

If he shall offer it for a thanksgiving offering. (7:12)

We all have reasons to be grateful. Who is not the beneficiary of some form of good? While some of us have it better than others, it just means that our sense of gratitude should be commensurately greater. We are sorely deficient in one aspect of life: gratitude that we are Jewish; gratitude that we have the opportunity and cognition to realize how fortunate we are to have Torah and *mitzvos* to study and observe. How vacuous are the lives of those who are bereft of these unique Heavenly gifts? Do we show our appreciation? Do we walk around smiling that we are Jewish? Do our children have a sense of excitement at being able to learn Torah, go to shul and perform *mitzvos*? The *Baal Shem Tov*, *zl*, was an assistant *cheder rebbe* (prior to revealing himself). His position entailed bringing his young charges to *cheder*. He did so with great vigor as he led the children, singing and dancing to words of *Tehillim*. When a child goes to school in such a manner, the enthusiasm and vibrance of *Yiddishkeit* are always with him.

Rabbi Yitzchak Rubin relates a poignant story which underscores this idea. In the 1950's, *Yiddishkeit* in America was in its bare nascency. At that point, *Rav Yosef Gelertner, zl*, a *Gerrer chassid* was *rav* of a small *shteibel* in Queens, N.Y. Recent immigrants, most of whom were survivors of the Holocaust, comprised the majority of those who frequented the *shteibel*. Indeed, *Rav Gelertner* was himself a survivor of Auschwitz. Suffering through the purgatory of a number of camps, he and his wife had miraculously survived and came to these shores with the hope of rebuilding their lives. Queens, at that time, was not a hub of *chassidus* and as a *Gerrer chassid* with all of the regalia, he stood out. Yet, people flocked to his *shul*, because it was a warm and friendly environment. The *davening* was enthusiastic, with much singing, and the *rav* extended himself to strangers, as well as to his members.

One day, a young, observant boy walked into the *shul*. A member of the local Orthodox shul, he was looking for a *shul* in which he would feel at home and would receive the personal attention that he craved. One problem that he had to overcome was the language barrier: he spoke no *Yiddish*, and most of the members spoke no English. After a few visits, *Rav Gelertner* walked over to the boy (who was all of thirteen years old) and invited him to his family's *Pesach Seder*. Apprehensive, but excited, the boy accepted. (He must have cleared it with his parents.)

Pesach arrived, and on the second *Seder* night, the boy found himself seated at a long table that was bedecked with all of the *Pesach Seder* accouterments. At the head of the table sat the *rav* in his white *kittel*, sporting his *shtreimel* on his head. Next to him was the *rebbetzin*, dressed in her *Yom Tov* finery. Lying in a bassinet next to them was their three-month-old infant. Her name was Miriam, and with her came a poignant story of survival, hope and miracle.

Miriam was not supposed to be. The Nazi fiends were infamous for their cruel, maniacal murder of the Jews. Their perverted experiments on their hapless victims has been glossed over for obvious reasons. While some Jews survived these experiments, their ability to propagate and one day have a family had been seriously compromised. The *rav* and his wife were such victims. The doctors

they consulted were frank: "You will not have a family. End of story." The doomsayers were unaware of the power of sincere *tefillah*. Prayer storms the Heavens and penetrates the gates of tears that remain open to those who pray with hope. Twelve years passed, during which time the Gelertners pleaded with Hashem for a miracle. Finally, the time to realize the miracle had arrived with the birth of their precious Miriam, who now lay sleeping peacefully in her bassinet.

Toward the middle of the *Seder*, Miriam made her presence known. She woke up screeching at the top of her little lungs. Her mother attempted to quiet her by rocking the bassinet, to no avail. When she kept on crying, *Rav* Gelertner rose from his seat, took the little bundle into his arms and went upstairs. A few minutes passed until the boy heard the *rav* dancing with his infant daughter. Round and round, up and down, with increasing fervor he danced and danced. He also sang, "*Oy es iz gutt tzu zein a Yid! Oy, ez is gutt tzu zein a Yid!*" "Oh, it is good to be a Jew! Oh, it is good to be a Jew!" He went on and on. This holy man had survived purgatory on earth, had experienced the redefined meaning of travail, had suffered for one reason: he was a Jew. Yet, he danced and sang, "*Oy, ez is gutt tzu zein a Yid!*" He had every reason to seethe with anger. Instead, he sang with deep pride and praised Hashem with gratitude for creating him as a Jew.