

KOIL MEVASSER

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Knowing When to Listen

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

There is a fascinating moment in the unfolding story of the plagues that should make us stop and take notice. Seven plagues have now struck Egypt. The people are suffering. Several times pharaoh seems to soften, only to harden his heart again. During the seventh plague, hail, he even seems to admit his mistake. "Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. "This time I have sinned," he said to them. "The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong."9: 27). But as soon as the plague is over he changes his mind. "He and his officials" says the Torah, "hardened their hearts" (9: 34).

And now Moses and Aaron have come to warn of a further plague, potentially devastating, a plague of locusts that, they say, will devour all the grain left after the hail as well as the fruit of the trees. And for the first time we hear something we have not heard before.

Pharaoh's own advisors tell him he is making a mistake:



Pharaoh's officials said to him, "How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the Lord their G-d. Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?"

These words immediately transform the situation. How so?

Back in 1984 the historian Barbara Tuchman published a famous book called *The March of Folly*. In it she asked the great question: How is it that throughout history intelligent people have made foolish decisions that were damaging both to their own position and to that of the people they led?

By this she did not mean, decisions that in retrospect proved to be the wrong ones. Anyone can make that kind of

(Continued on page 2)

Prayer Schedule

SHABBAT PARASHA BO

Friday, January 7th
Minhah & Arbit 4:30 pm
Candle Lighting 4:41 pm

Saturday, January 8th
Shaharit 8:30 am
Tehillim *before Minhah*
Minhah & Arbit 4:15 pm
Motzei Shabbat 5:45 pm

WEEKDAYS

Sunday, January 9th
Shaharit 7:30 am

Monday to Friday
Shaharit 6:30 am

Talmud Torah Classes
Tuesday & Thursday 4:00 pm

EREV SHABBAT PARASHA BESHALAH

Friday, January 14th
Minhah & Arbit 4:40 pm
Candle Lighting 4:47 pm

Please confirm daily prayer times with minyan leaders.

(Continued from page 1)

mistake. That is the nature of leadership and of life itself. We are called on to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty. With the wisdom of hindsight we can see where we went wrong, because of factors we did not know about at the time.

What she was talking about were decisions that people could see at the time were the wrong ones. There were warnings and they were ignored. One example she gives is of the wooden horse of troy. The Greeks had laid siege to troy unsuccessfully for ten years. Eventually they appeared to give up and sail away leaving behind them a giant wooden horse. The Trojans enthusiastically hauled it inside the city as a symbol of their victory. As we know, inside the horse were thirty Greek soldiers who that night came out of hiding, and opened the city gates for the Greek army that had sailed back under cover of night.

It was a brilliant ploy, but [Laocoön](#), the Trojan priest, had guessed that it was a plot and warned his people, in the famous words, I fear the Greeks even when they come bearing gifts. His warning was ignored, and Troy fell.

Another of Tuchman's examples is the papacy

in the sixteenth century which had become corrupt, financially and in other ways. There were many calls for reform but they were ignored. The Vatican regarded itself, like some financial institutions today, as too big to fail. The result was the reformation and more than a century of religious war throughout Europe.

That is the context in which we should read the story of Pharaoh and his advisers. This is one of the first recorded instances of the march of folly. How does it happen?

Some years ago Dreamworks studio made a cartoon film about Moses and



the exodus, called Prince of Egypt. The producer Jeffrey Katzenburg invited me to see the film when it was about half complete, to see whether I felt that it was a responsible and sensitive way of telling the story, which I thought it was.

What fascinated me, and perhaps I should have

understood this earlier, was that it portrayed Pharaoh not as an evil man but as a deeply conservative one, charged with maintaining what was already the longest lived empire of the ancient world, and not allowing it, as it were, to be undermined by change.

Let slaves go free, and who knows what will happen next? Royal authority will seem to have been defeated. A fracture would appear in the political structure. The seemingly unshakable edifice of power will be seen to have been shaken. And that, for those who fear change, is the beginning of the end.

Under those circumstances it is possible to see why Pharaoh would refuse to listen to his advisers. They are weak, defeatist, giving in to pressure, and any sign of weakness in leadership only leads to more pressure and more capitulation. Better be strong, and continue to say No,

and simply endure one more plague.

We see Pharaoh as both wicked and foolish, because we have read the book. His advisers could see clearly that he was leading his people to disaster, but he may well have felt that he was being strong while they were merely fearful. Leadership is only easy, and its errors only clearly visible, in retrospect.

Yet Pharaoh remains an enduring symbol of a failure to listen to his own advisers. He could not see that the world had changed, that he was facing something new, that his enslavement of a people was no longer tolerable, that the old magic no longer worked, that the empire over which he presiding was growing old, and that the more obstinate he became the closer he was bringing his people to tragedy.

Knowing how to listen to advice, how to respond to change and when to admit you've got it wrong, remain three of the most difficult tasks of leadership. Rejecting advice, refusing to change, and refusing to admit you're wrong, may look like strength to some. But usually they are the beginning of yet another march of folly.

Shabbat Shalom

In Memoriam

It is customary to light a memorial candle in the evening and to donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend prayer services in honor of loved ones.

Sunday / 4 Shevat

Rachel bat Esther

Tuesday / 6 Shevat

Maurice ben Yaacov Jonah*

Wednesday / 7 Shevat

Shmoel ben Shaul*

Thursday / 8 Shevat

Ezra Sion ben David
Eliyahoo Faraj ben
Abraham Shalom
Rivka bat Toba

Friday / 9 Shevat

Shaul Hai ben Ezra Zakoo Halevy

Shabbat / 10 Shevat

Naima bat Chahla

*To update, please call the office
at 310.474.0559.*

Refuah Shleimah

*Please include these
individuals in your prayers:*

Yonatan ben Alizah ▪ Mazal Tov
bat Sulha Mitana ▪ Matilda
Louisa ▪ Yaheskel ben Regina ▪
Ayala bat Naomi ▪ Khayah Noa
bat Sara ▪ Haim ben Mordechai ▪
Pnina bat Esther ▪ Yosi ben
Esther ▪ Victor ben Latif ▪ Ramah
Regina bat Farha ▪ Aziza bat Sara
Judith bat Malka ▪ Ofek ben Yochai
▪ Efrayim Zev ben Fayga ▪ Sulha
Matana bat Mozelle ▪ Gershon ben
David ▪ Farangis Miriam bat
Touran ▪ David ben Leah ▪
Avraham Haim ben Miryam

Torah Readings

Parasha pp. 248 to 262
Haftara pp. 263 to 264

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one or two weeks in advance
at 310.474.0559.

Community News

SHABBAT

KIDDUSH

is sponsored by
the Mizrahie and Jonah
families

in memory of
Rebecca Mizrahie
z"l

SEUDAH

SHLISHEET

is sponsored
in honor of
Mr. Morad Rafie

by
Mr. Farshad Rafie and Family

CONDOLENCES

We send our heartfelt
condolences to the family of
our dear member and friend

Maurice Zekaria, z"l

to his wife, Alice
his children Lilly, Mary
Ruthie, Leon and Ike
and all their families

*May Hashem comfort them together
with all the mourners of Tzion.*

Community Tehillim

A number of individuals in our community are recovering or combating illness. They need our immediate prayers to support them in their recovery. Take a few minutes today to pray and read from the Psalms, also known as Tehillim. In particular, Psalm 20 and Psalm 121 are meaningful during difficult times. Give a little of your day and have a big impact on the lives of friends and their families. Or, join us after Shabbat morning prayers to read together.

SHABBAT MITZVOT at KJ

We now offer for donation the following Mitzvot on Shabbat: **1. Petichat Hechal** The opening of the ark where the Torahs are kept; **2. Carrying of the Sefer Torah and Sefer Haftara;** **3. Hakamat Sefer** The lifting and showing of the Torah; **4. Mashlim*** The seventh aliya to the Torah who recites Kaddish; **5. Mafir*** The last aliya to the Torah which includes the Haftara (read by the clergy unless member reading is preapproved). Since we count on your donations to the synagogue to keep our membership fees as low as they are, we suggest a minimum donation for all those who are called to the Torah of \$126 or multiples of \$18 or \$26. We appreciate your support. *Paid members may call the office to book the Mashlim or Mafir in advance, in memory of a departed relative. You will receive confirmation before Shabbat if you will receive the aliya or if there is a conflict. Members may also reserve other aliyot in advance by calling the office. Non-members interested in reserving aliyot should contact the office for availability at 310.474.0559.

Learn to Chant The Haftarah

Wouldn't you like to chant the final portion from the Torah on Shabbat—the portion known as the Haftarah? Reserve a Haftarah reading by calling Sarah in our office at 310.474.0559. The Haftarah portion can be dedicated in honor of a family event such as a memorial, a bar/bat mitzvah, or a baby-naming. Then, schedule time with Hazzan Saeed Jalali & learn the authentic Baghdadi ta'amim, Iraqi melodies for singing portions from the Torah & Tanakh.

Mastering Time

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

This talk is dedicated in memory of Ezra E. Cattan

One of the seeming “givens” of our life is time. The question of “who sets your agenda” is the main difference from the attitude of the slave and the free man. The slave’s agenda is totally set by his master; the free man’s agenda is (ostensibly) set by himself. Mastering time means controlling one’s life. Setting the time and the calendar means molding our days, weeks, months and years to fit the values that we stand for is essential for living a meaningful life.

Background

Our parasha contains what could be considered the first commandment given to the Children of Israel as a nation. That commandment concerns the mastery of time. Pharaoh and his people have been pummeled by nine plagues; with the promise of the most devastating plague to come. At this moment of the narrative, the Torah shifts the topic of discussion to a discussion about the slaughtering of the lamb that eventually became known as “qorban Pesah,” the Passover offering. Before getting into the details of how to carry out that law, God commands Israel to change the calendar—to “master time.”

Text *Shemot 12:1*

Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household.

Analysis & Discussion

This verse is seen as the first commandment given to the children of Israel. According to the Midrash quoted by the first comment of Rashi in Bereshit, the Torah should have begun with this verse. Hashem, the creator of time, set the agenda for Israel by letting them know that this month ushers in for Israel a new era. One in which Israel decides which month is first. This commandment includes sanctifying the new month based on witnesses and adding an extra month every few years in order to ensure that the moon based



calendar would remain in alignment with the seasons, which, of course, are based on the sun.

Why do you think that the first commandment that God gives to Bne Yisrael is to change the calendar? Changing the calendar means that a new stage of existence has begun. The event of the Exodus was formative and meant that we start numbering our days and years from then.

According to the Torah, months are based on the moon. When there used to be a full Torah legal system, including its highest court, this high court would decree a new month only after they had heard astronomical testimony about the status of the moon. Every few years the court would decide to add another month to reconcile the 365-day solar year with the 354 days that comprise twelve lunar months. This is done so Pesah would always be in the spring.

The Jewish year, 5771, reflects a convention of counting the years from the creation of the world. This convention is not found in the Torah, which generally numbers the years based on the reigns of different kings, or the years since the Exodus or the exile. In the Talmudic and Gaonic periods, the years were numbered based on the generally accepted convention in the Hellenistic world; they counted from the year 311 b.c.e.. Today, Western and Christian countries number their years from Jesus death. Generally, when we cite a year according to the Christian calendar we use the letters “c.e.” (“common era”), or b.c.e. (“before the common era”); this reflects our recognition that it is not our calendar, but one that is commonly used. Muslims number their years from the year 621 c.e., the year of the “hegira,” Mohammad’s trek to Mecca. The Shomroni community (the Samaritan community in Israel) to this day numbers its years from the Exodus from Egypt. In Judaism, even the calendar is not set by external events. Rather, the spiritual leaders of Israel set it, when they would decide to sanctify a month, or add an extra month. The blessing we say on the various

(Continued on page 5)

Parasha Summary: Bo *from chabad.org*

In this week's reading, Bo, the last three plagues – Locust, Darkness, and Death of the Firstborn occur. Moses commands the Israelites concerning the Pesah Offering and the seder. Finally, Pharaoh releases the Israelites from his land.

First Aliyah: Plague Eight: At G-d's behest, Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh and deliver a warning: "How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let My people go so that they can worship me!" They inform Pharaoh that if he does not allow the Israelites to go, Egypt will be attacked by locust.

After Moses and Aaron leave, Pharaoh's servants beg him to let the Israelites leave. "Don't you yet know that Egypt is lost?" they argue. Pharaoh calls back Moses and Aaron and offers to let the Israelites leave—if their children remain as security. Moses and Aaron refuse, and Pharaoh stubbornly refuses to let the Israelites go.

Second Aliyah: Moses stretches out his hands and swarms of locusts sweep down on Egypt. They consume absolutely every blade of grass and all the crops. Pharaoh beseeches Moses to pray to G-d to remove the locusts, promising to then release the Israelites. Moses prays and a wind carries the locusts back to the Red Sea, but Pharaoh changes his mind yet again. Plague Nine: A frightful darkness descends upon Egypt. For days, the nation is incapacitated by darkness. "But for all the children of Israel there was light in their dwellings."

Third Aliyah: Pharaoh summons Moses again, offering to release the Israelites if they leave behind their cattle. Moses refuses. Pharaoh sends Moses away, warning him to never appear in his presence again. Moses agrees, then delivers a final message that G-d relays to him. At that moment, G-d tells Moses that he will visit one more plague upon Egypt, after which Pharaoh will actually drive the Israelites from his land.

Fourth Aliyah: Moses delivers G-d's warning to Pharaoh: "At midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt. Every firstborn in the land of Egypt will die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the slave woman..." G-d then gives the Israelites their first mitzvah, that of determining the New Moon (Rosh Chodesh) each month and establishing a lunar calendar. G-d also tells Moses to tell the Jewish people of the Pesah offering. The Israelites are to roast a lamb and consume it, with matzah and bitter herbs, on the eve of



(Continued from page 4)

festival days is "Blessed are you, Hashem, our God, who sanctifies Israel and the times." It is explained, Hashem sanctifies Israel who sanctifies the times. . .

Slaves of Time (by Yehuda Halevi)

The slaves of Time are the slaves of a slave;
Only the slave of the Lord is free.

Therefore, while other men seek their portion,
"The Lord is my portion" says my soul.

What does Halevi mean by "the slaves of time"? People who seek to increase the ephemeral benefits of this world [are slaves of time]. This line is parallel to the line of "other men seek their portion" which means to increase their wealth. Time was meant to be our slave, but it could become our master, that is why those who serve time are slaves of a slave.

Why is the "slave of the Lord" really free? He alone masters the drives to increase one's portion in this world. He frees himself from the shackles of the fleeting pleasures and lives towards a higher ideal.

the fifteenth of Nissan. Only on this first Pesah, the lamb's blood is put on doorposts of Israelite homes, so they will be spared when G-d smites the Egyptian firstborn. G-d also instructs that in future generations this day signals the start Passover, during which no leaven can be eaten or possessed.

Fifth Aliyah: Moses gathers the Israelite elders and conveys to them G-d's instructions.

Sixth Aliyah: Plague Ten: At the stroke of midnight G-d strikes all the Egyptian firstborn. No Egyptian home is spared, and Egypt erupts in a great outcry. Pharaoh begs Moses to take the Israelites and leave. The Egyptians pressure the Israelites to leave as soon as possible. The dough the Jews made for provisions is baked before having time to rise and they leave at midday of the fifteenth of Nissan. This section concludes with rules about the Paschal Offering.

Seventh Aliyah: G-d gives several mitzvot: 1) Male firstborn are sanctified to Him. 2) Eat matzah on Passover. 3) Recount the story of the Exodus at Passover. 4) Bring kosher, male firstborn animals as offerings to G-d. 5) Put tefillin on the head and arm.

Tu B'Shvat

*Wednesday, January 19th
at 6:30 pm • Live Music
30 Fruits, Wine, Dessert*

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