

“She opened it, and saw him, the child, and behold! A youth was crying... ‘This is one of the Hebrew boys.’” (2:6)

A child, a youth: is it a child or a youth? *Chazal* ask this question in the *Talmud Sotah* 12b. The Torah calls him a *yeled*, child, and it also calls him a *naar*, youth. Which is it? He is a child, but his voice is that of a youth. *Chazal* seem to imply that Moshe *Rabbeinu*’s voice had the maturity of that of a young boy. We wonder at the Torah’s expression, “This is one of the Hebrew boys.” Why could the Torah not have simply said, “This is a Hebrew boy.” Why does it say, “one of the Hebrew boys”? Furthermore, what do *Chazal* mean when they say that Moshe *Rabbeinu* cried like a youth? How does a youth cry?

Horav Meir Shapiro, z.l., explains that the difference between a child’s tears and that of a youth lies not in the sound but in the reason for the tears. A child cries when he is in pain or in need. A child cries only for his personal reasons – nothing else. He still lacks the understanding that one also cries for the hurt sustained by others. The youth, however, understands that others also have pain, and he expresses his empathy for them through his own tears. A youth cries when his parents are in pain, while a child does not recognize their pain, nor does he understand the need to empathize with others.

Moshe *Rabbeinu*, the infant floating upon the water, was in personal danger. His life hung in the balance. At any moment, his precious basket could capsize, and he would perish. It is, therefore, no wonder that he would cry – he was in danger. What shocked Pharaoh’s daughter was the fact that even after she rescued him from the water, he continued to cry. She now realized this child was not crying for his own personal needs. This was a youth who had an acute understanding of the circumstances that confronted his People. Moshe *Rabbeinu*, the child/youth, cried for *Klal Yisrael* as he empathized with their pain.

The future leader of *Klal Yisrael* studied his circumstances. While it was true that he was miraculously saved, what about the tens of thousands of other Jewish boys who did not merit this miracle? Can they be ignored? This is implied by the *pasuk*, “She opened it and saw him” – after she took Moshe out of the water, after he was saved, she saw that he was still crying. Then she realized that this was no ordinary child – this was a youth, a mature young man, crying for his People.

We now understand why the Torah writes, “This is one of the Hebrew boys.”

Moshe *Rabbeinu* cried for the other Jewish babies whose lives were still in danger. He had the body of a child, but he cried with the wisdom and maturity of a youth.