

## And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael who were coming to Egypt... A new king rose... who did not know Yosef. (1:1,8)

Pharaoh soon forgot all the wonderful things that Yosef had done for him and his people. Sadly, this is not uncommon. People remember you only when they need your help. Once they feel they can do it alone, they quickly forget that they were your beneficiaries. Unfortunately, this is human nature. It requires a special person, whose character traits are refined, to acknowledge what he owes and offer his gratitude. Forgetfulness is often a product of self-centeredness. When a person sees only himself and his immediate needs, he can easily dismiss the benefits and blessings that he has received from others in the past.

*Hakaros ha'tov*, recognizing that one has benefitted from another and is now beholden to him, is the only way to combat the tendency to forget. Thus, we foster humility and gratitude within ourselves. The *Shibud Mitzrayim*, the Egyptian bondage, began as a consequence of forgetfulness on the part of Pharaoh. The only way in which we can drive that disease from our midst is to remember what we experienced.

Memories play a crucial role in shaping our identity, guiding our actions and forming the foundation of moral and ethical living. The importance of memory is emphasized repeatedly in the Torah, as it connects the past with the present, laying the foundation for the future. We should not forget key events in our history, so that the lessons which they impart will continue to shape our perspective. Hashem orchestrates everything that we experience for a specific purpose. By forgetting, we ignore that purpose. Thus, we are relegated to reliving the past.

The *parsha* begins by hinting to the key to our people's enslavement in Egypt: *Ha'ba'im*, who were coming to Egypt. During the entire time that the original family existed in Egypt, it was always "coming;" they were not settled. They never viewed themselves as Egyptians. They were Jews from the "old country" who were presently living in Egypt. It was only after Yosef, his brothers and the members of the original group who came to Egypt died that their descendants saw themselves as permanent residents, citizens and eventually members of Egyptian society. As a result, the status quo concerning the Jews' identity as Jews took a nosedive. When Pharaoh saw that this generation of Jews had forgotten their roots, he, too, began to forget. After all, nothing about these Jews reminded him of Yosef. He did not recognize a vestige of Yosef's character, morals or spiritual persona in this new group of Jews. When we forget, they forget, and so begins the travail that we have endured throughout history.

History has a way of repeating itself. Egypt repeated itself in Spain and then in Germany and France. The French Revolution aroused intense excitement for the Western European Jew. Just as the Enlightenment had decimated German Jewry in the larger communities, the scourge of assimilation resulting from the gentile's open-door policy granting the heretofore ghetto Jew access to French culture, society and education was about to cause a similar spiritual destruction

of the Western European Jew. As the Jews achieved acceptance in France, they responded to the government's call and many enlisted in the National Guard. The Jew wanted to be viewed as a "Frenchman," not as a Jew.

How quickly they forgot their persecutors and the oppression of anti-Semitism. They forgot (or ignored) the lessons of the past. They forgot the suffering and misery that had been so much a part of their lives, as they sacrificed their Judaism, *shuls* and traditional way of life, just so that they could be accepted as *goyim*. This decline was not gradual, but immediate, as masses of Jews were swept away into the culture of their host country.

*Va'timalei ha'aretz osam*, "The land became filled with them." The areas that had been closed to the Jew were now open. The alien society gave them carte blanche to become *goyim*, and they accepted the invitation. This is the result of forgetting. The *Satmar Rebbe, zl*, committed himself to rebuilding the *Satmar Kehillah* on the American landscape. The Holocaust had decimated European Jewry, and many of those who survived sought physical and spiritual haven. Some were not prepared to live life as they once had. This was a new world; they had suffered enough; it was time to distance themselves from the world that was. The *Rebbe* would not hear of it. Strict adherence to the customs of old was a benchmark of Satmar. They retained their distinctive dress code, as well as their unshorn beards and *payos*. This was not a yearning for a long-lost past, but an end in itself. Changes of location do not determine the application and practice of Torah and *mitzvos*. Many have posited that, because the *Satmar Rebbe* was prepared to stand and lead his community to the extreme, the rest of the Jewish community was able to survive, even with their lenient attitude toward dress and fashion.

The *Rebbe* was not the only one who refused to permit forgetfulness to permeate the minds of the newly-emerging American Jewish community. The handful of surviving *Roshei Yeshivah* and *Chassidic Rebbes*, together with a number of inspired American laymen, saw to it that the American Jewish community would not suffer a memory loss and that Torah and *Yiddishkeit* would flourish once again – in America and in *Eretz Yisrael*.