

Politics & Mysticism in the Weekly Torah Portion

Parshat (Portion) Shemot

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Shalom & welcome all.

This week's Torah portion is called Shemot (Exodus 1:1-6:1).

This week...

*** *Ask Pharaoh, Taxes Lead to Slavery***

Yes, that is right, the first step taken to enslave a free population is to first tax their wealth. Wealth leads to power. Power leads to independence. Strip away wealth and power, and independence are stripped away with it. This is not a modern concept, nor are modern governments the first to practice this. The practice of taxing a free population into outright slavery began long ago in ancient Egypt and Pharaoh was the first “tax-man.”

This revelation about economic manipulation and socialist enslavement is clearly written in the Bible, verse by verse, in the first chapter of the Book of Exodus. Let us review the relevant verses and see or ourselves.

“Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more numerous and stronger than we are. Let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they increase, and a war befall us, and they join our enemies and depart from the land.” So they appointed over them tax collectors to afflict them with their burdens. . . . But as much as they would afflict them, so did they multiply and so did they gain strength, and they were disgusted because of the children of Israel. So the Egyptians enslaved the children of Israel with back breaking labor.” (Exodus 1:9-13)

When we look at the above verses we discover an apparent contradiction. In verse 9, it states *“the people of the children of Israel are more numerous and stronger than we [the Egyptians] are.”* Yet, in the next verse Egypt wants to act shrewdly to prevent Israelite growth, *“lest they increase,”* a problem, which from the previous verse, already seems to have happened. This apparent contradiction is resolved when viewed in light of the following verse.

“So they appointed over them tax collectors to afflict them with their burdens.” In order to prevent Israel from growing stronger, Egypt placed over them tax collectors. Tax collectors, as we all know, are authorized by the ruling government to take other people's money. So, apparently Egypt's first attack on the children of Israel was not against their persons or their freedoms, but rather against their money. Remember, wealth provides both power and independence, two things that the average Egyptian did not have at all.

Why did the Egyptians act in this way? Because, we must remember, (as recorded in Genesis 47:13-25), that previously Joseph manipulated the Egyptian economy to enable Pharaoh to take possession of all the wealth and property in the country. Even the

population became indentured servants to Pharaoh's government. The only ones left with any freedom in their persons and property were the Egyptian priesthood and the foreigners, the children of Israel.

Now, the wealth of the priesthood was that of Egypt itself. But the wealth of Israel, that was another story. For the children of Israel were only temporary residents in the land of Egypt, and when they would leave they would take their money with them. So, originally the children of Israel came down to Egypt wealthy and stood out in contrast to the enslaved greater Egyptian population. This is why the Egyptians plotted against them. For Israel was more numerous and stronger financially than the rest of Egypt. This is why the Egyptian government acted with guile to find subtle ways to equally enslave the children of Israel and to thus “legally” rob them of their possessions and to lower them to the indentured position of the rest of Egypt.

Taxation in ancient Egypt, (and in some more recent socialist/communist regimes), was not only of the people's physical possessions but also of their personal time and efforts. Not only did one have to hand over 30% or more of one's financial wealth, one would also have to surrender over 30% or so of one's time during the year to physically work on government projects, without any compensation for time or effort. Eventually 30% or so expanded, until it became an all inclusive 100%. Thus, the people were left with no freedoms, no wealth, no hope and no future. Slavery to government, be it in ancient times or in modern times, always begins with subtle social manipulations and ends with total destitution.

In ancient Egypt, national service began as a patriotic duty, but over time it degenerated into comprehensive form of government enslavement. Even today we have many modern forms of this government enslavement disguised under many different cloaks of acceptability. All these forms of enslavement, regardless of whatever names they fall under, contradict the very foundation of all Biblical teachings.

The message of the Bible has always been clear. When God brought forth Israel from out of Egypt and led them to Mt Sinai to receive His Law, the first of the Ten Commandments clearly states, *“I am the Lord, your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”* (Ex. 20:1). God is our Lord, true, but this part of the commandment is only the preamble. What follows after this is the actual commandment, “who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

God's Law is clear and applicable to all who want to walk in His Ways. The only way we make God to be our Lord is when we accept that He has taken us out of the land of Egypt, with all its mental defilement, and out of the house of bondage, which refers to governmental restrictions over personal freedoms. The entire purpose of God's Law is to set man free to be independent, self sufficient, responsible, productive, righteous human beings. When we live by God's Law we rise up to become that which we were created to be (Genesis 1:27), beings created in the image of God.

When however, we submit ourselves to the servitude of others, we surrender our internal spiritual Divine image and instead take upon ourselves the internal psychological image of our new master, be that of a government, a leader or a political system. These more than anything else today have become our modern false gods. This is why the second commandment says right after the first, *“you shall have no other gods before Me.”* (Exodus

20:2). God is warning us right in the beginning of His Law, that in order to serve God, one cannot serve another in his place.

Later, in the days of Samuel, (1 Samuel 8:5-8) when the people approached the prophet requesting that God place over them a King, God responded, through the prophet, that such a request was tantamount to rejecting God's rule and replacing it with that of mortal men. *"They have rejected Me from reigning over them. Like all the deeds which they have done from the day I brought them up from Egypt, and until this day, and they forsook Me and served other gods"* (1 Samuel 8:7-8).

Although God acquiesced and gave the people their king, Biblical history documents that the entire period of Kings, be it in the Southern Kingdom of Judah or the Northern Kingdom of Israel, was an unmitigated disaster. Even the best government of Kings brought with it trouble, adversity, wars and conflict. Not even the best of them ever established the dream of true human freedom, peace and tranquility.

In retrospect, centralized governments, guided by human hands, have always tried to bend and brake the human spirit, and force people and the societies that they create to submit and be molded into forms and images foreign and strange to both Heaven and the human spirit. Not for nothing is the Hebrew term for idolatry, Avodah Zarah, which literally translates as "foreign/strange servitude." There is no greater idolatry that being true to man and at the same time being false to God. *"It is better to take shelter in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take shelter in the Lord than to trust in princes"* (Psalm 118:8-9).

Man without freedom is dead. The Egyptians sought to kill the spirit of the children of Israel and indeed did succeed to a great extent. Even when God did bring the people out of Egypt, it soon became apparent with the sins in the wilderness that not even God could take Egypt out of the hearts and minds of the enslaved people. God is our redeemer to free our bodies from servitude, but it is we ourselves, by our obedience to God's Law that we redeem our souls. Essentially, redemption is two-fold and we are partners with God in accomplishing it. This has been the message of religion even since its inception. God does His share, but we must our ours!

Charity begins at home, slavery begins with government. The Egyptians dealt subtly with the children of Israel. They tricked them into becoming slaves. In this way, the Egyptians avoided creating any animosity, or opposition. The children of Israel were duped and blinded into becoming willing slaves. Little by little they gave up their wealth and then their freedoms until they had nothing left and then found themselves in the most desperate of situations. As it was then, so is it still today.

Evil empires never come out and say that they want to enslave their populations. On the contrary, they always proclaim messages of freedom. Yet, when viewed in the light of honesty and inquiry, the messages of freedom presented by government are always subtle deceptions that lead to slavery.

Governments, even ancient Egypt, use the ploy of class struggles to manipulate and misguide the public. It is always an "us verses them" battle. In Egypt, it was the Egyptians verses the Israelites. Today, the class struggle is usually presented as the rich (symbolic of Israel) and the poor (symbolic of Egypt). This is why fascist states that seek to enslave their

populations always seem to have an edge of anti-semitism (hatred of Jews). These enslavers of freedom cannot escape from their spiritual origins in Pharaoh's Egypt.

These deceptive government philosophies always proclaim how the evil rich take advantage of the innocent, hard working poor, and that therefore the poor have the right to overthrow the rich and to take all their wealth. The rich are viewed as evil so that stealing from them becomes justified in the minds of the thieves. This is only one of the many modern forms of lies and evil that permeates and poisons our society. Yet, it is again, nothing new. This was the same mentality the Egyptian government used to turn the Egyptian people against the children of Israel. Then and now, the government created jealousy in the hearts of the poor, then aroused the poor masses with anger and resentment, to the point where the average Egyptian citizen viewed it right and proper to subjugate the children of Israel.

Change the name of the characters and we still see the same story being played out today, over and over again. The battle between good people and bad government is simply the age-old battle of good and evil being fought out in the public arena. Like Solomon said, *"there is nothing new under the sun"* (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Those who truly want to stand up for what is right and righteous therefore have a hard choice before them. The righteous, like Moses in ancient Egypt, must stand up to corrupt government and demand, *"let my people go."* The first step towards human freedom is the freedom from harsh and cruel edicts, the first of which always attacks one's personal wealth. Taxation is the first step to socialist, fascist slavery. Ask Pharaoh, he'll tell you! Today, we have many Pharaoh's, what we need today is a Moses, at least one! God will redeem us, this is His promise, but we too must do our share.

When we choose to live by God's Law then we will also merit God's grace. The two always come together. Freedom from tyranny begins with revolt against taxation. Needless to say the powers that be consider such a revolt to be a provocation to war. To avoid such a conflict, the Egyptians struck first to enslave the Israelites. For those of us unfortunate enough to already be slaves, maybe we need a subtle silent revolution against the modern day oppressive systems we all suffer under, one that can bring about upheaval and change with the same subtly used by the Egyptians. Remember, Moses said it best, *"let my people go."* Granted, Moses had God on his side, but with the help of Heaven, so do we.

Any comments? Please send them to me at kosher Torah1@yahoo.com