

Courage

Rabbi Maury Grebenau

Miep Gies is an impressive woman. This Austrian woman hid Anne Frank and her family from the Nazis in Amsterdam, knowing full well that what she was doing was illegal and put her in grave danger. She is one of many heroic non-Jewish citizens who helped to save Jews from the horrors of the Nazi scourge. The courage embodied by these people is inspiring. They understood that what the government was doing was wrong and they put themselves at risk to stand up for what was right.

In the very beginning of Shemos we find the precursors for this type of courage. First Shifra and Puah display impressive courage by disobeying Paroah's orders to kill the male children born to the Jews. They understood full well that they were risking their own lives by disobeying Paroah. Paroah calls them before him again and confronts them for their disobedience. They manage to wiggle out of what they have done by claiming that the Jewish women have no need of their midwife services and so they are unable to carry out Paroah's nefarious plot. The Midrash, quoted by Rashi, tells us that the reality is they not only didn't kill the babies, they actually fed and protected them.

But these are not the only women who have the courage to stand up to Paroah. Next it is Paroah's own daughter who ignores his quest to terminate the next leader of the Jewish people. She pulls a baby from the Nile with full knowledge that he is a Jewish child and then has the audacity to raise him under Pharaoh's nose. This took amazing courage and a very clear idea of morality. She disobeyed her father, the king of Egypt, in order to save a child.

What is the lesson of these amazing women? All of them had a clear moral compass. An internal knowledge of what was right and proper. They all ignored the popular notion of what was 'best' for the country, in favor of the moral path. The second characteristic that they all had in common was tremendous courage. They all had the internal strength to be able swim upstream against very widespread and entrenched ideals. Meip explains this well when she explains her motivation for saving the Frank family. "Permanent remorse about failing to do your human duty, in my opinion, can be worse than losing your life¹", she explains.

Shifra and Puah are rewarded by Hashem with 'houses' (Shemos 1:20-21) which Rashi explains to mean the houses of priesthood and kingship² that would come from these two women. Paroah's daughter, which the Midrash tells us was named Batya, is saved from the plague of the firstborn and walks into Gan Eden living (Yalkut Shimoni Mishlei Ch. 31). Both rewards seem to be life, through legacy of descendents or through ones own longevity. These courageous women who risked their own lives are rewarded with the very chance for life which

¹ Interview with Miep <http://teacher.scholastic.com/frank/tscripts/miep.htm>

² See Tosefes Bracha (Shemos 1:21) for an explanation of why these would be referred to by the moniker "houses"

they helped bestow on others. It is interesting to note that Meip just celebrated her 100th birthday last year, perhaps this too reflects her courageous actions.