

Parshas Bo

For the week ending 6 Shevat 5756
26 & 27 January 1996

Summary

Hashem tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aaron to remove the locusts, and he admits that he has sinned. Hashem ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart and again Pharaoh fails to free the *B'nei Yisrael*. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe, and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, and to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too. Moshe tells Pharaoh that Hashem is going to bring one more plague, the death of the firstborn, and then the Children of Yisrael will leave Egypt. Hashem again hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again he will be put to death. Hashem tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the first month in the calendar year. The *B'nei Yisrael* are commanded to take a sheep on the tenth of the month, and guard it until the fourteenth. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach sacrifice, its blood put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat to be eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign to Hashem to pass-over their homes when He strikes the firstborn of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating *chametz* on Pesach. Moshe relays Hashem's commands, and the Jewish People perform them flawlessly. Hashem sends the final plague, killing the firstborn, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. Hashem tells Moshe and Aaron the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (the redemption of the firstborn son), and *tefillin*.

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Commentaries

A MULTITUDE OF MITZVOS

"...and you shall not break a bone of it (the Pesach offering)." (12:46)

In the Second World War, during the 'blitz' on London, large numbers of families were evacuated to safer areas. Sometimes, the family itself was divided, with some children being evacuated to places as far away as Canada, while other children stayed with their parents in the relative safety of the English countryside. One can well imagine the tremendous outpouring of emotion that took place when the war came to an end, and these families were re-united. But after the initial overwhelming emotion, it became clear that the bond between the parents who had stayed with their

children was far closer than their relationship with those children from whom they had been separated for over four years.

We think that because we love our children, we give to them. The reverse, however, is also true - **because we give to our children, we love them.** Every time you get up in the middle of the night to get your child a glass of water or to change his diaper, you are giving, and that giving leads to love. What was lacking in the relationship between the parents and their evacuated children was four years of not getting up in the middle of the night to give them a glass of water.

The same is true in our relationship with Hashem: People often say 'I would love to have your faith! But I just don't feel it!' The truth of the matter is that **doing leads to feeling.** When you give to Hashem, by doing what Hashem wants you to do, it's the spiritual equivalent of getting up in the middle of the night to give your child a glass of water.

That is the reason Hashem gives us so many mitzvot to help us remember the Exodus. For surely if we just needed a memorial, wouldn't eating a little matza be enough? But Hashem gives us a multitude of mitzvot so that we will be deeply affected emotionally, and our hearts will be drawn to a powerful love for our Creator.

(Based on the Sefer HaChinuch and Rabbi E. Dessler)

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PESACH SUSPENDED!

“And you will celebrate it (Pesach) as a festival for Hashem; throughout your generations, as an eternal decree, you will celebrate it.” (12:14)

If we look at the festival of the Exodus from Egypt merely as physical redemption from a corporeal enslavement, we could make the mistake of saying that during other times of physical oppression and exile we should suspend the celebration of Pesach. However, if we view the redemption from Egypt as a *spiritual* exodus, if we focus on the fact that Hashem rescued us from drowning in the spiritual morass of Egypt, and took us as His chosen people, then the Festival of Pesach is something eternal, to be celebrated even in the darkest exile.

Thus “if you will celebrate it (Pesach) as a festival to Hashem” - if you celebrate it as a *spiritual* redemption, then “as an eternal decree, you will celebrate it” - even in the darkest exiles.

(Adapted from the Meshech Chochma)

BREAKING DOWN THE DOORS

“I will pass through the land of Egypt this night and I will smite every firstborn - I am Hashem.” (12:12)

“I will pass through the land of Egypt this night” - I and not an angel “...and I will smite every firstborn” - I and not a seraph “...I am Hashem” - I am He, none other. (Yalkut Shimoni 189)

Why was it necessary for Hashem himself to perform the miracle of the first-born? Why couldn't He have sent a spiritual messenger - an angel - instead? Everything exists at first in a higher form and then devolves downward through the various levels of existence until it reaches our world. All entities exist in all realms, but in different forms. For example, we know fire as something that burns, but in the higher worlds, fire derives from the passions of the wicked. Consequently, what we perceive as a miracle sometimes results from our limited perspective in this lower world. For example, when Avraham Avinu emerged unscathed from a blazing furnace, it was indeed a great miracle, but only to us. In the upper realms, given that Avraham Avinu was free of the passions from which fire is derived, the entity that corresponds to fire could not touch him, and thus his deliverance did not seem miraculous at all. This is what it means when Gavriel - the ministering angel of fire - said “I will go down and save him (Avraham).” Gavriel's descent symbolized that fire's higher nature would be revealed in this lower plane of existence.

However, the Jews in Egypt were so steeped in corruption, that they were unfit to be redeemed even by the standards of the higher realm. Thus, only Hashem was able to ‘break down the doors’ - to alter the course of nature so that the Jewish People could be released from their slavery, and for that reason, no angel, but Hashem alone, could perform the miracle of the death of the firstborn and free the Jewish People from Egypt. A miracle even at the highest level.

(Adapted from the Beis Halevi)

Haftorah: Yirmiyahu 46:13-28

“As Tavor is fixed among the mountains and Carmel traveled across the sea...” (46:18)

When the Almighty was about to give the Torah, two mountains, *Mt. Tavor* and *Mt. Carmel* had such a desire that the Torah should be given on them, that the angel who is appointed over mountains began moving them towards *Mt. Sinai*. Nevertheless, Hashem chose *Mt. Sinai* as the site of the giving of the Torah. However, these two mountains were recompensed for their disappointment by being uprooted and replanted in *Eretz Yisrael*. Later, on *Mt. Tavor*, the Jews were miraculously saved in the time of the prophetess

Devora, while on *Mt. Carmel*, Hashem's unity was proclaimed in the time of *Eliyahu*. If these two mountains were moved to *Eretz Yisrael* because of their intense longing for the Torah to be taught on them even for the brief moments of the giving of the Torah, then how much more will all the world's *Batei Medrash* (study-houses), where the Torah has been learned continuously for over 3,000 years, merit to be transported to *Eretz Yisrael* in the coming epoch!

(Megilla 29b, Maharsh" a, Rashi, Bereishis Raba 99:1, in The Midrash Says)



Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Kol Mekadesh Sh'vii - ~~l~~ka asen kf
“Whoever keeps Shabbos...”

סועדים בו לברך שלש פעמים

“They dine in this day in order to say blessings on the meals three times.”

On the Sabbath, explains the famed Chassidic leader Rabbi Mendel of Rimanov, a Jew does not eat merely to satiate himself but rather to have the opportunity over and over again to come closer to his G-d by making blessings over the food He has provided. It may be added that this is why many Jews say “Lekavod Shabbos” (“In honor of the Sabbath”) before each course of the Sabbath meal. The historical background for this custom can be found in the Midrash which describes the hatemongering description of the Jews, related by their arch enemy Haman to the king, as people of ravenous appetite who eat and drink and say it is all “for the enjoyment of the Sabbath, for the enjoyment of the Holiday.”

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