

Devar Torah 1: Parashat Bo

Mitzvot and Making Good Choices

And the Lord said to Moses: ‘Go to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his courtiers, that I might show these My signs among them and that you may recount to your son and your son’s son, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them – in order that you may know that I am the LORD.’

Seven plagues failed to convince Pharaoh to accede to Moses’ demand in God’s name, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me.” Time and again, while in the throes of a devastating plague, Pharaoh has promised to let the Hebrews leave, only to renege the moment the affliction has gone. In today’s parlance, Pharaoh does *not* make good choices.

The last three of the plagues are visited upon Egypt: a swarm of locusts devours all the crops and greenery; a thick darkness envelops the land; and all the firstborn of Egypt are killed at the stroke of midnight on the night of Passover.

This account of devastation and abuse of power is the subject of much of this Torah reading. So what message might we derive from it on this Women’s League Shabbat? There is, of course an alternative, positive message: let us consider mitzvot and making *good* choices

In preparation for the exodus from Egypt, God conveys to Moses a series of commands, among them:

Regard the month of the exodus as “the beginning of the months.”

As a Passover offering to God, a lamb or kid is to be slaughtered and its blood sprinkled on the doorposts of every Israelite home so that God should pass over these homes when He comes to kill the Egyptian firstborn.

Each year, beginning on the 14th of Nissan, the Israelites must remove leaven from their houses; they should eat matzah and maror and recount the story of the exodus to their children. No leaven should be eaten or in their possession for seven days. All firstborn should be consecrated to God, in commemoration of God’s killing the firstborn of Egypt and sparing the Jewish firstborn.

In addition, passages from this parashah are inscribed in tefillin: they should be worn as “a sign on your arm and a remembrance between your eyes, that God’s Torah be in your mouth, for with a strong hand did God bring you out of Egypt.”

Embedded within this exodus narrative we thus read about the mitzvot that have come to serve as the foundation of the Jews’ covenant with God.

Women’s League for Conservative Judaism has chosen this year to focus on mitzvot, as reflected in its special project, *Mitzvah Yomit*. Women’s League has urged sisterhood members to perform a

mitzvah a day: maybe giving tzedakah or feeding the hungry; volunteering at a senior day care facility or making a shiva call; maybe planning a *Shabbat* meal for a family and/or friends, or studying Torah.

And what about making good choices . . .? Women's League reminds us in everything we do to understand the importance of each individual, that everyone tries to do her own job well; that being a trustworthy person, one of integrity, is more important than winning. This year, the Women's League and Torah Fund theme is *Le'avdah ul-shamrah* . . . to plant and preserve. Protecting the environment is an excellent choice as this makes us partners in the ongoing process of creation. Recycle, use bio-degradable products, walk, organize an environmental Shabbat, or use cloth shopping bags.

Mitzvot and making good choices . . . from reverence for Torah to the promotion of the Women's League mission . . . what a combination for the perpetuation of Conservative Judaism.

Shabbat shalom!

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