



הרב הראשי עיה"ק אלעד מרדכי מלכא שליט"א

נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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Chief Rabbi of Elad, Israel MORDECHAI MALKA, Founder & President of Institutions "Or Hamelech"



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Parashat Shemot

The True Test of Man's Divine Service

Our *parasha* teaches us that despite Pharaoh's command to kill Jewish newborn males, the midwives Shifra and Puah, feared Hashem and did not listen. Rather, they allowed the babies to live. As reward for their Heavenly fear, the *pasuk* states (1:21) that Hashem "made houses for them." Rashi, quoting our Sages (*Sota* 11b), comments on the *pasuk* (1:20), "And Hashem bestowed good upon the midwives," by explaining that the "houses" referred to the *Kehuna*, the *Levi'ah*, and the kingship of Israel, which descended from them, for the Torah calls them "houses." The *Kohanim* and *Levi'im* came from Yocheved [also known as Shifra], and the kingship came from Miriam [also known as Puah]. The Gemara, there, quotes the *pasuk* (21), which states, "And it was, that the midwives feared Hashem, and He made houses for them," and mentions that there was a dispute between Rav and Shmuel. One of them posited that the "houses" were those of the *Kohanim* and *Levi'im*. The other one held that it was the house of kingship.

Questions

1 – The Gemara seems to state differently than the way Rashi cited it. For in two *pesukim* does the Torah mention the fact that the midwives were G-d fearing. The first time is in *pasuk* 17 and the second is in *pasuk* 21. From the Gemara it is indicated that the midwives' reward was not on account of the first time they exemplified fear of G-d, when it states that they feared G-d and refrained from killing the children. Rather, it was on account of the second Heavenly fear that was mentioned. There the *pasuk* stated, "And it was, when the midwives feared Hashem, He made houses for them." There Rav and Shmuel dispute what the houses actually were. However, Rashi explains that the words, "And Hashem bestowed good upon the midwives," were because of the Heavenly fear depicted in the first *pasuk*. Yet the *pasuk* only states what the good Hashem gave them was, after it mentions a second time that the midwives feared Hashem. According to Rashi's explanation we could ask, why, despite the fact that they exemplified Heavenly fear twice, was there only one reward?

2- Second, why does the Torah mention twice that the midwives feared Hashem – it seems redundant!

The Way of the Nation

We will begin by saying that if one observes the way members of our nation usually practice their Divine service, he will see that they carry it out as it suits them. Despite the fact that an individual goes to pray with a *minyan* in a *beit haknesset*, he prays when it is most convenient for him. He does not exert effort to pray in a set *minyan* each day, as our Sages instruct. This is as they said, "Anyone who prays in a set place each day, the G-d of Avraham will help him." Rather, sometimes he needs to leave early, and so he prays earlier. One morning, he may be tired from a wedding he attended the night before, and so he prays later. The same thing applies to Torah *shiurim*. Even if he does participate, it depends on how he feels physically, how things are going at home, etc. He either goes or does not go. With *chesed* and *tzedaka* as well, he gives and bestows *chesed* when it is convenient for him. This expresses itself in all of man's Divine service. Whenever there is a reason or a difficulty in observing the Torah and mitzvot, he decides not to do it and pushes it off for another time. However, from our *parasha* we learn that man's main spiritual achievement and the test which determines his true level, is specifically when he is faced with a difficulty, yet nevertheless, overcomes his *yetzer hara* and obstacles to perform the Will of



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Hashem. According to this is the size of man's reward for his deeds in this world. For performing the Will of Hashem when it is convenient and suits a person does not accrue a very great reward.

The Midwives Were in two Different Situations

Now we can explain the *pesukim* with an explanation that I wrote more than 40 years ago. The midwives were commanded by Pharaoh to throw the children into the water. If they would refuse to comply, they would be putting their lives in danger. On the other hand, if they would comply, their lives would be in danger when the Jews would discover that they were killing their children. They would certainly kill them when they found out. Therefore, whatever they decided, they would nevertheless be in danger. That being the case, it was more logical for them not to carry out Pharaoh's decree; after all, they were Jews as well. Therefore, one might say that there was no proof that they were G-d fearing and that because of their fear they refrained from killing the children. Nevertheless, the Torah states that the midwives feared Hashem, since it is possible that the danger posed by the king was greater than the danger posed by the Jewish people. For the king is capable of providing them with protection, honor, and reward. Nevertheless, they chose to fear Hashem and not Pharaoh. This is the fear that the Torah refers to in the first *pasuk* [17], when they had just decided to save the Jewish children. The reward that they earned for this fear is mentioned in *pasuk* 20, which states, "And Hashem bestowed good upon the midwives, and the nation increased and became very mighty." How did the midwives benefit by the Jewish Nation's growth? The answer is that there was no doubt that the Jews suspected that perhaps the midwives were killing some of the children out of fear of the king. Therefore, to vindicate them in the eyes of the people, Hashem made a miracle and they multiplied tremendously. Jews had six children at one time, and according to one opinion, sixty. Then everyone saw that on the contrary, from the time that Pharaoh issued his decree and appointed these midwives with a charge to kill the children, they nevertheless increased and did not diminish. This earned them much respect from the Jews, for then the Jews realized that they had not conspired with Pharaoh. Indeed, this is stated by the Midrash (*Shemot Rabba* 1:15). However, after they merited this great kindness of the nation's population increase, a new, enormous trial faced the midwives. For now they could escape the danger posed to them by the Jewish Nation and also of that posed by Pharaoh. If they would now kill a portion of the children, they could tell Pharaoh that these were all that they managed to kill. Now they would also not have to fear the Jews, because since they had multiplied to such a degree and were giving birth to so many children at once, they would never suspect the midwives. They would assume that it was only natural for some of the newborns to die. However, the midwives, despite the fact that they faced a whole new trial, still continued to fear Hashem. They transgressed the king's decree despite the fact that he was the one who now posed the danger and not the Jewish people. Therefore, the Torah repeats in *pasuk* 21, "And it was when the Midwives feared Hashem." For this was an even greater level of Heavenly fear than the previous one. Their first act may not have been viewed as one that expressed awesome fear of Heaven, since they had no choice in the matter. However, the second time did express great fear, because at that point, the Jews had increased tremendously, as stated above. Therefore, it was specifically for this fear that the midwives were rewarded with "houses." This is why their Heavenly fear is repeated in the *parasha*.

Carrying out the Will of Hashem Even When it is Difficult

From here we learn a very fundamental principle in Divine service, namely, that there is Heavenly fear and then there is **true** Heavenly fear. There is one form of Heavenly fear that is generated by the fact that he is a Jew, obligated in Torah and mitzvot. Then there is Heavenly fear that an individual could



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theoretically excuse himself from with a variety of reasons, but nevertheless exhibits it. The same thing applies to every mitzvah, or to Torah study and prayer. There is the part that man must do, and then there is the part that he does not have to do, for one reason or another. Man's primary greatness is measure by the second form of Heavenly fear, and his reward is inestimable. Therefore, for the first Heavenly fear, the midwives were rewarded with the nation's increase in number. Yet for the second form of fear, they were rewarded with "houses." This is as it states in *Tanna D'bei Eliyahu*, that a mitzva performed despite distress is one hundred times more valuable than a mitzva performed easily. The explanation for this is that when there is no difficulty involved, it is natural for a person to fulfill the mitzva. However, when it is difficult, he feels that he has a reason to back out. Nevertheless, if he fulfills it, it shows that he loves Hashem. Therefore, each mitzvah, word of Torah study, or prayer, which is performed with self-sacrifice that goes beyond the level of the law, merits him great reward.

Story About the Vilna Gaon

The Vilna Gaon was once sitting and studying Torah with his students. A pauper, dressed in rags, entered; his shocking appearance aroused the mercy of everyone who saw him. He made his way around to the students, asking for *tzedakah*. They gave him, as did the Vilna Gaon. After he finished collecting and walked towards the door, the Gaon rose from his place and gave the pauper yet another time. His students asked him for an explanation. The Gaon responded that the first time he gave was to alleviate the pain that he felt upon seeing such an unfortunate fellow. The second time he gave, however, was to fulfill the mitzva of giving *tzedaka*. When a person gives charity in reaction to the pain that he feels, he is doing it for himself, but not to fulfill the Will of Hashem. But once his pain has subsided, then he can fulfill the mitzva of *tzedaka* to carry out the Will of Hashem. Similarly, any mitzva that an individual does because he feels forced to do so – either because he feels uncomfortable, or for honor, or out of embarrassment – he is not doing the mitzva to carry out the Will of Hashem, just his own will. But when an individual performs a mitzva that he is not required to do, he displays that his entire intention is to perform the Will of Hashem. Therefore his reward is great, and he also receives reward in this world.

Words of Mussar

We have learned that man's Torah study, mitzvot, and good deeds are measured by his conduct when he faces disturbances and obstacles in his Divine service. If something stands in the way of his going to the *beit haknesset*, *shuir*, or to do *chessed*, but he nevertheless exerts effort and performs them, this points to his love of Hashem and his value of Torah and mitzvot. This is as our Sages tell us that according to the effort is the reward. For not all deeds are equal; there are those who exert more effort and those who exert less. According to the dedication he exhibits, so to, does his reward increase. Therefore, the midwives merited the reward of *Kehuna*, *Levi'ah*, and kingship specifically for the Heavenly fear they displayed the second time. Therefore, one who is weak should garner his strength, as the *Shulchan Aruch* states at the very beginning of *Orach Chaim*, that one should be strong like a lion, fierce like a leopard, and swift like an eagle to perform the Will of Hashem – for this is the true test.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka