

JANUARY 19, 2015

Parashat Bo

A Meaningful Deadline

Tomorrow I will bring (Exodus 10:4)

הגנני מביא מזחר (שמזרת י:ד)

We all live with deadlines. While we might resent them at times, we also recognize that deadlines help us get things done. Rather than just pressure us, they push us forward, and prevent us from treading water without making progress on projects and goals. In order for deadlines to have meaning, they have to have consequences. According to [Dictionary.com](#), the term deadline originally referred to the line in Civil War prison camps which prisoners were forbidden to cross, lest they be shot. Today, we demonstrate the seriousness of an end date in a timeline by referring to it as a deadline.”

Moses sets a deadline for Pharaoh by issuing an ominous warning about the coming plague of locusts, which would destroy what remained of Egypt’s agriculture and economy that wasn’t ruined by the hail. When issuing his warning about the plague Moses says, “If you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow will I bring locusts.” (10:4) Locusts would not come immediately, but on the following day—“tomorrow.” The Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 13:6), noting this detail explains that, “[The plague set for the next day]...so that they would change their minds and repent.” Instead of unleashing the locust immediately, Moses sets a deadline for Egypt to reconsider and recant. He gives them time, but with it a deadline that carries grave consequences should Pharaoh refuse to recant.

Among the [Thirteen Divine Attributes of Mercy](#) delineated in Exodus (34:6-7) is the attribute of *erech apayim*—that God is “slow to anger.” Instead of exacting retribution for sin immediately, God chooses to delay retribution, allowing the sinner the opportunity to repent. Rabbi Ezra Bick [explains](#) that this does not imply an indefinite delay of retribution. “The basis for ‘slowness to anger’ is not indifference or the absence of caring, but the opposite—[God] can extend His spirit because in the end [God] will exact punishment.”

The world has negotiated with Iran over its nuclear program for many months. Each round of talk has culminated with a “deadline” that, when missed, has simply been extended. Iran, after years of stalling and denials, finally succumbed to the pressure of biting economic sanctions and entered into talks. It has since toyed with the West, missing multiple deadlines to reach a final agreement. Iran initially was given limited relief from the U.S. sanctions from Jan. 20 to July 20, 2014, and it was extended until this July as negotiations over its nuclear program continued. U.S. and European sanctions have curbed foreign investment and hindered exports of the Persian Gulf state’s oil, its most important source of revenue. After a year of inconclusive negotiations, a return to the prospect of tough sanctions—that would only go into effect if no agreement is reached at the conclusion of the current negotiations—will increase the effectiveness of U.S. diplomacy.

This month, [Bloomberg politics reports](#), Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) stating, “I worry that over time that these current sanctions have less significance.” Some in Congress, including Casey, have supported stronger sanctions against the Islamic republic. Casey said he thinks there will be a vote on sanctions before the July deadline for the nuclear negotiations, and he contended that would help maintain pressure on Iran. Strong sanctions brought Iran to the negotiating table. Now, only a real deadline which carries the threat of new, stronger sanctions will coerce Iran to finally make a deal and shut down its quest for a nuclear weapons capability. ■

A Nation that Acts Quickly

For in haste (Exodus 12:10)

כי בחיפזון (שמות יב:י)

On Wednesday, January 13th, 2010 at 6am, just hours after a terrible earthquake in Haiti killed tens of thousands and left untold numbers of people injured, IDF Brigadier General Itzik Kreiss was woken by a call from his commander: “We’re sending a humanitarian mission to Haiti. Take a field hospital and be there on the ground as soon as possible.” Time was critical. The faster they could get there, the more lives they could save. [Said Kreiss](#), “Our people, with their constant ‘on-alert’ mentality, didn’t wait to be called. Hearing about the disaster on the news, they packed their bags, left everything behind, volunteered for the mission, and within hours, we had a full team organized and ready to go. We packed one hundred tons of equipment—or two cargo planes—flew halfway around the globe, and landed in the disaster area in the evening. We worked all night long, to get the entire hospital ready by morning, and on Saturday at 8am, were the first advanced hospital in the region fully operational, and treating patients.”

Israelis know how to work quickly. Israeli Air Force pilots stand ready, at all times, to thwart possible attacks from the air. Soldiers in Iron Dome batteries man their stations day and night, protecting the population from missiles and rockets. And, when need be, the entire country can—and does—quickly mobilize, calling tens of thousands of reservists from their daily lives to army service. When needed, this ability to work quickly has also helped save lives around the world.

This “on-alert” status—Israel’s readiness and ability to work quickly—has been part of our national ethic since the birth of the Jewish nation. Describing the nature of the consumption of the paschal lamb in Egypt Moses tells the people, “And thus shall you eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste.” (12:10) The people were instructed the sacrifice on alert—“ready to go” without a moment to waste. This element of the Exodus carried such significance that it became a central aspect of our Passover celebration. In later times, when Jews ate the Paschal offering in Jerusalem, they could not eat it with any type of bread. Rather, “You shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt you eat unleavened bread therewith—the bread of affliction; for in haste did you come forth out of the land of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 16:3)

The matzah that we eat on Passover reflects this “on-alert” status, as it is prepared and baked quickly. What is the nature of this requirement? Why must quickness and alacrity play such significant roles in the Passover experience? S’forno (on Deut. 16:3) explains, “The reason for the mention of the quickness regarding the bread is: in place of the ‘quickness’ (i.e. having to run to meet our basic needs) of poverty, [the Nation of Israel] experienced the rapidity of the redemption...” We are a nation that is always ready to act quickly, because we were born in haste, experiencing the rapid, miraculous transformation from a band of slaves to a free people.

From its hostile neighbors to its vast desert terrain to its unique demographic make-up, the Jewish state has had to overcome countless obstacles and has still emerged as a light unto the nations. The always on-the-go nature of Israel has resulted in her expertise in technology, humanitarian assistance and defense strategies that are utilized by countries on every continent. Yet, perhaps the most amazing aspect of these great achievements is the fact that Israel has achieved so much in such a short period of time. Looking at Israel’s readiness to adapt, change and grow, we can only wonder how Israel will change not only itself, but the world around it, in the future. ■

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