

Good People in the World

Category: Shemos, Shemos

Sometimes people see only the bad in the world. It's always important—especially in our times—to remember that from the darkest of situations, a bright light can arise at any moment.

A Lost Diamond

Good Shabbos!

One winter a few short years ago, an Israeli diamond dealer at the Tel Aviv diamond exchange lost a bag of gems worth \$200,000 dollars. He and his son were reduced to crawling all over the place, literally, looking all over the place for the lost diamonds. But it was all for naught—they failed to find anything.

They then tried looking at security footage—only to find that the area in which the bag was last seen did not have security cameras. What was worse, the gems did not belong to them, and so they did not have insurance on them.

A religious Jew, also a diamond dealer, was walking in the street not far from this scene of chaos, when he spied a little bag lying on the sidewalk. He instantly understood that it was something to be picked up—and then discovered the diamonds inside it. He immediately handed them over to the security department at the exchange, and the lost items were returned to their owners.

The upright finder said that he had not had the temptation to take it for himself. He had been raised to believe that something that didn't belong to him was not to be touched—unless, of course, you wanted to return it. The happy owner of the lost diamonds, however, gave the man a sum of cash as a token of thanks.

Around the same time, however, there was a similar story in Connecticut.

An Orthodox rabbi bought a used office desk on the Internet for under \$200. The seller was an older woman, a widow, and she was selling it out of her own house on eBay or something like that.

Well, after the rabbi picked it up, brought it home and tried to move it into his

home office, he discovered that his doorway was too narrow. He was forced to take the desk apart to get it through the door, and in doing so, he found a bag hidden inside the desk.

The bag contained \$100 bills. When he finished counting them all, he discovered that he had just found almost \$100,000 dollars.

He immediately told his wife that it wasn't theirs and that they had to return to the woman from whom they had bought the desk. It turned out that the widow had hid all the money her husband had left her in the desk and had been planning to use it to support herself for the rest of her life but forgot where she put it. The young rabbi who returned some \$98,000 dollars to the woman said that he had never even thought of touching the money.

The woman said that she had never believed that there still existed people who were that upright and proper.

Such stories are a breath of fresh air. A lot of people, after all, go around feeling bitter and hopeless about the world. They tell themselves, and make sure to tell other people, too, how everyone is crooked and corrupt, and that if you try to be straight, they'll just run you out of town. So instead of being straight, join the party and be like everyone!

But then, G-d suddenly sends us people like these who prove that there are still upright and proper people in the world, and when they find something that doesn't belong to them, even something very tempting, they control themselves and do the right thing.

It Seems Like A Dark World

And that brings us to this week's Torah portion.

In this week's Parshah, we start reading the story of the Egyptian exile. We read how the Pharaoh, who was afraid that the Jewish Nation getting too populous in Egypt, calls his advisors and together come up with the "Final Solution" for the Jewish Problem.

So the Pharaoh drafts the Jews into slave labor, thus turning them into a nation of slaves. Then he summons the head midwives of the Jews, ordering them to kill

Jewish baby boys at the time of birth. But the midwives risked their lives and did not cooperate; it's only natural that Jewish women would not kill their own fellow Jews.

Now the Pharaoh sees that the midwives were not listening to him, and so he decrees the famous decree to throw every baby boy into the river. The situation was so grim that the Jews gave up having children. And throughout this new era, no one in Egypt stood up to defend the Jews.

Moshe himself had this realization when, years later, he went out to see the suffering of his brothers and saw how an Egyptian officer wanted to kill a Jew. The Torah (Shemos 2:12) tells us, “and he turned this way and that way, and he saw that there was no man”—and one of the commentaries tells us that he looked both ways and saw that there was no one stepping up to defend the Jews. In the Egypt of those days, Jewish blood was cheap.

When we read such a story, we can lose hope and conclude that there's no hope for mankind— either everyone is a murderer, or, in the best-case scenario, it's something that doesn't concern them, such that even the best people among them are not ready to defend a Jew.

Light in Pharaoh's Home

But then, into the midst of all this darkness there bursts a ray of light.

We have the story of Baby Moshe, whose own mother puts him in a basket in the water at the river's edge. We see the Egyptian princess go down to the river and discovering the baby, declaring that he is “of the Hebrew children.” How did she know he was a Hebrew? In the simple text itself, we find nothing written telling us that there were any Jewish identifying signs—rather, it was the intuition of the princess, and at that moment, she made a fateful decision. By Egyptian law, every Jewish baby had to be drowned and she, as the daughter of the Pharaoh, definitely had to adhere to her father's rules.

But instead of drowning the baby, she pulls him out of the water and adopts him as her son.

Even if she had only returned him alive to the Hebrews, that alone would have

been a heroic act. But here, she does the unbelievable—she adopts a Jewish baby and takes him into the palace of the Pharaoh. Even the name he was given proudly declared the stubbornness of the princess to not submit to her father's orders: "And she named him Moses, and she said, 'For I drew him from the water'" (Shmos 2:10).

What's interesting here is that Moshe was not called by the name given to him by his parents when he was born—rather, he was specifically called by the name given to him by the Egyptian princess. Why? Because it was she who risked her life for him. As the Midrash puts it, "This is the reward of those who do good—even though Moshe had many names, the Torah only established his name as the one that Batya, the daughter of the Pharaoh, called him; even G-d didn't call him by another name" (Shmos Rabbah 1:26). (See Sichos Kodesh 5741 Vol. I, pg. 447.)

The story of the Egyptian exile is so dark and awful that a person is liable to get depressed reading about it—there's no hope, everyone hates us and kills us, and no one is ready to stand and defend the persecuted. But suddenly, a "ray of light" is shown to us by G-d—in the very house of the cruelest man in Egypt, there shines forth a great soul like this, like Batya, the daughter of the Pharaoh, the first "Righteous Gentile" in history.

And so the Pharaoh's daughter merited to be "adopted" by G-d as His own daughter, so to speak.

As the Midrash puts it: "G-d said to her... 'Moshe was not your son but you called him your son; so, too, are you not My daughter but I call you My daughter.'" The Midrash also notes that Batya means "daughter of G-d." (Vayikra Rabbah 1:3.)

The Section of Righteous Gentiles

In our day, many of us have visited Yad Vashem, and almost the entire museum makes you cry and feel depressed.

But then you get to the Righteous Gentiles section, where there are eternalized some 25,000 non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews.

The fact that thousands of Jews risked their lives to save other Jews is normal. It's

natural, and that's the way it's supposed to be. But the fact that so many non-Jews risked their lives to save Jews and were not ready to stand by the wayside, it is they who are the heirs to the tradition of the daughter of the Pharaoh. It is they who give hope to mankind.

Never allow yourself to think that the world is no longer a good place. Sometimes, in the worst of darkness, the greatest light will appear.

Good Shabbos!