

## Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe by the river. (2:5)

The *Baal HaTurim* writes that the last letters of *va'teired bas Pharaoh* – *daled, saf, hay*, spell *dassah*, her religion. This teaches us that Bisyah, daughter of Pharaoh, was not taking a random trip down to the river. She went there to immerse herself as her concluding step toward converting to Judaism. This comment is already stated in the *Talmud (Sotah 12b)*, “She went down to the river to wash herself off from her father's idols.” *Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita*, asks an intriguing question. Of all times to join the Jewish People, this was not the most propitious. No people were more reviled in Egypt than the Jews. They were treated as parasites and enslaved. Their lives were meaningless to the Egyptians, who persecuted and murdered them, first at random, and later in a systematic process to destroy them physically and emotionally. Why would Bisyah decide now, of all times, to join this downtrodden, rejected nation?

*Rav Gamliel* explains that it all depends on one's perspective. How one views an incident determines how he will experience it. In his commentary to *Va'yaar b'sivlosam*, “And (he) observed their burdens” (2:11), *Rashi* comments: “*Moshe Rabbeinu* went out to see the suffering of his brethren and grieve with them.” He identified with the Jewish People. Although he was raised in Pharaoh's palace, an environment that bespoke anti-Semitism, he retained his pedigree and remained committed to the heritage of his parents, Amram and Yocheved. By identifying with the pain experienced by the Jews, Moshe became one with them. Likewise, Bisyah ruminated over the fact that the Jews were the target of such vicious animus. Why the Jews? It must be that their values, way of life, and religious conviction posed a threat to the pagan, hedonistic culture that characterized Egypt. The average Egyptian viewed the downtrodden Jews as dismal failures, pathetic examples of human deficiency. Why would they want to have anything to do with them? Not so Bisyah, whose perspective was like Moshe's – empathetic, profound, intelligent. The Egyptians must have had a reason to single out *Klal Yisrael* as the subject of such treachery. Rather than simply being punished, they were being refined, much like gold in a crucible. Egypt was the crucible for purifying and refining the Jewish nation, and from there it will emerge to distinction – both spiritual and material. She wanted to be a part of this nation. She sought to share in their greatness.

*Rav Gamliel* relates that he spoke to a Jew who is fully observant, who claimed that the suffering he witnessed during the Holocaust inspired his current level of observance. Prior to the war, he was a free-thinking, assimilated Jew, who maintained no belief in Hashem, His Torah or *mitzvos*. This transition was actually an anomaly, since it was increasingly more common for one's questions *vis-à-vis* the Holocaust to catalyze a rejection of the faith, rather than motivate return and embrace. The man explained with an analogy that allowed him to see the light: “A young child who was brought to *shul* was disturbing the congregation. Unable to read and bored, he reacted to being cooped up with a bunch of “old” men who were *davening*. The members of the congregation did not like being disturbed, so they responded in the usual manner, by “shushing” and motioning to him to be quiet. At times, their patience wore thin, but, one thing was certain, no one would lift a finger to the child – except for his father. When the father saw that all the signals and warnings

failed to quiet his son, he lifted his hand and administered corporal punishment. Certainly, this was not out of a lack of love, but rather, out of a sense of responsibility, because he loved his child and wanted to see him develop into a fine, upstanding, fully-observant *ben Torah*. The slap was an expression of love and care – not animus – or lack of control. Likewise, the discipline to which we are privy is a demonstration of our Father in Heaven’s love for His children. Evidently, we are not all able to see or sense this phenomenon. When you think about it, do all children recognize and acknowledge that their parent’s discipline is an expression of love? It demands maturity and even a little empathy, whereby the child imagines that he/she was the parent who was compelled to address their child’s present behavior, and to “modulate/tweak” its course so that the future they all hope for would be realized.

*Rav Gamliel* sums it up: For every event experienced both by the communal *Klal Yisrael* or the individual Jew, if he/they apply their heart and eyes to it (in other words, they think rationally, with common sense, empathy and an open mind), it will have a positive effect in catalyzing a better Jew and a better nation. One who expands his mind and thinks will soon see how much Hashem loves him/us. Troubles should not turn us away from Hashem; on the contrary, they should bring us closer, because it shows that He cares.