

Pharaoh commanded his entire people, saying, “Every son that will be born – into the river you shall throw him! And every daughter shall you keep alive.” (1:22)

While Pharaoh had originally issued an edict for the Jewish midwives to kill the male Jewish babies and allow the females to live, he now wanted all of the boys – even Egyptians – drowned. This decree was the result of Pharaoh’s astrologers pinpointing the day that the Jewish savior would be born. They also foretold that his downfall would come through water. Thus, Pharaoh had all of the male children born on that day put to death through water. How small-minded they all were in thinking they could foil Hashem’s plan. Moshe *Rabbeinu* was raised in Pharaoh’s palace by none other than the princess. Water, in the guise of the rock which Moshe struck, did actually play a role in his downfall in his not being allowed to enter *Eretz Yisrael*.

In the *Haggadah*, this *pasuk* is used to represent *amaleinu*, our toil, a reference to Hashem’s seeing our suffering in Egypt. *Amaleinu* is defined as *Eilu ha’banim*; “these are the children (sons) which Pharaoh had killed.” *Rabbeinu Chaim m’Lunil* writes that the *banim*, sons, were considered *amaleinu*, our toil, because, *Ha’yageia la’rik mikra amal*, “One who works for naught; his work goes to waste, thus, it is considered *amal*.” The *Malbim* (*Yair Ohr 3 shoresh amal*) writes: *Amal hu libli tachlis b’maasav*; “to work without purpose in one’s activities.” The obvious challenge to this definition comes from the Torah’s words, *Im bechukosai teileichu*; “if you will follow in My decrees” (*Vayikra 26:3*) upon which *Rashi* writes: *Shetiheyu ameilim baTorah*; “That you will toil in Torah.” In other words, following Hashem’s decrees means that one toils in Torah.

This idea of *ameilus baTorah* seems to be inconsistent with our earlier explanation of the term *amal*. Certainly, one who toils in Torah is doing so for a purpose. He does not consider his learning Torah an activity which has no *tachlis*. It would be absurd to say that Torah study is an endeavor that is for naught.

Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezechai, Shlita, explains that the primary lesson imparted by the *amal* (as explained by *Rabbeinu Chaim m’Lunil* and the *Malbim*) is that when any activity does not have a purpose that activity is transformed into *amal*, pure toil. *Ameilus* is an activity which one performs without ambition, for no purpose, with no consequence. Thus, bearing children so that they could be immediately drowned by Pharaoh was *amal*, since having these children had no overt purpose.

Ameilus baTorah, toiling in the field of Torah erudition, certainly brings with it great results. It bears fruit like no other endeavor and engenders reward that is unparalleled in its infinite value. Also, Torah molds a person’s character, both ethically and morally. We must, therefore, assume that *ameilus* with regard to the Torah has nothing to do with the context of the endeavor; rather, it defines the attitude of the actual endeavor. One who learns Torah does so purely because it is Hashem’s command. He does not study for the sake of reward, for *siyata diShmaya*, Divine assistance, or for the fruits of his achievement. He studies Torah because it is the *dvar Hashem*,

word of G-d. The fact that Torah learning engenders many rewards – such as Heavenly assistance and character refinement -- does not change the fact that the endeavor is performed solely for the purpose of the activity – not the fringe benefits.

Alternatively, *v'es amaleinu eilu ha'banim*, raising children to achieve each one's individual potential can be difficult – if a person does not understand that Hashem does not just drop off a *neshamah*, such that some “make it” and some do not. A parent who gives up on his/her child due to his/her perception of the child's deficiency of character is guilty of heresy (*Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*). If Hashem has entrusted you with a child, it is clear that only you are able to raise that child properly, as Hashem does not give a person a *nisayon*, challenge, that he cannot handle. Since it is impossible to know the potential of each child, one may not prematurely give up on any child. Anyone who has been in *chinuch*, or any perceptive parent, can attest to this verity.

Some students might be considered wild; other students might even be considered uncontrollable; and then there is the young boy whose behavior is what I would term so incorrigible that it is beyond words. Not a day passed that he was not involved in some shocking experience. The boy was not a “bad boy”; he simply had no concept of self-discipline. The *rebbeim* in the school felt that unless drastic action was taken, this boy would have a negative influence on his class – even on the general student body.

Matters came to a head when, one day, one of the *rebbeim* entered the school's *bais hamedrash* and heard noises emanating from the *Aron Kodesh*. He opened the *Aron* and found – to his shock – a goat! He knew that only one person could have had the audacity to perpetrate such an unspeakable act. Our wayward student was brought to the *menahel*, principal, who said, “Enough is enough!” The student was to be expelled. At that moment, the strangest thing happened: the boy refused to move from his seat. Even when the *menahel* pointed to the door and said “get out,” the boy sat motionless, refusing to move. “What do you want?” asked the *menahel*. “Take me to the *rav* and head of the *Bais Din* of our city.”

The administration knew with whom they were dealing. This boy would not budge until he got what he wanted. He was that type of personality. They decided to grant his request and brought him before the *Av Bais Din*, head of the city's court. The boy was prepared to speak in his own behalf and asked to be heard, “What you are about to do to me by ejecting me from the school will affect not only myself, but also my children who will be born to me after I marry and establish my home. (Obviously, with a deficient Jewish education, his future appeared bleak and that of his children even bleaker.) Did you discuss this with my ‘children’ before you made the decision to expel me from school?”

Everyone assembled at the *bais din* stood dumbfounded. They had never heard such a question posed by an adult before, let alone a young boy. Since they did not know how to answer the child, the *Av Bais Din paskened*, decided, that the boy should remain in school. (I do not know if the boy's behavior changed drastically or at all. He remained in school and completed his studies.)

A number of years ago an outstanding young man, a Torah scholar of note, who was one of the top students in one of *Eretz Yisrael's* premier *yeshivos*, became engaged to a special girl from a wonderful family. The *chassan's* father, who was a noted *mechanech*, educator, stood up before the crowd and related the above story – underscoring the disastrous impact that negative *chinuch*, deficient education, could have had on this boy's future children. He stopped for a moment and said, "I am the grandson of the one who at the last moment saved himself from being ejected from the school. Look at who has descended from that boy!"

We never know to what heights each individual will rise. So many factors and circumstances can alter the trajectory of a child's growth. Therefore, it is the responsibility of each *mechanech* (and, of course, the parents) never give up hope and to put all of their strength into seeing that the potential of each child is realized.