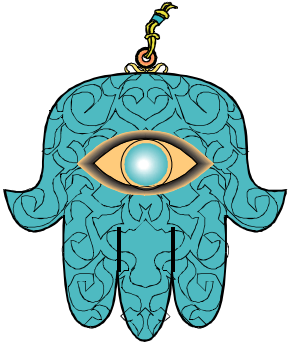
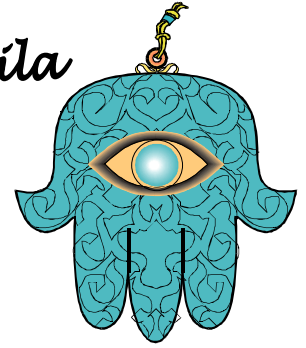


# Spiritual Thought for the Week

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January 8/9, 2010

## Politics

(Parashat Shemot – Exodus 1:1-6:1)

How do we explain the sudden turn of events in Egypt, when the Children of Israel go from having “most favored nation status” to becoming an enslaved people? How is it possible that the same people who once had a minister serving in the Egyptian government, whose economic genius saved the economy from total collapse, are now persecuted and beaten as lowly slaves?

“A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph” (Exodus 1:8). Who was this “new king”? Two rabbis in the Talmud explore the deeper meaning of the term “new king.” According to Rav, there actually was a “new king,” meaning a new person who took the throne. This new king never met Joseph, and had never even heard of him. Shmuel offers a different explanation; he says that the Pharaoh who enslaved the Israelites was the exact same Pharaoh under whom Joseph served. What was “new” was not the king, but the king’s policies. When it served his own political interests, he was friendly towards the Israelites. Now that circumstances had changed, he no longer saw his friendship with the Israelites politically advantageous, so he adopted a new policy towards them, which would serve his current interests – turning the Israelites into his slaves.

What lessons in political science can we draw from both Rav and Shmuel’s opinions? Rav teaches us that the friendly relations of one leader or administration towards a particular population within their country, or towards a foreign country, in no way guarantees that the next leader or administration will maintain the same policies. Shmuel teaches a somewhat harsher lesson in politics, that even while in power, the same leader who acted like your friend yesterday can change his policies if he feels that this friendship no longer serves his political interests.

The old joke “Who should I vote for, and is it good for the Jews?” may not be such a joke after all. It is humor that reflects a long and fragile political history of the Jews in many countries, under many governments. Jews have suffered under many new leaders “who did not know of Joseph,” and even under leaders who knew of him but changed their policies.

I’ll let you decide which lesson – Rav or Shmuel – is harsher, but there is one thing that is clear: for those who think that the Torah is some outdated book with nothing to teach us in a modern society – think again.