

And it was because the midwives feared G-d that He made for them houses. (1:21)

The *meyaldos*, midwives, risked their lives to save and sustain the Jewish infants. Pharaoh was a mass murderer; he would have had no problem adding two more Jewish women to his list of victims. Yet, the Torah underscores not their act of saving the children, but that their behavior was the result of a deep-rooted sense of *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Hashem. Imagine, if a Jew who had saved his fellow's life at great risk to himself is presented to us. Would we laud his *yiraas Shomayim* or his life-saving efforts? Why does the Torah focus on their fear of Hashem?

Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl (quoted by *Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita*), derives a powerful principle from this *pasuk*. The significance of a *mitzvah* – its value and personal and collective achievement – is not measured on the barometer of the actual *mitzvah* (its purpose), but in accordance with the element of *yiraas Shomayim* that comprises its performance. Thus, had the midwives not infused their life-saving actions with a profound sense of *yiraas Shomayim*, the Torah would not have lauded their efforts. The reason for this, I believe, is that *yiraas Shomayim* invests an action with integrity. Indeed, a person's spiritual integrity determines his *yiraas Shomayim*.

We see this concept played out following *Akeidas Yitzchak*, when the angel said to Avraham Avinu, "Now I know that you are a *yarei Elokim*, fear Hashem" (*Bereishis* 22:12). Furthermore, the Torah designates the iniquitous Amalek, whose cruelty against our nation has proven to know no bounds, as one who is *v'lo yarei Elokim*, "does not fear Hashem."

Horav Dov Yaffa, zl (*Mashgiach Kfar Chassidim*), related that he was present when a *yeshivah* student came to the *Chazon Ish, zl*, requesting his sage counsel. He claimed that he knew himself well and felt that he was so spiritually circumspect that joining the army would not alter his religious level. He did add as an aside, however, that his *yiraas Shomayim* might cool off/numb – ever so slightly. The *Chazon Ish* replied, "To cool off one's *yiraas Shomayim* is *yaharog v'al yaavor*, "Let him be killed rather than transgress" (or similar to one of the three cardinal sins which require that one give up his life rather than transgress a law).

Horav Moshe Schneider, zl (*Rosh Yeshivah* London), would emphasize in his *shmuessen*, ethical discourses, that a *bachur*, *yeshivah* student, who studies Torah and is successful in his studies, but views this endeavor as not being different from any other educational discipline (such as literature, math, geography, etc.), has yet to taste the *kedushas ohr haTorah*, sacredness of the illuminating light of the Torah. He added that he wept copious tears to Hashem, praying that his *talmidim* be *bnei Torah*, not merely students of Torah.

Yiraas Shomayim means that every moment of one's life one is cognizant of Hashem's Presence and acts accordingly. *Horav Moshe Shapiro* was wont to say, "We did not come into this world just to move the furniture from one corner of the room to the other." We each have a Divine mandate

and a designated role to play out by partnering with Hashem in bringing this world to its ultimate destiny. Each of us has a specific and vital role to play in Hashem's plan. To do this, we must first acknowledge Hashem in our life and live accordingly. Thus, we can aspire to become a conduit for bringing Hashem's blessing to the world.

Horav Chaim Scheinberg, zl, was asked which *mitzvos* should be increased for the household in order to increase the *yiraas Shomayim* level of its inhabitants. He replied, "*Yiraas Shomayim* means fearing Hashem and being afraid to transgress any of His *mitzvos*. When one fears someone, he is careful not to do anything that might go against his wishes. Increase *kavod*, the honor, of Torah, and you will increase your *yiraas Shomayim*. If one increases his Torah study and the respect and honor he manifests towards the Torah, he automatically increases his *yiraas Shomayim*. Torah, more than anything else, brings a person closer to Hashem."

Understandably, one who fears Hashem, not only maintains cognitive acknowledgement of His Presence in every aspect of his life, he expends every effort to glorify and sanctify Hashem's Name in his every endeavor and interaction with people of all religious persuasions. *Horav Shlomo Gissinger, zl*, was a brilliant *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, whose erudition touched upon all facets of the Torah. His *bein adam l'chaveiro*, relationship with his fellowman, paralleled his *bein adam l'Makom*, relationship with Hashem. He viewed every man in his true essence: as a *Tzelem Elokim*, created in the Divine Image. Thus, every human being – regardless of religion, race, creed or color – is a *Tzelem Elokim*, and, as such, deserved his respect. It goes without saying that this attitude not only earned him much respect, it also glorified Hashem's Name, even to those who were not members of the Jewish People. All this is an aspect of *yiraas Shomayim*, being cognizant of Hashem's over-arching Presence in our lives.

In Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum's inspiring biography of, and tribute to, *Rav Gissinger*, one chapter is entitled, *The Great Mekadesh Shem Shomayim*; it is a collection of vignettes underscoring *Rav Gissinger's* interaction with people from all elements of society. The opening paragraph encapsulates his character.

Reb Zelig walked into Mahibar Cleaners two weeks after *Rav Gissinger's* passing. He had a long-standing relationship with the owner, who was not a *Yehudi*. In their ensuing conversation the owner said, "Rabbi Gissinger was a real, good rabbi."

Coming out of the blue with such a statement piqued *Reb Zelig's* curiosity, and he asked him, "Why do you say that?"

"Well, a few years ago, the Rabbi came in to my store, and we got to talking. I told him that I was bothered by the fact that some Orthodox Jews seemed to be uncomfortable about shaking my hand or physically interacting with me. I guess being a gentile excludes me from their society. Do you know what Rabbi Gissinger did? He came behind the counter and gave me this great big bear hug! He was a real good rabbi."