

“The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us... Then we cried out to Hashem, the G-d of our forefathers... And (He) saw our affliction, our travail, and our oppression.” (26:6-7)

Chazal teach us that each of the above mentioned terms refers to another form of persecution. “Onyeinu,” our affliction, refers to the disruption of family life; “Amoleinu,” our travail, refers to the children being thrown into the river; and “Lachatzeinu,” our oppression, refers to the extreme pressure the Egyptians exerted upon us. If this is the case, why are the persecutions not mentioned at the beginning of the pasuk, immediately following the phrase, “The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us”? Why are these terms mentioned only after Hashem has listened to our pleas?

In a homily delivered before Rosh Hashanah 1941, during the tragic and painful days that marked European Jewry’s meeting with the angel of death, the Piaszecner Rebbe, z.l., lamented, “We see now that we do not feel each pain and sorrow to the extent that we once felt, even for little irritations. If, indeed, we were now to feel all the pain inherent in a tragic situation with the sensitivity and severity which we once experienced, it would be impossible to exist for even a single day. The simple explanation for this is, as Chazal say, ‘The decayed flesh of a living person does not feel the knife.’ The only thing we feel is that our selfhood is being trampled upon; the world has turned dark and bleak; there is no day, no night, just turmoil and confusion. It seems as if the whole world weighs upon us, pressing down and crushing, to the breaking point... so that consequently, we do not feel the uniqueness of each tragedy in accordance with its true dimensions.”

In other words, Klal Yisrael was numb; they were numb with extreme pain. They could no longer feel each and every affliction. Hashem, however, did feel the pain. When He heard their cry, He knew fully well every single affliction which they had suffered. How important this lesson is for us. Some individuals undergo much pain and affliction. It is almost as if they have become numb to their suffering because they have suffered so much. Hashem does not forget. He feels everything and will take it all into consideration in the final analysis.