

## **Bo: Mastering Time**

- Fabian Schonfeld.

This Dvar Torah extols the philosophy of “Torah Im Derech Eretz” which was the hallmark of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. It was printed in 5760 (1999) in the “National Council of Young Israel Weekly Divrei Torah”.

Bo: Mastering Time

(From Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld, Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills, New York )

In the parsha of Bo we come across the first mitzvah given to our people as, indeed, Rashi points out in his very first commentary on the Book of Bereishit. The mitzvah concerns the celebration of Rosh Chodesh which determines the days and dates in our calendar as they relate to our various holidays. The text is “This month is given unto you”. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch draws our attention to the statement of our Sages: “It” (time) “is handed into your care and its fate is determined by you: you are not handed to it and your fate is not determined by it.” In his essay on Chanukah, Rav Hirsch makes a similar comment in reacting to the question that is asked so often by so many: Is Judaism in accordance with the times? Rav Hirsch reacts by saying that we have to turn the question around and ask, “Are the times in accordance with Judaism?”

Rav Hirsch is telling us that it is not Judaism or the Torah which are outdated, obsolete and backward, but it is the time or times in which we live which have not yet obtained the level of morality and ethical conduct outlined by the Torah. We could paraphrase this idea by saying “The times are behind the times”.

In this connection it would not be too far fetched to state that, for example, the NEW YORK TIMES or LOS ANGELES TIMES are a perfect illustration of the ideas expressed thus far. They claim to present “All the news that is fit to print”. But is all that they present really “fit to print”? And if they distort news, or print articles that are “unfit”, then they have lost their sense of moral direction. The world has a long way to go before it reaches the spiritual heights of the Torah and its teachings and before it attains even a semblance of ethical conduct which emanates from every pasuk in the Chumash.

The ultimate question is “Who is in control”? Is it the Torah and its values or is it humanity pressured by the demands of society and the modern age. Thus the caveat and the warnings of our Sages with which we began this message has great meaning for us all. Is it the Chodesh – “time”, which directs us, or is it we, the Jewish people, that controls and directs time?

In our day and age this message is all the more powerful and vital.

Modernity confronts us and as much as we cannot ignore it we have to tame and guide it so

that one day the world will understand the truth of the philosophy presented to us by the great giant of Torah Im Derech Eretz who gave us the tools with which to confront the challenge of the so called modern age: Samson Raphael Hirsch, Z"TL.

(Submitted by Nisson Shulman)