



Tzizis at the Window of the Monastery Parshas Shmos

The Jew was astounded, rubbing his eyes unbelievably. He has been providing meat to a Paris monastery for years, but he had yet to encounter such a scene. He focused his gaze on the Tzizis, the four cornered ritual garment, hanging out of the window. Someone must have been playing a joke on him.

Maybe it was a Jew? He rejected that notion, as there would be no reason for a Jew to be at this monastery. As the day passed he tried to forget the scene, but the fringes flowing in the wind would not leave him. He decided to return in the evening and investigate the issue.

Then he had another idea – maybe it was a Jewish boy who was signaling for help. He had not come up with a plan yet.

He approached the monastery's administration and asked to meet the Jewish boy. He did not know the boy's name, but claimed he was his relative. The monastery knew the butcher, and therefore allowed him to meet the brothers, Alexander and Shimon.

The butcher could not believe his eyes. The two brothers, aged 9 and 11 were held at the place against their will. They shared with him their life story of adversity and hardship. Their parents left Israel after the Gulf War in 1991 and moved to France after encountering financial difficulties in the country. The mother had a breakdown and was hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital. The father, who could not contend alone, left the house and then the authorities intervened.

The authorities sent the boys to a Christian institution, and they subsequently ended up in the monastery. They clung to one thing – their Tzizis.

The Jewish butcher was determined to save them no matter what. He decided on a plan, and left them with a promise he would return.

In our weekly parsha we learn of G-d repaying the Hebrew midwives who defied Pharaoh and saved the Jewish children.

"Now it took place when the midwives feared G-d, that He made houses for them."¹ The Talmud explains that the "houses" are those "of the priesthood, the Levitic family, and the royal family, which are called houses."²

G-d repays deeds in the same manner that they were committed. Why did G-d repay the midwives in a spiritual manner when they physically saved children?

When we take a close look at Pharaoh's decree we see it is multi-tiered.

"And he [Pharaoh] said: When you deliver the Hebrew women, and you see on the birth stool, if it is a son, you shall put him to death, but if it is a daughter, she may live."

On one hand the midwives are ordered to kill the boys, but on the other hand, they are ordered to let the girls live.

Later on, Pharaoh commanded his people: "Every son who is born you shall cast into the Nile, and every daughter you shall allow to live." It appears here the Pharaoh has become favorable to the girls. Why so?

The commentators explain that Pharaoh was seeking to set the children on the path of sin. In a sense, setting a person on the path of sin is worse than taking his life.

In response, the midwives "feared G-d" and defied Pharaoh, keeping the children alive, physically as well as spiritually.

Therefore, they were rewarded in kind spiritually. The midwives gave spiritual life, and were rewarded with spiritual lives.

We heard loud knocks on our door in the middle of the night. Two Jewish children stood at our door, after having left the darkness into a great light.

In the coming days, I was to testify on behalf of the children. The French authorities demanded that the children be returned.

A defended the children and shared the story of the Tzizis at the monastery window. What better proof was there of their Jewishness, I argued in court, thus beating the extradition demand.

They tried to take a soul of a Jewish child and failed, and the children merited growing up in a Jewish and nurturing environment.

¹ Shmot 1:21.

² Tractate Sotah 11b.