

Avram took his wife Sarai... and all their wealth that they had amassed, and the souls they had made in Charan. (12:5)

Rashi explains that the *nefesh*, souls, which they made in Charan, is a reference to the many people who Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Imeinu* were able to pluck from the grasp of the pagans and inspire with the monotheistic belief. These converts to Hashem followed the ones who had “made” them. Avraham’s *raison d’etre* in life was to promulgate the belief in Hashem. To teach the truth was not enough if he did not convert the people. A successful teacher is one who impacts the lives of his students. This was our Patriarch’s goal, his life’s work. Indeed, every endeavor that he undertook was for the specific purpose of enhancing the glory of Heaven and disseminating the concept of a life of service to the Almighty.

It is, therefore, surprising that *Chazal* (*Talmud Nedarim* 32a) say that Avraham was punished-by his descendants being enslaved in Egypt for two hundred and ten years, because, when the King of Sodom asked him to return his citizens (whom Avraham had saved from invading kings), he agreed. The King of Sodom said, *Ten li ha’nefesh v’ha’rechush kach lach*, “Give me the people and the wealth take for yourself” (*Bereishis* 14:21). In his commentary to the *Talmud*, the *Ran* writes: “Had Avraham kept the people (that he had rescued), he would have brought them under the wings of Hashem.” *Rashi* writes that he should have converted them. In any event, our Patriarch, who gave his life for Jewish outreach, is chastised for returning the citizens of Sodom. Because he did not insist on keeping them and eventually converting them, his descendants suffered the brutal *shibud Mitzrayim*, Egyptian enslavement.

How are we to understand the reason for the punishment of our Patriarchs – and us? A man who devotes his entire life to seeking out the truth and teaching it to a world of pagans – was held to task for missing a few? Our Patriarch went to great measures to achieve success, traveling from place to place, at great personal affliction, all because he wanted to glorify Hashem’s Name. He feared no man, risking his life and possessions for his faith. Yet, just because he missed a few, he was punished with the knowledge that his children would suffer the pain of enslavement in an environment steeped in moral depravity – for two hundred and ten years! Is this fair?

In my very first *dvar Torah*, in the inaugural edition of *Peninim* some twenty-four years ago, I quoted my *Rosh Yeshivah*, **Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl**, who derived from here that the responsibility to reach out to all Jews is compelling and ceaseless. No Jew should be left behind, and no person should be relegated to walking blindly in the spiritual darkness that envelops so much of contemporary society. Regardless of how much a person has achieved, it is never enough. We have no room for complacency or respite in this endeavor. This explanation personifies the *Rosh Yeshivah*, whose fiftieth *yahrtzeit* is this year. Despite ill health and having suffered the tragic, brutal murders of his family and the destruction of the *Telshe Yeshivah* in the European Holocaust, the *Rosh Yeshivah* was relentless in the execution of his responsibility to sow the seeds of Torah in America. He was a beacon of light in a sea of confusion, the captain of the

ship who never left his post, who never wavered from his course, who never rested, because he never felt that the job had been completed.

At that time, I assumed that the responsibility for outreach is based on the importance and inestimable value of each and every Jew. As a result, I was still bothered by the explanation. After all, if one reaches nine out of ten Jews, it is still considered a success. Concerning everything else we go according to the numbers, the percentages. That Avraham did not achieve one hundred percent should not have marked him for censure and punishment.

Reading the *shmuess*, ethical discourse, once again, I realize that the *Rosh Yeshivah* meant something else. As Torah Jews, we have a responsibility to reveal and enhance the glory of Hashem in the world. It is not about how many people we reach. It is about how much we have increased *kavod Shomayim*, honor of Heaven, in the world. Each individual who has been exposed to the greatness of Hashem, and the way of life His Torah instructs him to live, adds to *kavod Shomayim*. Thus, this is not about one more person or one less person. It is about raising the banner of Heaven higher and increasing the knowledge of Hashem.

Avraham *Avinu* truly did so much, but we are helpless in measuring *kavod Shomayim*. It is measured by a scale whose barometer is spiritual in nature. We have no idea concerning the value of "more" *kavod Shomayim*.