

## **But the midwives feared G-d and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them, and they caused the boys to live. (1:17)**

Pharaoh had to stem the tide of the Jewish population explosion. Infanticide was his proposal. He could not prevent conception, but he could see to it that the infants never saw the light of day. The two Jewish midwives feared Hashem and rejected Pharaoh's orders, claiming that, by the time they arrived, the children had already been born. These midwives were, like so many of the other Jewish women, *nashim tzidkaniyos*, righteous women, who placed their commitment to Hashem above everything. Their faith in the Almighty motivated their actions, despite the pressing question: To what kind of world and to what type of life were they bringing these infants? They were helping the mothers give birth to children who would live a life of persecution and slavery, beaten, reviled, starved and eventually murdered. Did they not care about the quality of life to which these babies would be subjected?

No! They trusted in Hashem. Their function was to bring the child into the world. Hashem would care for the infant. Life is of infinite value, and even a moment is worth eternity. Furthermore, a Jew measures life according to purpose and value – not quality. If Hashem granted life to these children, then they had purpose. A life with purpose is a life of value. Who were they to decide differently?

Likewise, the righteous women went out to the fields, fed and washed their husbands, giving them hope. Afterwards, the women would return home until it was time to give birth, then, they would return and give birth in the fields under the apple trees. What a beautiful and meaningful practice – but what about the children? Who took care of them? What quality of life would they have? The mothers trusted in Hashem, Whom they knew would take care of the children. These women were righteous Jewesses who understood that every child/*neshamah*/soul that Hashem sends down to this world has a purpose and value that is immeasurable. That in and of itself is the greatest definition of quality of life! A life of purpose and value – that is a life of quality.

Sadly, many are influenced by the secular way of thinking, believing that the quality of life determines if one should be kept alive. A person who is suffering and can no longer be effective, who is miserable and in pain, has no quality of life. Why make him suffer? A baby whose mother is incapable of taking care of him, who is born into a life of poverty and travail, will have no quality of life. So, why bother? *Baruch Hashem*, had these secularists been in Egypt, the saga of the Egyptian exodus might have been different!

Every Jew should know that regardless of his circumstances, he is enjoined to live a life of meaning and purpose, because this is what Hashem demands of him. Otherwise, why would he be here? No one is “just here,” and nothing “just happens.” There is purpose and meaning to all aspects of life. A meaningful story that deserves to be repeated underscores this idea which has been around

for a while:

During Menachem Begin's tenure as Prime Minister, one of his ministers was Shmuel Tamir. While not personally observant, Tamir understood that questions which involve Jewish law have to be ruled on by a Torah scholar of repute. The country was suffering through a severe economic crisis. People were without work, money and even food. A secular Jew immediately wonders how to solve the crises by abrogating *Halachah*. After all, whenever something is not right, it is the fault of the *chareidim*. Tamir felt that abortions would stem the tide of "indiscriminant" births and spare many families the negative effects of the economy. He turned to the venerable *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, *Horav Arye Levin, zl*, an individual who was both loved and revered by Jews of all stripes.

Mr. Tamir presented his case to the *Rav*, asking that abortions should be permitted, so that families could live. *Rav* Levin paused for a moment and responded, "I find it quite interesting that you come to me with this question, because, years ago, I had a similar decision to render for a young couple. They were both students, parents of one child, a little girl. They had recently found out that another child was on the way. The financial situation at home was beyond desperate. There was no way they could handle another mouth to feed. As Jews, they begged me for a dispensation to end the pregnancy.

"I explained to them that, while I felt for them wholeheartedly, there were nonetheless three reasons why they must see this pregnancy through to completion. First was the firm conviction that Hashem, Who created life, has the ability to sustain it. Your child is His child as well, and He will be there for yours, because it is also His.

"Second, you have the *mitzvah* of *Peru u'revu*, 'Be fruitful and multiply.' The fulfillment of this commandment is achieved when one has a boy and a girl. Third, you are already pregnant and within you already exists a holy soul with a mission in life. Like every one of us here on earth, every *neshamah*, soul, has its individual purpose which the world needs; otherwise, it would not have been created. Do not prevent your child's mission from achieving fruition – for its sake and for the sake of mankind."

Disappointed by the *Rav's* refusal to grant them a dispensation, Tamir asked, "*Nu, Rebbe*, did they listen to you, and did they have the child?" "Yes, they did. They had a little boy," *Rav Arye* replied.

"And *Rebbe*," Tamir continued with a touch of sarcasm in his tone, "did the boy fulfill his mission in life?"

*Rav Arye* looked Tamir right in the eyes and said, "This you will have to answer. The people who came to me so many years ago were your parents. You are standing here today only because they chose to follow my *p'sak*, ruling. So, indeed, let me ask you now – did you fulfill your mission?"

We are all here for a reason. What is the reason? Hashem knows, because He created us. Let it suffice to say that He does not create indiscriminately. For whatever reason or purpose God created someone, a person's life matters – to him, his family, his friends/students, associates, neighbors, the world, but mostly to Hashem. Since one's life matters to Hashem, he must do everything possible to preserve every second of it. When Hashem decides to call him home, his life will cease – and not one moment earlier.