

## TORAH THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

### PARSHAS SHEMOS

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#### “The Gift of Life”

He said to his people, "Behold! The people, the children of Israel, are more numerous and stronger than we..." (Ex. 1:9).

The Egyptians were frightened by the growth of the Jewish population. They were afraid that if a war broke out the Jews would join their enemies and force them out of their own land. Pharaoh summoned his three chief advisors: Bilam, Job and Yisro, to ask their advice on how to deal with this situation. Bilam advised killing the Jews, and he himself was later killed. Job kept quiet and was punished with a life of suffering. Yisro ran away and was rewarded with descendants who became the heads of the Sanhedrin.(1) It is clear that Bilam deserved a far greater punishment than Job, since Job didn't commit an active crime - he merely remained silent. However, it seems that Job's punishment was actually greater than that of Bilam. While Bilam suffered a quick death, Job had to endure suffering the likes of which no other man has ever experienced. How can this be understood?

To be alive is, in itself, the greatest gift possible. Life is full of opportunities, and despite the presence of any pain or suffering no matter how bad, life is still infinitely greater than death. Consequently, Bilam's punishment was far more severe than Job's. While Job still had the gift of life, Bilam lost it forever.(2)

To determine whether a fish is alive one must see if it can swim upstream. Being alive means that you're accomplishing and growing. Every moment in life is a priceless opportunity to grow and create a connection with God.

Late one night, R' Yisrael Salanter noticed a shoe maker at work fixing shoes. He asked him, "Why are you working so late?" The man replied, "As long as the candle is still burning, I can still fix the shoes." As long as we are still in this world we can grow and do good deeds, but once the candle goes out our time is up. Whatever we have we have, but we can't fix any more.

#### NOTES

1. Sotah 11a.

2. R' Chaim Shmuelevitz (Sichos Mussar, Parshas Shemos, Ma'amar 29).