

# A TALE OF TWO PHAROAHS

*by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky*

*Dedicated l'eeluy nishmas Ya'akov Moshe ben Mai-eer (Jack Poppers a'h'), Niftar 26 Kislaiv 5755 -- thanks from his son, Michael Poppers*

Did you ever hear of a split personality? Well if there ever was one, Pharaoh, or at least the ruling culture of the land of Mitzrayim, which we commonly refer to as ancient Egypt, surely epitomizes a Jekyll Hyde persona: alternating between a gracious host (who is willing to cede all his power to the whimsical machinations of a felon) and a cold-hearted despot (who years later ignores the rational arguments of two dynamic leaders).

Think about it. In this week's portion Pharaoh dreams twice. The dreams vary in their characters although their theme is constant; lean animal, emaciated stalks that devour succulent and luscious ones.

Perturbed, Pharaoh summons his advisors but their interpretations of the returning nightmare are at best weak.

Suddenly a wine butler who, two years prior, was sitting days from death in jail comes up with a cockamamie notion about a Hebrew slave lad, who was incarcerated for an attempted attack on the wife of a distinguished noble. The slave had interpreted dreams while in the belly of the beast and his interpretations proved accurate.

Pharaoh must have been desperate. After all, why in the world would he listen to the advise of a former prisoner to free a current one?

What happens after Yoseph's response is even more astounding. Pharaoh, in a lightning-like decision transforms the young slave-prisoner-Hebrew into second in command, noting that Yoseph "shall be in charge of my palace and by your command shall all my people be sustained; only by the throne shall I outrank you." (Genesis 41:40)

Years later Pharaoh drives Moshe and Ahron, scions of nobility, brilliant scholars, and leaders of a legitimate nation, out of his palace, refusing to have a rational discussion with them! Whether it was the Pharaoh of Yoseph's times or literally a new Pharaoh, how could the culture breed a king who was ready to give away the palace to a former slave but not yield infinitesimally to two noble princes!

This one came years back via e-mail.

## **Two (I deleted out the ethnicity) women were sitting together in the park.**

The first lady asks, "So nu, how are the children?"

The second one responds, "My daughter is terrific. She is married to the most wonderful man. She never has to cook, he always takes her out. She never has to clean, he got her a housekeeper. She never has to work, he's got such a good job. She never has to worry about the children, he got her a nanny."

The first woman continues to ask, "And how is your son these days?" Now the second one grimaces. "Just awful. He is married to such a witch of a woman. She makes him take her out to dinner every night and she never cooks a dish. She made him get her a housekeeper, Heaven forbid she should vacuum a carpet! He has to work like a dog because she won't get a job and she never takes care of their children, because she made him get her a nanny!"

Rav Dovid Povarski, Rosh Yeshiva of Ponevez of blessed memory, explains that Pharaoh is no different from many of us. When you are promised salvation or a chance to beat impending doom and be the one who will emerge on top of the market, your selfishness cedes to the one who will make life more comfortable for you. You will praise him and exalt him. However, when good fortune and comfort comes with a price tag and you are told that you have to give up something or work harder in order to maintain your lifestyle or desires, then the advice is derided and scorned.

Pharaoh was excited to have someone else plan the salvation of his kingdom and increase his wealth. He thus honored Yoseph royally. However, when Moshe and Ahron advised him how to save his throne, by freeing the Jews and perhaps having his own nation work harder, then he derided the Jewish leaders and drove them from his palace.

When the advice brings easy honor, fame, and fortune we all praise he who bears it. When hard work and sacrifice is the price to pay, we cannot bear to hear it.

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

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