

"And the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the first was Shifrah and the name of the second was Puah." (1:15)

Chazal comment that Shifrah was actually Yocheved, the mother of Moshe *Rabbeinu*, while Puah was her daughter, Miriam. *Chazal* attribute Yocheved's name to the fact that she "smoothed out" the limbs of an infant after its birth. The *Midrash* indicates that her name is derived from the fact that she washed off the blood which covered an infant at birth. The reasons which *Chazal* suggest for Yocheved's name are perplexing! Should such a rudimentary task as attending to an infant at birth be the catalyst for assigning such an outstanding, virtuous woman as Yocheved another name?

A name defines a person's essence and describes his/her character. Do elementary tasks which take place daily in the delivery room of every hospital demand such significant recognition? This question becomes even more compelling when we take into consideration Yocheved's preeminence as described by *Chazal*. She was born as Yaakov entered the gates of Egypt. She represented the fulfillment of the seventy souls entering Egypt. She became the wife of the *Gadol Ha'dor*, leader of his generation. She was the mother of Moshe, Aharon and Miriam, the leaders of the generation that was liberated from Egypt, and who later received the *Torah*. Was there no other distinguishing quality by which to describe Yocheved other than her skillful devotion to attending to the infants after birth?

Horav Yitzchak Goldwasser, Shlita, responds by citing an insightful statement from *Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, z.l.*, who said, "It is not the action that determines an individual's greatness, but rather, it is the person who determines the action." In other words, if a great person performs a deed, regardless of its level of significance, it becomes a notable act, by virtue of the person who performed it. In the beginning of *Parashas Noach*, *Rashi* comments that the deeds of the righteous are reflected in their offspring. As a person's children mimic the image of their parent, so, too, do the actions of a *tzaddik* carry the imprimatur of their executor. The virtuous person's actions should always be viewed in a positive light, since they emanate from a source which is inherently honorable and exemplary.

Yocheved completed Yaakov *Avinu's* family of *shivim nefesh*, seventy souls. She inspired the three great leaders of *Am Yisrael* during its formative years as a nation. She was the mother of the houses of *Kehunah*, *Leviah* and *Malchus*. She was lauded for her day-to-day relationship with *yaldei Yisrael*, the Jewish infants, because her role was an integral part of the total process. Her great and noble deeds were no different in nature than her simple everyday activities -- because they all emanated from one source. The activity is not the essence; rather, it is the person who executes the deed that makes the difference. Yocheved's physio-therapeutic handling of the Jewish infants was unlike that of any other person; it represented *gadlus*, greatness! Indeed, an individual of Yocheved's stature should be named according to her simple acts. This indicates that

her preeminence was infused throughout her entire essence and was reflected in every act that she performed.