

“TO OBEY –OR – NOT TO OBEY”

Par'oh, the king of Egypt ordered the Hebrew midwives [or to the Egyptian midwives of the Hebrew women...]“When you deliver the Hebrew women and you see them on the birth stool, if it is a son –you are to kill him, and if it is a daughter, she shall live”. But the midwives feared GD and they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded, and they allowed the male babies to remain alive. [Shemot 1:15]. They decided to defy the genocide orders against the Jewish people.

Shifra and Puah, the Egyptian midwives of the Jewish people [or, Yocheved and Miriam, who were Moshe's mother and sister, refused to follow Par'oh's orders –because they feared GD. They placed GD's law of “thou shalt not murder ahead of Par'oh's orders of genocide. If they were indeed Egyptian midwives then they certainly deserve to be mentioned in the archives of “Righteous Gentiles”. They showed courage and moral authority in defying the orders of a mighty ruler. Even if the national identity of Shifa and Puah is open to interpretation, then certainly the action of Par'oh's daughter is definitely a classic example of the gentile who puts her life on the line by “refusing to follow orders” to save a Hebrew baby. This outstanding act of a righteous woman and rebellion against tyranny enabled not only the Hebrews but also the Torah to develop and flourish.

The Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin writes that , hoping to save her baby brother from the Egyptians, who were under orders to cast any Hebrew baby boy in the Nile [1:22], places him in a basket hidden along the banks of the river. Par'oh's own daughter, Batya, comes down to bathe in the river, her retinue of women depart to the river's edge to allow their mistress a measure of privacy. When Batya notices the basket hidden among the reeds, she even sends away her trusted maidservant who generally never left her side. She retrieves the basket and as she suspected, finds a Hebrew baby. Miriam, waiting nearby offers to find a Hebrew wet nurse for him.

According to the Netziv, the text then states that the child grew up, and was brought to Batya, who named him Moshe. Batya justified her right to adopt him since she had drawn him out of the river where his parents had left him. She then brought him up as her own, risking her life by refusing to follow her father's orders. From Batya's perspective, this act of courage was tantamount to a biological mother shedding blood and risking her life to bring her baby into this world.

It is not by accident that it is Moshe, brought up by Batya in Par'oh's palace, that rebelled against Par'oh and killed an Egyptian task-master. His model for his refusal to follow orders was non other than his Egyptian mother-Batya

During the Nuremberg trials against the Nazi war criminals [1945-46], the major line of defense used by the Nazi defendants was that a soldier cannot be held accountable for actions which were ordered by a superior officer. However, the court concluded that "the fact that a person acted pursuant to the order of his superior officer does not relieve him from responsibility under international law, provided that a moral choice was in fact, possible for him". Meaning, that if he would be severely punished or killed for refusing to obey to commit genocide, he would not be culpable.

How different is our Torah law! "If a gentile tells you to kill X or he will kill you, you must allow yourself to be killed-but don't kill another person" {Sanhedrin 74a}. For Jewish law, Batya the daughter of Par'oh and Moshe Rabbeinu showed us and taught us the way of GD, The Almighty.

Shabbat Shalom, from YERUSHALAYIM

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QUESTIONS ON PARASHAT SHEMOT: 1-There is a custom of "Shnayim Mikra V'echad Targum", reciting the words of the parasha 3 times, twice by reading the words in Hebrew and once in Targum [Aramaic, Onkelos]. Which word alludes to this Minhag.?

2-Gemara Shabbat, 149a, states, that Aharon was rewarded for showing great love for his brother Moshe [see 4:14]. What did Aharon do to demonstrate his love for Moshe and what was his reward?

3-Our parasha states [2:1] "A man from the house of Levi took [married] a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and gave birth to a son." Their names are mentioned in 6:20, as being Amram and Yocheved. Why were they not mentioned here?

4-How old was Yocheved when she gave birth to her son? [see Rashi] 5-Pasuk 2:10 states, "Vayigdal Hayered", the boy grew up, and the next pasuk states, "Vaigdal Moshe", and Moshe grew up. What is the difference between the two?

6-According to Gemara Megila 13a, Moshe had 10 names. How many can you find?

7-who in the parasha should be honored as a "Righteous Gentile"?

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