

# GROWTH INVESTMENT

*by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky*

It was a test for the ages. The mighty Pharaoh commanded the midwives Shifra and Puah, known to us as Yocheved and her daughter Miriam, to kill all the boys born to Hebrew mothers. Not only did they ignore the edict, they countered it by nourishing the newborns with pacifying words and comforting amenities food and drink.. The Midrash tells us that they cared for the sick and unhealthy babies as well, nourishing them with prayers, and Hashem in heaven did not ignore their actions. But the verses need some explanation. First the Torah tells us, "And G-d rewarded the midwives, and the nation flourished and prospered." Only then does it add, "And it was as the midwives feared Hashem, and He made for them houses." Rashi explains that both midwives were rewarded for their efforts with more than physical houses. They were rewarded with houses of Kohanim and kings. Hashem rewarded them well with generations of kings and priests, Divine attributes that are perpetuated through the species of humans that the midwives actually saved male Jewish children! A kohain can only be the son of a Kohain, and a King can only be a male!

But there seems to be an interruption in the order of the verses. The words "and the nation flourished" seem out of context. In fact, Rashi is bothered by the obvious question and explains the verses as follows. "And G-d rewarded the midwives," and what was the reward? "He made for them houses." The words "and the nation flourished" are part of the narrative, an historical footnote inserted into the middle of the episode of heroism and reward. But the simple, juxtaposed text needs clarification. Perhaps there is a way to explain the historical insert

More than 10 years ago, my brother, Reb Zvi and his wife had a beautiful little baby boy. He was truly beautiful. And he was truly little. Five weeks premature and only two-and-a-half pounds.

For a while it was touch and go. The prayers of a community and thousands of friends and relatives pulsed the support systems that sustained the child's short breaths and the parents' deep hopes. For nearly two months the baby endured in the neo-natal unit under the care of the most prestigious doctors and devoted nurses that the city of Chicago had to offer. After two grueling months of prayers, incubators, and devoted healthcare, the baby arrived home healthy. The joy and gratitude to Hashem was overwhelming, but the young father did not forget his gratitude and appreciation to the mortal messengers, the entire medical and nursing staff, who worked arduously, day and night, to help insure the newborn's health.

He wanted to express his appreciation in a very special way. He searched gift shops and bookstores for a proper memento to show his appreciation, but he could not come up with an appropriate gift. A

few days after the baby was brought home, the young father mentioned his dilemma to his Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Eliyahu Svei, Dean of the Philadelphia Yeshiva.

"The nurses don't want perfume, and the doctors don't need pens," said Rabbi Svei. "What they want to see is the continued growth and health of your child. Every year, on his birthday, bring the child to the hospital and let the staff share in the joy of his growth and success! That will be the most meaningful gift you can offer!"

The Rosh Yeshiva explained: Before the Torah mentions an additional reward bestowed upon the midwives, it alludes to the greater reward that they truly appreciated. Their efforts towards Jewish perpetuity were not in vain. The nation prospered. The young babies, whom they worked so diligently to sustain, grew up. And they married, and they flourished. All the midwives wanted was the propagation of their nation. And that was their first reward. The gift of Houses of the Priesthood and the Houses of Royalty were an added bonus which Hashem was pleased to deliver. But as far as the midwives were concerned, the greatest reward was the joy in seeing that the children they delivered flourished, and that the nation prospered and grew. All the risks were worth it for that knowledge alone. And so the Torah tells us, "and Hashem made good for the midwives, and the nation grew and flourished." For them, that was the greatest reward. The rest was just icing on the just desserts.

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