

SELECTIVE MEMORY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The Torah in this week's parsha informs us that there "arose a new king - a Pharaoh that knew not of Yosef." The Talmud advances two opinions as to who this new king was. One opinion is that he was truly a new king, who out of ignorance and prejudice knew not of Yosef and how he saved Egypt in its darkest days of famine and depression. The other opinion advanced there in the Talmud is that it was the same old Pharaoh that had been blessed by Yaakov and saved by Yosef but that now he chose not to remember Yosef and his past grand achievements. Rashi here in this parsha quotes both opinions of the Talmud. This second opinion implies somehow that this Pharaoh must have lived a very long life since the enslavement of the Jews by the Egyptians did not begin until well over a century after the death of Yosef and his brothers. It is therefore reasonable to see in these seemingly contradictory opinions of the Talmud a lesson and perspective on Jewish history and current events. The two opinions are in reality but two sides of the same coin - the coin of ingratitude, hatred of the "other" and selective historical memory. The new Pharaoh and the old Pharaoh are really the same type of historical tyrant and hater. And they are both to be considered very dangerous to Jewish survival and to civilization generally. And in every generation they arise once again to threaten us and all of humanity.

There are those who are truly ignorant of the contributions of the Jewish people to the general welfare of humanity and civilization. Inundated with false indoctrinations and malicious conspiracy theories, overwhelmed by religious or secular fanaticism, seeking instant utopia whose pursuit justifies the most murderous means imaginable, this new king knows not Yosef and also sees the Jews as a mortal threat. The new king in the past century was mainly represented by the Communist movement, by the Soviet Union. The poison of anti-Semitism which the Soviet Union disseminated throughout the world has survived the fall of that evil empire itself. It haunts us to this very day. But there was also the old king who knew not Yosef. Jewish contributions to the development of Wilhelminian Germany and to the Weimar republic were purposely forgotten by the German people in World War II. The twelve thousand Jews who died in World War I fighting for German victory were willfully expunged from the German mindset. The old king was ungrateful and immoral. The contributions of the Jews to Moslem society have been great and long-lasting. Yet, the old kings and the new kings that govern much of that society today choose to forget and not know and now demand the extinction of the Jewish state and people. The narrative of Shemot repeats itself today in Europe and Africa and here in the Middle East. The world needs a good lesson of teaching in the parsha of Shemot. So too do the Jewish people. It will make us wiser and more realistic about our

present and future course as a people and as a country.

Shabat Shalom

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