

"And they saw the G-d of Yisrael; and under His feet there was a form of a sapphire brick, like the very Heaven for clearness." (24:10)

The above sentence is complex. Undoubtedly, the unimaginable notion of "seeing" Hashem refers to some aspect of Divine Glory, as the commentaries have already expressed. The allusion to the "*brick of sapphire*" begs for explanation. Why does the *Torah* mention this? The *Targum Yonason* cites a *Midrash* which sheds light on this enigma. This brick is a reminder of the wretched slavery to which *Bnei Yisrael* were subjected. The Jewish men and women worked side by side, trampling and treading the mortar. One delicate young woman in the advanced stage of pregnancy miscarried as she was treading upon the mortar. The stillborn child became mixed into the brick mold. The terrible wailing of the mother ascended to the Heavenly throne, whereupon the angel Gavriel was dispatched to retrieve this "brick" and bring it up to Heaven. It was placed next to Hashem's throne as a memorial.

A profound lesson can be derived from this story. No incident is relegated to oblivion. Hashem records every horror, regardless of who is affected. No tragedy suffered by His children is considered insignificant. Amid all of the tension and shouting, one young woman pathetically cried out. The angel made a brick from the unborn child, and Hashem had it placed near His seat. Indeed, as the *Midrash* continues, that very night Hashem smote all of Egypt's first-born. The sapphire memorial was the most fitting tribute to this young *neshamah*, and, perhaps, a consolation for the mother. With this concept in mind, we may begin to confront some of the horrifying tragedies, we have experienced, both as individuals and as members of *Am Yisrael*.

An amazing *Chazal* expresses a similar idea. The *Talmud* in *Avodah Zarah 3B*, questions, What does Hashem do in the fourth part of the day? The response is: Hashem studies *Torah* with little children! *Rashi* explains that this refers to children, who had died when they were yet young!

Horav S. Schwab, z.l., applies this *Chazal* in a most poignant way. Imagine for one horrifying moment, the one and one half million Jewish children whose lives were so brutally snuffed out during the Holocaust. They were tragically sacrificed just as they were at the threshold of life. They are presently studying *Torah* with Hashem, Himself. They have a personal *chavrusa* with the Almighty! This is perhaps the meaning of the "sapphire memorial." Hashem perennially remembers those who have experienced more than their share of anguish in life.

In a homiletic exposition, *Reb Yitzchak Bunim, z.l.*, compares the *Yeshivah* Day School movement to the angel Gavriel in ancient Egypt. When the European Jews arrived in America "en masse," they immediately began working, kneading "clay" and making "bricks" in order to build an economic base for their families. They toiled to provide their families with material sustenance, but, unfortunately, many forgot to provide their children with spiritual sustenance. The Jewish soul was tragically becoming stillborn! The soul that should hold its head up high, filled with pride and joy,

was being buried in the "bricks" of materialism.

Just as Gavriel scooped up the stillborn child out of the lime and clay to bring it to the heights of Heaven, so, too, have our *Torah* day schools, through their devoted teachers, taken the souls of the young out of the materialistic milieu and provided them with the opportunity to ascend to the throne of glory. The Jewish spirit is stimulated only through a proper education under the auspices of a *Torah* day school, staffed by teachers who exemplify the true essence of *Torah*. Through this endeavor, Judaism will not be stillborn, but will live, thrive and endure.