

And Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, of his brethren. (2:11)

Rashi's famous comment tells it all: *Nassan einav v'libo liheyos meitzar aleihem*, "He applied his eyes and heart (to see their suffering and) grieve with them." The **Melitzer Rebbe, Shlita**, observes that Hashem has given us a *mitzvah* to protect our eyes from gazing at anything that will cause us spiritual harm. *V'lo sassuru acharei levavchem v'acharei eineichem*, "And (do) not explore after your heart and after your eyes" (*Bamidbar* 15:39). To explore with our eyes can be quite dangerous to our spiritual health. This is why we are admonished concerning *shemiras ha'einayim*, guarding/ protecting our eyes from those areas which increase our base physical passions, causing us to stray. On the other hand, elsewhere, we are commanded not to look away, *Lo suchal l'hisaleim*, "You shall not hide yourself" (*Devarim* 22:3). One may not look away and ignore a lost article belonging to a Jew. We must stop, pick it up and return it. We have a responsibility to all Jews. Turning away our eyes does not change the fact that someone is in need. Averting our gaze will not make the need disappear.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* taught us that a Jew does not divert his visual awareness of another Jew's pain. It begins, *va'yaar*, "and he observed." If one does not look, he remains unaware. Indifference to another Jew's plight begins with a refusal to see, to observe his pain. One cannot be sensitive to what he does not see. One does not have to turn his head away intentionally, nor maliciously refuse to look at a situation. He just seems to discover new areas of *frumkeit*, religious observance, to occupy his mind, so that he is able to justify his indifference and insensitivity to others.

In the *Talmud Sotah* 21b, *Chazal* decry the *chasid shoteh*, pious fool, who refuses to pull a woman out of the water, thereby allowing her to drown. His claim that he does not look at women earns him his well-deserved appellation. The *Talmud* also addresses the fellow who shuts his eyes to avoid looking at women. This causes him to bloody himself as he walks into a wall.

Moshe did not allow himself this stigmatism. He looked when necessary, because he cared about his brothers. He was not looking for excuses, as so many do when they lack the fortitude to help another Jew in pain. Far be it from me to suggest that we are unsympathetic. It is just that it is easier to help when the adversity is of a conventional nature, such as illness, poverty and death. When the challenge is of a more exotic nature, such as reaching out to a Jew in trouble with the law, helping women or children who are victims of abuse, children at risk, women who are maliciously abandoned by their husbands, people tend to shy away and encourage "others" to help.

This double-standard is not innovative. It was already in vogue in Moshe's time. Moshe was certainly not the first person to behold a Jew being beaten by an Egyptian. He was the only one who stopped and took issue with it. What happened to everybody else? Where were all of the other

Jews? Did they not see what Moshe saw? **Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita**, explains that it was no secret that Jews were being persecuted by the Egyptian aggressors. Moshe distinguished himself by the fact that he viewed each and every Jew as *achiv*, his brother. The Torah alludes to this when it writes, “And he saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew man, of his brethren.” One usually gets involved when family is suffering. I underscore “usually,” because it is not always true. Some people turn their backs even on close family. It may not be the norm, but, sadly, it is true.

Vayeitzei el echav, “And (he) went out to his brethren.” The reason Moshe left the comfort and isolation of the royal palace was that his brethren were suffering. He felt a brotherly kinship to them which inspired him to help them. When we turn our collective backs on a fellow Jew or Jewess, we must remember that he is our brother; she is our sister. If we continue ignoring them – the problem is with us – not them. We have lost our kinship with the Jewish People. We should view Jewish issues as family issues, Jewish problems as family problems. We must open up our eyes – not close them, hoping the problem will go away. Sadly, it does not go away until someone with courage and sensitivity becomes involved.