

# WHAT'S NEW?

*by Rabbi Dovid Green*

This week's parsha begins recounting the enslavement and exploitation of the Children of Yisrael. The political atmosphere changes from Egypt welcoming Yaakov and his family as dignitaries, to hatred and suspicion. The great commentaries remark that the Egyptian exile is a paradigm for our own exile from Israel which began with the destruction of the second Holy Temple in approximately 70 A.C.E. This means that the ideas in the parsha deserve careful study as they are pertinent to our own situations.

In Exodus (1:8) the Torah writes "*And a **new** king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef.*" It is automatically clear that there is more to the story than meets the eye. Who wouldn't have known Yosef? Without Yosef interpreting the dreams for Pharaoh and preparing for the 7 years of famine, there would be no Egypt left. In our times someone like Yosef would have sports arenas, libraries, avenues, and shopping centers named after him. Children in elementary schools would make plays about him, and we would all have a long weekend commemorating his birthday. That is to say the least. Rashi explains that "he (Pharaoh) made himself as if he didn't know Yosef." Incidentally, this illustrates the point which is brought out in Pirkei Avos (Chapters of the Fathers). The mishna (Chapter 2, mishna 3) states "Be careful with ruling authorities, for they only befriend people for their own needs. They appear as friends while they are benefiting, but they don't stand up for a person in his time of difficulty." Of course Pharaoh knew Yosef, but it was no longer in his best political interest to embrace Yosef or his family whose population had grown out of proportion with his own nation.

The wise king Solomon said (Ecclesiastes 1:9) "*There is nothing new under the sun.*" The meaning is that in the category of things "under the sun," in the physical world, nothing is truly new. Everything is just a new configuration of something which has already been done. However, our sages say "under the sun nothing is new, but above the sun, beyond the limitations of the physical world, everything is new." In the morning liturgy (in the blessings preceding the Sh'ma) we refer to G-d as "The One Who renews the creation every day constantly." Behind the scenes is constant renewal. What's new? Everything! This is reality. Unfortunately, it is difficult to be in touch with that reality. It takes great faith to be aware of it, and courage to internalize and live by it. On the other hand, what is the alternative?

Madison Ave. tells us it has the answer. Commercials tell us this is new, and that. Everyone is running after what's new like big kids in a toy store. People put so much time and effort into acquiring and maintaining their toys. Never was a society so in debt for non-essential things. Are we any happier?

The Talmud tells us that the soul is a part of G-d which is placed into a physical existence. The analogy is of a princess who elopes with a common villager. Anything he brings her can never satisfy her, because she is used to living as a princess. When he offers her all the boiled potatoes she can eat, she begins to cry. So too, the soul is accustomed to closeness to G-d. When it comes to this world it craves things which it had been accustomed to before. We hear the voice, and we attempt to fulfill its wishes. We give it fun. Bun gee jumping! Amusement parks, concerts, movies, and chocolate! All the soul does is sigh. She's always left wanting. How can we satisfy her lofty desires?

In the words of the Sh'ma (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) which we recite twice a day, we find the answer. *"And these words which **I command you today** should be on your heart."* Rashi comments that we should view the commandments as something new which everyone runs to greet. The commandments of the Torah are spiritual lights clothed in physical clothing. They are the "food" of the soul. They are our way of maintaining our closeness to a spiritual G-d in this physical world.

People get excited about new kings and new things. The student of the Torah understands that there is really nothing new under the sun. However, the commandments are not from "under the sun." They are performed under the sun, but their source is from "the One Who renews the work of creation constantly, each day." They are the only source of satisfaction for the soul. They are the only things which calm the voice inside. May we all merit to taste the newness and fulfillment of the commandments of the Torah.

Good Shabbos!

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