

SPECTATOR SPORT

by Rabbi Label Lam

End Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon in the land of Egypt saying: "This month is for you the head of months, the first of the months of the year it will be for you." (Shemos 12:1-2)

It's a peculiar phenomenon, the incredible fascination that we all have with news. Why it's almost an obsession. It's hard to live from minute to minute, certainly day to day without knowing "What's happening?", "What's new?" Did not King Solomon tell us In Koheles, "There is nothing new under the sun!"?! Does that not mean that ultimately there is no news?! Everything is a recycling of the old news! No matter what the headline of day, it's likely more of the same "jealousy, appetite, and glory seeking that escorts man out of the world" (Avos). So what's the big attraction, almost addiction we have with news? Is it merely a mass insanity to be surrendered to or severed from?

The Sefas Emes points out brilliantly that although there is nothing new under the sun, the source of our passionate yearning for news is really rooted in a soulful longing for the source of news which is beyond the sun. We repeat twice daily in our morning prayers, "He renews with His kindness constantly the act of creation!" As the Zohar says, "He looks into the Torah and creates the world!" The world is in the process continually being constituted and affirmed by the Almighty's loving gaze. Although the screensaver on your computer looks static and frozen, it is always being energized and made to conform to the program that constantly commands the creation of that still-life picture. So it is with the whole world believe it or not!

Again the Sefas Emes informs us of the fact that the exile began in Egypt with the establishment of the new King. That was the beginning of our capitulation to the control of surrounding political and social forces. It wasn't long until our lives were not our own and our time was under the dominion of Pharaoh. Therefore it is no mistake that the first giant step forward out of Egypt starts by reclaiming the clock, the calendar, by taking back time to be our own. This is the beginning of Torah according to Rashi, because the Torah is not so much interested in history or cosmology or the age of the universe but rather what do we optimally do moment by moment about now!?

It was during the first Gulf War that a close friend and I shared an observation that changed our lives. We noticed how totally engulfed everyone was in what was happening, blow-by-blow in the unfolding drama of war. We figured that if so many are so thirsty for news, for something new that there must be a great opportunity of equal proportion flowing into the world from the spiritual realm.

My friend, a successful businessman, and I dreamt of a modest proposal, a simple business plan that was met universally with rejection. The idea was, "What if we were to buy up yesterday's newspapers and sell them today or next week at a cheaper price!? Could that not be a profitable enterprise?"

The critics barked back that the day after the news of the newspaper is old it is only good for wrapping fish, cushioning Pesach dishes, or jumpstarting a barbecue. You have to hire someone to haul it away the next day. Our response to this test question was, "If it isn't worth anything the day after, then of what real value in terms of time, money, and attention is it today?"

I am not a cartoonist but I conjured up mentally a picture. Keeping in mind that "life is a self-portrait" and I devoted a good part of my misspent youth as a baseball pitcher, I imagined Yankee Stadium filled to the brim with 65,000 anxious fans. The pitcher is poised staring in towards the catcher for a signal indicating what his next delivery will be.

However instead of studying that sign his eyes are slightly vaulted to where a giant screen sits above and behind the catcher and there is a live feed, a real time video screen showing the pitcher watching 65,000 people, watching the pitcher watching 65,000 people, watching him ad infinitum, like tilted mirrors in the bathroom that allow you to see the back of your head forever. And the caption reads, "Spectator Sport!"

The whole world is watching us, watch the whole world, watching us, watch the whole world, and they grow impatient. With this first mitzvah, this slight wink of the moon, we are invited-mandated-even compelled to play a central role on the grandest of stages and not to be mere observers in a **"spectator sport"**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).