

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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*This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of
Professor William Schwartz. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"*

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21 TEVET

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS SHEMOS

Root Cause of Antisemitism

But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were disgusted because of the people of Israel (1:12).

On the face of it, this verse seems a little hard to understand. What exactly were the Egyptians disgusted with and for what reason? Rashi (ad loc) explains that "they were disgusted with their own lives." Though Rashi explains what they were disgusted with (their own lives) he doesn't provide the reason for their disgust and their harsh reaction.

In fact, this has been an existential question that has haunted the Jewish people for two millennia: Why do so many people hate us? What did we ever do to them to incite the need to exterminate or expel us from their lands?

The answer is actually given in the verse itself. Pharaoh and the Egyptians were on a mission to eradicate the nation through excessive taxation and hard labor. Yet "the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." In other words, the more they did to us the more successful we became, particularly in growing as a nation. Our incredible success under the harshest conditions highlighted their own inadequacies as a nation. It began to dawn on them that compared to the Jewish nation they

were far inferior. That is why, Rashi explains, they were disgusted with their own lives. Frankly, seeing our ascension made them feel terrible about themselves.

Unfortunately, this has been repeated throughout history. The Germans, soundly defeated after World War I, were both embarrassed and impoverished. This became a breeding ground for the most virulent antisemitism because they needed to feel that they weren't at fault; rather it was the fault of the Jews who controlled everything and were a malevolent subhuman life form. Therefore, the Jews should be exterminated.

If one travels through Poland and Ukraine it will become readily apparent how miserable the populace is and why antisemitism is "mother's milk" in these countries. The root cause of antisemitism is a host country's deep dissatisfaction with their own lives; particularly as it is contrasted by the success of the Jews. Obviously, their ready solution to feeling better about themselves is to eliminate those that highlight their inadequacies.



Miami Edition



**Join Rabbi Akiva Zweig's
Weekly Parsha Class**

Wednesday Mornings at 9:30am

Meeting ID: 2765819544

Password: raz

**Join HaRav Yochanan Zweig's
Baalei Batim Shiur
on the Parsha**

Friday Mornings at 11:15am

Meeting ID: 78325727308

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A Deafening Silence

The Talmud (*Sotah* 11a) tells us that Pharaoh had three advisers: Yisro, Iyov, and Bilaam. When Pharaoh was deciding how to approach his “Jewish Problem” he sought the opinion of each of his three advisers.

Bilaam, the grandson of Lavan (according to some opinions he actually was Lavan), was an evil man and relished the prospect of eradicating the Jewish people. It was he who advised Pharaoh to enslave the people, destroy their identity, and later to kill the male babies.

Iyov was a righteous man who was opposed to any plan to destroy the Jewish nation. Yet, rather than display his true feelings on the issue, he refrained from offering any opinion. Perhaps he knew that his objections would be met with resistance. He most likely rationalized that he could do more to help the plight of the Jewish people at a later date by remaining in his position as advisor. As a result, he decided not to oppose or accept Bilaam’s proposal, but remained silent.

Yisro, on the other hand, objected to Pharaoh’s characterization of the Jews as a “problem” and rejected the idea of exterminating the Jewish people. Yisro’s protests angered Pharaoh and Yisro had to flee Egypt in order to save his life.

The Talmud continues by telling us that each of the three advisers was rewarded or punished according to his deed. Bilaam, who encouraged the execution of thousands of innocent Jews, was killed by the very people he sought to exterminate. Iyov, who remained silent in the face of Jewish oppression, was afflicted with a life of tremendous emotional pain (first he slowly lost all his possessions and then his children died) and physical suffering (his body became covered in boils to the point he wouldn’t leave his house). Yisro, who fled because of his opposition, sacrificing his position of leadership and life of comfort and wealth in Egypt, eventually became the father-in-law of Moshe and his descendants became prominent judicial leaders of the Children of Israel.

We know that a very basic tenet of Judaism is that God repays a person measure for measure. Therefore, we can clearly understand the reward and punishment of Yisro and Bilaam. However, why was Iyov’s punishment so severe? Iyov did not support the decree of persecution against the Jewish people. Iyov’s only sin was remaining silent. Why then did he have to suffer such a harsh life, one where tragedy followed tragedy?

The reason that Iyov’s suffering is clearly more severe than even Bilaam’s punishment is because his reaction was the unwitting cause of the Jewish nation’s suffering in Egypt. How? In every generation there are madmen who have no qualms about the murder of entire civilizations to achieve their warped goals. What keeps them in check? Mainstream society saying this is not okay, that the ends do not justify the means. Society saying that they will not tolerate such behavior is what causes these sociopaths to retreat to the shadows.

Much like the way Hitler (*yemach shemo*) came to absolute power when his many years of vitriolic propaganda was embraced by the German society. Pharaoh realized that if Iyov wouldn’t even stand against the destruction of the Jews than it was an acceptable plan. The real responsibility for the creation of evil isn’t by the madmen who conceive it; the responsibility lies with the society that accepts it as a viable approach. Iyov’s silence was the precursor to every society that is silent in the face of unspeakable evil. That was why he was punished so severely.

