

Civil Disobedience

Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you help the Hebrew women give birth, observe them as they deliver. If the child is a son, kill him, but if it's a daughter, she may live." The Hebrew midwives, however, feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this and let the boys live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before a midwife can get to them." So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied and became very numerous. Since the midwives feared God, He gave them families. Pharaoh then commanded all his people: "You must throw every son born to the Hebrews into the Nile, but let every daughter live." - Exodus 1:15-22 HCSB

Many people use the excuse "I was just following orders" or "everyone is doing it" when confronted with their wrongdoings. But there is a saying among the tzaddikim that goes "ain shaliach' le-dvar aveirah" which literally means "There is no messenger in a case of sin."

Normally, one does not blame the courier for the message he brings. However, when the courier agrees with and acts upon a sinful order, he becomes an accomplice and is to be held accountable for his part in the evil.

We possess free will even when we do not possess freedoms. The Hebrew midwives were the slaves of an oppressive king who had the power of life and death. They chose to practice civil disobedience and Yahweh blessed them for it.

King Saul ordered his troops to murder innocent priests. Some of his men disobeyed this horrifying command. One man called Doeg the Edomite chose to obey and murdered eighty-five souls.¹

In the heat of battle, King Saul also ordered that no one should eat until all of his enemies were all dead. This foolish order weakened and demoralized his troops. When crown prince Jonathan who had not heard the order ate, Saul was prepared to kill his own son. Fortunately, his men again chose to disobey.²

King David, desiring to cover up his adulterous affair, ordered Joab to have Uriah killed. Joab did not rebel against this immoral order and went one step further. While arranging for Uriah's death, he also allowed other soldiers to die so that the one man's death would not attract attention.³ For this sin, God arranged for Solomon to have Joab killed.⁴

We are responsible for our actions. We are accountable – even when under orders. In following the chain of command, we dare not forget that at the very top sits God. If one of His underlings chooses to sin, we must decide where our truest loyalties lie. There is no messenger in a case of sin.

¹ 1 Samuel 22:9-23

² 1 Samuel 14:24-45

³ 2 Samuel 11:14-25

⁴ 1 Kings 2:29-34