

THE CHABAD WEEKLY

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Every son that is born you shall cast into the River, and every daughter you shall make live (1:22)

Pharaoh did not merely allow the Jewish girls to live; he commanded to make them live (techayun, in the Hebrew).

Pharaoh's decree of annihilation against the Jewish people consisted of two parts: to throw every Jewish newborn male into the Nile, and to "make live" every female. The boys were to be physically murdered. The girls were to be murdered spiritually by making them live the Egyptian life, by indoctrinating them into the perverse lifestyle of Egypt.

The boys were to be drowned in the Nile. The girls, too, were to be drowned in the Nile - conceptually, if not actually. The Nile, which irrigated the fields of rain-parched Egypt, was the mainstay of its economy and its most venerated god. The girls were to be raised in this cult of the river, their souls submerged in a way of life that defies the earthly vehicle of material sustenance.

In our own day, the Pharaoh-instituted practice of drowning children in the Nile is still with us: there are still parents whose highest consideration in choosing a school for their children is how it will further their child's economic prospects when the time will come for him or her to enter the job market.

The people of Israel survived the Egyptian galut because there were Jewish mothers who refused to comply with Pharaoh's decree to submerge their children in his river. If we are to survive the present galut, we, too, must resist the dictates of the current Pharaohs. We must set the spiritual and moral development of our children rather than their future "earning power" and "careers" as the aim of their education.

[The Lubavitcher Rebbe] - chabadonline.com

[Pharaoh's daughter] saw the box among the rushes, and she sent her maid ("ammatah") to fetch it (2:5) Another interpretation of this verse renders the Hebrew word ammatah as "her arm" rather than "her maid." Ammatah also means "arm lengths." This is to teach us that "her arm was extended for many arm-lengths" (to enable her to reach the basket). (Talmud; Rashi)

If Moses' basket lay beyond her reach, why did Pharaoh's daughter extend her arm? Could she possibly have anticipated the miracle that her hand would be "extended for many arm-lengths"?

There is a profound lesson here for each and every one of us. Often, we are confronted with a situation that is beyond our capacity to rectify. Someone or something is crying out for our help, but there is nothing we can do: by all natural criteria, the matter is simply beyond our reach. So we resign ourselves to inactivity, reasoning that the little we can do won't change matters anyway.

But Pharaoh's daughter heard a child's cry and extended her arm. An unbridgeable distance lay between her and the basket containing the weeping infant, making her action seem utterly pointless. But because she did the maximum of which she was capable, she achieved the impossible. Because she extended her arm, G-d extended its reach, enabling her to save a life and raise the greatest human being ever to walk the face of the earth. (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

And Moses said to G-d: "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?" And He said: "This is your sign that I have sent you" (3:11-12) This itself--your humility--is the reason why I have chosen you. (Avnei Azel)

The story is told of two brothers, both disciples of the Rebbe of Lublin, who served as Chassidic rebbes. One enjoyed a large following, while the other had few disciples. Said the second brother to the first: "I don't understand. We are both disciples of our late master; we are both equally great in learning and piety; so why do so few Chassidim come to me, while so many seek you out?"

Replied the other: "I, too, ask the same question: Why do they come to me instead of to you? But it seems, my brother, that in both our cases, our question is also the answer. They don't come to you because you can't understand why they don't come to you; and they come to me because I can't understand why they come to me." (Maayanah Shel Torah) chabadonline.com

Playing At "Rebbe-Chassid"

Once, when Rabbi Shalom DovBer Schneerson (who later served as the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe in the years 1882-1920) and his brother, Rabbi Zalman Aharon, were children, they played at "Rebbe and Chassid." The young Shalom DovBer was close to five years of age at the time, and his brother a year and four months older. Little Shalom DovBer refused to play the "rebbe," asserting that, "There is only one rebbe" (i.e. the real rebbe, the children's grandfather Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch). So Zalman Aharon acted the role of rebbe and Shalom DovBer played the chassid.

A chassid's consultation with his rebbe in yechidut (private audience) usually concerns one of two things: a query of haskalah--an intellectual question or problem--or a request for guidance in avodah, the chassid's personal service of G-d. In the children's game, the "chassid" entered into yechidut with a query in each of these areas.

In the haskalah portion of the audience, the exchange went as follows:

"Rebbe, what is a Jew?"

"A Jew is fire."

"So why am I not burned when I touch you?"

"Fire does not burn fire."

The "chassid" then complained of a deficiency in his personal avodah and the "rebbe" advised him on how to correct it. To this the young Shalom

DovBer said: "You're not a rebbe."

"Why not?" asked Zalman Aharon.

"A rebbe," said the child, "would emit a sigh before replying."

From Once Upon a Chassid (Kehot, 1994)

FROM MY FATHER'S SICHOT: EXODUS FROM EGYPT MEANS LEAVING LIMITATIONS AND BOUNDS, AND CHASSIDUS IS TO ENABLE MAN TO LEAVE THE RESTRICTIONS OF THE MATERIAL WORLD. THERE IS A DIFFERENCE: THE EGYPTIAN EXODUS MEANS SHATTERING AND THEN DEPARTURE, WHICH IS WHY THEY WENT AWAY FROM EGYPT. THE CHASSIDIC EXODUS MEANS PURIFICATION AND CORRECTION, STEPPING OUT OF WORLDLY LIMITATIONS AND BOUNDS WHILE REMAINING IN THE WORLD. THIS MEANS, WHILE FUNCTIONING WITHIN THE WORLD WE MUST TRANSCEND ITS LIMITATIONS. WE ARE TO REMOVE THE LIMITATIONS AND BOUNDS, AND PERCEIVE THE TRUTH - THAT THE WORLD PER SE IS TRULY GOOD, SINCE, AFTER ALL, THE NATURAL WORLD IS WHAT G-D INTENDED. THIS IS ATTAINED THROUGH THE AVODA OF CHASSIDUS. (1) FOOTNOTE: (1) When society and environment ("world" in chassidic usage) conflict with Torah, there may be a reaction of withdrawal from "world" and its affairs. Extreme monastic withdrawal is rejected by Torah. Chassidus advocates being "within world," involvement in the normal routines of family and occupation for example, but refusing subservience to the values and principles of "world." The Jew's values are to be Torah's while he functions in the marketplace or laboratory. He utilizes the opportunities and challenges of "world" to subordinate and use worldly affairs for Torah ideals, values and goals. He will do this intellectually when confronting concepts that appear not to be consonant with Torah, and also by observing Mitzvot in inhospitable circumstances. While functioning in this environment he is apart from it, refusing to be dominated or intimidated by it. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM TEVET 25).

If people are stepping all over you and your opinions, perhaps it is because they also need some space.

Learn to leave room for others to step somewhere without having to step on you.

-Bringing Heaven Down To Earth.