

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
**Weekly Torah Commentaries Series**  
*The Portion of*

**Bo**

January 29, 2009

Sponsored by  
**Roberta and Robert Hadi**  
in loving memory of  
Roberta's Mother  
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*Simi Bas Zlata*

**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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Presented by

**Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

**Dean**

## ***1. Being a Victim of the Deceit of Edom***

The Midrash states, "Reb Elazer Ben Pedas says, 'Just as G'd brought the plagues upon the Egyptians, so too will He bring them upon the kingdom of Edom (the current exile being experienced by the Jewish people).' As it states, 'Just as what was brought upon Egypt will be brought upon Zhar.' Who is Zhar? ...The verse is referring to the kingdom of Edom (Esav) because they brought great suffering (*meitzir*) upon the Jewish people. (Throughout the Talmud the Kingdom of Edom is referred to as the 'the evil kingdom')...However, when G'd will bring upon them a plague that is similar to blood it will be even greater than that which came upon the Egyptians. Their rivers will be transformed into pitch and the earth will become sulfur. Their land will burn and flow day and night with hot pitch and the smoke will billow forever. They will be destroyed from generation to generation." Why will G'd's punishment upon the Edomites (Romans) be so extreme?

The Midrash continues. "G'd will punish them harshly because they had disrupted the Torah study of the Jewish people. Since it states, 'You shall engage in it (the Torah) day and night' the obligation of the Jew is to engage in Torah on a continuous basis. Since the Edomites caused the Jewish people to be disengaged from this continuous obligation, they will be punished eternally with rivers that flow with pitch, measure for measure. Throughout history there have been other kingdoms that have also decreed that the Jewish people should not study Torah. The Greeks had issued multiple decrees against the Jewish people that were punishable by death. One of those decrees was prohibiting the study of Torah. However, G'd will not avenge their sin in the same harsh manner. Why will G'd only bring retribution upon the Edomites for all eternity and not the other upon civilizations that acted in a similar manner?

Esav (forbearer of the Edomites) is quantified as the master of deceit. Esav had even deceived his own father, convincing him that he was devoutly righteous and thus deserving of the blessings/birthright. The Torah states regarding the Covenant between the Parts that G'd had made with Avraham, "**And He (G'd) said to him (Avraham), 'Take to Me three heifers, three goats, three rams, a turtledove, and a young pigeon (*gozel*).'**" The Midrash tells us that each one of these species refers to one of the future exiles to be experienced by the Jewish

people. The species "gozel (young pigeon)" corresponds to the Edomites because "they deceive all humanity." The word "gozel" in Hebrew also means "to steal/deceive." Esav/Edom represents the ultimate in unadulterated falsehood. He was able to present something that is truly evil as something of great value. He had no scruples because he had no conscience. As Chazal tell us he had said, "There is no judgment and no Judge."

Yaakov, our Patriarch, was the antithesis of his brother Esav. As the Prophet states, "Give truth to Yaakov...(*Teetain Emes l'Yaakov*)" Yaakov was the embodiment of truth, which is the Torah itself. As King Solomon states in Proverbs regarding the Torah, "Acquire Truth (Torah) and do not sell it." In order for the Edomites to remove the Jewish people from their Torah studies they did not simply do so through issuing decrees as the Greeks had done, but rather, they had presented alternatives to the Torah itself. They had impressed upon the Jewish people that the position of the Edomites was an embodiment of truth. They had convinced the Jewish people that aspiring to advance the material has value and purpose. The Edomite exile has undermined truth through their characteristic of subtle deception, which eroded the fundamental tenets of Jewish perspective. All other civilizations who had tried to detach the Jew from his Torah study were not able to present a compelling alternative as the Edomites had done. Regarding other enemies, the Jew was fully aware of what his oppressor was trying to bring about and therefore resisted. This was not the case with the Edomites. Their level of spiritual destruction has brought havoc upon the Jewish people, which is being experienced currently. They therefore deserve continuous and eternal punishment for their unceasing levels of influence, which is contrary to the Torah itself.

## ***2. 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.

### ***3. Perspective, the Determining Factor***

The Torah states, **"G'd said to Moshe, '...Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow silver vessels and gold vessels.' Hashem granted the people favor in the eyes of Egypt..."** Until this moment, the Jewish people were seen by the Egyptians as lowly slaves and mere chattels. They did not look upon the Jew as one

to be esteemed or admired. However, because G'd had endowed the Jewish people with a special charm, they were perceived favorably by the Egyptians.

G'd had promised Avraham that after his children would complete their years of bondage, they would leave with great wealth. In order to bring this about, the Jewish people were instructed to borrow valuable personal effects and ornate garments from their masters. One would think that after the Egyptians had experienced nine devastating plagues and having been demoralized and seeing their country reduce to rubble, they would have even been willing to relinquish their valuables to the Jewish people without needing to see them in a special light. They should have parted with their wealth because of mere intimidation; however, the Torah tells us that was not so rather the only reason they released their gold and silver vessels was because G'd had granted the Jewish people favor in the eyes of Egypt.

Because the Jew was seen as being special, the Egyptian in actuality felt that he was the beneficiary of lending what was requested of him to the Jew. It was seen as a privilege to fulfill the request of someone who was as special as the Jew. Why was experiencing the devastation of the plagues not sufficient reason for the Egyptian to be compelled to lend what was requested of him? One would think saving one's own life had greater value than one's own wealth.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the title for the monarch of Egypt was always "Pharaoh." This appellation contains the Hebrew letters "aayin, pay, raish" which spell the word "aafar – dust/earth." The Egyptian people believed that existence was limited to the physical/material. Although the Egyptians were experts in the area of sorcery, it was only a means to manipulate forces that exist and affect the physical plane. They rejected the belief that there is a spiritual realm, which transcends and can override the laws that pertain to the physical. Thus, the essence of the Egyptian is bound to the material. After Egypt was physically destroyed, as a result of the plagues, the only security that the Egyptian had was his own material wealth. Releasing one's wealth without feeling that he was the beneficiary of his action would have been the equivalent of death. Therefore, it was necessary for G'd to endow the Jew with special charm so that the Egyptian should esteem him.

The Torah states, **"You shall love Hashem, your G'd with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your resources."** The Jew is obligated to love G'd to the point of being willing to give his life for the sake of His

Maker. The Gemara asks, if this is so, then why does the Torah also need mention that one must forfeit all of his material wealth to demonstrate one's love for G'd? If one is obligated to give his life, which is the ultimate, then it is understood that to demonstrate his love one would be obligated to part with his material possessions. The Gemara answers that it is not necessarily so. There are those who value their material wealth more than they value their own existence. Parting with the material is worse than death. If one believes that the acquisition of material is an end unto itself, then parting with the material is the equivalent of ending one's existence. However, if one understands that the value of material is only a means to facilitate one's spirituality then it is less of a challenge to part with it for the sake of G'd.

If one has difficulty giving up the material when he should, then it is a reflection of his spiritual standing. If giving charity to support Torah, which the individual values, does not come easily, then it is an indication that he has not yet internalized sufficiently what he believes. One's inability to give significantly is based on one's feeling that he will have less. If this is the case the focus of the individual is upon himself. Meaning, his needs are the ultimate objective of his own existence. Intimidation would not have been sufficient to compel the Egyptians to release their personal valuables to the Jewish people because the material itself was the purpose of their existence. It was their essence.

The Torah tells us that after Moshe had asked the Jewish people to donate the necessary materials that were needed for the building of the Mishkan, they did so without delay and in an unlimited manner. He needed to tell them to cease their giving because all that was needed had already been given. The characteristic of giving is inborn in every Jew. It is part of his spiritual make up. This characteristic is inherited from Avraham our Patriarch, who was an embodiment of kindness and giving. The Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers states, "*Im ein kemach, ein Torah* (If there is no flour, there is no Torah)." Meaning, if one does not have material sustenance he cannot engage in Torah study. As physical beings, it is necessary to address our human needs; however, it is only a means to a greater end to function as a spiritual being.

#### 4. *Seeing the Human Being for What He is*

The Torah tells us that G'd instructed Moshe to address Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, in a manner that was befitting for a king. Although G'd had demonstrated, through the plagues, that He is the Master and the Jewish

people had the upper hand; nevertheless, Moshe spoke to Pharaoh with great respect. The Midrash states, "From here we learn that Moshe gave great respect and honor to the king. Before leaving Pharaoh's presence after forewarning him about the impending plague of the killing of the first born Moshe had said, **'Then all these servants of yours will come down to me and bow to me...'** Although Pharaoh was included as one who would bow to Moshe, he was omitted in the statement out of respect. ...Yosef also acknowledged the position of the monarch with respect. (Although Pharaoh was in desperate need of someone to interpret his dreams, Yosef addressed him in a respectful manner)...Yaakov, our Patriarch gave special honor to kingship. The Torah tells us that he rose up in the presence of his son Yosef, who was the Viceroy of Egypt. Eliyahu the prophet gave special honor to Achov, the king of Israel. (Although Achov was evil, Eliyahu addressed him with respect and honor.) Chananya, Meshael, and Azaria acknowledged the king with honor. Also Daniel honored king Nebuchadnezzar..." The Midrash is teaching us that one must acknowledge and respect a king, regardless of his actions. Even if he is truly evil, one must acknowledge kingship with respect. Why is this so?

We say in the prayer service of Rosh Hashanah, "He coronates kings, but the Kingship is His..." The reason one must demonstrate a proper level of respect and honor to a king, regardless of what he may be, is because he was installed by G'd himself. G'd chose that specific individual to be in a position of enormous power, despite the fact that he may be evil. Therefore, one who demonstrates proper respect for a king is acknowledging that the mortal's honor and glory is only due to a Divine source, G'd Himself. In fact, the blessing that one recites upon seeing a gentile king, "Blessed is He who gives of His Honor to the mortal of flesh and blood."

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."** Seemingly, the Torah is telling us that if one appreciates and understands how G'd had made a mockery of Egypt through the plagues, then one will come to understand that G'd is the Omnipotent One. Why is one contingent on the other? Recognizing the revealed miracles as the Hand of G'd should sufficiently confirm that He is the Supreme Master.

The Jewish people were enslaved by Pharaoh who reigned over the most advanced and mighty civilization in existence. Until Pharaoh was dethroned by G'd, it seemed to be that he and his empire were invincible. During the year of the ten plagues G'd decimated Egypt and ultimately Pharaoh was exposed as a person who was completely ineffective and limited. G'd not only incapacitated him as monarch of Egypt, but He also intended to make a mockery of him. G'd wanted the Jewish people to understand that the basis for Pharaoh's monarchy and ability was only because He installed him as king of Egypt. As G'd elevated him to the status of king, G'd dethroned him from that exalted position. It is important for the Jew not to be awestruck or intimidated by any mortal man, despite his position of power because it is only G'd who gave him that power. This was demonstrated through the last three plagues that were brought upon Egypt.

The Gemara in Tractate Chagigah cites an opinion that states that if there is person who is a half-Canaanite slave and half-free man (a Canaanite slave who is owned by two 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 the mitzvos, he nevertheless is not obligated in *alias ha'regel* (ascending the Temple Mount on the Festival). A Jew, when he visits the Temple Mount during the Festival, must bring two offerings: a festival offering (Chagigah) and a burnt offering. The Torah states that the obligation to ascend the Temple mount is to **"see the countenance of the Master (G'd)."** The Gemara explains that the reason the half free/half Canaanite slave person has no obligation in this particular mitzvah is because the verse states, "one must come before the Master (G'd)" imply 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 visiting the Temple Mount on the festival.

Identically, it is essential to the Jew to understand and internalize the reality that he has only one Master. Because if one reveres and esteems the mortal king as a "master" it interferes and does not allow the internalization of G'd being the true master. This is the reason G'd made a mockery of Egypt.

The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, "Who is the one who is honored? It is the one who honors his fellows..." Why is honoring one's fellow the basis to be honored? Why should one honor his fellow? Is it because

of etiquette or proper social behavior? It is only because man was created by G'd in His image and form that one should demonstrate respect to his fellow human being. When one accords his fellow honor in an appropriate manner, he is acknowledging G'd. This is because his fellow reflects G'dliness in his make up. This individual's perspective of humanity reveals that he is truly honored because he values the characteristic of G'd. Similarly, if one reveres the king because he was chosen by G'd to reign, he is acknowledging that G'd is the Master of all. This must be the perspective and belief of every Jew.

## ***5. The Plague, A Reaction to the Defiance of Pharaoh***

The Midrash cites a verse from Psalms regarding the plague of darkness, “ ‘He (G'd) sent darkness and it became darker because they did not accept His dominance.’ The darkness that G'd had brought upon the Egyptians was severe. Why was this so? Because the Egyptians were unwilling to become subservient to G'd (despite all of the plagues that had preceded the plague of darkness). G'd had said to the angels, ‘The Egyptians deserve to be smitten with darkness.’ All of the angels agreed in unison and they accepted G'd's Word. G'd sent the darkness and it to become more intense. The darkness was more than a mere absence of light it was tangible. This is analogous to a king who gives an order to one of his loyal servants to punish a defiant subject with fifty lashes. Rather than administering fifty lashes, the devoted servant of the king gave one hundred lashes. Similarly, G'd had commanded that darkness should come upon the Egyptians and the darkness intensified itself.” Meaning, the angels that were commanded to bring darkness upon the Egyptians, intensified the plague on their own accord.

An angel is a spiritual being that carries out the Will of its Maker with total devotion as instructed. If this is so, how could have the angels intensified the darkness that came upon the Egyptians, which was not in conformance with the Dictate of G'd? The Torah tells us regarding the plague of hail that it was a phenomenon of fire and ice coexisting simultaneously. Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “Although fire and water are opposing forces, they made peace with one another in order to carry out the Will of their Maker.” Because G'd Wills that fire should burn and water be the agent that extinguishes fire, that is why nature functions in this manner. However if G'd should Will that water should not extinguish fire, then water and fire will coexist with one another. If this is so, then what is the meaning of the words of Chazal “fire and water made peace among themselves...?” This indicates

that these forces, on their own, chose to coexist without G'd Willing this new phenomenon.

Rambam writes in The Fundamentals of Torah that an angel is an intellectual spiritual being. It is a being that has a unique level clarity to understand G'd and His Will. Thus, it carries out the Will of G'd as instructed. An angel is not a spiritual automaton. It is because of its exceptional understanding of G'd that the angel is compelled to carry out His Will. This is similar to the Sinai experience at the time of the giving of the Torah.

The Gemara explains that the Jewish people were compelled to accept the Torah at Sinai. As it states, “G'd held the mountain over them, as if it were a barrel, and had said ‘If you accept the Torah it will be good. If not, there you will be buried.’” According to the literal understanding of the words of the Gemara, the Jewish people were physically coerced to accept the Torah at the threat of losing their lives. Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk explains that this passage within a metaphorical context. The Jewish people had ascended, at Sinai, to an unusual level of clarity that was compared to the angels. Choice only exists when one believes that there is an alternative. However, if one's understanding of value is unencumbered then one no longer has choice. Thus, they were compelled to accept the Torah. It was the equivalent of holding the mountain over them.

When G'd brought the plague of hail upon the Egyptians, the angel responsible for the function of water and the angel responsible for the function of fire chose to coexist because they understood with absolute clarity the desecration of G'd's Name that was being perpetrated through the defiance of the Egyptians. The Egyptian belief was that all existence was limited and bound by the laws of nature. Thus, fire and water, which are opposing forces could not coexist. After Pharaoh had witnessed 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.**” Seeing this new phenomenon which was contradictory to the laws of nature was a sanctification of G'd's Name. Pharaoh understood at that moment that there was a power outside of nature that dictates existence.

Similarly, the angel that was responsible to bring about darkness appreciated the desecration of G'd's Name that was being perpetrated through the defiance of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Therefore, when G'd ordered the plague of darkness to come upon Egyptians, the angels responsible for executing the Will of G'd, intensified the plague in order to punish the one who desecrated G'd's Name by bringing greater devastation upon the Egyptians- just as

the loyal servant added fifty lashes to the punishment of the defiant subject.

**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 – Derech Hashem
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Chulin –Kisui Hadam
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 Kamah
2:00pm	Mincha

**Special Weekday Classes**

**Monday**

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

**Tuesday**

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

**Wednesday**

- 11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Megilah**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
Enter on 54<sup>th</sup> 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<sup>th</sup> FL)