

THE BIBLE VIEWS A NEW ADMINISTRATION

The eve of the inauguration of a new American President and Administration is not an inappropriate time to speak of another incoming Administration on which our Sidra comments: *עָלָה מֶלֶךְ עַל־מִצְרָיִם*, "And there arose a new king on Egypt."

Let me make it clear: I shall be attempting in this sermon to derive instruction from the biblical narrative, not to draw parallels between the ancient Egyptian Pharaoh, who has been an execration for the past 3,300 years of Jewish history, and the democratically-elected President of a great nation who has not yet been tested in his exalted office. The fact of the newness of Administration -- *עָלָה מֶלֶךְ עַל־מִצְרָיִם* -- is what both have in common. Thereafter, all similarities are empty conjecture, irrelevant and impertinent. Our text, therefore, is primarily a pretext for a Scripturally inspired commentary on the fateful world events of the past several weeks.

The Torah teaches us: *וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ עַל־מִצְרָיִם וְלֹא יָדָע יוֹסֵף*, "There arose a new king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, 'Behold, the people of the children of Israel are too many and mighty for us; come, let us deal wisely with them,

וְלֹא יִשְׁרָף - lest they multiply, and the Israelites prove disloyal to the ruling circles of Egypt.'" The Pharaoh and his advisers therefore, decided to enslave the Israelites and oppress them. However,

וְכַךְ יִרְבּוּ וְיִפְּצוּ, "the more they afflicted them,
the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad."

What does it mean that the new Pharaoh "knew not Joseph?" Certainly he should have known about a major part of recent Egyptian history, even if he had not met Joseph personally. One of the most perceptive commentators on the Torah, the author of "Keli Yakar," explained these five words: The new Pharaoh did not know what happened to Joseph, he did not make it his business to learn the appropriate lessons from the biography and the history of Joseph. And what the Pharaoh primarily failed to learn was that there was about Joseph a quality that was common to all his descendants and to all the people of Israel, namely, that the more he was oppressed, the more did he thrive. The more his enemies tried to destroy him and bring his great dreams to grief, even when these enemies were his closest friends and even his own brothers, the more did Joseph prosper, until he triumphed and prevailed. Pharaoh therefore had to be taught the lesson afresh, and the more the Egyptian king attacked the Israelites under the slogan וְכַךְ יִרְבּוּ ("Lest they multiply"), the more resolutely did the Lord decree: וְכַךְ יִרְבּוּ so indeed shall they multiply. In the play of these two words, pen and ken, we find the lesson that Pharaoh failed to learn and had to be taught at such great expense to himself and to his countrymen.

So the first thing that Pharaoh's new administration has to teach us and the entire world is: pen and ken, the stubborn, obdurate refusal

of Israel to fit into the preconceived patterns wished upon them by others, from Pharaoh and Haman through Toynbee and Stalin and, of course, De Gaulle. This obstinacy and orneriness is the secret of Jewish survival: let the anti-Semites wish destruction upon us, but we will "davka" frustrate his designs. For his אֲנִי / בְּ, we will respond: אֲנִי / כְּ. The survival of the Jewish people is our ability to transform pen into ken.

This talent is not genetic, an inborn perverse survivalism. It is providential, it is the result of special divine concern in human affairs. Just as the story of Joseph is altogether natural, and at the same time altogether supernatural, a marvelous combination of human free will and divine predestination, so does Jewish history present us with an inescapable providential dimension of Jewish existence. This means that a Jew must always act, out of his freedom, with full responsibility for his future -- and at the same time recognize that the will of God leads us, and through us the world, towards a destiny which is vague and undefined, but the lodestone of the history of man. In the short run it always seems that oppression of the Jews pays -- and it frequently has. But in the long run, God's long arm, His אֵל / בְּ, has entered into the stream of human events and held the destiny of Israel aloft and aright, making that one slight change in one letter that served to transform the pen into the ken. For we are the descendants of Abraham and the bearer^S of his blessing,

and to him was it told, "And I shall bless those who bless thee, and curse those who curse thee."

I would therefore commend this to the attention of the new Administration of the United States. The special nature of the Jewish people as the people of the Bible has exerted a certain fascination on Bible-oriented America from pre-Revolutionary days and on. Despite periodic outbursts of anti-Semitism, American friendship for Israel is not only the result of the legitimate exercise of political influence by American Jews, and not only attributable to America's own power interests in the Middle East, but also, I believe, to some extent a feel of the American folk for the uniqueness of Israel in the Scriptural perspective. There is no other way to explain this almost mystical feeling for Israel, and it goes back to late pre-Revolutionary days when a distinguished American from New England seriously proposed Hebrew as a national language of the then-emerging United States.

We may hope that in its even-handed beginning, the Nixon Administration will not repeat the error of *forgetting*. We hope that the new Administration will acknowledge the special nature of Jewish history, the providential dimension of Israel's existence -- for one must be level-headed and not a mystic to take this into cognizance. And it is more important to be "level-headed" than to be "even-handed."

The second lesson of the new Administration is that of misplaced trust. The descendants of Joseph made the error of trusting the Pharaoh who knew not Joseph. When Moses and Aaron came to their countrymen and brought them the message of liberation, the Israelites turned on Moses and Aaron and castigated them, calling them "trouble-makers." They were happy enough with Pharaoh, they did not need anyone to stir up matters and make things difficult. But biblical history taught that we must always beware, for you can not trust a tyrant.

Too much trust is as bad as too little confidence. The Big Four imposed settlement being proposed by Russia and France sounds like an easy way out -- much too easy. I fear that even some American Jews, who as usual are more frightened than Israeli Jews, will be scared into advocating acceptance of this settlement. But the Pharaohs of the Kremlin can't be trusted. *הַיּוֹם יִסְרָאֵל כִּי יִשְׁכַּח אֶת-הַיְיָ* is the biblical anticipation of that oft-quoted dictum of the British philosopher Santayana, that we ignore history at our own risk, and that those who forget history are destined to relive it. We must remember that a return to the situation of May 1967 means a return to instability and fear and danger. And we must never, never permit Russian troops entrè into the Middle East. If we can't remember as far back as the biblical Pharaoh, we certainly ought not to forget what happened a mere few months ago when Russian troops overran Czechoslovakia. You do not invite the wolf into the chicken coop. Israel must and will refuse to become another Czechoslovakia.

The third item for the new American Administration is: Don't be overwhelmed and cowed by President De Gaulle. The Rabbis taught,

היום "אם לא ידעו את ישראל, לא ידעו את ה'"
"אם לא ידעו את ישראל, לא ידעו את ה'"

(ד 27 א 146) -- There is an intimate connection between the two

sentences by and about Pharaoh -- the one that "he knew not Joseph," and the other, his response to Moses and Aaron: "I do not know the Lord." Both these statements, that of not knowing Joseph and not knowing the Lord, are the symptoms of unspeakable arrogance, and it was this arrogance that was Pharaoh's downfall. It is, similarly, this superciliousness of General De Gaulle, the successor to the Egyptian Pharaoh, a Frenchman who apparently considers himself a semi-deity possessed of mystical "grandeur," that led him so thoroughly to misunderstand and misinterpret the State of Israel.

Let the General learn from the Pharaoh: The head of state who is arrogant must himself become one of the "spare parts" of history.

Let the General know: The last and strongest "grand-frappe" is administered not by man, but by God.

Let De Gaulle recall that those "who knew not Joseph" have, ultimately, become nothing more than "mirages" in the annals of decent mankind.

Let that authoritarian Frenchman remember that not only are the Jews an "elite people, self-assured and domineering," but we are also the people who makes it its business to change the ד 27 / 2

into the 525' /> .

There is a fourth lesson that a new Administration must learn from history. Joseph's misery was a result of the failure of values by his brothers. His life was abandoned for 405 1,768, 20 pieces of silver in cold cash. The Jewish tradition has always rebuked Judah for his statement, 1N32 832 5N, "What profit will we have" if we kill him: Judah weighed money against life, and showed too great an interest in the superiority of money. Pharaoh forgot that lesson, and so he proceeded to repeat it. He built his pyramids with Jewish slave labor and, according to Jewish tradition, cemented Jewish infants into the mortar that made up its foundation.

But 3,000 years is a long time ago, and one cannot expect politicians or even diplomats to remember that. But let us then remember what happened a mere 25 or 30 years ago: The Germans offered the Allies a trade -- a few thousand trucks for an equal number of Jews. But the Allies turned it down. The trade wasn't worth it. Presumably, had the Germans offered two trucks for one Jew, it might have been worthwhile. . .

The last two weeks have seen the same error repeated. When Lebanon-based Arab terrorists attacked an El Al jetliner in Athens and attempted to roast alive all the passengers therein, the world was little moved. But when the Israelis, in their neat and surgical attack on Beirut, performed their mission without the cost of a single

human life on both sides, the world got into an uproar. The destruction of airplanes and machines in Beirut was considered a major crime, but no one thought of the attack in Athens or the explosion in Jerusalem or the bombs in Hebron. The American representative in the United Nations forgot that life is more important than goods. The United Kingdom representative forgot. But Israel can't forget and won't forget. And it is our hope that the new Administration of the United States will learn, that they will not show that they, like Pharaoh, "knew not Joseph."

What about us Jews? What are we going to learn from all this? The answer is that we must learn how to continue to transform pen into ken. After the Athens attack, the Hebrew daily, "Haaretz," carried an article in which its reporter interviewed people on the street. One of them was a Belgian Jewess who had come for a visit to Israel. "Do the recent events in Athens," the reporter asked the woman, "cause you to make any change in plans?" The woman answered: "They certainly do. I had intended to return by Sabena, but now I have changed my ticket for El Al . . ." 525' /2 !

We American Jews should have learned something from the Six-Day War. A number of American Jews had children who were in Israel at the time. They became near hysterical and wanted their children to come home. I know that because there are people in this congregation this morning who asked me to help -- and I did, because I myself am a parent and I know what it feels like to have your children in danger.

But all -- without exception -- of the young people I telegraphed and talked to by long distance phone were adamant: they would not return. They would not abandon the Israelis to their own fate while they ran back to America. These young men and women have emerged from that experience as new individuals, with their mettle as human beings and as Jews tested and found not wanting. But those American Jews, and Jews of other countries, who in those dark days of May quickly packed up and ran away, will forever bear the scars of their cowardice.

So now the lesson must be clear: ㄋ ㄣ ㄣ ' / > . We must have more tourism to Israel, more Aliyah, and, wherever humanly possible, more and more patronizing of El Al. ㄋ ㄣ ㄣ ' / > !

And not only must we patronize El Al, but perhaps we must specifically do it in place of -- Air France! I do not know how economically significant an American-Jewish boycott of French goods will be. I even wonder if it is politically wise, considering the sympathy for Israel by so many Frenchmen. But if it should be decided that it is the best procedure, it would be one in which we should participate with great relish. For the French Government's pen, we must respond with our ken. If the General will not sell Israel aircraft, we shall not fly Air France. If he will not sell tanks, we will not buy French cars. If he will not sell Israel spare parts, we shall decide we can get along without French perfume. Ken, indeed, we shall prevail.

American Jews must further learn that we can no longer act as if the United Nations is the fulfillment of a great religious and prophetic

ideal. Nonsense! Let us no longer speak of the U.N. in hushed reverence with our eyes piously glancing heavenwards. It is only a political instrument, not a spiritual reality. As such, it must not be abandoned; it must be used, wisely, by each nation. But it never must be adored naively. It is by no means, absolutely by no means, a fulfillment of the great visions of Isaiah and Amos about the nations streaming up to the House of the Lord. If anything, a much more appropriate passage of the Bible is that of the second Psalm:

למה רגזו גוים וילאילו עַמֵּי אֶרֶץ חַיִּים -- "Why are the nations in an uproar and why do the people mutter in vain . . . against the Lord and his anointed? . . . He who dwells in the Heavens will laugh; the Lord will make a mockery of them."

Finally, Jews throughout the world must learn and never forget that the best friend Israel has is the Jewish people elsewhere; and the best friend that Jews throughout the world have is -- the State of Israel. The events of the last few weeks must reinforce the worldwide Jewish solidarity that we began to experience in June of 1967.

This too was taught to us by Joseph. The Egyptian exile is considered by our tradition as, partly, punishment for the Jews, who, after Joseph's death, failed to practice מילה, the observance of circumcision. What the Rabbis meant to emphasize was not the solitary mitzvah of circumcision, but rather the concept of berit, "Covenant."

All Jews are children of the same Covenant, and it is that which binds us one to the other. *כֻּלָּם בְּרֵיךְ הוּא*, all Jews are brothers and comrades to each other. This idea and this reality must be impressed upon our children and passed on to children's children.

Mr. Nixon and his Administration take the reins of power in a critical time in world, American, and Jewish history. He is confronted by many severe problems; one cannot envy him, one must only wish him well. Not the least of his problems is that of the Middle East.

It is our hope and our prayer that the Almighty bless him and his advisers with the wisdom to learn from the past, not to repeat the errors of *הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּם*.

We shall pray for him, for his success and his health, in the words of our prayer book: He who gives triumph to kings and dominion to princes . . . may He bless the incoming President of the United States and all his advisers . . . may the King of Kings in His mercy keep them alive and protect them . . . and place in their hearts the will and the desire to act benevolently towards us and all Israel . . . In their days and in our days, may Judah be saved, may Israel dwell in serenity and in security, and may the Redeemer come to Zion.

So may it be His will, and let us say, Amen.