

**Shabbat Shalom  
from Rabbi Michael Gold**

Candle Lighting Time  
Friday Erev Shabbat 5:39 pm

Services

Thursday Morning Jan. 15 8:30 am Minyan followed by Bagels and  
Bible

Saturday Jan. 17 9:30 am Shabbat morning service.

Again, Jews are under attack as a synagogue in Jackson, MS was set on fire. Thank God no one was hurt, although several Torahs were destroyed or damaged. Unfortunately, we live in a world where each attack on Jews makes the next attack more acceptable. We must be concerned with security while continuing to live as proud, public Jews.

Here is my weekly message.

**PARSHAT VAERA  
PHARAOH AND *MARTY SUPREME***

“Yet Pharaoh’s heart stiffened and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said.” (Exodus 7:13)

For this Torah portion, I want to write about Pharaoh. But first I want to describe a movie I saw this week.

I went to the movies to see *Marty Supreme*. (Yes, I still like going to real movie theaters, eating movie popcorn, and not simply streaming movies on my tv.) The movie was excellent, receiving four stars in my local newspaper. Timothée Chalamet deserved his Golden Globe Award for best actor. The young actor is amazing in the way he prepares for his screen roles. To play a young Bob Dylan in *A Complete Unknown*, he spent several years learning to play the guitar and harmonica. And to play Marty, he spent years becoming an expert ping pong player. He filmed his own ping pong scenes.

*Marty Supreme* is based on the life of a real ping pong player and hustler Marty Reisman, although the movie took liberties with his life. Marty is a

young Jewish man in New York City in the early 1950's, working in his uncle's shoe store while dreaming of playing ping pong on an international level. He will not give up on his dream and will do whatever is necessary to finance his participation in international tournaments. He is not a very nice man, acting in ways both legal and illegal. He gets his girlfriend pregnant, although she is married to someone else. And he seduces a faded movie star played by Gwyneth Paltrow, trying to get help from her wealthy businessman husband, played by *Shark Tank's* Kevin O'Leary.

I loved the skill of the actor. But I truly disliked the man he portrayed in the movie. Usually in a movie, if there is a character who is unethical, you wait for some kind of redemption. Will he improve his ways by the end of the movie? We want to cheer for the main character. But Marty never seems to get better. He continues to do whatever is necessary, no matter who he hurts on the way, to participate in international ping pong tournaments. He is a talented ping pong player but not a nice person. In a sense he reminds me of Pharaoh in this week's portion.

Pharaoh consistently ignores Moses' plea to let the Israelites go. The plagues get worse and the Egyptians suffer terribly. But Pharaoh is a proud, stubborn man who never finds redemption. In the beginning he hardens his heart. But in the end, only with the sixth plague (boils), does it say that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. It is as if Pharaoh had become so enmeshed in wrong behavior that it became second nature to him, as if God made him that way. He had hit a point where he was unable to change. This is why the Talmud teaches, "The evil inclination is at first like a spider web, then like a heavy rope" (*Sukkah* 52a). It had become part of Pharaoh's temperament to become stubborn and unbending.

We hope that Pharaoh will become a better man, but he never does. In the movie, we hope Marty will give up his hustler ways, but he never does. It was fascinating to watch a movie where an excellent actor plays a not-very-nice character. Only in the very last scene of the movie is there a hint that Marty has become humanized (I will not give it away.) I come from a tradition that teaches that people can change for the better. Even Pharaoh could have been a better man. None of us is perfect; all of us can improve. To become a better person ought to be our goal in life.