

## Seeing with the Heart

### I. A Little Girl on the Banks of the Nile

Salvation is often borne of humble origins.

Baby Moshe, future savior of Israel, is floating down the Nile, into the waters of oblivion. The only thing which stands between this boy joining the thousands of others drowned in those waters are a small set of eyes, that of a little girl, his older sister Miriam. She stands at a distance, concerned, and yet, her heart filled with faith, she waits for deliverance. And, as we know, from the very daughter of Pharaoh it would come, for the Almighty works in mysterious ways.

When the princess came, the little girl was ready. She had been looking not with her eyes, but with her heart.

### II. Of Hearts and Eyes: Yaakov to Moshe

If one looks inside a Sefer Torah, right where the parshah we read last week meets the one before it, one notes that it is the only Torah portion not afforded its own line. It simply begins where the last one left off. Rashi, noticing this anomaly, of a closed text, senses that it is replete with symbolic value. As Yaakov was about to die,

the closing of the text evokes other more profound closures, למה פרשה זו סתומה? כיון שמת יעקב אבינו, נסתמו עיניהם ולבן של ישראל מצרת השעבוד, the Death of Jacob, and the ensuing period of bondage, closed the eyes and hearts of the Jewish people.

After all, a leader provides vision, עינים פקוחות. She sees what others do not. After all, a leader provides the emotional bandwidth, לב פתוח, that others may not possess.

Not until the arrival of Moshe, do we find the reopening of the collective heart and mind. As he grew in the palace, the Torah tells us, he went out to his brethren, ויצא אל אחיו וירא, בסבלותם, Even before Moshe had ever seen them, at least as a young adult, Moshe thought of them as his brothers, ויצא אל אחיו. Rashi's language echoes precisely what had been absent since the death of Yaakov, נתן עיניו ולבו להיות מיצר עליהם, he opened his eyes, but more importantly, his heart, to see that his gilded life in the palace was far from the grinding suffering of his Hebrew brethren. And, despite the chasm of wealth and privilege in every measurable category which separated Moshe from his biological brethren, he truly felt their pain and suffering.

### III. One Thousand Acts of Chessed

What we see is determined by how capacious our hearts are, whether we have done the work in advance to consider the humanity of the one whom we encounter.

It can be for the better, or for the worse.

When we recite the third paragraph of Shema, **ולא תתורו אחרי** **לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם**, do not stray after your hearts and after your minds, It ought to have said the opposite, do not be corrupted by that which you see, and the impact which it can exert on one's heart. But, the opposite is apparently the case.

When Moshe opened his heart, he saw something completely different, and he was prepared to act. Unfortunately, as happens on occasion in life, it was not immediately appreciated. Moshe's deep concern for the ancient Hebrews was resented, and he found himself running for his life. Sometimes, it can feel that no good deed goes unpunished.

But, we cannot afford to fall prey to this kind of cynicism.

More often than not, the extent to which we allow other into our hearts, and consequently, are able to see the many ways in which we may be of some measure of assistance, is deeply and profoundly appreciated. And, if it is not, let us take solace in the wisdom of our Sages, "the reward for a mitzvah is itself a mitzvah, **שכר מצוה מצוה**."

It is not infrequently the case that if we simply ask someone how he or she is doing, *a pro forma* question will elicit a *pro forma* answer. And, if we're looking only with our eyes at those around us, but not with our hearts, the result will be, as the Psalmist declared. "they have eyes but they see not".

But, if we're looking carefully, and I don't mean prying, but simply being aware of our surroundings, as a determined little girl was on the banks of the Nile some three thousand five hundred years ago, we'll discover a great deal. We may realize that we're in a position to resolve a problem, or help direct someone to a resolution, or simply, and this is not a small thing, to be a kind ear.

A community exists at a public level, in our Tefillot, in our learning together, in our social program and lectures. But, a community exists as well, in its essence, in a thousand private acts of chesed-some, nothing more than a kind word or a short text message.

But, to be able to reach out, we first have to see. And to see, to truly see, we must look not with our eyes, but with our hearts, to perform the interpersonal and emotional equivalent of reading between the lines. In this private gesture lies the very seeds of redemption.