

DECEMBER 16, 2013

Parashat Shemot

Standing Up Against the Tide

And the daughter of Pharaoh came down (Exodus 2:5)

ותרד בת פרעה (שמות ב:ה)

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 1) notes that Moses' parents must have given him a different name, however the Torah refers to him by the name that Pharaoh's daughter gave him. This is undoubtedly due to the great risk she took in defying her father's explicit decree by bringing a Jewish child into the palace. Dr. Gili Zivun notes that the text, instead of identifying her by name, only refers to her as the daughter of Pharaoh (who the Midrash tells us was named Batya) highlighting the notion that "the princess rebelled against everything her father's regime stood for." Her willingness to withstand tremendous pressure and rescue Moses ultimately brought salvation to the Jewish people.

The daughter of Pharaoh defied her father and heroically saved a helpless child, reminding us that individuals, when they rise to the occasion, have the power to affect others and even bring great salvation.

In November, an intersection outside the Bulgarian Embassy in Washington was named in honor of Dimitar Peshev, a Bulgarian lawmaker who helped spare the lives of tens of thousands of Jews during the Holocaust, [The Times of Israel](#) reported. Peshev, a former deputy speaker of Bulgaria's Parliament, drew attention to a secret deportation order that would have sent Jews in the country to German death camps, and circulated a protest petition which led to the ultimate suspension of the deportation order, as King Boris III sent Bulgarian Jews to labor camps but refused to deport them or turn them over to the Nazis. Historians say nearly 50,000 Jews were saved. Peshev's story also serves as a critical lesson about the power of individuals to effect change. Instead of buckling to pressure and refusing to act, his petition united students, clergymen and others in support of the Jewish population, which spurred his government to resist the Nazi pressure and saved the lives of thousands. Today, as the state of Israel continues to face grave, existential threats, we cannot forget the power that each of us has to get involved and affect change, if we are willing to speak out about our important cause. To take action, click [here](#).

Pharaoh's daughter, who rescued Moses from the Nile, reminds us of the power individuals have to bring about change, save the innocent, and bring salvation to the world. ■

The Same Regime

And the children of Israel sighed (Exodus 2:23)

ויאנחו בני ישראל (שמות ב:כג)

After suffering through decades of slavery "the king of Egypt died; and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried" (2:23). Why did they sigh and cry at this particular point? Nahmanides (on 2:23) explains that with the death of the king, the enslaved Israelites hoped that the new ruler would act in a kinder, more benevolent manner than his predecessor. "When they saw that the king had died, they sighed greatly due to the ascension of a person even more wicked and corrupt than the first."

Just as the Israelites hoped that the rise of a new Egyptian regime would bring change, the United States hoped that Iran's new leadership would enact substantive change as well. To date, that has not been the case.

When Iranian President Hassan Rouhani took office in August, he claimed that if elected, he would restore the economy and improve rocky relations with the West. Viewed as a moderate, the world hoped that the election would dawn up a new era and Iran's serious human rights abuses could be put in the past. Sadly, indications from inside the Islamic Republic suggest that little has in fact changed. Over the past year, at least 500 people have been put to death in Iran. According to [Fox News](#), "Many of Iran's condemned were accused of being a 'Moharebeh,' or one found to be 'waging war against God' under Islamic law." In addition, [Slate Magazine](#) reported that, "Iran's morality police have arrested the popular singer Amir Tataloo, whose work had not been approved by the culture ministry. In the southern city of Kerman, 16 people were arrested on charges of cooperating with Western and anti-Iranian news networks..." In a recent op-ed piece in [The Washington Post](#), Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian human rights lawyer and the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize laureate wrote, "In the theocratic ideology of the Islamic Republic, human rights are conditioned on whether the state approves of a citizen's beliefs. This is nothing less than religious apartheid. It breeds fanaticism and violence. If there is no end to such abuses, how can the Islamic Republic be trusted?" Iran's continued human rights abuses call into question the ability of the international community to trust both its motives and actions surrounding its quest to become a nuclear power. For more Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

The Jewish people sighed when they realized that change did not make the Egyptian regime better. As the international community watches Iran abuse its citizens, it must do much more than simply sigh in frustration. ■

Unwilling to Compromise

Three days journey (Exodus 3:18)

דרך שלשת ימים (שמות ג:יח)

Many commentators wonder why Moses was instructed to ask Pharaoh to allow the Children of Israel to go pray after travelling a distance of three days. It's clear that had they been released, the Jews would have never returned. Nechama Leibowitz (see Studies in Exodus p. 94) quotes the opinion of Akeidat Yitzchak, who suggests that the minimal request was intended to expose Pharaoh's refusal to negotiate in good faith. "This was part of God's mysterious plan to expose to all the extend of Pharaoh's obstinacy...It was for this reason he commanded them to request no more than ten days release...implying that they would return. In spite of all this, [Pharaoh] refused."

Like Pharaoh, who wouldn't grant even the most reasonable request from Moses, the Palestinian Authority has rejected reasonable American initiatives that could potentially move the peace process forward.

During his recent visit to the Middle East, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry presented both Israel and the Palestinians a number of proposals "to offset security risks if it pulls back from the West Bank in a future peace deal with Palestinians," [The Wall Street Journal](#) reported. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu told Kerry that he is prepared for a historic agreement that would create a Palestinian state alongside Israel, but any treaty must ensure Israel is able to "defend itself, by itself, with our own forces." When Kerry brought his proposals to the Palestinians, he was not warmly received. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), PA President Mahmoud Abbas shot down a proposal by Kerry to maintain Israeli presence in the Jordan Valley for ten years following the signing of an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord. The Palestinians rejected the offered American security ideas, saying the arrangements proposed were totally unacceptable. An official described the meeting as being "worse than bad" and added that the Palestinians "will never accept Israeli presence in the valley." Israel has taken bold steps to get peace talks started, including agreeing to release more than 100 Palestinians, many of whom have murdered innocent Israeli civilians. Now that talks have resumed, it is imperative that the Palestinians remains committed to the process. Yet, recent Palestinian obstinacy calls into question the Palestinians' willingness to reach a negotiated settlement with Israel. For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

Just as Pharaoh's refusal to accept Moses' most basic offer demonstrated his obstinacy, the PA's refusal to consider the latest American peace proposal demonstrates its unwillingness to make concessions necessary for peace. ■