

# The Shul

at the Lubavitch Center  
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1 Shevat 5777

Va'eira

January 28, 2017

## Did the Egyptians Have a Choice? By Elisha Greenbaum

Four hundred years before the Jews left Egypt, G-d foretold to Abraham his descendants' enslavement and eventual emancipation.<sup>1</sup> This prophecy pre-supposes that the Egyptians were fated to do evil, pre-programmed by G-d, as it were, to enslave the Jewish people and fulfill their destiny. If so, if our gaolers were just pawns in some cosmic master plan, how can we demand and celebrate their punishment?

The traditional theological response to this is to make a distinction between the effect and the cause. The Jews, as a nation, were fated to be tormented by the Egyptians, as a nation. Evil, however, is the sum total of malicious actions effected by a number of individual sinners. Any one Egyptian could have opted out of his countrymen's actions and remained guilt-free and blameless. When we demand retribution for the actions of each individual sinner, it is in recognition that each one of them exercised free will and elected to sin.

Did Pharaoh however have free choice in the decision to maltreat the Jews? The justification that G-d's bidding would have been accomplished with or without the participation of any individual Egyptian would seemingly not answer in Pharaoh's case. Were the leader of the nation to refuse to participate, surely the slavery would have been averted entirely. If so, considering that G-d had foretold the mistreatment of the Jews, Pharaoh would have had no conscious choice, but was predestined to direct the program of ethnic discrimination.

Even more remarkably, on a number of occasions in this week's Torahreading Moses is directed by G-d to visit Pharaoh and threaten yet another plague. Nonetheless, Moses was forewarned to expect that his admonition would have no immediate affect and Pharaoh would persist in his obstinacy. Does it not logically follow then that it was unfair to punish Pharaoh for refusing to heed the Divine command, as his refusal was pre-ordained by G-d?

In the times of the prophets, were someone to claim the gift of prophecy we would demand that he foretell several auspicious events in the near future with 100% accuracy. Making a mistake in even the slightest of details would demonstrate him to be a false prophet. If, however, his prophecy had consisted of gloomy prognostications and these failed to materialize, this would not render him automatically suspect. G-d is kind, merciful and always ready to extend another chance. Many prophets have been sent to deliver tidings of forthcoming doom in the hope that this will awaken us to return to Him.

In other words, promises by G-d of future goodness and kindness are guaranteed to eventuate; negative news--not necessarily. When G-d foretold future pain and suffering for His nation, these could theoretically have been pre-empted at His command. The fact that for whatever reason G-d chose not to save us is between Him and ourselves.

Prophecies of evil do not *have* to eventuate. The Jews could have potentially been spared, and the Egyptians could have refused to participate. Though G-d described to Abraham his descendants' eventual enslavement, this was not automatic.

Each of us exercises free will at every crossroad on our journey through life. The Egyptians, as with every evil empire and ill doer throughout history, *chose* to practice misery and destruction, they exercise free will in their wantonness, and fully deserve Divine retribution.

(Source: [http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/348111/jewish/Did-the-Egyptians-Have-a-Choice.htm](http://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/348111/jewish/Did-the-Egyptians-Have-a-Choice.htm))

## DAVENING SCHEDULE

<b>Friday</b>	<b>January 27</b>	<b>29 Tevet</b>	Shacharit .....7:00 a.m. Candles .....5:04 p.m. Mincha .....5:05 p.m. Father-Son Learning.....7:45 p.m.
<b>Shabbat</b> <i>Rosh Chodesh</i>	<b>January 28</b>	<b>1 Shevat</b>	Shacharit .....9:00 a.m. Sof Z'man Kriat Shema .....9:46a.m. Mincha & Seuda Shilishit ..4:50 p.m. Maariv .....6:05 p.m.
<b>Sunday</b>	<b>January 29</b>	<b>2 Shevat</b>	Shacharit .....8:00 a.m. Mincha/Maariv .....5:00 p.m.
<b>Monday</b>	<b>January 30</b>	<b>3 Shevat</b>	Shacharit .....6:50 a.m. Maariv .....8:15 p.m.
<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>January 31</b>	<b>4 Shevat</b>	Shacharit .....7:00 a.m. Maariv .....8:15 p.m.
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>February 1</b>	<b>5 Shevat</b>	Shacharit .....7:00 a.m. Maariv .....8:15 p.m.
<b>Thursday</b>	<b>February 2</b>	<b>6 Shevat</b>	Shacharit .....6:50 a.m. Maariv .....8:15 p.m.
<b>Friday</b>	<b>February 3</b>	<b>7 Shevat</b>	Shacharit .....7:00 a.m. Candles 5:12 p.m. Mincha .....5:10 p.m. Father-Son Learning.....7:45 p.m.

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### Kiddush

Everyone is invited to Kiddush after davening.

Please consider sponsoring or co-sponsoring a kiddush in honor of a Simcha, Yahrtzeit, etc, email Reuven Frank for additional information.



### Yahrzeits this Week:

Tuesday, 1/31 Shevat 4 Toby Epstein Mother Ruth Freedman (Pesse Rivka bas Yechiel)

## FRIDAY NIGHT EVENTS ▾



### Father/Son Learning

Weekly Father/Son learning Friday nights with chulent from O'Fishel. Time: 8:10 p.m., followed by a story. If anyone has any questions, please see Rabbi Eli Itzkowitz