

# IN PREPARATION- TO SAVE A NATION

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

The priest of Midian had seven daughters; they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's sheep. The shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and saved them and watered their sheep. They came to Reuel their father. He said, "How could you come so quickly today?" They replied, "An Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds and he even drew water for us and watered the sheep." (Shemos 2:16-19)

"An Egyptian man saved us..." This is comparable to someone who was trying to save himself from the danger of another donkey bite and ran to the water's edge. There he noticed a child drowning in the river. He saved the child. The child told him, "If it had not had been for you I would have died." The man told him, "I didn't save you, the donkey did! I ran from him to the water and that allowed me to save you." So it was between the daughters of Jethro and Moses. They said, "Thank you so much for saving us from the shepherds!" Moshe answered them, "That Egyptian that I killed he saved you!" And therefore they said to their father, "An Egyptian man saved us..." Meaning: Who caused that the Hebrew man should come to our rescue at that time? It was the Egyptian man that he had confronted and killed. (Shemos Rabbah)

What does the seeming farfetched story in the Midrash mean to teach us? Perhaps its aim is to help us to make better sense of the events in our lives. In a New Yorker cartoon, written on a sign in the library above two arrows were the words; "Fiction" (In one direction) and "Stranger Than..." (In the other) Events that happen in life that is often stranger than anything we could ever dream up on our own.

In Yaffa Illiach's "Chassidic Tales of the Holocaust" she relates a story she gleaned from a survivor she had met up-state New York at a bungalow. He told her about the terrible day when the Nazis overran his town and abducted his beautiful sister. He was so outraged and angry that in an act of almost insane defiance he stormed their newly established headquarters and demanded that his sister be released. To add insult to injury the presiding officer called his colleagues to witness the pitiful spectacle of this desperate Jew. They threatened that if he didn't leave immediately they would kill him.

He persisted and insisted that he wouldn't leave until they handed over his sister. The officer taunted him cruelly and told him, "I'll release your sister! Sure I'll release your sister when hair grows on the palm of your hand!" They laughed and jeered at him. Then he lifted his hand and showed them a full growth of hair on the palm of his hand. All were silenced with shock. They shouted, "He must be the

devil!" In an instant his sister was let go and both managed to survive the war.

What had happened? Years earlier this young man had been in a terrible accident. His hand was mangled in a machine and he needed skin grafting. Ever since that tragic day he had suffered daily with an embarrassing reminder of the event. Strangely hair started to grow wildly on the palm of his hand.

I can only imagine that he must have been haunted by existential nausea on some conscious or sub-conscious level asking, "Why me G-d? Why is this happening like this to me?" Whether aware or not we all most likely whisper those types of questions when "tough stuff" is happening to us. However, one day the answer came to him like a lightning bolt. That which looked like the worst thing that had ever happened to him in his life actually was the key to saving not just himself but his beloved sister too.

It could be that in retrospect we can begin to appreciate that many of the best tools we gained to be able help others were gotten through our most rugged experiences in life. Moses, still in the grooming stage, had already developed a positive appreciation for even the toughest of life's teachers, *in preparation - to save a nation*.

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