

Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens. (2:11)

Pharaoh did not enslave the members of *Shevet Levi*, which, considering his evil character, is an anomaly. He was a cruel despot who had no regard for the feelings of others. He considered himself to be a deity, fearing and respecting no one. Why would he be lenient towards *Shevet Levi*? *Horav Yonasan Eibeshutz, zl*, offers a practical explanation which goes to the core of the concept of *nosei b'ol im chaveiro*, sharing the yoke/empathizing with (the plight of) one's fellow. Pharaoh's astrologers told him that the man who would be the Jews' savior would hail from *Shevet Levi*. Pharaoh conjectured (and rightfully so) that to be an effective leader, one must empathize with his flock. He, too, must suffer with them, feel their pain and grieve over their losses. Therefore, Pharaoh refused to enslave *Shevet Levi*, because if they did not feel the pain, they would not be able to produce the individual who would liberate the Jews.

Pharaoh erred, because he had no inkling concerning the character of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. Not only was Moshe not enslaved, he was raised amid untold wealth, literally with a silver spoon in his mouth. Despite his access to all material bounty, Moshe did not rest as long as his brethren were suffering. He left the palace to share in their burdens. *Rashi* comments on the above *pasuk*: *Nasan eino v'libo liheyos meitzar aleihem*, "He applied his eyes and his heart to see their suffering and grieve with them." What is achieved by seeing our fellow suffering or even grieving with him? At the end of the day, the person's pain has not been alleviated. He still hurts as badly as before. I was reading an article authored by a Jewish chaplain who serves the hospice unit of a large New York hospital that serves many Jewish patients. A hospice is a place that treats patients who are at the end stages of life. They are often in serious pain or heavily sedated to relieve the pain. Unlike his visits to other parts of the hospital, where he focuses on hope and recovery, the hospice wing is for those whose hope is centered on something else – not recovering. The patients and family perspective concerning intervention is that the loved one experiences peace and dignity during his life's last moments. Furthermore, he does not want to die alone, but would rather be surrounded by those who care deeply for him.

This brings me to viewing Moshe *Rabbeinu's* appearance on the slave labor scene more as a message of: "You are not alone. I care about you, and I will be with you in your pain and suffering. Sometimes, we cannot relieve the pain; we cannot diminish the fear of the unknown, but we can impart the message that you are not in this alone. I will hold your hand; I will not leave your side." Is this not what Hashem says: *Imo anochi b'tzarah*, "I am with him in his pain" (*Tehillim* 91:15)? Hashem does not say that He will remove the pain; rather, He will be at the person's side to intimate that he does not have to do this alone. He will be with him all the way.

We focus on relieving pain and suffering when, for the most part, it is out of our hands. Thus, we lose sight of the importance of companionship. A hospital room is like a dungeon. The patient does not know where he/she is living – or if, in fact, he/she will leave – period. People in prison are alone

– each individual prisoner compelled to work through his own personal life and issues. The one who visits, learns and listens to the prisoner cannot reduce his sentence, but he can give him companionship. He can communicate the message: “I care about you. Your welfare is my concern.”

Most patients have family who never leave their side – advocating for their care and welfare. I say “most,” because a glaring minority does not have family, does not have friends who are able to visit. Thus, they are relegated to spending their time confronting their fears – alone. Veritably, they are not alone. Hashem’s Presence rests at the head of the bed of each *choleh*, sick person. Sadly, when one is overcome with fear, he/she does not realize this. The person who visits is conveying the message that Hashem never leaves one’s side. He is always here. This was Moshe’s message to *Klal Yisrael*: “You are not alone. Hashem is here. He will never forsake you.”

An added caveat enables one to help others, an idea which we tend to ignore, because we convince ourselves that our lives are perfect, and it is someone else who is down and out – not I. This might be true, or it may be self-deluding. In any event, one who performs *chesed*, acts of kindness, to others also benefits himself. A wonderful, meaningful quote (author unknown) asserts: “Sometimes the reason good things are not happening to you is that you are the good thing that needs to happen to other people.” Simply explained, it means that you are special and that someone out there needs you to bring positivity into his/her life. It means that you mean something to someone. You have a purpose that extends beyond yourself. You must improve your life, deal with your issues, so that, by improving yourself, you can add a dimension of value to someone else’s life.

Horav Chaim Volozhiner says it more succinctly when he writes (preface to *Nefesh Ha’Chaim*), *Ha’adam lo l’atzmo nivra ela l’ho’il l’achrini*, “The purpose of the creation of man is to help others.”