

GOODNESS BEGETS GOODNESS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Shifra and Puah give Jewish children life in this week's parsha. Midrash and Rashi point out that Shifra and Puah were really Yocheved and Miriam. In God's world where everything eventually evens out, Moshe, Yocheved's son and Miriam's brother will be saved from the Nile and its tides and crocodiles by another woman who saved children, Batya, the daughter of the Pharaoh. There is a common streak that runs throughout the Torah that goodness begets goodness and evil always will lead to other evil.

Saving children is the prime value in Jewish life. The emphasis on education in Jewish life is part of this mission of salvation of the young. The enemies of the Jewish people have always concentrated on destroying Jewish children so that the Jewish future would be bleak and non-existent. Pharaoh's decree to cast Jewish children into the Nile was the first in a long line of such decrees.

The Germans and their evil cohorts destroyed one and a half million Jewish children during the Holocaust. The absence of these children from the midst of the Jewish world is felt even today, seventy years later. Thus the supreme act of kindness and risk taken by Shifra and Puah leads to their reward that the savior of Israel will also be saved from the Nile by a different, compassionate and risk taking woman.

One never realizes how a kindness and good deed done to others can influence for good one's own life and family circle. By saving other children, Shifra and Puah saved their own little child and brother as well.

In the late 1940's the Day School movement in America was barely on its fledgling feet attempting to somehow save thousands of American Jewish children from the pits of complete assimilation and Jewish apathy and ignorance - the Nile River of its day, spiritually speaking. It faced overwhelming problems and fierce opposition from within the established Jewish community itself.

Many felt then that somehow being intensely and proudly Jewish in a knowledgeable fashion was un-American. One of the major problems that the Day Schools faced was finding dedicated young families willing to leave the imagined sanctuary of the New York area to become the teachers and administrators of these new schools in the hinterlands of America. They were justifiably concerned about the future of their children growing up in a more difficult, Jewishly speaking, environment.

Rabbi Ahron Kotler, one of the driving forces behind the creation of these new day schools, boldly announced to the yeshiva world that any young couples who would move to these "out of town"

communities to help build and staff these schools would be personally guaranteed by him to have success in raising their children as they wish.

His guarantee and prediction was fulfilled in dozens of families who have made a great deal of difference in rebuilding Torah life in America. Saving others in essence, and in the long run, helps to save one's own self. The redemption of Israel from Egyptian bondage is initiated by small acts of kindness, sacrifice and goodness. Israel and Zion is redeemed by acts of justice and righteousness.

Shabat shalom.

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com