

# Righteous Gentiles: A Seat At The (Passover) Table

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## II. Righteous Gentiles In Torah

1. Melchizedek: The first righteous Gentile and the first person to bless a Jew.
2. Hagar and Ishmael: the first woman to hear the Divine voice; the first Jewish child to be saved from death.
3. Tamar: the first teacher of morality to the Jewish people.
4. Asnat: the first gentile mother of Jewish children.
5. Shifrah and Puah: the righteous midwives who invented civil disobedience
6. Bityah, Pharaoh's daughter: the mother of Moses and the nurturer of Jewish children
7. Jethro: the father-in-law and teacher of Moses
8. Rachav: the prostitute who was the first "gentile Zionist"
9. Yael: the gentile warrior who fought for the Israelites
10. Hiram: the gentile "contractor" for Solomon's temple
11. Naaman: the Syrian general who acknowledged God
12. The sailors and Ninevites: gentiles who acknowledged God; gentiles who repented
13. Ruth: the classic "convert" to Judaism
14. Cyrus, King of Persia: the creator of the second Jewish commonwealth
15. Dama ben Netinah: a postbiblical righteous gentile and exemplar of honoring parents  
(Not to mention, Adam and Eve, Noah & Mrs. Noah, Cain, Able, Seth....)

## I. Righteous Gentiles

Ger toshav (**Hebrew**: גֵּר תוֹשָׁב ger "foreigner" + toshav "resident"), is a term used in **Judaism** to refer to a **gentile** who is a "resident alien", that is, one who lives in a Jewish state and has certain protections under **Jewish law**, and is considered[1] a righteous gentile (**Hebrew**: חֲסִיד אֻמוֹת הָעוֹלָם hassid umot ha-olam "pious among the nations").

A ger toshav is a Gentile who accepts the authority of the Torah and the Rabbis upon himself, but specifically as applied to Gentiles. The term ger toshav may be used in a formal or informal sense.

## III. Exodus: The Book of Righteous Gentiles

### The Midwives

Ellen Frankel in her book of feminist Torah commentary *The Five Books of Miriam*, says that Shifra and Puah were not Israelites at all, but Egyptian women. They were "Hebrew midwives" in the sense of being midwives to the Hebrews. This debate appears in the classical midrash.]

Evidence for this latter interpretation is the fact that they were called into Pharaoh's chambers, which might have been unlikely had they been part of the slave people, and Pharaoh's acceptance of their comparison of the Egyptian women to the Hebrew women. If they had been Egyptian women, they would have known the difference, but as Hebrew women (who presumably did not serve the Egyptians) they might not have been able to offer that alibi. As Frankel puts it, if Shifra and Puah deserve our praise as Jewish heroes, "how much more" do they deserve our praise if they were Egyptian, and willing to risk it all for babies who were not of their people!

## Bat Paro

Pharaoh's daughter is unquestionably another righteous soul of humanity. We have no reason to doubt her origins and background. She is the daughter of Pharaoh. And out of the midst of Pharaoh's house she brings her kindness to Moses, child of the Nile.

## Yitro

Even before the great Exodus, however, came the lesser exodus. Moses left Egypt, fleeing Pharaoh's anger after beating an Egyptian man to death and nearly doing the same to a Hebrew man (Exod. 2:14). He arrived as a stranger at the well in Midian and found refuge in the home of the high priest Jethro, who gave Moses his daughter Zipporah as a wife. This is the same Jethro who came into the desert to unite the families and showed kindness to Israel, his kinsman's people. He too is a righteous gentile who crowned our earliest mythology with his daughter Zipporah, the wife of Moses and mother of his children.

## 18:2 A Decent Fellow

## 18:1-12 Comfort of a Father

## 18:13 Rebuke of a Father

## B. What Really Happened In The Dark

### 1. Bad Jews

#### *Why The Plague of Darkness*

First, the first reason was to conceal from the Egyptians the deaths of those members of the Jewish people who had become so immoral and corrupt that they didn't deserve to participate in the exodus. Only one-fifth of the Jews departed from Egypt; four-fifths had died during the plague of Darkness. Other sources say four-fifths simply chose not to go. They died and were buried while it was dark and the Egyptians couldn't see. If they had to die, Hashem wanted to prevent the Egyptians from degrading the Jewish people by saying, "Their G-d smites them just as He does us."

### 2. Bad Egyptians

Second explanation is that since only the Children of Israel were able to see during this plague, it provided them with the opportunity to search the Egyptian homes and find the valuables that were stolen from them during their servitude. Later, before leaving Egypt, they would return to the Egyptian homes and retrieve their stolen items.

### 3. Good Egyptians Too

Granted, when Israel leaves Egypt there will be all kinds of tumult, anger, thievery and revenge. Some of these farewells will be harsh. Worker will take revenge on taskmaster, slave on oppressor, serving girl on mistress. But some of the farewells inevitably were emotional. Not for nothing was the day of parting described this way: "'Speak now in the ears of the people, and let them ask every man of his neighbor, and every woman of her neighbor, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold.' And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians" (Exod. 11:2-3). (Some Israelites were blinded while some Egyptians could see!). There were friendships between Egyptians and Israelites. The Egyptians felt a need to compensate their departing neighbors, or perhaps simply to outfit them for their journey out of Egypt.

### 4. Egyptian Brothers & Sisters Make The Exodus Too

Earlier, the Torah said that a great multitude of Egyptians accompanied the Israelites when they left Egypt (12:38). The traditional estimation is that 3,000,000 people made the Exodus. We know that only one-fifth of the Jews left Egypt and

that was 600,000 men. If one-fifth of the Jewish people totaled 6000,000, then 2,400,000 had died during the plague of Darkness. The Targum Yonassan says the difference, 2,400,000 were made up of Egyptians who went out with the Children of Israel. The implication is that these Egyptians took the place, in some respect, of those Jews who perished. Who were those Egyptians who accompanied the Israelites? The Medrash describes these Egyptians as the elite of their society. They were the wise men, the wealthy and the craftsmen. Pharaoh allowed them to depart with the Israelites. This is why later, when it says that Pharaoh regret sending them, the "them" was not referring to the Israelites; it was these elite Egyptians that he regretted allowing to leave.

## IV. Our Egyptian Brothers

### A. Darkness

21. *The Lord said to Moses, "Stretch forth your hand toward the heavens, and there will be darkness over the land of Egypt, and the darkness will become darker."*

כא. ויאמר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה נְטֵה יָדְךָ עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם וְיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ עַל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְיָמַשׁ חֹשֶׁךְ.

22. *So Moses stretched forth his hand toward the heavens, and there was thick darkness over the entire land of Egypt for three days.*

כב. וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת יָדוֹ עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם וְיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ אַפְלָה בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁלֹשַׁת יָמִים.

23. *They did not see each other, and no one rose from his place for three days, but for all the children of Israel there was light in their dwellings.*

כג. לֹא רָאוּ אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו וְלֹא קָמוּ אִישׁ מִמִּתְחַתָּיו שְׁלֹשַׁת יָמִים וְלָכֵךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אֹר בְּמוֹשְׁבֵתָם.

### Chapter 11

1. *The Lord said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go from here. When he lets you out, he will completely drive you out of here."*

א. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה עוֹד נֹגַע אֶחָד אָבִיָּא עַל פְּרַעֲהוּ וְעַל מִצְרַיִם אַחֲרָי כִּן יִשְׁלַח אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה כְּשִׁלְחוֹ כָּלָה גֵרֶשׁ יִגְרַשׁ אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה.

2. *Please, speak into the ears of the people, and let them borrow, each man from his friend and each woman from her friend, silver vessels and golden vessels."*

ב. דַּבֵּר נָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיִּשְׁאַלוּ אִישׁ מֵאֵת רֵעֵהוּ וְאִשָּׁה מֵאֵת רֵעוּתָהּ כְּלֵי כֶסֶף וְכְלֵי זָהָב.

3. *So the Lord gave the people favor in Pharaoh's eyes; also the man Moses was highly esteemed in the eyes of Pharaoh's servants and in the eyes of the people.*

ג. וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת חוֹן הָעָם בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם גַּם הָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה גָדוֹל מְאֹד בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּעֵינֵי עֲבָדֵי פְרַעֲהוּ וּבְעֵינֵי הָעָם:

## Conclusion: Never Again Is Not Enough

The lessons of human tragedy, whether great or small, cannot be reduced to a mere cry for more power, so as not to encounter another Amalek, Sennacherib or Hitler. There must also be a search for the good Amalek, the good Samaritan, and the good German; with them we can repair the world again and make it even better. Too many have taken the oath of "never again," intending that this should never happen to us again. They are so focused on themselves, on the Jewish people and Jewish history, that they have never noticed the lessons of the biblical stories of Egyptian bondage and liberation: that it should never again happen to anyone. This is the legacy of the Egyptian midwives. This is the teaching of Pharaoh's daughter. These are our orders from the God-fearers, rebels against the kingdom and the lovers of mankind from among Pharaoh's slaves. And let's spell it out again: fear of God was not intended as religious extremism, but as a balance and restraint against unbounded human tyranny.

There is one more benefit to the unending search for the righteous gentiles who save the light of the world. They always ask us by their very existence: are there enough righteous persons among you who preserve the flame of goodness and humanity by your treatment of the stranger and the Other? They oblige us to confront ourselves honestly and answer the question of whether our enemies can look at us and tell themselves that we are not all alike, that we are not pure evil. Who is the Israeli Schindler or the Jewish Wallenberg of our generation? Who is the daughter of Pharaoh who will draw an enemy from the water and make him into a prince of his people's freedom and the world's? -Rabbi Avraham Burg

### God Loves Gentiles

Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah 8:2

(Psalms 146:8) "G-d loves the righteous." G-d said: 'I love those who love Me and so it says (1 Samuel 2:30) "For I honor those who honor Me."

They love Me so I love them in return.' Why does G-d love the righteous? Because

righteousness is not an inheritance or a family trait. You find that priests are from a priestly family and Levites are from a levitical family as it says (Psalms 135:19-20) "O house of Aaron bless G-d! O house of Levi bless G-d!" If someone wants to become a priest [from the family of Aaron] or a Levite he cannot because his father was not a priest or a Levite. However, if someone wants to become righteous even if he is a gentile he can because it is not a family trait as it says (ibid.) "O those who fear G-d bless G-d!" It does not say the house of those who fear G-d but those who fear G-d. It is not a family trait rather on their own they chose to fear and love G-d. Therefore, G-d loves them.

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 3:4 based on Tosefta Sanhedrin 13:1; Talmud Sanhedrin 105a

Righteous gentiles have a place in the world to come.

### Gentiles As Holy As High Priest

Midrash Sifra, Acharei Mot 9:13

(Leviticus 18:5) "Which man shall carry out and by which he shall live." Rabbi Yirmiyah would say: We see from here that even a gentile who fulfills his laws is like a [Jewish] high priest.

### CHOSEN PEOPLES

Rabbi Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, former Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogue of Great Britain, describes a commonly held Jewish view on this issue:

"Yes, I do believe in the Chosen people concept as affirmed by Judaism in its holy writ, its prayers, and its millennial tradition. In fact, I believe that every people - and indeed, in a more limited way, every individual - is "chosen" or destined for some distinct purpose in advancing the designs of Providence. Only, some fulfill their mission and others do not. Maybe the Greeks were chosen for their unique contributions to art and philosophy, the Romans for their pioneering services in law and government, the British for bringing parliamentary rule into the world, and the Americans for piloting democracy in a pluralistic society. The Jews were chosen by God to be 'peculiar unto Me' as the pioneers of religion and morality; that was and is their national purpose."