

G-d Doesn't Forget

Category: Shemos, Shemos

When the Nazis thought through the Final Solution, they were just copying the Egyptians. What positive takeaway can we cull from the story?

The French Collaborators

Good Shabbos!

It wasn't long ago that the French government opened an archive to the public that comprised of 200,000 documents detailing the collaboration of the Vichy government with the Nazis during World War II. It was this collaboration that led to the expulsion and murder of over 75,000 French Jews, with a full 25 percent of French Jewry perishing in the Holocaust.

Immediately after the Holocaust, the world wanted to believe that the Vichy regime, under the leadership of Marshal Pétain, had done what it did for lack of choice—that it was the Germans who forced them to do it. But by the 1970s already, details emerged that proved that they had been accessories to evil—that the regime itself tried to identify Jews, aided in rounding them up, and sent them on French government trains to their deaths, with Paris police only too happy to help with the proceedings.

In particular, the events of July 16 and 17, 1942, stand out.

Over those two days, 12,500 Jews—mostly women and children—were assembled in Paris, and then held in frightful conditions for the next several weeks before they were sent to Auschwitz. These Jews innocently believed that the French police, who acted so cordially, had not come to arrest them, and so they did not hide from them. Ultimately, though, it was the French police who turned them over to the Nazis.

Understandably, the Vichy regime tried to cover up their actions altogether, and certainly tried to blame the Germans. But in the end, the truth came to light.

And that brings us to this week's Torah portion.

This week's Torah portion starts the Book of Shmos and introduces us to the Egyptian exile. When we read it closely, we see that the pattern of doing terrible things and hiding it isn't new. The Nazis followed the same approach as the Egyptians.

People don't just wake up one day and decide to harm their neighbors. Pharaoh understood this, so he began by dehumanizing the Jews. He spread hateful lies and stereotypes, making them seem less than human. This made it easier for the Egyptians to justify treating them terribly.

The Torah says, "The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and grew, and the Egyptians were disgusted because of the Jewish people" (Shmos 1:12). The Egyptians became so frustrated by the growing Jewish population that it made them miserable in their own lives.

The Midrash gives a vivid example: An Egyptian would go out and see so many Jews that they'd feel sick and even want to commit suicide. Pharaoh's propaganda had completely dehumanized the Jews.

We see this even earlier in the parshah. The Torah describes the Jews' growth as, "They were fruitful and swarmed and became very strong, and the land was filled with them" (Shmos 1:7). The Kli Yakar explains that the Egyptians saw the Jews as nothing more than bugs, swarming all over. To them, the Jews were just roaches.

The Final Solution

The next step in Pharaoh's plan was to eliminate the Jews entirely—what we might call his "Final Solution." But Pharaoh considered himself a sophisticated and enlightened leader, so he wouldn't resort to outright murder in plain sight. Instead, he came up with a secret plan.

He summoned the Jewish midwives and commanded them: "When you deliver the Jewish women, if it's a boy, you must kill him." His idea was that the mothers would think their babies had been stillborn or miscarried. Even if the plan was discovered, Pharaoh could claim it wasn't his fault—it was the midwives who carried it out. As the Midrash explains, Pharaoh wanted to shift the blame so that G-d would punish the midwives, not him.

But the plan failed because the midwives refused to cooperate. So Pharaoh escalated his efforts with an even more brutal decree: “Every boy that is born shall be thrown into the river” (Shmos 1:22).

Why the river? Why did Pharaoh specifically choose drowning as the method? Rashi explains that his astrologers had told him, “The Jewish savior has been born today, and we see that his downfall will come through water.” Pharaoh, trusting their interpretation, believed he could destroy this future leader by drowning all the newborn boys. Ironically, the astrologers were partly right—Moshe would later face consequences related to water when he struck the rock instead of speaking to it. But they completely misunderstood the timeline.

There’s also a practical explanation for Pharaoh’s choice. He likely realized that even the Egyptians wouldn’t tolerate the open slaughter of babies. As much as Pharaoh had dehumanized the Jews, killing innocent infants is something that even the most hardened society struggles to accept. History has shown how such events can shock the world, like the global outrage sparked by the photo of a drowned Syrian refugee child a few years ago.

So Pharaoh devised a more “efficient” and secretive method. Under the cover of night, his secret police would enter Jewish homes, kidnap the newborns, and throw them into the Nile. By morning, there would be no evidence—no bodies, no graves, no signs of what had happened. Life could continue as usual. The Egyptians could go to work or bathe in the river, pretending nothing had happened.

It was a cruel but clever plan. No one would be blamed, and no one would feel guilty. Pharaoh ensured that his people could ignore the horror unfolding around them and carry on with their lives as if nothing had changed.

This also explains why G-d chose to turn the Nile’s water into blood as the first of the Ten Plagues. The Midrash HaGadol teaches that since the Egyptians had thrown Jewish babies into the Nile, G-d punished the water itself. The river, which had been used to cover up their crimes, was now exposing their guilt. By turning the Nile into blood, G-d made it clear: the river was soaked with the blood of innocent Jewish children.

But that wasn’t the end of their punishment. The ultimate justice for drowning Jewish babies came at the Splitting of the Sea. The Egyptians could have been

killed in any way—G-d didn't need to bring them to the Reed Sea. After all, in the Plague of the Firstborn, G-d struck the Egyptians in their own homes. So why did G-d specifically choose to drown them?

The Midrash (Mechilta) explains: “By the measure one measures, so is it measured out to them.” Pharaoh had decreed, “Every Jewish boy must be thrown into the river,” and G-d responded in kind: “You will meet the same fate.” And so, at the Reed Sea, Pharaoh's chariots and soldiers were flung into the water, drowning just as they had drowned the innocent.

It was divine justice, measure for measure. The Egyptians who had treated the Nile as their tool for cruelty and murder were now punished by that same element—water. Their actions came back to haunt them, in the most fitting way.

Measure for Measure

So what's the lesson here, my friends?

The Rebbe taught us that G-d's measures of goodness far outweigh His measures of punishment. If G-d ensures that sins committed in secret are exposed publicly through punishment, how much more so does He reveal and reward the good deeds done in secret!

Take, for example, the countless lives saved during the Holocaust by people—Jews and non-Jews alike—who risked everything to help others. Many of these acts were done quietly, without recognition, but G-d has a way of making sure those stories are eventually told.

One example is Gilbert Kraus, a Philadelphia Jew who, in 1939, rescued 50 Jewish children from Austria and brought them safely to the United States. For decades, no one talked about his heroic actions. But one day, someone found his wife's diary, which detailed the entire story. This discovery led to a documentary created by his granddaughter and her husband, and the story reached people worldwide.

Another example is Nicholas Winton, a British man and an assimilated Jew. He organized the famous Kindertransport trains, which carried nearly 700 Jewish children from Prague to safety in England, where they were adopted by Jewish

families. For 50 years, Winton kept his work a secret—even from his wife. It was only when she found a notebook documenting each child's details that the story came to light. G-d made sure the world learned of his incredible bravery, and Winton was celebrated globally for his actions.

The same is true for us, my friends.

Sometimes, we do good deeds that seem to go unnoticed or unappreciated. But history teaches us that G-d doesn't forget. He ensures that credit eventually goes where it's due.

At the end of the day, no bad deed goes unpunished, and no good deed goes unrewarded. So let's commit to doing more good—not for recognition, but because it's the right thing to do. And let's hope that our actions help bring about the ultimate era of goodness, with the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days. Amen!

Good Shabbos!