

D'var Torah:

Ki Tavo

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CHIEF RABBI

How do some people justify antisemitism?



In Parshat Ki Tavo, we are told how in ancient times farmers would come to the Temple. They would bring their bikkurim, their first fruits, and there they would recite a passage recalling key moments of Jewish history. In this passage the farmer would say (Devarim 26:6),

"Vayareiu otanu haMitzrim vayaanunu." - "And the Egyptians were bad to us and they oppressed us."

In his book Kol Omer Kra, Rabbi Yosef Chaim Karo asks a great question. He says that the words 'vayereiu otanu haMitzrim' cannot mean that the Egyptians were bad **to** us. In that case, the Torah would have said, 'Vayereiu **lanu** haMitzrim.' 'Vayereiu otanu' on the other hand means that the Egyptians caused us to **appear** to be bad.

At our Pesach Seder we read these verses and immediately afterwards we bring a verse from the book of Shemot through which we recall how Pharaoh justified the oppression of the Hebrews in his time. He said (Shemot 1:10)

"Hava nitchachma lo" - "They are clever. We need to be cleverer than them."

"...vehaya ki tikreina milchama," - "It will come to pass if our enemies launch a war against us,"

"...venosaf gam hu al soneinu v'nilcham banu..." - The Hebrews won't be on our side! They don't see themselves as being an integral part of our nation; they will "join the forces of the enemy and be against us!"

Pharaoh made this claim without any factual basis whatsoever, and the Egyptians swallowed it. Their mindsets were changed and as a result, they considered the Hebrews to be the 'them' as opposed to the 'us', and it was within their comfort zone to persecute us.

Time and again through history we have seen how aggressors have blamed the victims, with the suggestion the Jews are the cause of Antisemitism but, baruch Hashem, there is one thing that we have on our side.

The farmer in the temple would conclude his comments by saying, "Vanitzak el Hashem Elokeinu," - "We cried to the Lord our God" "Vayishma Hashem et koleinu," - "And Hashem heard our voices." In the same way as Hashem saved the Jews from the Egyptians in those days, so may He always guarantee that 'am Yisrael chai' - despite all forms of hatred and persecution the Jewish people will live and will thrive throughout all future times. Shabbat shalom.

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