

TO BE CARING...TO BE DARING

by Rabbi Label Lam

And it happened in those days that Moshe grew up and he went out to his brothers and saw their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, of his brothers. He turned this way and that way and saw that there was no man, so he struck down the Egyptian man and hid him in the sand. (Shemos 2:11-12)

And he saw their burdens: He placed his eyes and his heart to be pained about them. (Rashi)

These are the first recorded steps of the mature man Moshe onto the stage of history. What did he do that was so great? He left the comfortable confines of the palace of Pharaoh. What's so special about that? Why was it such a defining moment in the life of Moshe? Certainly he already knew of the suffering work of the Jews in Egypt? What was gained by going out to visit the painful scenes first hand? What did he see that he had not already heard about? That's exactly the point!

Our Baale' Musar understood well what Madison Avenue, the motor vehicle bureau, and propagandists of all stripes and allegiances have understood, "We do not act on what we hear but rather on what we see." For that reason chronic traffic violators are forced to witness scenes of terrible crashes till it is etched into their psyches what the mind already knows, "55 saves lives". Maybe it was twenty years ago there was a tidal wave in Bangladesh and 100,000 people lost their lives within a few moments. I went home that night and at dinner discussed the extent of the human tragedy. I was able to eat with gusto. That same year I hit a little dog coming home one night. I had no desire for dinner that night. What happened? Isn't large scale human suffering more sacred to me than a single doggy? The answer is, "This one I only heard about and this one I saw!"

While in Israel I had occasion to spend some time with an old friend who at an earlier time in his life had been a Protestant minister. Since then he has made some great changes. When he tells his story he begins in Hamburg Germany where he and his wife had been studying for their doctorate in Protestant theology. One Sunday morning he stumbled upon an entire picturesque segment of the Hamburg newspaper that was dedicated to 50th anniversary of Kristalnacht. My friend describes his horror as he studied the vivid image of gruesome beatings of Jews on the cobble stone streets on a familiar café corner adjacent to the university where he and his colleagues had had many a discussion about love and other lofty subjects. He was curious why he had never heard any mention about these local events before. Certainly if these atrocities happened within the shadows of the university campus there must have been some official protest. His inquiries were blithely dismissed.

There were no official or unofficial responses. These were only Jews being abused. What then, he wondered, the value of all this talk of love?

He began a feverish campaign to discover why the Jewish People were the ones continuously treated to the persecution. Finding no meaningful answers within his circle of professors and priests he found his way to the Jewish community and what he discovered was not in the least bit hateful, if anything it was loving and truthful and maybe that was the real rub. As a result of this search he his wife began a new path as dedicated Torah Jews.

Certainly, Asher, as he is now known, had heard of Kristalnacht. He had to visually experience the devastation to act on the message. So too Moshe went out to witness the pain of his people to be caring...to be daring. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).