

## The Egyptians mistreated us. (26:6)

The Egyptians were cruel to us, making us suffer and imposing harsh slavery on us. We cried to G-d, G-d of our ancestors, and He heard our voice; he saw our suffering, our harsh labor, and our distress. (26:6,7)

Interestingly, *Chazal* (quoted in the *Haggadah*) interpret each of the latter phrases: our suffering; our harsh labor; and our distress. They appear, however, to have ignored the beginning of the *pasuk*, *Va'yareiu osanu ha'Mitzrim*, "The Egyptians were cruel to us, making us suffer and imposing harsh slavery on us." In the *Haggadah*, the second part of the *pasuk* is explained as follows: "Suffering" refers to the separation of men from women; harsh labor refers to the murder of our children; and distress refers to our stress. Why do *Chazal* explain the second part of the *pasuk*, while ignoring the beginning? That they focus on Hashem listening to our voices and skim over the Egyptians' cruelty to us is enigmatic.

*Horav Kalonimus Kalman Shapiro, zl*, the *Piaseczner Rebbe*, the *Rebbe* of Warsaw, was murdered together with millions of his brothers and sisters. While he left no biological progeny, his writings have fascinated students from all aspects of the Jewish spectrum. His Holocaust writings and homilies possess an incredible level of potency and serve as a guide toward understanding the darkness that enveloped our people during the tragic years of World War II. His homilies are, at times, theologically challenging, and, if a lesser person would have articulated this challenge, he might have been questioned. The *Rebbe*, however, does not pull any punches, clearly stating his questions and fears, while never for a moment mitigating his extreme faith in Hashem. He understands that, as mortals with limited capacity for understanding Hashem's ways, the answers will elude us. Thus, we resort to complete faith.

In regard to our opening question, the *Rebbe* explains that, in their present circumstances, having experienced the brutality, persecution and witnessed the murder of so many of our people, comparing the way we once felt and how we feel today, we have become numb to all pain and suffering. We have suffered atrocities that only sadistic creatures like the Nazis could have dreamed up. We have seen and experienced it all. In the past, we felt every pain, regardless of its weak and inconsequential nature, because we had never before experienced true pain. On the other hand, if today, after having lived through so much, we would respond as we did then – it would be impossible to survive, even for a single day.

*Chazal* (*Shabbos* 13b) explain, "Dead flesh of a living person does not feel the scalpel." The *Rebbe* explains that we can only feel a bone-crunching sensation throughout our body, the universe is blacked out for us. Day and night have ceased to exist. We feel nothing but disorientation and confusion. It feels as if the entire world is pressing down on us, squeezing, squashing and stressing us, *chas v'shalom*, G-d forbid, to the bursting point. We are unable to feel the details of each torment or gauge the degree of its pain. (I took the liberty of paraphrasing his heartrending words, due to the nature of the circumstance and the emotion-laden sincerity of the

man whose boundless love for Hashem and His People was without peer.)

Thus, the *Rebbe* explains why *Chazal* did not interpret the first part of the text: “The Egyptians were cruel to us,” because the Jews did not experience every harsh decree individually. They experienced it as a community who had lost so much and who had experienced such indescribable pain. They had collectively reached the extreme level of “dead flesh,” numb and forlorn. Yet, Hashem “heard our voice” and observed the most minute detail of every single torment – of every single person. Then, Hashem had mercy and saved the Jewish People from the cruel Egyptians.