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THE REWARD WE RECEIVE BY SHARING THE JOY OF OTHERS

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)

It is written, “But the midwives feared G-d and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them, and they caused the boys to live ... G-d benefited the midwives – and the people increased and became very strong. And it was because the midwives feared G-d that He made them houses” (Exodus 1:17, 20-21).

Why is verse 20 (“G-d benefited the midwives”) not immediately followed by the description of how G-d rewarded them (“He made them houses”)? Instead, why is it interrupted in the middle by the phrase, “and the people increased...”?

I have read in the book Darchei Mussar that the reward G-d gave the midwives was that the people increased and prospered. The midwives Shifra and Puah – that is, Yocheved and her daughter Miriam (Sotah 11a) – would not be content with personal reward (the establishment of their homes) if the Children of Israel had continued to be oppressed and overwhelmed with hard labor and their newborn males thrown into the river (Exodus 1:22), which threatened to exterminate the Jewish people. Yet when they saw that Hashem, in His infinite goodness, annulled the decree of the wrongdoer and that the more the people were oppressed, the more it would “increase and so it would spread” (v.12) – that the people multiplied and grew considerably – their joy was complete. Thus it was only when the overall situation of the Children of Israel improved that the midwives were able to appreciate the personal reward that was allotted them: They would give rise to houses of priests and kings

of Israel (Sotah 11a). In other words, the fate of the people was their primary concern.

The one who merits this, the author concludes, is therefore one who feels and shares the joy and pain of his fellow and all the Jewish people. Does Hashem Himself not proclaim, “I am with him in distress” (Psalms 91:15)?

A man should therefore first sympathize with the distress of his fellow, love him, and inquire about his needs. His own private life and interests should be secondary. His reward will be immense when he sincerely thinks of the happiness of others, as it is written: “You shall love your fellow as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). You should first love him and sympathize with his situation with your entire being, and then you should think of yourself.

Before continuing, let us relate what Rabbi Tzvi Yechezkel Michaleson, of blessed memory, head of the Rabbinical Courts of Pionsk and its surroundings, wrote about Rabbi Chanoch Henich of Alexander. While he was working in Novidvar, Rabbi Chanoch Henich suffered numerous humiliations, particularly from a certain person who should have been, from all accounts, excommunicated according to Halachah (Shulchan Aruch, Yore Deah 243:7). The residents of the city therefore insisted that the Rav excommunicate him, yet he stubbornly refused. Believing that the Rav was afraid of government authorities, those close to him collected 9,000 gold pieces and went to speak to him. “If the government takes you to court,”

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they explained, “this is the maximum fine they can impose on you. So here it is if you need it, Rabbeinu. Now banish this evildoer so that he no longer dares to humiliate a rabbi!”

Rabbi Chanoch flatly refused this proposal of theirs. To those close to him, who explained that the situation was perfectly clear and that there was no reason for him to be afraid, he replied: “There is no doubt about that. I know very well that this man should, according to Halachah, be excommunicated. Yet I wonder if personal interests are not playing a part in all this. I wonder if this banishment will simply be for G-d’s sake [see Exodus 29:12], so as to avenge the honor of the Torah and its scholars (who are angels of G-d), which have been tarnished by evildoers [see Shabbat 119b]. I therefore cannot accept to do this, lest personal interests enter into play, and in the final analysis I will not comply with the will of the Torah.”

This account shows us that we must always demonstrate the greatest caution and the utmost composure when humiliated. Shifra and Puah implored Hashem that their actions be for Heaven’s sake (see Exodus 22:19). Only the fear of G-d would push them to incur risks to save children made in the image of G-d, and it was this image of G-d that they saw when saving the children from death. That is what generated their fear of G-d (see Exodus 1:17).

However the midwives were not yet fully satisfied. Perhaps personal interests had played a role in their decision. Maybe they were allowing the children to live, not because of their fear of G-d, but for other reasons. Their joy was only complete when they saw the people multiplying and increasing. They tirelessly made their way from one place to the next in order to help Jewish women give birth. It was then that they perceived G-d’s help in making their work a success, and of this it is written: “Those whose hope is in the L-RD will have renewed strength” (Isaiah 40:31).

Consequently, when we serve G-d without experiencing weariness, this is a sign that He is helping us. The building of their houses, that of the priesthood and royalty, was secondary with respect to their joy over having untiringly covered the land in order to help Jewish women give birth and to see an increasing number of babies. The midwives certainly did not act through pride or for any personal honor whatsoever.

They only sought to increase Hashem’s glory. There are no boundaries in serving G-d; there is no weariness. The more we serve G-d, the stronger we get. That is what the midwives experienced. The people multiplied and increased, and the midwives felt no fatigue whatsoever. At that point they were certain that they had acted solely for G-d’s sake.

We know that G-d repays “measure for measure” (Shabbat 105b). Now we see that by having allowed the children to live, the midwives’ reward was the building of houses of priesthood and royalty. Was that a case of being repaid “measure for measure”? This is the question raised by Rabbi Daniel Heyman, one that he heard from his Rav.

The verse specifies, “He made them batim [houses]” (Exodus 1:21), and the term batim comes from Batiah, Pharaoh’s daughter – bat Y-h (“daughter of Hashem”) – who, as our Sages explained (Vayikra Rabba 1:3), saved Moses from the river (see Exodus 2:5). Thus G-d acted measure for measure. The midwives saved the souls of Israel, and as a reward G-d sent them Batiah, who saved our teacher Moses, the son of Yocheved and brother of Miriam (the two midwives).

The verse states, “His sister [Miriam] stationed herself at a distance to know what would be done with him” (Exodus 2:4). She had prophesied that her mother was destined to give birth to a child who would save the Jewish people (Sotah 11b). Now even if the midwives’ reward consisted of houses of priesthood and royalty that were to come into being, respectively, through Moses’ brother Aaron (the High Priest) and through Miriam herself (by marriage to Caleb from the tribe of Judah), the saving of Moses himself also constituted a reward that was measure for measure. This is because Moses represented the priesthood (since he built the Tabernacle) and royalty (since he led the Jewish people). Thus by sending the midwives Batiah (who saved Moses), G-d repaid the midwives measure for measure.

It is written, “The Children of Israel were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became very strong – very, very much so” (Exodus 1:7), for Jewish women were giving birth to six children at a time (Mechilta Bo 12). Thus we see that the one who shares the joy of his fellow and strives to help him in all circumstances receives an immeasurable reward from G-d.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

RABBI HAIM MESSAS

The Messas family was one of the most important in all of Morocco. It gave rise to great sages who served in rabbinic courts and produced many disciples. In our time, those who are best known are Rabbi Yossef Messas Zatzal, the Chief Rabbi of Haifa, and our teacher Rabbi Shalom Messas Zatzal, the Rav of Jerusalem.

Rabbi Haim Messas, the father of Rabbi Yossef, was born in Meknes in Elul 5603 (1843), and from his youth a pure fear of G-d burned in him. He behaved with the utmost holiness, and his prayers were heard. He had many disciples, among them being Rabbi Raphael Baruch Toledano, his son Rabbi Yossef Messas, and many others who became dayanim and taught Torah in Morocco and Eretz Israel.

He left behind the book *Nishmat Haim* on Torah and Tanach, as well as important Halachic books. His work was published in 1949 by his son Rabbi Yossef, and later republished by the Bnei Issachar foundation thanks to his son Rav Eliyahu.

Rabbi Haim Messas Zatzal passed away in 5664 (1904). His disciple Rabbi Raphael Baruch Toledano recounts the following story about him:

"Friday morning, Nissan 6, 5663 (1903) began a day of mourning for Israel, for all our wicked enemies surrounding us attacked like wild beasts, trying to exterminate and pillage the whole community. They were armed with axes and all sorts of lethal weapons, and they came like woodcutters to tear down the city walls. At the time Morocco had no king, which prompted this terrible crisis. On that morning, everyone was assembled in the streets of the town, young and old alike. I too was there during those terrible times. Our holy teacher was among this multitude when he fell to the ground. His long beard, as white as snow, lay in the dust as he let out great cries for repentance and awakened hearts with his enflamed voice. He said, 'My children, return to G-d with all your heart! Perhaps He will be favorable with us and we will not perish.' He recited Shema Israel aloud, and the entire community repeated it after him several times. [Note: See Targum Yonatan on the verse that states, "Behold! A man of the Children of Israel..." (Numbers 25:6), which he translates as, "They cried and recited Shema Israel"]. We all wept amidst the lightening and thunder of the enemy. With lead bullets flying over our heads, we screamed and cried. Then G-d saved us from this terrible danger, for the watchmen from every rampart announced that a great dread had descended upon our enemies, and that they had all fled and were dispersing in every direction. Blessed be He Who answers His people Israel in times of trouble; blessed be G-d Who saves. We know very well that it was the merit of our holy teacher that protected us. A few days later he fell ill, and he remained bedridden until rendering his holy soul to his Creator on Tammuz 8, 5664 (1904), for he had atoned for the generation. May the merit of his beautiful soul protect and defend us, we and all Israel, Amen."

His son Rabbi Yossef Messas Zatzal, the former Chief Rabbi of Haifa, recounted the following stories:

"One Friday after the morning service, while he was still in synagogue, some people came to see him and accused the grandson of the great and venerated Tzaddik, Rabbi Shemuel ben Vaish, of having stolen a Kiddush cup and a candlestick from them in the synagogue. My father saw the accused man, dressed in patched-up clothes, barefoot, and looking half asleep. He then sent the man's accusers away immediately and asked him if he had recited the morning prayers, or if had a Tallit and Tefillin. The man replied

that he did not. At that my father became very angry and began to strike him. He then made him sit down and gave him his own Tallit and Tefillin and a prayer book. While he was praying, my father began to cry, moan, and ask for mercy on the man. When he was finished, he had the man read the parsha of the week with him, twice in Hebrew and once in Aramaic, while telling him to look at the Tetragrammaton printed in the book in order to become filled with holiness. Once finished, he began to question the man about the theft. My father concluded that he had stolen the objects and resold them to another Jew because of his great poverty. He then had the buyer summoned and spoke to him harshly, accusing him of supporting sinners and issuing him a fine equal to half of what he paid for the stolen objects, the other half coming out of his own pocket. He gave the owners back what had been stolen from them, and he bought the thief a new pair of Tefillin and gave him a Tallit Katan. My father also gave him a prayer book, some shoes, a hat, smock, and pants, all the clothes being made from beautiful fabrics that were very wear-resistant and practically new. He also gave him some money to purchase what he needed for Shabbat. After having given him all this, which my father paid for out of his own pocket, he began to console the man. He brought him to his home and fed him breakfast before sending him off. On Shabbat, he again had him come over in order to eat with him, and all day long he had him listen to words of Mussar."

"Once, near Passover (a time when houses are rented out in Meknes), a man came to my father demanding that a poor Talmid Chacham pay up his rent for the past year and then leave his house. My father had great difficulty in getting the landlord to accept a compromise, namely that my father would pay the rent for the past year and the landlord would allow the Talmid Chacham to remain where he was for another year. Now the Talmid Chacham said that he had no way to pay the landlord, and so the latter asked him for some collateral. The Talmid Chacham replied that he didn't have any, and when my father heard this, he immediately took out my mother's silver bracelets and gave them as collateral. My father then sent the two parties home in peace. The bracelets remained as collateral with the landlord for more than three years, until G-d gave the Talmid Chacham a little money. At that point he purchased the bracelets back and returned them to my father."

"One day, during a time when a Jewish laundrywoman was working for us at home, my father went to synagogue to pray Mincha. Before praying, however, he remembered that he had not paid the laundrywoman. He immediately decided to take the money out of his wallet and pay her, and it was at that point that he realized that he didn't have the money available. He then left synagogue to find someone to lend him the money with which to pay her, but because it was raining and there were no passers by, he couldn't find anyone. He was quite worried about this and said, 'Master of the world, do for us what You promised: "The one who purifies himself is helped."' He had barely finished speaking when he looked around him and saw a package sticking out of the mud. He went to take it, and inside he found just enough money to pay the laundrywoman, neither more nor less. Overjoyed, he hurried to have it brought to her, and then he went to pray Mincha with a happy heart. For several days he looked for the owner of this money, but without success."

THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

It is written, “And now, go and I shall dispatch you to Pharaoh and you shall take My people the Children of Israel out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10-11).

The “and” in the expression, “and you shall take” is difficult to understand, for it seems to communicate two commandments from Hashem, whereas in reality there was only one. Instead, the text should have used the expression “to take” (“I shall dispatch you to Pharaoh to take My people...”). The same anomaly is again found in Moses’ response: “Who am I ... and that I should take the Children of Israel out” (v.11).

We can fully understand this point in light of the following Midrash: “ ‘And now, go and I shall dispatch you to Pharaoh.’ Concerning the word lecha [go], Rabbi Elazar said that the hei at the end of the word indicates a certainty: If you do not go and save them, no one will be able to.”

To better understand what this means, let us use an analogy to examine two different ways of sending a person to do something.

We sometimes send someone to a given place to purchase some goods for us, in which case we give him the means to purchase them. Yet it sometimes happens that we entrust someone to do our business for us by saying: “Purchase things at your own expense, and when you return I’ll reimburse you for everything.” The difference between these two methods is that if the agent does not want to go, in the first case he will say, “I cannot go, but I know someone else who can. Give him the money and he’ll do as good a job as I would.” In the second case, where the agent must purchase things with his own money or on credit, only he can do so. He cannot refuse by saying, “Send somebody else.”

The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to send representatives to Pharaoh to command him to let His people leave Egypt. If the Children of Israel had been meritorious enough to be saved, it would have hardly mattered who the representative was. However since that was not the case, Hashem wanted to add to their merit by sending the most upright of the people, meaning Moses and Aaron (Shemot Rabba 15). That is why the Holy One, blessed be He, specified to Moses: “And now, lecha [go] and I shall dispatch you.” If He had said, lech (without the hei), this would have meant that He wanted simply anyone to go. The addition of the hei teaches that it was personally up to Moses to save them, and that another agent could not have properly accomplished this mission.

This is the meaning of the Midrash: “Lecha [go] ... the hei at the end of the word indicates a certainty: If you do not go and save them, no one will be able to.” There are clearly two requests here: First, to go to Pharaoh and accomplish his mission there. Second, to take the Children of Israel out by his own merit. It was to this that Moses, in his modesty, replied: “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take the Children of Israel out of Egypt?” The agent in the second case that we spoke of in our analogy has, all the same, the ability to refuse by saying, “How can I purchase goods with my own money, since I have nothing? And who would extend credit to a poor wretch who doesn’t even have enough money to buy bread?” That is what Moses meant when

he said, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh”: It is impossible for me to even meet such a great sovereign. By saying “and that I should take the Children of Israel out,” Moses meant: “Also, how can You ask me to take them out through my own merit?” Hence in the words of the Midrash (as cited by Rashi): “ ‘And that I should take’ – through whose merit?” In his great humility, Moses believed that he had very little.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK EVERYTHING FOR EDUCATION

The Gaon Rabbi Raphael Baruch Toledano Zatzal, the Rav of Meknes in Morocco, learned that in the city of Ujda, near the Algerian border, there were no religious schools for Jewish children, and that parents there were sending their children to secular schools. He was very distressed by this and decided to travel to that city to push the leaders of the community to establish a religious school. He set up meeting with them for a Sunday, and since Ujda was a half-day away by train, he decided to leave just after Shabbat.

During Shabbat, however, Rabbi Baruch fell ill and had to remain in bed. Because of his illness, he decided to abandon his plans to take the long and arduous train ride. However after several hours, Rabbi Baruch suddenly jumped out of bed. How could he allow himself to be sick while Jewish children were not studying Torah or being educated in the Jewish faith? He announced that he was feeling better and decided to leave as planned! Imploring him to stay was useless, and so he rented a carriage and paid the driver extra to quickly drive him to the train station. This enabled him to catch his train at the last minute.

He felt feeble in the train and trembled with cold, shivering all night long. However with daybreak, when the train arrived at Ujda, his illness and fatigue disappeared and he felt invigorated with the strength of youth. He assembled the leaders of the community and spoke words that went straight to their heart, explaining the need of an education rooted in Torah. The listeners agreed, and in the meantime they begged him to eat something after such a long trip. Rabbi Baruch, however, announced in a definite tone that he would eat nothing until a decision on a religious school had been taken. The leaders began to argue that nobody knew what the future held, and that now was not the time to establish a new school, but that they should wait a while.

Rabbi Baruch listened to all this without reacting. Then, all of a sudden, people could see tears flowing from his eyes.

“What’s the matter Rabbi?” they asked him with apprehension.

He replied, “Since my words have not been heard, I’m afraid that I lack sufficient fear of G-d, for the Sages have said that anyone who fears G-d, his words are heard.”

Those assembled were astonished, and there and then they decided to build a school from where Torah would be taught.