

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Bo

Robert and Marie Briefel
For the Yahrzeit of his beloved and revered father

Berich Bernard Briefel,

Dov Ben David, z'l

May His Neshama Have an Aliyah

January 28, 2010

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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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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Bo

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
Dean

1. Sinai the Culmination of Redemption

The Torah tells us that G'd spoke to Moshe and commanded him to communicate the four expressions of redemption to the Jewish people. The Torah states, **"Say to the Children of Israel: 'I am Hashem and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I shall take you to Me for a people and I shall be a G'd to you...'"** The first three expressions **"I shall take you out...I shall rescue you...and I shall redeem you"** are clearly expressions of redemption; however, how is the fourth statement **"I shall take to Me for a people..."** also considered to be an expression of redemption? Seemingly, the verse is referring to when the Jewish people were taken to be G'd's people at Sinai.

Regarding the Ten Commandments that Moshe had received at Sinai, the Torah tells us that they were **"charus- engraved"** onto the tablets. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) states that the word **"charus"** (without vowels) can be read as **"cheirus – freedom."** Meaning, the only truly "free" person is the one who is engaged in Torah study. Only through Torah study, can one be truly free to make proper choices. Torah study allows one to have sufficient clarity to take control of one's life. One who does not engage in Torah study is conflicted by his physical desires and drives and thus cannot make appropriate choices due to his own conflicts of interest. Thus, he is a slave to his own physicality and not truly a free individual. Therefore, the fourth expression of redemption is the ultimate freedom that one gains through being taken as G'd's people and spiritualized through the Torah itself. The first three expressions of redemption were only a prerequisite to the culmination of what freedom truly is.

The verse continues **"...and you shall know that I am Hashem your G'd, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt."** Seemingly, G'd is saying to the Jewish people that they would only know after the Sinai event that it was He who took them out of Egypt. One would think that after witnessing the plagues of Egypt and

the splitting of the Sea, the Jewish people would understand with clarity that G'd Himself took them out of Egypt. However, the verse indicates that it is only after the Sinai event that they would surely know, in retrospect, that it was G'd who had taken them out of Egypt.

Prior to Sinai, the Torah tells us on many occasions that the Jewish people acknowledged with certainty that what had transpired in Egypt was attributed to G'd Himself. As the verse states after the Sea had split and closed upon the Egyptian armies, **"They (the Jewish people) believed in G'd and His servant Moshe..."** Meaning, the Jewish people attributed the miracles of the sea to G'd Himself. Regarding the plague of hail the Torah states, **"...you shall know that there is none like Me in all the world."** Regarding the last three plagues the Torah states, **"...so that you may relate in the ears of your sons and your son's sons that I made a mockery of Egypt and My signs that I have placed among them- that you may know that I am Hashem."** Seemingly, it was clear to the Jewish people, before Sinai that G'd had redeemed them from Egypt.

Rambam writes in The Fundamentals of Torah, that the basis of Jewish belief that Moshe was G'd's prophet is not based on the miracles that he performed. If one's belief is based solely on witnessing miracles, it is considered to be **"inconclusive (dofee)"** because one's belief could be questioned by attributing the miracles to sorcery. The basis for the veracity of Moshe's status as G'd's Prophet is based on the fact that the entire Jewish people witnessed G'd openly communicating to Moshe.

If the Jewish people's belief in G'd was based upon Moshe's performance of miracles, then it could be said that the basis for his supernatural ability was not due to G'd but rather that he was a greater sorcerer than those in Egypt. Thus, the confirmation of the Sinai event was vital and pertinent to indicate that everything that had transpired before that time was in fact the Hand of G'd. As the verse states, **"I shall take you to Me for a people and I shall be a G'd to you; and you shall know that I am Hashem your G'd, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt."**

2. *A Predicament that is Seen as a Failing*

The Torah states, **“Moshe and Aaron went and gathered all the elders of the Children of Israel. Aaron spoke all the words that Hashem had spoken to Moshe...and the people believed.”** After Moshe had proven himself to be the Redeemer, through the miracles that he was instructed to perform, they believed. Since they had believed that the redemption was imminent, the Jewish people chose to cease working. Pharaoh reacted to their defiant behavior by withdrawing the straw subsidy that was provided to them by the Egyptians. He nevertheless demanded the same quota of bricks to be produced. An obvious consequence of Moshe's influences and presence was that their bondage intensified.

The Torah states, **“Say to the Children of Israel: ‘I am Hashem, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt... G'd said to Moshe to inform the Jewish people that He was going to free them from their enslavement. They were destined to experience three levels of extrication from bondage before they would be taken as G'd's people. Despite the assurances that they were given by Moshe, the Torah continues, “So Moshe spoke accordingly to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to Moshe because of shortness of wind (*kotzer ruach*) and hard work.”** Because the Jewish people were overwhelmed and limited as a result of the intensified labor, they did not have the capacity to absorb and internalize what Moshe had told them.

Sforno explains, “The Jewish people did not listen to Moshe because they did not sufficiently reflect upon what was being said because they did not have trust in G'd that He would redeem them. If they would have had faith that He would, it would have been considered a righteousness for them as it was regarding Avraham, our Patriarch. As we find with Avraham, our Patriarch. Avraham and his wife Sarah, were barren. The Torah tells us that when G'd told Avraham that he would have a son, **“He believed”** and it was considered a “righteousness.” When the Torah tells us that “Avraham believed” it is not referring to his intellectual acceptance of G'd's promise, but rather, he internalized the good tidings as if he already had fathered the son. This special level of belief was considered a “righteousness.” Because the Jewish people did not have this level of faith in G'd it was considered a failing.

Sforno continues, “It is because of this lack of faith and their unwillingness to accept their predicament

that this generation was not worthy to enter the Land of Israel. However, their offspring would enter into the land.” Sforno is seemingly difficult because the Torah states explicitly that the generation of the desert did not merit to enter into the Land because of the sin of the spies. When the Jewish people had heard the negative reports of the ten spies, they began to cry and bemoan their fate because they believed that the Land was a location that devoured its inhabitants. As a result of their lack of faith, G'd decreed that every Jewish male between the ages of 20 and 60 should die in the desert over a 40-year period.

In order to understand Sforno, one could say that had the Jewish people had sufficient faith in G'd, they would not have been overwhelmed by their labor. This would have been considered a “righteousness” just as Avraham's faith in G'd was considered a “righteousness.” If this would have been so, they would not have asked Moshe to send spies to scout out the Land, because they would have had sufficient faith in G'd. They would have believed that the Land was within their reach to be conquered as He had promised them. However, because they did not have the capacity to internalize what Moshe had presented to them, it subsequently caused them not to merit the Divine Protection that would have prevented the sin of the spies.

One must continuously strive to attain additional merit, because one cannot know if that merit will be needed at a later time in order to deal with an issue or overcome a challenge. The Gemara in Tractate Menachos tells us that when Rav Katina had his garments tailored, he would make sure that their corners would be rounded so as to not require fringes (*tzitzis*). An angel came to Rav Katina and told him that although the rounding of the corners of his garment absolved him of the obligation of *tzitzis*, it was nevertheless something that was considered inappropriate for him to do. If the Wrath of G'd would come upon the Jewish people, the non-performance of a mitzvah that is easily attainable would bring prosecution upon the individual. Doing more, rather than doing less could avert tragedy. Although there are many instances in which one is not obligated to perform a mitzvah; however, if one has the ability to create the context in which he would, it is something that should be initiated. This would generate merit that may be needed at a later time.

3. *Putting Pharaoh In His Proper Light*

At the beginning of the Portion of Bo G'd communicates to Moshe the objective of the last three

plagues, **“...I have made his (Pharaoh) heart and the heart of his servants stubborn so that I can put these signs of Mine in his midst; and so that you may relate in the ears of your sons and your son’s sons that I made a mockery of Egypt and My signs that I have placed among them- that you may know that I am Hashem.”**

We see two important aspects of the last three plagues being presented. Firstly, the purpose of G’d’s hardening the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was to create a setting to be able to bring about more miracles upon Egypt for the Jewish people to witness. Secondly, the last set of miracles contained an aspect of their redemption that was not displayed in the previous miracles. The objective of the first seven miracles were to demonstrate that G’d was the Omnipotent Being and that there were no other powers other than He. However, the last three miracles were to make a mockery of Egypt.

In the Portion of Veyeitzei, the Torah tells us that Rachel our Matriarch, who was barren at the time, approached Yaakov and requested of him, **“Give me children - otherwise I am dead.”** Yaakov responded angrily to her by saying, **“Am I instead of G’d who has withheld from you fruit of the womb?”** At this time Leah had already given birth to six sons and the concubines had born their children. The Midrash tells us that Yaakov’s response to Rachel’s request was insensitive and would therefore have consequences. The Midrash states, **“Is this the way one responds to a distraught woman? I (G’d) swear by your life that your children will bow down to her child (Yosef).”** Because Yaakov was insensitive to Rachel his children ultimately would need to bow down to Yosef, as Viceroy, in order to request grain for their survival. This was considered to be a punishment for Yaakov’s insensitivity. Yosef was the most special son of Yaakov, as the Torah states, **“Israel loved Yosef more than all of his sons...”** If so, why would requesting grain from him be considered a punishment?

When blessing and bounty is received directly from G’d and not through an intermediary, it allows the individual to be fully appreciative to G’d because of the obviousness of the source the blessing. However, if one’s sustenance or blessing comes through a medium, then one’s appreciation to G’d becomes blurred because he must also be beholden to the person who had demonstrated his kindness. Because the children of Yaakov would need to bow down to Yosef in order to receive their sustenance it caused a distance between themselves and G’d.

The Gemara in Tractate Chagigah cites an opinion that states that if there was an individual who is a half-Canaanite slave and half-free man (a Canaanite slave who

is owned by two Jewish masters and subsequently received a writ of emancipation from one of them) he is not obligated to ascend to the Temple Mount on the Festivals. Although the half of him that was emancipated is considered to be a fully-obligated Jew in all of the mitzvos, he is nevertheless absolved from the mitzvah of ascending the Temple Mount on the Festival and bringing the necessary offerings. The Torah states that the obligation to ascend the Temple mount is to **“see the countenance of the Master Hashem.”** The Gemara explains that the reason the half free/half Canaanite slave has no obligation in this particular mitzvah is because the verse states, **“one must come before the Master Hashem”** implying that it is only the individual who has one master and not two masters. Since the half-free man is still bound to a mortal master he cannot internalize and appreciate the Mastership of G’d. Therefore, he is exempt from the mitzvah of visiting the Temple Mount on the festival.

Identically, it is essential for the Jewish people to understand and internalize that they have only one master. If they revered and perceived Pharaoh as their master, it would infringe and limit their ability and capacity to internalize the reality of G’d. They must see Pharaoh as an individual of whom G’d made a mockery so as to understand that his power was only ordained to him by G’d. Thus, they would conclude that they had only one Master, G’d Himself.

4. Moshe’s Affront to Pharaoh

The Torah tells us that after Moshe had presented Pharaoh with the impending plague of locusts and depicted for him the devastating effect that it would have on Egypt, he remained oblivious to the threat of destruction. He thus would not send out the Jewish people. Upon seeing Pharaoh’s arrogance and apathy, Moshe turned his back upon him and departed his presence. The verse states, **“And he turned and left Pharaoh’s presence.”** Moshe’s manner of departure from Pharaoh’s presence was considered a slight and an affront to monarch of Egypt.

After Moshe had left Pharaoh’s presence, the Torah tells us that his servants urged with him to allow the Jewish males to leave Egypt to serve their G’d before the country would be destroyed. They could not tolerate any further destruction. As the verse states, **“Pharaoh’s servants said to him, ‘...Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?’”** Pharaoh heeded their voice and summoned Moshe and Aaron to return. He said to them, **“Go and serve Hashem your G’d...”** The Torah

continues, **“And Pharaoh drove them out of his presence.”** Chazal explain that because Moshe had acted disrespectfully towards Pharaoh, he in turn acted with disrespect by “driving him out” of his presence.

G'd had initially instructed Moshe and Aaron to go to Egypt and approach Pharaoh to free the Jewish people from bondage. He told Moshe to interact with Pharaoh with the utmost respect and reverence. Thus, when Moshe turned his back on Pharaoh, which was an intentional affront, it seems to have been contradictory to G'd's command. Evidently, Moshe justified the disrespect that he displayed. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that initially Pharaoh who was a pagan, rejected the concept of G'd, a Supreme Being. However, after witnessing the plague of hail, he exclaimed, **“This time I have sinned; Hashem is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the evil ones.”** (Because Pharaoh had seen something that was contradictory to the laws of nature. The plague of hail was a coexistence of fire and water which are two entities that could not coexist. This allowed Pharaoh to understand that there is a power that transcends material existence). Despite his momentary recognition of truth, the Torah states, **“...he continued to sin; and he made his heart stubborn...Pharaoh's heart became strong and he did not send out the Children of Israel...”** Because of Pharaoh's had rejected the truth that he had come upon as a result of his arrogance, Moshe was disgusted with his behavior. Moshe believed that he was no longer worthy of being treated with respect and reverence because his degree of insolence.

It is told that one Purim in Radin, in the Yeshivah of the Chofetz Chaim, a student had approached him in an intoxicated state and asked him “Could I be your partner in the world to come?” Initially Chofetz Chaim ignored the student and paid no heed to his request. However, after the student continued to persist with his request, the Chofetz Chaim said to him, “I am willing to accept you as my partner in the world to come under one condition. You must accept upon yourself from this moment forward to never utter a word of negative speech (*lashon ha'rah*.)” To merit to be the partner of the Chofetz Chaim in the world to come is something that could not fathom because of his dimension of righteousness and spiritual accomplishment. When the student became sober and was told the condition of the offer from the Chofetz Chaim, he decided that he could not make such a commitment. He could not commit himself to not utter a word of negative speech. He thus declined the offer. After Chofetz Chaim heard the young student's response, he turned from him in disgust. He could not understand how in the face of such a monumental opportunity, one could not commit to

controlling his gift of speech. The Chofetz Chaim's behavior is rooted in the Torah, which is alluded by Moshe's reaction to Pharaoh's rejection of truth.

5. G'd's Involvement with Choice

The Torah states, **“and He (G'd) hardened the heart of Pharaoh.”** Rambam explains in the Laws of Repentance, that initially Pharaoh had the ability to choose. However after rejecting G'd, despite the fact that he had witnessed the first five plagues that were revealed miracles, his ability to choose was withdrawn from him. From the sixth plague onward, Pharaoh no longer had the ability to choose. Nevertheless, he is held culpable for the evil that he perpetrated against the Jewish people because he chose to forfeit the privilege of free choice.

Ramban and Sforno explain the hardening of Pharaoh's heart was not to deny him the ability to choose, but rather, it was to give him the inner strength and stamina to be able to make rational choices despite the overwhelming pressure, due to the plagues, to release the Jewish people. G'd's hardening of Pharaoh's heart was to strengthen him so that he should repent by choice no to be forced to release the Jewish people.

Ramban explains that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart from the eighth plague onward was no longer to assist him in being able to choose but rather it was to withdraw his freedom of choice to allow G'd to increase His miracles (plagues) upon Egypt in order to make a mockery of them. As it states, **“...so that I can put these signs of Mine in his midst, and so you may relate in the ears of you son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Egypt...”** Pharaoh was not held accountable for not being impacted by the last three plagues because he in fact had no free choice.

Regarding the verse **“and He (G'd) hardened the heart of Pharaoh”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “G'd said, ‘It is known to Me that when the nations of the world will repent (teshuvah) 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)...’” *Sifsei Chachamim* (commentary on Rashi) explain the Midrash cited by Rashi to mean, “G'd said, ‘If I do not harden the heart of Pharaoh then 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 so, I must bring upon them further plagues and tragedies because their repentance was not valid. When mankind will see this they will say, ‘This is the way of G'd, that he brings destruction upon those who repent.’ The nations of

the world will not realize that it is only because Pharaoh did not do a complete teshuvah. I will therefore harden the heart of Pharaoh so that he should not do teshuvah of any sort, thus avoiding a desecration of My Name.” According to Rashi, the sufferings that were brought upon Pharaoh were not because he was the cause of the forfeiture of his own free choice (as mentioned by Rambam), but rather it was for previous acts of evil that were perpetrated by him.

Although we see that there are several opinions among the earlier commentators regarding Pharaoh's actual predicament; nevertheless, based on circumstance it is possible that each one of the positions is cogent and is implemented by G'd. We understand that one's ability to choose is a privilege that is bestowed upon mankind by G'd. If one abuses this privilege it can be withdrawn. The concept that culled from Chazal that because G'd wants every man to repent properly, He gives each individual the inner strength and fortitude to deal with his predicament in order to choose rationally. The position cited by Rashi is also implemented by G'd. In order to prevent a Desecration of G'd's Name, which would cause Him to be perceived as being inequitable, G'd does not allow one to go through the motions of repentance when that person needs to be punished.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk explains that if Pharaoh would have acknowledged G'd as a result of the plagues and done a proper teshuvah, he would have created a setting in which the entire world would have come to believe in monotheism. This is because Egypt was considered to be the most advanced civilization in the world. It was also recognized as the center of philosophical and theological thinking. Thus, if Pharaoh and the Egyptian people would have done a proper teshuvah and accepted monotheism, the entire world would have followed, thus dispelling paganism from existence. With Ramban's understanding of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, that it was only to give him the stamina to do a proper teshuvah, we are able to appreciate that the value of Pharaoh's repentance would have gone beyond himself. It would have impacted upon and benefited all humanity. However, because Pharaoh was evil, he did not repent.

Each person has his own unique spiritual make up and purpose in existence. G'd thus presents each individual with predicaments and settings that are necessary for his own spiritual development. In addition to one's own personal development, the ramifications of one's choices can impact upon the world at large.

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar – Path of the Just
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Chulin –Gid Hanasheh
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi- Bava Basra
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:30 – 12:30pm	Talmud: Megilah Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00-2:00 pm	Ramchal: Derech Hashem Location: Cedarview Capital 1Penn Plaza (45 th FL.)

Tuesday

12:10 - 1:10pm	Torah Insight Based on the Parsha Location: Yad Avraham
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Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm	Talmud: Megilah Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00—2:00 pm	Daas Tevunos Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

11:00 –12:00pm	Duties of The Heart Location: Yad Avraham
12:30 – 1:30 pm	Talmud: Megilah Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25 th FL)