

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series

Parshas Bo

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Sponsored in Loving Memory of:
Harav Avraham Dovid Mordechai z'tl
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By
Joseph and Dvora Perlow
May His Neshama Have an Aliyah

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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Moshe Understood His Own Shortcoming
The Extent of the Agency of Moshe and Aaron
The Ripple Effect of Hardening the Heart of Pharaoh
Moshe the Man of G'd

About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Parshas Bo

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

1. The Privilege of Choice

The Torah states at the beginning of the Portion of Bo, **“Hashem said to Moshe, “Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the hearts of his servants stubborn ...”** When Moshe and Aaron approached Pharaoh to ask him to release the Jewish people, the Torah states, **“Moshe and Aaron came to Pharaoh and said to him, ‘So, said Hashem, G’d of the Hebrews: Until when will you refuse to be humbled before Me? Send out My people...”** The Torah states in one verse that G’d hardened Pharaoh’s heart and in the following verse Moshe says to Pharaoh – “until when will you refuse to humble yourself before G’d.” The Torah is telling us that the basis for Pharaoh’s rejection of all the previous events was because he was not willing to acknowledge G’d due to his own lack of humility. Seemingly, we are able to understand this within the context of measure for measure. Just as he was not willing to soften his heart to G’d, G’d in turn hardened his heart.

Rambam writes in Hilchos Teshuvah (the Laws of Repentance) that Pharaoh had forfeited his power of free choice. Rambam states that if one believes that the classification of “tzaddik (righteous)” or “rasha (evil)” is predetermined, thus indicating that man has no free choice, he is a fool. Every individual is born with the ability to choose between good and evil. Thus, there is culpability for one’s choice if he has done evil, and is fully deserving if he has chosen to do good. Rambam asks if one is only culpable for doing evil because he had the choice to refrain from evil, then why was Pharaoh culpable for enslaving and withholding the Jewish people if G’d hardened his heart? Rambam explains that initially Pharaoh did have the ability to choose between right and wrong but because he had become so evil, G’d revoked his ability to choose. This is the meaning of “I (G’d) have hardened his heart.” Although Pharaoh’s continued perpetration of evil was not within his control, he is held fully accountable for that behavior because it was his choice not to have choice.

It is interesting to note that although from the sixth plague onwards Pharaoh no longer had free choice because G’d had hardened his heart, nevertheless, regarding each consecutive plague the Torah again tells us that G’d hardened his heart. If Pharaoh had forfeited his ability to choose after this sixth plague, then why was it necessary for the G’d to continue to revoke his ability to make the proper choice?

Avraham, our Patriarch, was presented with ten tests by G’d. Each of the tests was progressively more difficult and built upon the previous one to develop Avraham’s understanding of G’d and give him internal strength and resolve. If Avraham was first to be tested with the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak), which was the most difficult of the tests, he would have probably failed. It was only after he developed through his trials and tribulations a greater understanding of G’d that he was able to succeed with the Akeidah.

Similarly, the plagues that came upon Egypt occurred in a specific progression of increasing levels of revelation. They each touched upon and affected another aspect of existence. Each one of them revealed another dimension of G’d’s ability. Initially the Egyptians understood the plagues as being sorcery/witchcraft. However, when they experienced the third plague of lice, the sorcerers declared, “It is the finger of G’d!” When the seventh plague came upon Egypt, Pharaoh was impressed to the point that he declared, **“...I have sinned; Hashem is the Righteous One...”** The plague of hail was obviously not rooted in witchcraft or nature since two contradictory forces were able to coexist simultaneously. The plague of hail was comprised of water and fire. With each of the plagues Pharaoh came to a new understanding of G’d. Each plague had the potential to bring him to a greater level of clarity and understanding of G’d. Thus, with each new level of clarity and understanding, it was necessary for G’d to revoke his power of choice at that level.

The Torah tells us that it was Pharaoh's refusal to "humble" himself before G'd that caused his heart to be hardened. The Gemara tells us that regarding a person who is arrogant and haughty, G'd says, "The world is not large enough to contain you and I." In order for one to merit a relationship with G'd one must be humble. If one is arrogant, G'd withdraws from that individual. The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin tells us that if it were not for G'd's intervention and assistance to deal with one's evil inclination, it would be impossible to survive spiritually. Because of one's conflicts of interests and natural tendencies/drives, one needs Divine assistance in order to triumph over one's inclinations.

After being exposed to the first five plagues, which are classified as "revealed miracles," one should naturally acknowledge G'd's power. However, because of his arrogance, Pharaoh rejected G'd and behaved as if G'd did not exist. Thus, Pharaoh's rejection of G'd at that point was the ultimate display of arrogance. G'd therefore disassociated Himself from Pharaoh. Consequently, Pharaoh no longer had the power of choice. Therefore, it was not necessary for G'd to be proactive in hardening Pharaoh's heart, but rather it was because of his own arrogance that his heart was hardened.

2. The Importance of the Status of the Jew Before Redemption

The Torah states, **"Hashem said to Moshe, '...Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow to borrow silver vessels and gold vessels.' Hashem granted the people favor in the eyes of Egypt; moreover, the man Moshe was very great in the land of Egypt, in the eyes of the servants of Pharaoh and the eyes of the people."** The Torah tells us that G'd communicated to Moshe to "please" speak to the Jewish people to borrow the valuables of the Egyptians. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that the Torah uses the term "please" to indicate that Moshe needed to beseech the people to do so.

The Gemara explains that the reason Moshe needed to plead with the Jewish people to comply with his request was so that both aspects of the promise made by G'd to Avraham, our Patriarch, would be fulfilled. The Gemara states, "So that Avraham, the tzaddik, should not say that the decree – they shall be enslaved and afflicted for 400 years - was fulfilled and – afterwards they would

go out with great wealth - was not fulfilled. The people said to Moshe, "We are not interested in wealth. We have been in bondage for 210 years and want to leave as soon as possible with our lives. All we want is to be released." Thus, Moshe needed to beseech the Jewish people to borrow the precious possession of the Egyptians.

It is interesting to note that the reason Chazal tell us that Moshe had to beseech the Jews to borrow the wealth from the Egyptians was so that "Avraham, the tzaddik" should not have a claim against G'd. Chazal could have simply said that the reason the Jewish people needed to borrow was to fulfill the promise that G'd had made to Avraham – that they will leave with great wealth. How do we understand this?

The Torah tells us that G'd caused the Jewish people "to find favor in the eyes" of the Egyptians. In addition, Moshe was made to have special status in the eyes of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. It is only after the Jewish people and Moshe assumed "favorable" status did they borrow. Why was it necessary for G'd to cause them to assume a special status as a prerequisite to the borrowing? The Jews could have taken the wealth without special status because G'd had already devastated and humiliated Egypt through nine of the ten plagues. What then is the significance of the Jewish people finding "special favor/charm" in the eyes of the Egyptians?

If the Jewish people had been seen by the nations of the world as renegades/fugitives/escapees, who plundered the wealth of their masters and fled bondage, it would not have been a Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of G'd's Name). Avraham, our Patriarch dedicated his life to bringing about Kiddush Hashem. The only reason the Jewish people needed to be exiled to Egypt was to purge them of the failing of Avraham – who had asked G'd an inappropriate question. It was a Chilul Hashem (desecration of G'd's Name) that the Egyptians should enslave the Jewish people – the descendents of the man who introduced monotheism into existence – and ultimately forfeit their heritage/belief in G'd. In order to bring about a proper correction for the Chilul Hashem that had transpired because of Avraham's failing, the Jewish people needed to leave Egypt in a manner that would bring about the ultimate Kiddush Hashem to reflect Avraham's lifelong commitment to G'd's Glory.

It was public knowledge that G'd Himself destroyed Egypt on behalf of His people – the Jews. This awareness was a Kiddush Hashem. Despite the fact that G'd had destroyed Egypt, the Egyptians willingly gave

their precious belongings to the Jews because they were perceived as special – even though they were the chattel of the Egyptians for 210 years. Thus, the world will see the Jews as special.

The Jewish people left Egypt not as a downtrodden band of slaves, but rather as a valued people of great status and prestige. This was a Kiddush Hashem. Thus, we can understand the reason Moshe needed to beseech the Jewish people to borrow the precious belongings of the Egyptians.

3. What Criteria is Needed for Redemption?

The Torah states regarding the month of Nissan, **“Hashem said to Moshe and Aaron in the land of Egypt saying, ‘This month shall be for you the beginning of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year.’”** The Midrash explains, “...This month has special value because it is during this month (Nissan) that you (the Jewish people) will be redeemed. Moshe said to G’d, “How could this be the month of our redemption? You had said to Avraham our Patriarch that it is only after 400 years of servitude that we will be redeemed. We have been in servitude for only 210 years.” G’d responded, “When I want you to be redeemed I do not consider computations. Rather, I will redeem you when I want to do so – and this is the month of your redemption.”

The Torah tells us that after Moshe and Aaron had approached Pharaoh to ask him to release the Jewish people he withdrew their straw subsidy – but still demanded the same quota of bricks. This intensified the bondage and embittered the lives of the Jewish people. Chazal explain that it was because of this intensification that the redemption was expedited. Initially the enslavement was to be 400 years; however, because of the intensification of the bondage, it only needed to be 210 years. This intensification was a chesed (kindness of G’d). However, the Midrash cited earlier is explaining the time of redemption differently.

It was only when “G’d wants” to bring about the redemption that it happens. Meaning, when G’d wants to redeem the Jewish people, He will override all previous criteria. It is because of G’d’s intense love for the Jewish people that He wants to bring about their redemption – despite the fact that the Jewish people may be content with their own state of exile.

The Mishna in Tractate Sotah tells us that there are a number of indicators which point to the imminent

coming of Moshiach. It states, “The faces of the leaders of the generation will be like dogs. Arrogance will be at an overwhelming level. A daughter will stand up against her mother (total lack of respect). The elders will honor the youth etc.” The Mishna concludes, “We can only rely upon our Father in heaven.” Reb Chaim of Volozhin z’l explains that the concluding statement of the Mishna is telling us that the situation will become so bleak and hopeless that the only approach to resolution will be our Father in Heaven. However, Reb Chaim of Volozhin states that the closing statement of the Mishna can be understood differently.

When the Jews despair and thus declare that we can only rely upon G’d Himself, this itself is one of the indicators of the imminent coming of Moshiach.

Regardless of how we understand the closing statement of the Mishna, Moshiach will only come when the Jew understands that his state of exile is unacceptable, despite his material success. One must come to the realization that the only security of the Jew is G’d, his Father in heaven. Just as G’d desires to redeem the Jewish people, so to must they desire redemption. However, the Midrash that was previously cited gives us another understanding.

Under normal circumstances, all the criteria that were previously mentioned must be in place to merit redemption. However, if G’d should deem it the time of redemption because of His intense love for the Jewish people, He will bring it about instantaneously. The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah states, “Just as your forefathers were redeemed in the month of Nissan, you will in the future be redeemed in Nissan.” Meaning, just as G’d redeemed us from Egypt despite the fact that we did not fulfill the criteria of being in servitude for 400 years, identically in the future, even if the criteria for redemption will not be met, it will occur.

4. The Setting for Kiddush Hashem

The Torah states, **“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘...Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow to borrow silver vessels and gold vessels...’”** The Torah tells us that G’d commanded Moshe to “Please” speak to the Jewish people to tell them to borrow the silver and gold vessels of the Egyptians. Evidently, by needing to say “please” Moshe need to beseech the Jewish people to borrow the wealth of the Egyptians. Without his

beseeching, the Jewish people would not have wanted to borrow the wealth.

Sforno explains that the reason Moshe needed to beseech the Jewish people was because, "The Jewish people thought, 'If we simply leave with our own belongings, the Egyptians will not pursue us. However if we borrow all of their wealth and leave the Egyptian never to return, they will pursue us. Thus it is better not to ask to borrow the wealth.'" Thus Moshe needed to plead with the Jewish people to borrow the wealth of the Egyptians.

Sforno continues, "G'd said to Moshe, 'Please speak to the Jewish people to beseech them to borrow the wealth, because it is in only through this that the salvation will come about.'" Meaning, what seemed to be not in the best interest of the Jewish people was in fact what brought about the ultimate salvation.

The Jewish people borrowed the wealth as per Moshe's pleading and they were pursued by the Egyptians just as they had feared. If they had not taken the wealth, Pharaoh would not have been able to motivate his people to pursue the Jewish people. G'd had already devastated Egypt on their behalf. However, since the Jewish people had taken that which was most precious to the Egyptians, they were pursued. How did this bring about the ultimate salvation?

The greatest miracle of the exodus was the splitting of the Sea. Had the Jewish people not taken the valuables, the Egyptians would not have pursued them and there would not have been a need to split the Sea. The revelation at the splitting of the Sea was at such an advanced level that even the prophet Yechezkel did not merit to see what the maidservant saw at the splitting of the Sea. If the Jewish people had not taken the valuables, they would not have been privy to such a level of revelation. All of the events of the exodus were in preparation for the giving of the Torah at Sinai, which was the ultimate salvation. Every experience that the Jewish people had during the exodus was to advance their spirituality in order to make them worthy and give them the greatest capacity to be taken as G'd's people at Sinai.

Chazal tell us that at Sinai when G'd spoke to the Jewish people, each person prophesized to the level of his own spiritual capacity. Thus, the greater the capacity the more advanced and profound is the level of understanding of the transmission of the Torah. If the splitting of the Sea had not occurred, the Sinai event would not have been at that advanced spiritual level. The Jewish people had

experienced such a profound level of revelation of G'd's Presence at the splitting of the Sea that they were able to point and say, "This is my G'd!" Thus, although the Jewish people were initially terrified by the prospect of the Egyptians pursuing them, it was because of their borrowing the wealth that they experienced the ultimate salvation at Sinai in the most advanced state.

Chazal tell us that G'd interacts with the world in the manner of "measure for measure." The Egyptians were drowned in the Sea because they killed the firstborn Jewish males by drowning them in the Nile – measure for measure. The revelation of Divine Justice in the world is a Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of G'd's Name). The measure for measure punishment that was brought upon the Egyptians at the Sea was a testament to the world that there is a Judge and there is Justice. The world is not a random stream of events but rather the Omnipotent Being directs every aspect of existence.

The splitting of the Sea was not only beneficial for the spiritual development of the Jewish people as a preparation for Sinai, but also it was a Kiddush Hashem as a testament of G'd's Justice. Even the most advanced civilization in the world was subject to Divine Justice and could not outwit G'd. Thus, Moshe needed to beseech the Jewish people to borrow the wealth because despite the fact that the pursuit of the Egyptians was inevitable, it would bring about the ultimate salvation and Kiddush Hashem.

5. The Innate Difference Between the Jewish People and the Nations of the World

(from Vaaira)

The Torah states, "**Hashem said to Moshe, "...I shall harden the heart of Pharaoh so that I may multiply My signs and My wonders upon Egypt...Pharaoh will not heed you, and I shall put My hand upon Egypt."** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "G'd said, 'It is known to Me that when the nations of the world do teshuvah (repent) they will not do so with a whole heart. It is better that I harden their hearts so that I should have the opportunity to increase My signs (miracles) so that the Jewish people should recognize My strength.' G'd brings tragedy and destruction upon the nations of the world so that the Jewish people should take notice and fear Him. As it is written, "I have cut down nations and made their corners desolate so that you should take mussar (reproach)."

Sifsei Chachamim explain Rashi, "G'd said, 'If I do not harden the heart of Pharaoh, he and the Egyptians will definitely do teshuvah. However, it is revealed before Me that it will not be a complete teshuvah with a full heart. If I should bring further plagues and tragedies upon them, mankind will say – 'This is the way of G'd, that he brings destruction upon those who do teshuvah.' They will not realize that it is only because they did not do a complete teshuvah. Therefore, I will harden the heart of Pharaoh so that he should not do teshuvah of any sort, thus avoiding a desecration of My Name."

When one does not do a complete teshuvah, G'd will bring upon him further punishment to purge him of his spiritual impurity to bring him to the realization that his teshuvah was not complete. However because the nations of the world do not perceive the possibility of punishment in this context, G'd will not allow them to begin the teshuvah process.

Chazal tell us that when King Solomon built the Bais HaMikdash (Temple) he prayed to G'd that when the non-Jew comes to pray on the Temple mount, his prayers should be received regardless of his level of worthiness. This is so he should not accuse G'd of being unfair. However, regarding the Jewish people, G'd should only respond to the prayers of those who are worthy. It is because the Jew will understand that if G'd does not respond to his requests and supplications, it is due to his unworthiness.

The Midrash tells that there is no nation in the history of existence that G'd began to punish that was not ultimately destroyed. The reason for this is the more G'd inflicts punishment upon them, the more they became enraged and defiant with G'd. They believed that they were undeserving of punishment. As a result of their increased rejection of G'd, they ultimately had to be destroyed. The Jew, on the other hand, when tragedy and suffering befall him, will ultimately introspect and reflect on his past behavior. This is a fundamental and innate difference between the way the Jew and the non-Jew process each of their own realities.

It is interesting to note that in the Portion of Haazinu the Torah states, "**G'd says, 'My arrows will be expended from My quiver (inferring that the Jewish people will not be expended).'**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain this with an allegory. It is similar to an archer who shoots his arrows at a secure beam. Eventually all his arrows will be expended but the beam remains standing and intact. So too, despite the difficulties and suffering that

G'd will bring upon His people (to do teshuvah), they will not be destroyed through punishment. Rather, they will introspect and bring themselves to a point of reinstatement. This is not the case with the non-Jew.

The Sanctification of G'd's Name (Kiddush Hashem) in Egypt was as a result of the non-Jew not understanding that even if he had done teshuvah, it would not have been sufficiently complete. They would have not understood that their difficulties were because of their own shortcomings.

When G'd offered the Torah to the nations of the world at Sinai, their response to G'd was, "What is written in it?" They were not willing to accept its dictates unless they knew in advance that it did not conflict with their own interests. When G'd told the Edomites (Esav) that the Torah contains the commandment "Thou shall not kill," they responded, "We cannot accept the Torah since it is contrary to the blessing that we received from our grandfather Yitzchak- that we are to live by the sword." Thus, they rejected it.

If G had told them that the Torah contained the mitzvah of honoring one's father and mother, which was the commandment Esav observed meticulously, the Edomites would have agreed to accept the Torah. However, the basis for their acceptance would have been to fulfill their own interest rather than submitting to the word of G'd. On the other hand, the Jewish people unequivocally declared, "Naaseh v'nishma – we will do and we will listen," when they were offered the Torah. The basis for their acceptance of the Torah was that it was the Will of G'd. Their needs and conflicts of interest were not relevant at that moment. The Jew has the ability to see beyond his own circumstances and evaluate the moment correctly even if it means to recognize his own shortcoming.

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... with a solid morning of Torah study***

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Mishna
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30- 7:25 am	Halacha
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Shabbos
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00 pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

- 11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street
- 12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Avodah Zorah**
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue
Between E.51st and E.52st

Tuesday

- 12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
Location: Yad Avraham
- 1:30 – 2:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
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Wednesday

- 11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
Enter on 54th Street
- 1:00—2:00 pm **Derech Hashem**
Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

- 10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**
Location: Yad Avraham
- 12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
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