

MAN TOILS AND G-D FOILS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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A New King Arose: They Changed, So His Attitude Changed As Well

The Parsha begins, "And these are the names of the Children of Israel who came to Egypt with Yaakov..." The next few pasukim [verses] go on to list the names of the Tribes and tell us that Yosef and all his brothers died, along with their entire generation. Then the pasuk [verse] tells us that the Jews were fruitful and multiplied and became very mighty, and the land became filled with them. Then we learn, "A new King arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef." [Shemos 1:1-8]

According to one interpretation, he was a new King. According to another interpretation, his decrees were new. At any rate, the pasuk describes a time when, all of a sudden, there was a marked change in the relationship between the King to the Jews. "He said to his people..." [1:9] ... let us do something about 'the Jewish problem.'

What happened? The pasuk tells us that they all came down to Egypt. Then they all died. Then they became very populous. All of a sudden, Pharaoh's attitude toward the Jews changed. What happened? The pasuk does not give us any hint at what was behind this change in policy.

I saw an interesting insight from the Mikdash Mordechai, Rav Mordechai Ilan. He focuses on the expression "And these were the names of the Children of Israel **ha'baim** (literally 'who are coming') to Egypt." Technically, the pasuk should have written the words "**asher ba'u**" (who had come) to Egypt. The pasuk is discussing an event that happened in the past. Why does the pasuk seem to indicate that they are presently coming?

Rav Mordechai Ilan suggests that this word tells us something about the mind-set of these initial people that came down to Egypt. They did not view themselves as permanent residents or permanent citizens. They viewed themselves as temporary visitors who were just passing through.

If one takes a long trip, driving the whole day and finally spends the night in a motel, would such a

person view himself as a resident, for example, of Ashtabula, Ohio? Of course not! He is just passing through. It is not his place!

The key to what made the original generation different was that they always viewed themselves as **baim** Mitzrayma -- just now coming to Egypt, but not entirely there yet. Therefore, their whole attitude, their whole hashkafa, toward the Egyptians was entirely different.

"This is not my land. These are not my people. This is not my culture. I am just passing through, temporarily." That was the key to their success.

When Yosef, his brothers and their entire generation died, what happened? They multiplied, they became many, they became strong. The pasuk says "*Va'ya-tzmu b'meod, meod*" [They became very very mighty].

The pasuk should actually read "*Va'ya-tzmu meod meod.*" The word 'meod' means very. What does B'meod mean? What is the letter 'Beis' doing at the beginning of the word?

The Kli Yakar says that 'meod' also means money, as in, "*And you should love your G-d with all your heart and all your soul and ... u'vchol meodecha (with all your money)*" [Devorim 6:5]. Chaza"l tell us that the word 'meod' can mean physical goods and material property.

The Kli Yakar says that "*Va'ya-tzmu b'meod*" is telling us that the second generation in Egypt became very mighty because they became very wealthy and affluent. The second generation felt that 'they made it' and they became part of Egyptian society. They no longer saw themselves as **baim** (now coming) to Egypt.

"*The land became filled with them.*" The Yalkut tells us that this means they were to be found in the Theaters and the Cultural Centers -- on Broadway!

The first generation rightly viewed themselves as "greenhorns." "This is not our country! We do not want to settle down. This is not our culture! This is foreign to us!"

However, that generation died and the second generation became wealthy. They were not satisfied with keeping their money in the bank! One has to "show" his wealth, become "part of society," and "endow" places of art and culture! "The land" (according to the Yalkut, the Theater) "was filled with Jews."

Now it makes sense. "A new King arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef."

Rav Shlomo Ganzfried adds to this concept, in his work "*Aperion*." Pharaoh said, "These are not the same people that I knew. These are not Yosef's people! These are not the people that I remember. These are different people. They changed. Therefore, I will change."

Their change in themselves brought about the change in the attitude towards them.

"They want to become part of us? They want to become part of our culture? We have to watch out

for these 'Jews'!"

That is what happened. As long as they were **habaim** (the ones just now coming), Pharaoh respected them. He knew that they were different. He had a derech erez for these type of people. But when the Jew tries to change and become one of 'them,' then the attitude was "We don't want you!"

A Man Thinks, and G-d Laughs

[an old Yiddish saying]

The pasuk says that Pharaoh tried different methods to stem the tide of the Jewish population explosion. His first attempt was his instructions to the Jewish midwives to kill all the boys and save the girls.

Pharaoh saw that this did not work, so he invented another idea: *"All sons that are born shall be thrown into the river..."* [Shemos 1:22] Where did he get this idea from? Isn't there a more effective way than throwing the babies into the Nile?

The answer is that Pharaoh wasn't a fool. He wasn't a reactionary. This was based on the advice of his advisers. Chaza"l tell us, based on the Talmud [Sanhedrin 101b] that the astrologers of Pharaoh saw that the savior of Israel would meet his downfall through water. Therefore, Pharaoh, who had this inside 'intelligence,' decided to throw the Jewish babies and eventually all boys into the Nile, in order to nip this plague in the bud and preempt and outwit the 'Jewish problem.'

The Steipler Rav, zt"l says that this act is a living example of a pasuk: *"Many are the thoughts in the heart of man; but G-d's plan will be established"* [Mishlei 19:21]. Man has all sorts of ideas, but the only thing that remains is G-d's plan. As the Yiddish expression goes *"A mensch tracht un Got lacht."* (Man thinks of all his plans, and G-d sits there -- as it were -- and laughs!)

How ironic! This plan was supposed to kill the savior of Israel. Not only did this plan, which was implemented on the advice of Pharaoh's expert advisers, not kill the savior of Israel, the plan had the opposite effect. Moshe was put into the river. He was fetched by none other than Pharaoh's daughter who took this Moshe into -- of all places -- Pharaoh's household. He was saved by, and nurtured in, Pharaoh's house. He was supported by Pharaoh's money. He was educated at Pharaoh's expense. He was saved by this very Pharaoh that thought he was going to kill the Jewish savior.

"A mensch tracht un Got lacht." And this is not only true with Pharaoh. We each have our own ideas, plans and calculations. We think we are going to be smart. We think we are going to outwit somebody. Foolishness! *"A mensch tracht un Got lacht!"*

Glossary

hashkafa -- outlook (on life)

derech erez -- politeness (literally, 'the way of the land')

Personalities & Sources:

Kli Yakar -- R. Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron of Luntschitz (Poland) (1550- 1619) Torah commentary first published in Lublin, 1602.

Yalkut -- Yalkut Shimoni, early collection of Midrashic material, compiled by R. Shimon Ashkenazi HaDarashan of Frankfort (circa 1260). First published in Salonika 1521-27.

R. Shlomo Ganzfried -- 1804-1886; Hungary. Most famous for authoring the "Kitzur Shulchan Aruch".

Steipler Rav -- R. Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (1899-1985), Bnei Brak.

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