Atone for Your people, Yisrael, that You have redeemed. (21:8)

Simply, *asher Padissa*, "Which You redeemed," is an appellation which applies to *Klal Yisrael* throughout the generations. We are, and will continue to be, the nation who Hashem redeemed and continues to redeem from bondage and adversity. Hashem redeemed us from Egypt, which, as mentioned in the *Haggadah Shel Pesach*, was the preeminent liberation of our people. Had our ancestors not been redeemed, we would today still be in Egypt enslaved to a contemporary Pharaoh. Thus, *asher Padissa* is a reference to our redemption throughout the ages as a result of that first redemption from Egypt.

Ibn Ezra contends that *asher Padissa* refers to one generation – the generation that was liberated from Egypt. This implies that the people who left Egypt required *kapparah*, atonement. What atonement did they require? Two hundred and ten years under the brutal whip of the Egyptian taskmasters should have cleared the collective spiritual slate of *Bnei Yisrael*. This exposition implies the notion that even today, thousands of years after the Egyptian liberation, the *dor yotzei Mitzrayim*, generation of those who left Egypt, have a bill to settle. Why is this?

Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, zl, relates an explanation that he heard that opens up a new vista in understanding cumulative responsibility for one's actions that can affect generations. He first relates the well-known story concerning *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, which ultimately inspired him to innovate the *Mussar*, ethical character, movement. Apparently, *Rav* Yisrael arrived in Vilna and heard about an incident that had taken place concerning a poor shoemaker who overnight had become a member of the *nouveau-riche*, having been the beneficiary of a large inheritance. When time came for his daughter to get married, he held the wedding in the town's most prestigious wedding hall, a place that heretofore had been reserved for the wealthy members of the community. The shoemaker was prepared to go all out. After all, his daughter was marrying the *Rav's* son. For what more could a person ask?

The shoemaker was a kindhearted soul, so he invited the whole town, regardless of pedigree or financial portfolio. He was celebrating, and one celebrates with everyone. Exclusive invitations had previously been reserved for those who had inflated egos. Apparently, this did not sit well with the members of the wealthy elite. What right did the shoemaker have to make a wedding in a hall that "belonged" to them.

While these people merely complained, one of them took the infraction seriously and decided to do something about it. As they were walking down to the *chuppah*, the man walked up to the shoemaker with a pair of shoes in his hand and, in a loud voice for all to hear, asked, "How much would it cost to repair these shoes? By the way, can you also polish them?" This despicable person wanted to humiliate the shoemaker publicly on what was supposed to be an auspiciously happy day. The shoemaker took the insult too hard. He suddenly turned white and collapsed to the

ground in a dead faint. The doctors were called, but it was too late. He had already passed on to a better world. End of story? No.

When *Rav* Yisrael Salanter heard this tale, he declared, "How are the leaders of the city going to defend themselves in Heaven when they are blamed with the responsibility for having produced people with such detestable character. (The shoemaker had also over-reacted. A little embarrassment should not cause such a physical reaction, unless one's self-esteem is very low.) How would the rabbis defend themselves for having allowed such a crude and insensitive person in their midst?"

Rav Yisrael was essentially pointing the finger at Jewish leadership – himself included – for this infraction. He felt that he must do something to refine people's character. This was the inspiration for the *Mussar* movement. If a *frum*, observant, Jew could be so insensitive, then something must be done to refine his character. We see from here that responsibility for the future rests on the shoulders of Jewish leadership – even after they have passed on. Their lack of reproving the members of their respective communities – generations earlier – spawned such a miscreant. The spiritual character failings fostered by previous generations were carried forth from generation to generation.

Having said this, we understand why even the generation of the Jews which was redeemed from Egypt is called to task for the errant behavior of their descendants. It had to start "somewhere." They were that "somewhere."

Our actions have long and far-reaching repercussions – both good and bad. Many years ago, the *Rosh Yeshivah* of the Philadelphia *Yeshivah, Horav Eliyah Svei, zl*, was in New York with his family. New York to Philadelphia is not a long trip. When one must take public transportation, however, it can be pricey – especially if a number of tickets must be purchased. The local train was $12.00 one way. It was slow and made numerous stops, so they would arrive in Philadelphia later than they wanted. Amtrak had a train that was more convenient, but also very expensive: $70.00. They decided that all would travel by bus except for one son, who would take the train. This way, he could arrive in *yeshivah* for the last fifteen minutes of *shiur*, class. When they asked their father why he was spending $58.00 for a mere fifteen minutes of *shiur*, the *Rosh Yeshivah* explained, "I do not want it to be recorded in Heaven that I refused to spend $58.00 for fifteen minutes of *shiur*. I do not know what the *schar*, reward, is for fifteen minutes of *Gemorah shiur*, but I do know that if I do not spend the extra money, then all the *schar* I will ever get for fifteen minutes of *Gemorah* is $58.00. I am not willing to exchange my Heavenly reward for a few dollars." Not only does this show the *Rosh Yeshivah's gadlus*, greatness, it gives us a perspective on the far-reaching echos of our actions.