



Missed Opportunities

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

As we prepare for the Yom Tov of Pesach, time is of the essence. At every turn we must be mindful of time. The difference between matzah being *kosher l'pesach* (fit for Passover use) and *chametz* is dependent on time. Get the matzah baked in under 18 minutes and you are good to go – delay, and it's chametz. At the seder, you can't begin before nightfall and need to consume the *afikoman* before midnight. In fact, this fixation on time starts even earlier, generations earlier. The first mitzvah we were given (while still in Egypt) was *Kiddush HaChodesh*, sanctification of the new moon, setting and establishing the calendar. Judaism is fixated on time. This preoccupation is for good reason. Life is filled with beautiful and holy opportunities, but they don't wait around. Time is fleeting, and as such, when the opportunity for something meaningful comes your way – grab it – because if you don't, you will miss the moment. If you miss the 18th minute mark, your dough is *chametz*, and if you miss your moment, the door of opportunity closes.

I have been thinking and perhaps, even obsessing over this idea during the last few months. October 7th changed our lives and our nation. While we learned and were versed in historical atrocities committed against our people, on October 7th we saw this hatred, barbarism and unbridled sadism come to life before our tear drenched eyes. We saw what Hamas did to our men, women and children. We witnessed an event where even the dead were not spared from brutality and no one and nothing was off-limits. On October 7th we saw evil in its purest form. To this very day, almost 7 months later – our hostages have not been returned and our hearts remain achingly broken over all that has been lost. In the initial days and weeks after October 7th, there was an opportunity. An opportunity for the community of civilized mankind to come together and fight against evil. There was an opportunity for the nations of the world to stand behind Israel, our beloved ancestral homeland, the only democratic nation in the Middle East and support them as they were and are the tip of the spear in this battle against evil. Imagine what would happen if civilized nations made their stand against evil. There was and still is an opportunity to change the entire trajectory of mankind – by standing up, unequivocally united against evil. This type of unity of good could change the very moral fabric of the world. But it feels as if the world has missed the opportunity. The nations of the world are focusing on the wrong things. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is not Israel's fault – this was created and perpetuated by Hamas. Years of siphoning and pilfering aid meant to improve the lives of simple people; years of building terror infrastructure in dense civilian neighborhoods; an unprovoked attack filled with murder, rape, and innumerable atrocities on October 7th; these are the seeds which have blossomed into a humanitarian crisis. There is a price to be paid for abhorrent and evil behavior, and unfortunately, the residents of Gaza are paying it – but not because of us, but rather because of the immoral, terrorist leadership who has betrayed them. While we mourn the loss of innocent life no matter what religion, race, ethnicity, or geographic location – it is important to have explicit clarity as to the cause and catalysts of this crisis. Every nation has a right and obligation to protect its citizens – Israel must do whatever is necessary to make sure every man, woman, and child is safe and secure. Our hostages deserve to be returned – not part of a negotiation but because the world should have enough moral backbone to never allow human lives to be used as bargaining chips. War always carries with it collateral damage. The innocent are swept up and suffer. But we must have the moral clarity to place blame where it truly belongs.

There is still time for the nations of the world to seize the moment and stand by the Jewish State as we battle evil. I know my words will have no impact on the global stage – but I'm not writing it for them – I am writing for us. We have seen time and time again what happens when humanity fails to calibrate its moral compass. We have seen countless times the destruction that occurs when nations capitulate, cave in, and act like cowards in the face of evil. We can't change them – but we can change ourselves. If they miss their moment – we shouldn't miss ours. We should be reminded of the dangers of failing to seize the moment, and may we become stronger and emboldened as individuals, as a community, and as a nation to seize life's opportunities for growth, holiness, and elevation.