

“Don’t Cry Out Loud”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Moses was placed in a basket by the river to save his life from Pharaoh’s decree. Pharaoh’s daughter, walking down to bathe in the Nile, spotted the basket and, “When she opened it, she saw that it was a child — behold, a boy crying.” (Ex. 2:6)

The Bible speaks of Pharaoh’s daughter *seeing*, not hearing, Moses’ cry. The explanation offered by some commentators is that Moses did not cry aloud. His cry was of the deepest kind — silent. It was *Azur Mimaamake Halev*; stopped up in the depths of his heart, and all the sadness and terror he felt was reflected on his face. The expression on Moses’ face, the eloquence of his agony, the refusal to cry aloud, moved Pharaoh’s daughter so much that she adopted the child and brought him up in the palace.

Moses could not cry aloud was because it was not safe. As a Hebrew child, discovery meant death. His dilemma presages the situation of Jewish children who have hidden, or been hidden, over the centuries, in attics and basements and forests, knowing that the slightest sound would betray them. Silence, as captives all over the world know, is a prison forged of fear.

The ability to cry out — in pain, in sorrow — is a sign of freedom. When Moses died, the Israelites, free in the wilderness, wept aloud.