

Rabbi's Column

"It happened that when Pharaoh sent" - huh? From this interesting beginning of this week's Torah portion we can learn a very interesting lesson about how to treat people. Bear with me for a bit.

We constantly praise God "who brought us out of Mitzrayim, from the place where being enslaved felt normal" [my translation].
So who is responsible? God, or Pharaoh?

My personal opinion is that God is responsible for fulfilling his promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob which required that God bring out the Israelites at that time from Mitzrayim.

Then why does the Torah text make it sound as if Pharaoh really had something to do with the Israelites leaving Mitzrayim?

I think it has something to do with God's enabling even oppressors, once the people they have oppressed are well on their way to safety, to feel a tiny bit of the power they actually thought they had. It is very difficult to emulate God at this level of compassion, but perhaps a modern comparison or two can be found. If it ever happens that the Iranian people achieve freedom from religious zealots or that the North Koreans awaken to the possibility of joining the rest of us, it would be possible after the current leadership is no longer able to lead anything secularly or religiously to make a statement or two about how they acquiesced in their forced retirements. This might have to be a statement made after they have died, just to make sure they could never come back to power,

This past weekend Andrea and I were at the Bar Mitzvah of Ethan Veta in Denver. At one point I was engaged in a Torah Discussion with Cantor Kutner, who had read a commentary concerning the timing of the Exodus. The commentary tried to answer why the Israelites were allowed to enter Mitzrayim in the first place. It sounded like the commentary had answers which seemed a bit uncomfortable, and in conversation I came up with a point I had never thought of before.

God had told Abraham that the nations currently in Canaan had not yet behaved so poorly that it was time to kick them out and replace them. Perhaps if the Israelites had never gone to Egypt, they might have gotten impatient and tried to kick out the Canaanites before God determined they were ready to be kicked out, and in that manner actually lose the opportunity to inherit the land until the bad behavior had been atoned for?

I do not know if that thought fully works for today.

During this week of Shabbat Shirah (the restfulness of song) I invite you to search for the moments of melody that enhance your life.