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The Irrefutable IMPRINT OF G-D

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Bo

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Bechira is a Privilege

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Pharaoh Believed Himself to be a Deity

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Forces of Nature United to Do the Will of G-d

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Nothing Beyond G-d's Ability

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Not within the Realm of Natural

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As Extension of Sanctity We Can Sanctify

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1. The first mitzvah given to the Jews in Egypt was the sanctification of the new moon.
2. Nisan, as the month of redemption, is "first of the months."
3. The Torah says Nisan – "This month is for you."
4. Seforno: They entered into a state where they were able to exercise free will.
5. A slave is a chattel of the master.
6. The master dictates every aspect of the slave's being; the slave has no choice.
7. The Jews were circumcised and then slaughtered the pascal lamb in Nisan.
8. Redemption is also in context of the spiritual.
9. Prior to circumcision, there was a spiritual block – they couldn't discern good from evil.
10. The non-Jew who is spiritually blocked only has 7 Noachide Laws.

Debasing The Invincible Through Mockery

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1. G-d hardened the hearts of Pharaoh & his servants so He could increase the number of plagues upon Egypt.
2. G-d tells Moshe that it is imperative to communicate to their children how G-d made a mockery of Egypt.
3. The plagues that were revealed miracles were a display of G-d's power and omnipotence.
4. The plague of hail destroyed all the agriculture except for the wheat and spelt crops.
5. During the plague of hail, Pharaoh believed G-d to be the all-encompassing power.
6. After the plague ceased due to Moshe's supplication Pharaoh made an assessment of the devastation.
7. He discovered everything was destroyed except for the wheat and spelt crops.
8. Pharaoh drew from this fact the G-d is not the Almighty as these two crops were not destroyed.
9. G-d intended to give them a false sense of security by leaving crops that are staples of life.
10. The crops were only spared for the Locust to devour and ravage.
11. Egypt was the height of civilization & seat of power.
12. Mankind is impressed and intimidated by this.
13. We must share with our children that it is G-d who empowers and is all-powerful.
14. The model for this lesson is Egypt who G-d made a mockery of them.

The Gradual Extraction from Bondage to Freedom

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1. Midrash: The Jews acquired wealth at 3 junctures.
2. A: When the water in Egypt turned to blood the Egyptians purchased water from the Jews.
3. B: Leaving Egypt they borrowed silver and gold vessels from the Egyptians.
4. The third juncture was at the Red Sea.
5. These cast the remains of the Egyptians and diamond & gold bedecked chariots onto the seashore.
6. Midrash: The spoils of the sea were greater than the spoils of Egypt.
7. Why was it necessary for the Jews to become wealthy through the sale of the water if they were leaving Egypt with the wealth they borrowed leaving?
8. Each Juncture had another value.
9. Egyptians needed water to live; selling the water, the Jews dictated mastership over their masters.
10. They were elevated with a sense of self worth and had special favor in the eyes of the Egyptians.
11. The Egyptian felt privileged to lend his valuable possession to the Jew.
12. This gave the Jew a sense of value that did not understand he had.
13. The spoils of the sea were specific for the building of the Mishkan.
14. When told to build a sanctuary for Him to dwell in their midst there was no hesitation to do the mitzvah.

The Absurdity of the Intransigence of One Who has been Beaten

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1. Moshe and Aaron say to Pharaoh "To what point do you refuse to submit before me."
2. To submit in Hebrew is "Leianos."
3. Rashi: The root of the word "Leianos" is "Aani" – impoverished.
4. You refuse to behave like a poor man who is naturally low spirited and humble.
5. Gemara: G-d despises a poor man who is arrogant.
6. Although haughtiness and arrogance are negative traits, when attributed to financial status or accomplishment it can be tolerated.
7. The poor man, dependent on others, should be humble.
8. Pharaoh witnessed 7 plagues that could not be denied as the hand of G-d.
9. Egypt has been traumatized and reduced to rubble by the plague of Hail.
10. Pharaoh should now understand that he is a beneficiary not a benefactor.
11. His realization should be no less than the poor man who is humble.
12. Moshe uses the term "Leianos" (impoverished) for "submit" and "low spirited."

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Bo



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The Irrefutable IMPRINT OF G-D

Sinai the Culmination of Redemption

Torah: G-d spoke to Moshe and commanded him to communicate the four expressions of redemption to the Jewish people. “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.

Torah: Regarding the Ten Commandments that Moshe had received at Sinai, they were “charus – engraved” onto the tablets.

Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers): 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.

Torah: “...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.

Torah: Regarding the plague of hail, "...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 in *The Fundamentals of Torah*: 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.

Torah: "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."

A Predicament that is Seen as a Failing

Torah: "*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.

Torah: "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: "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.

Torah: 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: "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.

Gemara in Tractate *Menachos*: 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.

Putting Pharaoh In His Proper Light

At the beginning of *Parshas 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.

Parshas Veyeitzei: *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.

Midrash citing the *Torah*: "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*)." *Yaakov's* response to *Rachel's* request was insensitive and would therefore have consequences. 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.

Gemara in Tractate *Chagigah*: 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.

Torah: 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.

Moshe’s Affront to Pharaoh

Torah: 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.

Torah: After *Moshe* had left Pharaoh’s presence, 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: 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: 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).

Ohr HaChaim: 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 hara*.)"

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.

G-d's Involvement with Choice

Torah: "and He (G-d) hardened the heart of Pharaoh."

Rambam in *Laws of Repentance*: 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*: 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: 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.

Rashi citing *Chazal* regarding the verse "and He (G-d) hardened the heart of Pharaoh": "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*) explaining the *Midrash* cited by *Rashi*: "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: 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.



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