

A Passover Thought

BY RABBI DR. SHMUEL HIMELSTEIN

One of the arch-villains of Jewish history (a history full of villains who have tried to destroy the Jewish race) was Pharaoh, King of Egypt. It was he who enslaved the Jews and forced them into building monuments for him, Pithom and Ramses. Not content with that, he ordered that all newly born males be thrown into the river. The Midrash tells us how he had newly born children immured in the walls of his buildings, because their blood would serve as an excellent binder of the mortar. Here we have the archetype of the anti-Semite in action. In this season, then, it should be interesting to see how Jewish tradition regards Egyptians -- of course we are referring here to the Egyptians of biblical times.

A good starting point for this is another midrashic account. The Midrash mentions how, when the Egyptians finally met their just desserts, as they were swept away by the resurgent waters of the Sea of Reeds (not the "Red Sea" which is simply a mistranslation), the angels began singing praises to God. He, however, turned to them in anger as it were, and exclaimed: "The creatures whom I created with my own hand are drowning, and you have the

audacity to recite songs of praise?"

Judaism is not vindictive in this regard. In fact we can see this in one of the provisions of Jewish law. One of the prayers said to praise God is the Hallel (which literally means "praise") prayer recited on all joyous occasions, and the 'half Hallel', in which two of the 'whole Hallel' paragraphs are omitted, recited on less joyous occasions. In general, the 'whole Hallel' is recited on all the pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot) and on Chanukah, while the 'half Hallel' is recited on Rosh Chodesk, or the beginning of the new month.

On Passover, however, one only recites the 'whole Hallel' on the first day (the first two outside Israel) and then recites the 'half Hallel' for the remaining days. The reason, our sages tell us, is that Passover cannot be a complete holiday, because it means the death of the Egyptians. And remember - here we refer to the same Egyptians who were responsible for all the suffering of the Jewish slaves in Egypt!

We frail mortals have a tendency to remember the good that we did to others, while at the same time remembering every hurt and slight

that anyone ever did to us. At this Passover time, which is the time when we think of our Freedom, which we won at so great an expense, we should think of the Jewish way of looking at others. If Passover teaches us anything, it should teach us that all of the creatures on this planet are "the work of my hands," and that only by respecting everyone else can we truly follow in the ways laid down by our sages.

FARMERS MUST LEAVE SINAI

TEL AVIV (WNS) -- Farmers in the Yamit area who have agreed to accept compensation for moving to new farms inside Israel proper have been told by the Prime Minister's office they can stay on in their present homes until mid-April, although all

civilians are supposed to be out of the region, due to be handed back to Egypt on April 25.

But they have been warned that life will not be easy for them during the April weeks as electricity and water will be cut off at the end of the month.

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