

I wrote the following story a number of years ago, but I am taking my writer's prerogative to cite it once again as a springboard upon which to expound. The story is about Joseph Beyda, zl, one of the primary founders and directors of the Sephardic Bikur Holim, and it relates how he became involved in its incredible work. The story took place at a meeting of volunteers that Joseph came to meet in order to motivate and inspire the people who had been doing so much. He began by asking, "Why do we do what we do? Why do we stay at meetings until the wee hours of the morning, trying to help the poor and less fortunate? Let me share with you an experience that I had last week.

"I went on a visit to a young woman who had cancer. Her husband had left her. One of her children was autistic. As I sat with her, she held her young, autistic child in her loving arms, poignantly describing her nightmare of a life to me. During this time, her healthy three-year old daughter began to cry. I thought to myself, 'Why is she crying? Is it because her mother is spending so much time with her son? Is it because she knows her mother is gravely ill and might not live? Is it because she misses her father who will probably never return? Or is she simply hungry or tired?' I did not know why she was crying, but I knew one thing for certain: her mother was incapable of helping her. Her mother's hands were more than full. I attempted to calm this beautiful, helpless little girl by telling her, 'It will be all right.'

"But I realized that I was lying. It would not be all right. Her mother was sick; her father was gone; her brother needed constant attention - and she was hungry and tired.

"I went to bed that night, but I could not sleep. That little girl's plaintive cry kept me awake. I could not get her out of my mind. I could not help hearing those cries and seeing those bitter tears. I decided then that I had to do something to help her, to alleviate her pain in some way. Then I began to cry. I cried for her and for all the other little girls like her.

"This is why all of the other volunteers and I do what we do: We hear the cries! Perhaps others can turn down the sound and go about their daily routines. We cannot ignore the cries. As long as we hear the cries, we will continue to reach out to help."

The bottom line is: How can we ignore the pain of others? This empathy should be one of the overriding concerns of our lives. When someone else hurts, we hurt. What about those, however, who do not cry out loud, who whimper or put on a smile to conceal the hurt and suffering that they are

experiencing? What is it going to take for us to listen beyond what we can hear, and see beyond what appears before our eyes? There are people in our respective communities who are weeping silently. Some need parnassah, livelihood. For others, it might be a shidduch, matrimonial match, while for others it might be a problem with a child or a health issue at home. There are those who are simply unhappy. They feel that their lives are one big dead end, and, in some cases, for various reasons, it is.

The following story, related by Rabbi Yechiel Spero in his book, "One Shining Moment," portrays the attitude we should manifest towards others. Horav Shmuel Salant, zl, was the venerable Rav of Yerushalayim in the middle to latter part of the nineteenth century. He was known as an uncompromising halachist, who meticulously followed the law to the finest detail. As rav, he carried the concerns of his community on his shoulders. The story takes place in a shivah home, a home struck by tragedy as a young father, a Torah scholar, suddenly took ill and died shortly thereafter. There were no words to describe the tragedy and pain, the misery and the sorrow, that the family was experiencing. The young children had no idea how to react or to whom they should turn. Regrettably, neither did anyone else. People came by and just sat there waiting for the mourners to speak. This is consistent with halachah, which demands that the aveilim, mourners, commence the conversation. Since the mourners hardly ever spoke, the entire room remained uncomfortably silent.

When Rav Shmuel entered the house, the crowd immediately moved to the side to allow the elderly sage to enter. He sat down in front of the young aveilim. The contrast in age was almost palpable. Here was a Torah luminary who was three quarters of a century older than the young aveilim who were not yet bar mitzvah. The room remained quiet; no one spoke.

Rav Shmuel waited a moment before initiating a conversation with the young boys. As if a dam had burst, the young mourners opened up and began to share their emotions with Rav Shmuel. The rav described to them who their father was, portraying to them the kind of an exceptional talmid chacham, Torah scholar, he was. He described the "place" where his neshamah now reposed. Their father would always love and watch over them, the rav explained. Soon their sorrowful faces even began to display small smiles. After about an hour of animated conversation, Rav Shmuel rose and prepared to leave. The family had now begun the difficult road to closure and healing.

As Rav Shmuel walked out, accompanied by his closest disciples, one of them queried him why he had initiated the conversation with the aveilim, bypassing the halachah that required the aveil to speak first. The sage stopped suddenly, looked at his student incredulously, and asked, "Did you not hear them?" He was indicating that he had adhered to the halachah and that, indeed, the aveilim had initiated the conversation. The talmidim all looked at their rebbe with shocked eyes, since they had not heard the aveilim say a single word to begin the conversation.

Rav Shmuel continued, "I cannot believe that you did not hear their cries of pain. The moment I walked into the house I heard the children crying out in sorrow, in pain, in misery. How could you not have heard it?"

We understand what had occurred. Rav Shmuel's ability to hear was very acute. He could hear a silent cry, because he listened with his heart - not with his ears.

I have indeed seen the affliction of My People...I will descend to rescue it...and bring it up to a land flowing with milk and honey...Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain. And they say to me, "What is His Name? What shall I say to them?" (3:7,8,12,13)

If we peruse the pesukim carefully, we will note that Hashem actually presented Moshe Rabbeinu with

three reasons that he should accept the leadership of the Jewish People in order to lead them from Egypt. Regarding the first two reasons or purposes of the geulah, Exodus, Moshe responded in the negative, by employing a powerful excuse that precluded him from leadership. When Hashem stated the third reason, Moshe once again demurred, but, this time, it was not in principle. It was for a technical reason. In principle, he was willing to lead them from Egypt. How are we to understand this dialogue and the underlying reasons for Moshe's reluctance to lead, both in principle and for technical reasons?

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, analyzes this dialogue and derives a powerful message from it concerning the foundation and purpose of life in general and life in Eretz Yisrael in particular. The first time Hashem spoke to Moshe, He said, "I have, indeed, seen the affliction of My people...and I have heard its outcry (3:7). He then added, "I shall descend to rescue it from the hand of Egypt and to bring it up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey." (3:8) Moshe's reply was simply, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, that I should take My People of Yisrael out of Egypt?" (3:11)

Hashem presented Moshe with the reasons for redeeming Klal Yisrael. First, it was their affliction and pain. Their cries had reached the Heavenly Throne, their pain was intense. Second, Hashem wanted to bring them to Eretz Yisrael, their ultimate homeland. Hashem wanted Moshe to assume the leadership of this nation for these two reasons. In response to these two reasons, Moshe replied with a principle, "I am not the one for the job. It is just not me."

It was then that Hashem countered with a third reason for Yisrael's redemption. And He said, "For I will be with you...when you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain." (3:12) Now it was a different story. Klal Yisrael was to receive the Torah, something that could never take place in Egypt. Moshe no longer refused out of principle. Now it was for technical reasons: How was he to describe who had sent him? He did have a speech impediment that might undermine his ability to present the issues to the people properly. Moshe's earlier reason for refusal, his unsuitability to lead them, no longer played a role. Now it was a reason that might undermine his effectiveness in convincing the people and Pharaoh of his mission.

Rav Schlesinger explains that Moshe is teaching us an important principle concerning life. Moshe felt that the plague of yetzias Mitzrayim, the Egyptian exodus, could not be simply to alleviate Jewish pain and misery, so that they could now live a pain-free life without any spiritual restraints. To be liberated from slavery for the purpose of achieving freedom, so that one can now do whatever his heart so desires, is not a valid reason for liberation. Likewise, to be freed so that one can now go to Eretz Yisrael to live a lifestyle without spiritual restrictions, is similarly not a valid reason for freedom. To be freed from one misery, so that one could succumb to spiritual infamy, was also no reason for deliverance. It was only after Hashem indicated that the goal of the Exodus was that the Jewish People could come to Har Sinai and accept the Torah; the Torah which would be a vital and active part of their lives; the Torah that would guide and inspire them spiritually, that he no longer demurred in principle. He only had certain technical issues that needed to be addressed.

Leaving Egypt for Eretz Yisrael is an unparalleled spiritual opportunity. The significance of this move, however, is overshadowed when the people do not live a life of adherence to Torah and mitzvos. The purpose of Jewish life is to serve Hashem. To live in Eretz Yisrael and ignore the real purpose of this life is to defame the very principle by which life in this country is granted to us. When Moshe heard that the Jewish People would leave Egypt to accept a Torah which would then become part of their lifestyle in the Holy Land, he no longer had issues in principle regarding his participation in their

liberation.

This is why we say on Pesach, when we recite the Hagaddah, "Had He given us the Torah, and not brought us into Eretz Yisrael, Dayeinu, it would have been enough." Interestingly, it does not say, "Had He brought us into Eretz Yisrael and not given us the Torah, it would have been enough," because this would not have been enough. To be brought to Eretz Yisrael without the Torah would have served no purpose, for a life without Torah-- even in Eretz Yisrael-- is of little value. A life subjugated to the will of one's yetzer hora, evil inclination, a life of complete hefkeirus-- without control, values and morals-- is not considered truly living in Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, living in Eretz Yisrael demands even greater spiritual integrity.

Afterwards Moshe and Aharon came and said to Pharaoh, "So said Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael, "Send out My People." (5:1)

After much preparation, Moshe Rabbeinu stood before Pharaoh and demanded that he allow the Jewish People to leave the country for a short excursion into the desert. This preceded the plagues and the ultimate liberation of the Jewish People from Egypt. Moshe did not become Klal Yisrael's leader overnight. It was a process that evolved over time, a process that is worth studying for the lessons it imparts concerning leadership and endeavoring on behalf of a community. Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Shlita, points out that Moshe worked for, his position. He worked his way up from helping the individual, to reaching out to the community, until that auspicious moment when he stood before Pharaoh as Klal Yisrael's designated leader, demanding their release from bondage.

Let us trace his stepping stones to leadership. We first find Moshe going out to his brethren, seeing their toil and empathizing with their pain and misery. He did whatever was in his power to alleviate some of their hardship, but it was only partial assistance. Full liberation was a far-away dream. This did not, however, deter his efforts on behalf of the individual. He was overwhelmed neither with how much had to be done nor with his partial success. He did what he could, and he continued to do. He lent a shoulder to the individual, helping wherever he could. He encouraged and gave solace. This was his first step on the ladder of leadership: the individual.

After awhile, he ascended to the next rung and presented himself before Pharaoh with a practical suggestion: "Pharaoh, do you realize that the Jewish slaves are not allowed a day's rest? Surely, you understand that a slave who does not rest one day a week will die from exertion." When Pharaoh heard this, he said, "You are right. Give them a break for one day each week." Moshe, of course, selected the seventh day of the week, Shabbos Kodesh, as their day of rest. It worked. The Jews rested and studied on Shabbos. It rejuvenated them and gave them the fortitude to continue. Moshe was now endeavoring on behalf of the public, but he had still not reached his zenith, the leadership of Klal Yisrael.

There was a time lapse between the moment he went out to the individual Jew until he actually took the people out of Egypt. During this entire time, he empathized and worked on their behalf. He did not sit back simply because he did not have the exalted position of quintessential leader. Moshe's actions went beyond what his wisdom dictated was feasible. Yet, he surged forward and did what he felt had to be done, even if it might not be compatible with his seichel and hegyon, common sense and intellectual acumen. His actions superseded his wisdom.

In Pirkei Avos 3:12, Chazal teach us: "A person whose deeds exceed his wisdom shall have enduring wisdom, but one whose wisdom exceeds his deeds shall not have enduring wisdom." This means that one who refuses to act, to undertake an endeavor, to "step up to the plate" unless his intellect does a feasibility survey, until he comprehends every aspect of his deed and deems it within his capability to succeed, will not succeed in his growth, both from a mundane and a spiritual vantage point. The Jewish

People stood at Har Sinai and accepted the Torah with a resounding declaration of, Naaseh v'nishmah, "We will do and we will listen." This meant that even if they did not yet understand the Divine reason for the commandments, they would not make the fulfillment of mitzvos contingent upon their comprehension. This important principle has been a by-word for our People since that great moment. We do what must be done, regardless of whether we understand the reason. Likewise, if there is something to be done for another Jew or for the betterment of the community, we do not stop to think and weigh the chances for success or the political correctness of our endeavor. We act! Moshe taught us the way. We do not stop because something is difficult. We do not stop because it might not be acceptable. We do not stop because it seems unfeasible. We do; Hashem assures the success of our actions.

Hodiu ba'amim alilosav.

Make His deeds known among the peoples.

The very fact that the Jewish People still exist and thrive is in itself the greatest miracle. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, feels that this is especially important with regard to our Holocaust remembrance. While we certainly mourn the cataclysmic destruction that occurred, we should also focus on the miracle of our survival. All too often, we become bogged down with mourning and depression, failing to emphasize that we have survived and we must offer our gratitude to the Almighty for this. Individuals who have been in extreme mortal danger should never forget the miracles connected to their survival. The nation as a whole should constantly remind itself and proclaim its miraculous survival to the world. The indestructibility of the Jewish nation should be universally emphasized. This will not prevent modern day anti-Semites from acting in accordance with their heritage of persecuting and harassing Jews, but it is important for us to remember and proclaim it, so that it remains fresh in the eyes of the world.

The Gaon zl, m'Vilna, interprets alilosav, deeds, as referring to the tremendous chesed, kindness, of the Almighty, who, first grants us good fortune and then removes it as a form of providing a remedy for one's illness. Rather than penalize a person with new punitive measures, Hashem simply deprives him of the good fortune which he has enjoyed until now.

And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael who were coming to Egypt. (1:1) In the preface to his commentary to Sefer Shemos, the Ramban refers to this sefer as the book of galus and geulah, exile and redemption. This seems enigmatic when we take into consideration that the majority of the sefer deals with geulah, while it only addresses galus in the first two parshios. I once heard that in order to understand the depth of the galus and its effect on the people, one should study the redemption, including its various stages and challenges, as well as the reaction of the people. In that way, he will have a more penetrating analysis of the exile. In other words, how people react during redemption is the true barometer of the effect of the exile.

The Jewish People were in Egypt for two hundred and ten years. When they departed, only one fifth of the national population was left. Chazal explain this in their commentary to Shemos 13:18: Va'chamushim alu mei'erezt Mitzrayim, "And they went up armed from the land of Egypt." The word chamushim, which is translated as "armed," is a derivative of the word chamishah, five. This prompts Chazal to suggest that only one-fifth of the nation left, while the other four-fifths died during the three-days of darkness. Regarding the quality of the one-fifth that left, the Torah relates their arguments and complaints, in addition to the sins of the Golden Calf and the spies. It is clear that, although this is the group that left Egypt, these were spiritually deficient individuals, remnants of an exile that had taken a

terrible toll on their emotions and spirituality.

By studying how Klal Yisrael behaved during the geulah, one can understand how devastating the galus really was. Thus, Sefer Shemos occupies itself with relating the story of the redemption and the exile, for in every aspect of the redemption, we perceive a deeper understanding of the exile.

We see this in our own time. Those who survived the Holocaust may have remained alive, but they certainly have also remained traumatized - some emotionally and others spiritually. The reaction of each individual survivor during his redemptive period must be taken in context with the terror and persecution he personally sustained during his exile. We should not judge, because we cannot judge. Clearly, anyone who survived that black era of Jewish history had his own individual experiences that played havoc with his life. For many, liberation was not the end of this torment, but the continuation, as the survivors continue to carry the baggage of their previous exile. We, who were fortunate not to have lived through their dread, can only stand back and look on with reverence and awe at those who continue to survive.

Yosef died, and all his brothers and that entire generation. The Bnei Yisrael were fruitful, teemed, increased and became strong - very, very much so; and the land became filled with them. (1:6, 7)

When we refer to shibud Mitzrayim, the bondage of Egypt, what usually comes to mind is an image of intense physical labor. This is wrong, explains Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita. He cites the Kotzker Rebbe, zl, who interprets the pasuk in Tehillim 128:2: Yegia kapecha ki socheil, ashrecha v'tov lach. "When you eat the labor of your hands, you are praiseworthy, and it is well with you." A person who works with his hands is fortunate and praiseworthy. Rav Galinsky explains that if it is only one's hands that are laboring, regardless of how difficult it may be, he can manage the situation. It is much worse when his head is absorbed with every aspect of his work. Then, he is not as fortunate.

A chasid once came to the Kotzker and complained bitterly that alien thoughts were creeping into his mind during davening. The Rebbe responded, "You call them alien thoughts! They are not alien. They are your real thoughts. It is what you think about all of the time. They represent your priority in life. How can you expect to daven properly to Hashem if your mind is suffused with all of your business deals? On the contrary, your Shemoneh Esrai is what is alien to you."

Let us delve deeper into the Kotzker's interpretation. The great tzarah, trouble, of the Egyptian bondage was not the physical labor. It was not the pain Klal Yisrael suffered at the end of the day. Yes, their hands and feet hurt; in fact, probably every limb in their bodies must have been in agony. That, however, was not the real shibud. The physical labor did not catalyze their descent to the forty-ninth level of ritual impurity. It did not give them the status of ovdei avodah zarah, idol worshippers. No, it had to be something else.

Chazal teach us that as long as one of the brothers was alive the Jews did not become enslaved. The shibud began after no one was left. This seems to be the Midrash's commentary to the parshah: The bondage began as soon as the previous generation had passed on. This is not consistent with the Midrash on the next pasuk that attributes the onset of the shibud to the intermingling of the Jews with Egyptian society. They moved out of the Goshen ghetto and purchased villas in the Egyptian suburbs. After all, they had come of age. They wanted to be like everybody else. How are we to understand these contrasting commentaries?

Rav Galinsky feels that the two interpretations are connected; together, they explain the origin of the slavery. As long as the members of the previous generation were alive, the Jews maintained their shtoltz, dignity and class. There was a regal bearing, a sort of nobility to their demeanor, which

distinguished them from the common Egyptian. Thus, the tumah, spiritual contamination, that was so much a part of the base Egyptian lifestyle, was distant from them. When they no longer had whom to dignify and look up to in reverence, they began to lose their own sense of aristocracy. Klal Yisrael wanted to be like the Egyptians, because they did not retain the sense of pride that had been generated by their forebears. They began to acculturate, and this led to all-out assimilation. It all began with their loss of nobility, resulting from the passing of the original generation that came down to Egypt with Yaakov Avinu. They lost sight of who they were. When one has no positive self-image, he gravitates to wherever and whoever will accept him.

The Jews became Egyptians because they thought that by commingling with the citizens of their host country, they would themselves become citizens and develop a positive self-image. How wrong they were then, and how wrong have we been ever since that first test of assimilation. We have attempted this endeavor of futility in every country that has been our home, and we have always lost. The Jew is supposed to be distinct, his Jewish pride serving as his only self-image. It happened in Egypt; it happened in Spain; it happened in Germany; and it is happening in America. We are the bearers of a royal pedigree with a mission to be "a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation." Is anything more distinguished than this?

The king of Egypt died, and Bnei Yisrael groaned because of the work, and they cried out. Their outcry because of the work went up to G-d. G-d heard their moaning. (2:23, 24)

The second Sefer of the Torah begins with the terrible galus, exile of Egypt. The Jewish People were subjected to the cruelest and diabolical forms of slavery, as the Egyptians thought of every innovation to break the Jews physically, emotionally and spiritually. If we were to peruse the annals of history, we would find that the only dark period during which the Egyptian taskmasters found their parallel was the Holocaust, when Hitler's monsters also devised new ways to deny the Jew his right to life and liberty.

We are told that Pharaoh died and was replaced by a new ruler. The Midrash, quoted by Rashi, claims that Pharaoh did not actually die; rather, he contracted leprosy. His advisers told him the best therapy for this affliction was to bathe himself twice daily in the blood of one hundred and fifty Jewish babies. Pharaoh authorized the slaughter of three hundred Jewish infants every day. When the Jewish People heard of this new decree against them, they began to wail bitterly to Hashem.

When we take into consideration the absolute brutality of this decree, it makes our blood shudder at the callousness and cruelty to which a human being can descend. Furthermore, it was approved by his populace. There is no record of anybody voicing their protest over this despotism. The Jewish People wept, and no one listened. No one but Hashem. One would think that such a harsh decree would have brought about the Jewish redemption. It did not. A careful reading of the text indicates that something other than Pharaoh's cruelty catalyzed the liberation of the Jewish People. It occurred because "Bnei Yisrael groaned because of the work, and they cried out." Hashem heard their outcry.

In other words, it was not Pharaoh's savage behavior that prompted the end of the Egyptian slavery. Rather, the heartfelt and sincere prayer of the Jews, motivated by their intense suffering, elicited Hashem's mercy that brought an end to the reign of terror.

Horav Avrohom Pam, zl, in Noam Avrohom, Rabbi Shalom Smith's latest anthology of the Rosh Hayeshivah's shmuessen, ethical discourses, cites the Zechusa D'Avraham, Horav Avraham Chechanover, zl, who notes this and derives from here a fundamental principle in avodas Hashem, serving the Almighty. David HaMelech says in Sefer Tehillim 102:1, Tefillah l'ani ki yaatof v'lifnei Hashem yishpoch sicho, "A prayer of the afflicted man when he faints, and pours forth his supplication before Hashem." The Zohar HaKadosh interprets this to mean that the prayers of an afflicted person

manifest a unique quality. A broken-hearted Jew who is engulfed in suffering, beset by tragedy and persecution, pours out his heart to Hashem with sincerity. The desperate situation, in which he finds himself, compels him to pray as he has never prayed before. Indeed, this sincere prayer has the power to elevate other tefillos that just did not contain this degree of integrity.

The Zohar adds that not every tefillah has the power to pierce through the many spiritual barriers, impediments and kitrugim, indictments, against us. Hashem requires sincerity. For tefillah to be effective, the petitioner must be sincere; he must concentrate and reflect upon before Whom he is standing. The very fact that he has the opportunity to offer his supplication personally to the Almighty King of Kings, and to address Him directly saying, Baruch atah Hashem, "Blessed are You Hashem," is an indicator that he is speaking as a son to a Father. What an awesome privilege we have! Yet, we allow it to slip right through our hands, by failing to fulfill its requirements.

Hashem is known to us as the Shome'a Tefillah, One who listens to prayer. Do we ever contemplate the depth of this appellation? Hashem listens to sincere prayer. Why do we not take advantage of it? Any Jew has the power to address Hashem whenever he pleases. Hashem listens. Yet, we are so pre-occupied with our own lives and our foolish mundane trivialities, that even when we do daven, it is nothing more than lip service. We read the words by rote, usually from memory, because we are too involved to look into a siddur. Plus, the siddur slows us down, because we have to say every word. Yet, we expect Hashem to listen, accept and respond positively to such a prayer.

Now that we have explained why so many of our prayers are not authentic prayers, we understand why a prayer motivated by serious duress, a grave illness, a terrible affliction, or a painful experience has such driving power and effectiveness. It is sincere. It is real. It is expressed with concentration and devotion. We think very carefully about before Whom we are standing and Whom we are addressing. In other words, for once, we are davening the way we should. We cry out to Hashem from the depths of our heart: "Hear us Hashem!" Such a prayer ascends to Heaven unimpeded by the obstacles and detractions that often block our "usual" prayer. As it pierces through the Gates of Mercy, it continues on until it stands before the Heavenly Throne in its pristine nature. Hashem listens, because He is "close to the broken-hearted" (Tehillim 34:19).

The Rosh Hayeshivah adds that such a pure tefillah has the power to vickel arum, envelop or wrap around, yaatof, and elevate the other tefillos, the prayers that he and other people have recited, which-- due to their lack of sincerity-- have been "hanging around," just not strong enough to evoke Hashem's mercy and salvation in order to be accepted in Heaven.

The Zechusa D'Avraham explains that the Jewish People certainly prayed to Hashem for redemption from their bondage, even before Pharaoh issued his terrible decree to slay the three hundred babies every day. However, it was a different tefillah. It was a moan, a groan, in response to their slavery. It was more of a complacent daily krechtz, sigh, from their over-work. However, when they witnessed the daily blood bath, while nobody offered an outcry of protest; when they felt the helplessness of their situation, they finally realized that this was a crisis unlike anything else they had experienced. They had nowhere to turn but upward to Hashem- the only Source of their salvation. This prayer of sincerity and meaning from the bottom of their hearts was able to "wrap together" all of the other prayers that they had issued earlier, but were not good enough. Hashem listened, and He responded.

Rav Pam derives an important lesson from here. One who has sustained a tragic experience-- and whose heart is now broken-- has the advantage that his tefillos can take on a greatly enhanced significance in Heaven, characterized by the ability to envelop other prayers that had been deficient. A person can rise from the depths of personal tragedy and effect salvation for others. He now has the key

that will open the Gates of Mercy. He has the ability and the power. What greater chesed is this for others, and what greater z'chus, merit, it is for him!

Hashem said to Moshe, "Stretch out your hand and grasp its tail." He stretched out his hand and grasped it tightly, and it became a staff in his palm. (4:4)

Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, renders this passage homiletically. He views every Jewish child as a mateh, staff of Hashem, in Moshe Rabbeinu's palm. This mateh can sprout and grow as long as the Moshe Rabbeinu's, the rebbeim of every generation, continue to hold on to their students. Every Jewish child can grow miraculously and develop the powers of the Mateh Elokim, if he is nurtured by his rebbe, given the spiritual sustenance that is essential to becoming a talmid chacham, Torah scholar. Regrettably, there are awesome students who "fall to the ground," out of the grasp of their rebbe's hand, and become transformed from a Mateh Elokim into its diabolical counterpart. It deteriorates to such an extent that, vayanav Moshe mipanav, "Moshe fled from it" (ibid 4:3). When the rebbe counters, "What can I do now? He is no longer under my purview. I have no hashpaah, influence, over him"; the answer parallels what Hashem told Moshe when his staff turned into a serpent: Echoz bi'znav, "Stretch out your hand and grab its tail." Take hold of this student a second time and you will see how effective you can now be. At that time the student will revert to being a Mateh Elokim. It is all up to the rebbe. All too often we give up too quickly. Society demands speed, a quick turn-over. This approach is not effective with students. They must be inspired, and inspiration takes time, effort and love - qualities that cannot be rushed. In his many years as Rosh Yeshivah and Av Beis Din, Horav Yaakov Ades, zl, inspired a generation of Sephardic Torah scholars. He had the following two insights concerning educating Torah students: First, one should always seek to maximize a student's potential and creativity. After teaching a topic in the Talmud, rather than give a standardized test, he would ask the boys complicated questions, requiring each one to write his own personal opinion on paper. He once explained the reason for this innovative approach to testing a student. "Learning Talmud is like baking bread. Each woman may begin with the same dough and same oven, but the loaves do not emerge universal." Every student is unique and his individual understanding of the topic is distinct from that of his neighbor. He must be encouraged to develop his own potential.

Second, at a time when corporeal punishment was accepted as a form of discipline, he would frown on such measures. He would cite the pasuk in Bamidbar 31:23, "And everything that does not come in the fire, you shall pass through the water." This pasuk teaches us that utensils that are not heated, but used only with cold foods, do not require purging as a means of kashering them. Immersion in water suffices to bring them back to purity. Likewise, Rav Yaakov said, "When you want to correct someone, do not cart him through the fire. Instead, escort him through the water. Correct him in a soft, soothing manner, and he will return to his original pristine nature."

Nothing is more inspirational or encouraging than a rebbe intimating to his students that he needs their assistance. This elevates a student's self-esteem, inspiring him to move forward and upward. In a poignant exposition, in his book, "Touched By A Story (4), Rabbi Yechiel Spero relates the shmues, ethical discourse, the mechinah, high school, students heard from the venerable Rosh Hayeshivah of Telshe, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl. The Rosh HaYeshivah was already aged and weak, yet he felt it was important to give a special shmues to the younger students at the beginning of Chodesh Elul. The month of Elul is a serious time for all Jews, but for young high school boys taking their first steps in the vast sea of Torah literature, it is a period of awe and trepidation.

Rav Gifter would speak in a somber tone, as befits the month of introspection and teshuvah, repentance. He would recall his youth growing up in Portsmouth, Virginia and explain how he became

inculcated in the culture of mesiras nefesh, dedication and self-sacrifice, for Torah study. What was most memorable, however, was his battle cry for the month of Elul. "I am an old man," he would say. "I can no longer do it on my own." The students would look at each other in wonderment. Here was one of the gedolei ha'dor, pre-eminent Torah giants of the generation, and he could not do it on his own. Certainly, he must be toying with them. He could not be serious. So they thought until the Rosh Hayeshivah called out in a manner that only one who studied in Telshe can remember, "Please! Carry me on your shoulders!"

Rav Gifter surely did not need these young yeshivah students to carry him for his sake. It was for their sake. He was teaching them a lesson in achrayos, responsibility. It was their obligation and also their privilege to carry him - and everyone else. When a rebbe empowers a student in such a manner, his learning takes on an entirely new focus. It becomes his mission, his lifelong endeavor, his raison d'etre.