

And under His feet was like a brick work of sapphire, and an appearance of the Heavens in their brilliance. (24:10)

The Torah relates that *Klal Yisrael* accepted the Torah amid a resounding declaration of *Naaseh v'Nishma*, "We will do and we will listen." Following this, Moshe *Rabbeinu*, Aharon *HaKohen*, his sons and the seventy Elders were privy to an unparalleled revelation of Hashem. This was a prophetic vision in which they visualized Hashem sitting on His Holy Throne (*Ibn Ezra* explains that they saw Hashem's "back"). Under His feet was like a brick work of sapphire and an appearance of the Heavens in their brilliance. *Rashi* says that the brick work was in Hashem's Presence during the Jews' enslavement, so that their suffering (which was symbolized by the brick work, since they were making bricks for building) would be recalled before Him. The bricks symbolized their affliction, while the vision of the Heavenly light reflected the joy of their redemption. All of this is inspiring, but why did Hashem choose brick work of sapphire? Why not bricks of straw and mud, similar to the bricks the people enslaved in Egypt were making?

Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl, explains that there is a symbiotic relationship between *shibud Mitzrayim*, the Egyptian bondage, and *Matan Torah*, the Giving of the Torah. Essentially, *Klal Yisrael* was forged in the *kur ha'barzel*, iron crucible, of Egypt. Their national character of *rachamanim*, *baishanim*, *gomlei chassadim*, merciful, unassuming and doers of kindness, became refined in Egypt. They learned to feel the pain of others. They were unassuming in taking necessary steps to proffer acts of kindness and relief to their brothers. The tender, refined Jewish *neshamah*, soul, is the result of *shibud Mitzrayim*. They were now ready to accept the Torah.

This is why, explains the *Rosh Yeshivah*, the brickwork in Heaven was made of sapphire stone. In Hashem's eyes, every brick of straw and mortar was actually a sapphire, because these bricks transformed the Jewish people from selfish slaves to caring, giving, empathetic, dignified Jews whose acts of kindness to one another were carried out with love in the most unassuming manner. Hashem made a shining jewel out of their work, something of such great value that He wanted to see it all of the time. What *Klal Yisrael* thought was affliction was actually a stepping stone enabling them to receive the Torah.

There is a powerful lesson to be derived from here. We must learn to value even the worst experiences. The ability to transform adversity into opportunity, misery into joy, is real and achievable. Every incident has a purpose; every experience hones the mind. Even the most difficult circumstances can have a joyous conclusion. It is entirely up to the individual. A small-minded person sees the small picture which is presently in front of him. One who is greater and thinks deeper sees the larger picture and maintains a vision not only of the present, but also of the past and future. Whatever hardship one experiences, does not "just happen." The greatness of a person is manifest when he takes the bricks of straw and mortar and transforms them into bricks of sapphire that illuminate his life and the lives of others.