

Parshas Bo

This week's Parsha is Bo, where the final three plagues occur, and the nation of Israel is officially born, with the beginning of the first Mitzvah commanded to the nation: to start blessing the new months.

One of the purposes of the plagues and the miracles in Mitzraim was to have the Egyptians, and specifically Pharaoh, recognize the greatness of Hashem. For many of the plagues, Pharaoh tried to “one-up” Moshe, Ahron, and Hashem by showing that his sorcerers could physically cause the plagues brought upon the Egyptians. By the time the last three came about, the nation was turning on Pharaoh and his stubbornness (10:7) and began recognizing the omnipotence and greatness of Hashem.

This is why Moshe and Ahron were steadfast in their mission and remained intransigent. Pharaoh tried to make a “deal” work², but that was never the point. Now, part of this mission to recognize Hashem is the reason for Pharaoh's active stubbornness. According to Kabbalah, Hashem fills everything and surrounds everything; everything is Hashem (Malei Kol Almin, and Sovev Kol Almin). In this way, even though humans have within them the ability to decide good from bad, the power to decide is sourced in Hashem. Therefore, when the Parsha opens with the statement that Hashem will further harden Pharaoh's heart, Hashem was explicitly showing that He

Himself is part of the process of human decision-making, even when a person is sinning. Meaning the power to do anything is sourced in Hashem, so every possible outcome of any decision as it unfolds is powered by, and sourced in some level of G-dliness. The recognition of this is something Jews can understand (think of Shaar Habitachon in Chovos Halevavos), where Ibn Paquda lays out for the reader that one must do everything in their power to actively and consciously recognize that everything is Hashem. Our mission is to use the Torah and other checklist items (such as those suggested by Ibn Paquda) to best succeed in this. But when someone like Pharaoh is involved, the barrier to change is much greater, and the required miracles and changes are far greater to have a lasting impact. Whereas a Jew, and their Nefesh Elohis, which is a Chelek Eloka Mimaal, means that we don't need to experience the same cataclysmic events to achieve the level of belief and servitude to the Master of the Universe.

Notwithstanding, the events of redemption from Egypt were also a sign to the Jews, and we must recount and retell the story daily, and specifically the mitzvah to do so on Pesach, and it is part of the perpetuation of a core basis of our religion (for example the first of the 10 commandments, Hashem says, “I am Hashem your G-d, who...took you out of Egypt...” Because the story of redemption from Egypt is ultimately about the story of the redemption of our generation from our

¹ Even the fact that Moshe said to Pharaoh 11:4, at around midnight, see Rashi.

² Throughout his negotiations, and with the help of Rashi, we can see he was trying to not allow the

Jews to leave (i.e. the kids shouldn't go, or the cattle), and Moshe and Ahron were unwilling to budge.

Golus, to usher in Mashiach, which is the tachlis of creation.

Furthermore, the way we know this to be true is Hashem's first commandment to us, when our status went from slave to 'not slave' in an instant, was to bless the new month³. Which connects to the beginning of creation, and the first Rashi on Bereishis. That is, the core point to learn about creation was to see that, from the moment Hashem fashioned the universe, it was to arrive at this moment, when his people will serve Him. The highlight is that the first Mitzvah is our ability to manipulate the physical dimension by controlling when dates in the calendar fall, and, with it, when the commandments of Hashem will occur⁴. Hashem bequeathed the power of Torah to us, to use the Torah according to the 13 principles of Rabbi Yishmael, as ways to interpret the Torah, so that we may serve Hashem, and bring Mashiach. Hashem gifted us with the power to manipulate the physical world and to align it with holiness and spirituality. We see this further because the Jews in Egypt kept to their ways even though the nation around them diametrically opposed them. Egyptians served animals as gods, whereas the Jews had dominion over animals (and would sacrifice them to Hashem). Ultimately, Pharaoh recognized Hashem in 12:32, when he told Moshe to pray on his behalf, meaning he realized that

Hashem must be in control for Pharaoh to be saved. This reversal of attitude resulted in the next posuk, that the Jews were sent out, and left, and in posuk 36, that the Egyptians "looked favorably" on the Jews.

The remainder of the Parsha gives more commandments about Pesach, its laws, and who they apply to (converts and Jewish-born people alike).

One final point about the centrality of redemption is that we have it as a sign, as Tefillin (Totafos- from two words of 2x2 = 4), which includes the portion of our Parsha specifically about the redemption from Egypt. A sign we must think about daily. And the purpose of this is not only to remind us about Hashem's power, but that we ourselves will experience a redemption, the true redemption with the coming of Mashiach.

Good Shabbos

³ Chapter 12, after the announcement of the 10th plague.

⁴ As mentioned in our Parsha, the Jews were also commanded about the holiday of Pesach, which is defined by a specific date in the calendar. Before or after that day, there is no commandment to refrain from Chametz or eat Matzah (or any of the other Mitzvos). The punishment for eating

Chametz, for example, is Kares, a very harsh outcome. This means that we must take the calendar seriously and not mess around, lest we sin (even inadvertently). Therefore, Hashem says, if you follow the laws of the Torah, you will be allowed to announce when the new months begin (according to a process) and announce when the holidays will be, etc.