

Star Wars and Shemot: A New Hope

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Millions around the world have seen *Rogue One*, the new *Star Wars* movie. Again, stores are filled with *Star Wars* merchandise. Why has *Star Wars* remained so popular for so long? There are many reasons such as great special effects, but there is also a deeper reason: The *Star Wars* story is a story that we can easily relate to. It is the story of a small group of good people summoning the courage to stand up in opposition to the wicked and mighty.

The *Star Wars* story should remind us of a story we began reading this morning, the *Exodus* story. In the case of *Star Wars*, a just republic is replaced by a Senator who usurps power and becomes an oppressive emperor. Likewise, in the case of *Exodus*, a righteous family that enjoyed a position of privilege due to the political ascent of one of its own, Joseph, becomes persecuted as a new Egyptian dynasty replaces the old philo-Semitic one (this follows the view of Rav, who asserts in *Sotah* 11a that this period of oppression was not brought on by a change of policy by the ruling dynasty of Joseph's day, but by a new dynasty that had seized power). In the case of *Star Wars*, twin babies (Luke and Leah) whose destiny it is to restore justice to the universe by overthrowing the evil empire must be hidden from the emperor. Likewise, in the case of the *Exodus*, Moses must be hidden from Pharaoh so that he

can grow up and defeat the tyrant. In the case of *Star Wars*, Luke is able to choose good by refusing to turn to the dark side despite the Emperor's offer to join him in ruling the universe. Likewise, in the case of the *Exodus*, Moses who would eventually choose a life of righteousness over a life of privilege by throwing his lot in with the lowly Hebrews by killing an Egyptian taskmaster to save a Hebrew slave.

The message of both stories is a message of *Tikvah* (hope). In fact, though the original 1977 *Star Wars* movie is often referred to as simply *Star Wars*, its actual title is *Star Wars, A New Hope* because, even as the forces of darkness come to dominate the universe, a small number of people choose to do good (choose the light side of the force as we would say in Star Wars lingo) by forming a resistance movement.

This teaches us that, even as the forces of evil become empowered, we always have hope because we have the power to choose how we respond. Victor Frankel, the famous Holocaust survivor, states, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

According to *Sotah* 12a Moses own parents, Amram and Yocheved, have to be reminded by their young daughter, Miriam, of the importance of choosing to maintain hope. The Talmud teaches that their initial response to the death sentence decreed on all Hebrew male babies was to stop having children. Miriam reminded

her parents that there was a chance that Hebrew male babies may survive, because some in Egypt may refuse to carry out Pharaoh's murderous decree. While Miriam's parents could have disregarded her optimism as the naive workings of an immature mind, her optimism is validated.

First, the midwives assigned to the Hebrew population subvert Pharaoh's command of infanticide by lying to Pharaoh, telling him that by the time they come to deliver the baby the mother has already delivered the baby. Then Pharaoh's own daughter courageously saves a Hebrew infant even as, according to *Sotah* 12b, her maidservants were discouraging her from disobeying her father. As it turns out, Miriam's decision to choose hope over despair is rewarded, for the baby pulled out of the river by Pharaoh's daughter is her very own brother Moses, the future liberator.

Even the name of the deity that commissions Moses to liberate the suffering of the Hebrews denotes hope. G-d declares to Moses at the Burning Bush that his true name is *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*, which is often mistranslated as "I am what I am." The correct translation is "I will be what I will be." The difference between the two translations is enormous. "I am what I am" is the answer we would expect from a G-d who views himself as the deistic deity. Deists believe that G-d created the world and then stepped back and let nature take its course. Such a G-d would reason, if people want to treat each other with cruelty, so be it. However, the name "I will be

what I will be” denotes that G-d has not yet completed his creating of this world and is still active in it. In other words, G-d has unfinished business to do but needs a nation to help him perfect the world. Therefore he stepped into history to liberate a people who understood the danger of tyranny all too well and gave them his Torah (which literally means teachings). The Torah teaches us how to improve the world; that should give us tremendous hope.

Even as the anxieties of the world take grip of our own community, we must remember that no one can deprive us of our ability to choose to be hopeful and respond positively. As we have seen, hope can save.