

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Bo

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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

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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1. Pharaoh's Arrogant Stance

The Torah states, **“Moshe and Aaron came to Pharaoh and said to him, ‘So said Hashem, G’d of the Hebrews, Until when will you refuse to humble (lei’aanos) yourself before Me?’”** Rashi cites Targum who explains the word *“lei’aanos (to humble)”* to mean “to subordinate.” Rashi also explains that the word *“lei’aanos”* is derived from the word *“aanee (impoverished).”* Unlike the wealthy person who can pride himself by attributing his success to his own initiative and ability, the impoverished person has no basis to pride himself because he has nothing. The Gemara in Tractate Nidah tells us that one of the individuals who G’d despises is the poor man who is arrogant. One could understand the basis for the arrogance of the wealthy man; however, the sense of superiority of the poor person is unjustified.

When Moshe addressed Pharaoh seven plagues had already devastated and decimated Egypt. After the plague of hail, nothing remained whole in Egypt except for the wheat and spelt crops. Everything else had been destroyed. Pharaoh’s original kingdom was a faint recollection of the past. His kingdom was virtually reduced to rubble, yet he refused to humble himself before G’d by recognizing and acknowledging his predicament.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that if suffering and tragedy come upon an individual, one is forbidden to have compassion for him. Why is this so? The Gemara is not referring to every person who is in a state suffering. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that there are a number of reasons a person may suffer. Suffering may come upon an individual to compel him to repent. Suffering may also come upon one who needs spiritual rehabilitation. Thus, the suffering is atonement. Another level of suffering is one that is intended to destroy the individual because he is evil and has no chance to repent. This is the individual for which one should not have compassion because G’d is inflicting upon him suffering to destroy him. Therefore, the one who has compassion for him is actually interfering with the process because he will

lessen the suffering. Despite the fact that G’d had brought great suffering upon Pharaoh, he refused to humble himself before G’d. He rejected the opportunity to repent.

The Torah states, **“G’d hardened the heart of Pharaoh...”** Some commentators explain that G’d had withdrawn Pharaoh’s free choice. He no longer had the ability to repent or change his ways. If this is so, then why would G’d expect him to humble himself before Him, if he no longer had the ability to choose? It is to teach the Jewish people for generations to come until the end of time that it is possible for one to be so consumed by his own arrogance that despite the fact that he is on the brink of destruction, he will not acknowledge defeat or humble himself. Although Pharaoh was unable to correct his ways, we should learn the lesson that if one is willing to humble himself, then he will merit the clarity to be able to repent.

2. Appreciating One's Self Worth

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.

The Torah states in the Portion of Va’eira the four expressions of redemption that G’d wanted Moshe to communicate 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 be a G’d to you...”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain the words, **“I shall take you out”** to mean, “As I promised, after which you shall leave with great wealth.” Evidently, receiving great wealth was a necessary prerequisite to being

redeemed from Egypt. G'd had promised Avraham that after his children would complete their years of bondage, they would leave with great wealth. If the wealth was to be regarded as compensation for the years of service that the Jewish people had given to the Egyptians, the Gemara tells us that the spoils at the Sea (that had been cast upon the seashore together with the remains of the Egyptian army) were much greater than the wealth taken out of Egypt by the Jewish people. If so, the spoils at the Sea could have been the compensation for their years of slavery. Why was it necessary for the Jewish people to borrow the wealth from their masters before leaving Egypt?

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 been willing to relinquish their valuables to the Jewish people without needing to see them in a special light. They would have parted with their wealth because of mere intimidation; however, the Torah tells us that G'd gave the Jew special charm and favor so that the Egyptians should release their gold and silver vessels to them. Why did G'd need to perform such a miracle?

G'd redeemed the Jewish people from Egypt so that they should stand at Sinai and receive the Torah to become G'd's Holy nation. In order for the Jewish people to extricate themselves from a state of bondage in Egypt, where they had been the chattels of their pagan masters, they needed to appreciate and understand their own self-worth. It was only when the Jewish people could appreciate their own value could they be qualified to become G'd's people at Sinai. The Jewish people had witnessed the plagues that G'd had brought upon Egypt, which were revealed miracles. The ten plagues occurred over a ten-month period, during which, the Jewish people began to understand that G'd was performing revealed miracles on their behalf to demonstrate His love for them.

Despite the great miracles that G'd brought upon Egypt, the predicament of the Jew was that of a lowly slave. Therefore, G'd gave them special charm so that the Egyptian master should feel privileged to give his wealth to the Jew who had requested it. The Jewish people understood that their masters were not giving them wealth because they were intimidated but rather because they recognized the special value of the Jew. They thus no longer perceived themselves as lowly beings and slaves, but rather as masters. As the Mishna in Tractate Shabbos states, "The Children of Israel are the children of kings." It

was not sufficient for the Jewish people to be released from bondage, they needed to understand that they were royalty. Only then did they have the proper mindset to receive the Torah at Sinai and become G'd's people.

3. *Altering the Zodiac*

The Torah states, "**Pharaoh said to Moshe and Aaron, 'Go and serve Hashem, your G'd; which ones are going?... Pharaoh said to him, '...Look – the evil (*raah*) intent is opposite your faces. Not so; let the men go now...'**" The Torah tells us that Pharaoh did not want to allow all the Jewish people to leave Egypt because "**the evil (*raah*) intent is opposite your faces.**" Rashi cites the Midrash that explains the verse is referring to what the Egyptian stargazers had seen. They had told Pharaoh that they had seen a star called "*Raah*" which indicated "bloodshed" for the Jewish people. Meaning, if the Jewish people were to be freed to go to the desert they would be killed. Therefore, Pharaoh refused to allow them to leave.

The Midrash continues to explain that because of the sin of the Golden Calf, G'd wanted to destroy the Jewish people. However, because of Moshe's supplication G'd annulled the decree and the Jewish people were spared. Through Moshe's prayer, the "bloodshed" that was meant to be the destruction of the Jewish people was converted to the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Pascal sacrifice.

The Torah tells us that G'd gave the Jewish people the mitzvah of circumcision and the mitzvah of the Pascal offering as a prerequisite for their redemption. It is stated in Yechezkel, "And you are naked and devoid (of mitzvos)." Since the Jewish people were devoid of spirituality in Egypt, they needed a spiritual opportunity to merit redemption. G'd presented them with the mitzvos of circumcision and the Pascal sacrifice. As the Prophet Yechezkel concludes, "**It is through the bloods you shall live. It is through the bloods you shall live.**" The Gemara explains that the repetition of the term "bloods" is referring to the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Pascal sacrifice.

Kli Yakar explains in his commentary that the numerical value of the word "*Ki Raah* (referring to the evil star)" is the equivalent of "*orlah* (foreskin)." This alludes to circumcision, which is the removal of the foreskin. Thus, within the name of the evil star is an allusion to the

annulment of the decree against the Jewish people after the sin of the Golden Calf, which Pharaoh did not know.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that if one is born under the red star called “*maadin*” it is an indication that he has the inclination to become a murderer. However, this inclination can be channeled in a positive manner such as becoming a ritual slaughterer (*shochet*) or one who performs circumcisions (*moel*). Thus, although the individual is involved with the shedding of blood it is expressed in a positive manner. Similarly, the bloodshed that was seen by Pharaoh when he saw the star “Raah” manifested itself in a positive manner through the blood of circumcision and the Pascal sacrifice.

Although the zodiac does influence the fate of every individual, including the Jew, the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, “There is no *mazal* for the Jewish people.” Meaning, they are not subject to what is written in the stars because they are able to transcend the zodiac because their innately spiritual beings. This is not true for the non-Jew. He is bound by the zodiac and his fate cannot be changed. Tosfos explains that although the fate of the Jew is also recorded in the zodiac, his predicament can be changed through great merit and intense supplication of the community.

The Torah tells us that the Egyptian astrologers had seen in the zodiac that the death of the Redeemer of Israel shall come through water. As a result of this reading, Pharaoh decreed that all the newborn Jewish males be thrown into the Nile. The Midrash tells us that when Yocheved placed Moshe in the basket in the Nile, the Egyptian astrologers immediately declared, “The Redeemer of Israel has died.” Factually, Moshe did not. He survived the water because of a miracle. However, according to the natural order, any child placed in a basket upon the Nile would drown. The zodiac was accurate within the physical context, which is restricted to the natural order. However, G’d’s intervention to save Moshe, which is supernatural, has no relevance to the zodiac.

If the Jew lives his life as a physical being within the context of nature, because he is fully bound by the natural order, the zodiac has relevance to him. However, if one lives as a spiritual being, it is possible to transcend the natural order through his prayers and great merit.

4. *G’d’s Redemption in an Instant*

The Torah states, “**The Children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succos, about six hundred thousand on foot, aside from children ...They baked the dough that they took out of Egypt into unleavened cakes, for they could not be leavened, for they were driven out of Egypt for they could not delay...**” Since the Jewish people needed to leave Egypt suddenly, they did not have sufficient time to allow the dough to rise for their provisions. Moshe had told the Jewish people that they would be going out of Egypt on the fifteenth during the daytime period; however, they did not prepare in advance for this eventuality because they were not certain if in fact it would come about exactly as Moshe had said. However, when the exodus did take place, it happened in an instant. Chazal tell us that millions of Jews along with their livestock and possessions were ready to leave Egypt in a moment. They traveled from Rameses to Succos, which is a distance of 130 miles in a moment. It was only due to a miracle that millions of people could have been transported to one location for the sake of redemption in such a short period of time.

The Torah tells us in the Portion of Mikeitz that when Pharaoh heard that Yosef would be able to interpret his dreams, “**Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the dungeon.**” Yosef had gone instantly from being a lowly prisoner with no hope of rescue to standing before the monarch of Egypt. Sforno explains, “Yosef was rushed from the dungeon because G’d’s salvation comes about in an instant. As it states in Yeshaya, ‘In a moment I (G’d) will subdue their enemies (of the Jewish people).’ Similarly, regarding the redemption from Egypt. The Jewish people were driven out suddenly because G’d’s salvation comes about in an instant. This is the reason they did not have sufficient time for the dough to leaven before leaving Egypt. Identically at the end of time, regarding the building of the Third Temple together with G’d’s revelation, ‘G’d shall enter His Sanctuary instantly.’”

Since the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish people have been in exile for over 2,000 years. Despite the length and severity of the exile, G’d could bring Moshiach in an instant, which would be the ultimate redemption. As Rambam writes in the thirteen principles of Jewish faith, “I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Moshiach, and though he may tarry, still I await him every day.” When one partakes of the matzos at the Seder of Passover, one should reflect understand that the unleavened matzah

alludes to the fact that the redemption of the Jewish people occurred and will occur in an instant. The unleavened matzah communicates the belief that despite the fact that naturally many things cannot happen, however it has no relevance to the Jewish people. G'd will bring about redemption in an instant without any indication. Chazal tell us that the Third Temple is already built in heaven and will descend to the physical realm at the designated moment of redemption. Just as the millions of people in Egypt were transported in a moment from Rameses to Succos at the time of the exodus, G'd will gather in the exiles in a moment to serve Him in the Temple.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh writes based on the Zohar that if ten Jews were to gather in a synagogue and would sincerely want to bring Moshiach, G'd would bring him immediately. The fact that he has not yet come indicates that the level of desire is not sufficient to bring about redemption. One needs to understand that every moment that the redemption has been delayed G'd's Name is in a continuous state of desecration. The Jew must feel G'd's pain and therefore yearn for the coming of Moshiach, which will restore His Glory.

5. Not to Desecrate His Name *(From Vaeira)*

The Torah states, **“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘...I shall harden the heart of Pharaoh so that I may multiply My signs and My wonders upon Egypt...’** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “G'd said, ‘After Pharaoh had acted rebelliously towards Me, it has become revealed to Me that when the nations of the world will repent 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) so that they should recognize My power...’” Sifsei Chachamim 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 repent. However, it is revealed before Me that it will not be a complete repentance (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. I will thus be able to bring the plagues upon Egypt.”

The Torah tells us when G'd had informed Avraham our Patriarch that He was going to destroy Sodom, Avraham was concerned about the potential for the desecration of G'd's Name. He was troubled that the world would believe that G'd does not discern between the righteous and the evil, rather when He brings about destruction He does so upon the righteous and the wicked as He had done with the generation of the Flood. It is because of this that Avraham had a dialogue with G'd to confirm that there were no righteous people in Sodom. Why should Avraham have been concerned? It was known that the community of Sodom, **“was greatly evil. They recognized their Maker and defied Him.”**

The Torah tells us that when the angels came upon Sodom to destroy it, they were first hosted by Lot. When the community of Sodom had heard that the angels were being hosted by Lot, they surrounded the house, **“from the youngest to the oldest...”** to sodomize them. Sforno explains that the Torah states that the community of Sodom came **“from the youngest to the oldest...”** so that there should be no question to the world that they were all evil. There were no righteous among them from the youngest to the oldest.

Yechezkel the prophet explains that the reason Sodom was destroyed was because “They did not extend their hands in charity to the poor.” Reb Elchanan Wasserman z'tl asks, “Why should Sodom be destroyed for not giving charity? It is not one of the seven Noahide Laws. Thus it does not carry the death penalty if violated.” He explains that G'd created the world for humankind. If a community were to become so depraved that they could stand by and witness people dying of hunger before their eyes without any feeling of compassion, it is an indication that they no longer possess basic human qualities. Although, the community of Sodom did not violate one of the Seven Noahide Laws by not extending their hand in charity, they lost their profile as human beings because of their lack of compassion. Thus, they deserved to be destroyed.

The Midrash tells us that Yaakov our Patriarch and his brother had divided between themselves the physical and spiritual worlds. Yaakov was to have the spiritual while Esav the physical world. If this is so, then if Yaakov were to fail, he should be punished immediately in the physical world through suffering since he should not suffer in the spiritual world. On the other hand, if Esav would fail, he should not be punished in this world but rather in the world to come because the physical world is his. If

this were so, then only the Jewish people would be punished for their transgressions with disease and suffering and the non-Jew who represents the physical should be free of suffering. If this were to be, it would be a desecration of G'd's Name because the world would regard the Jewish people as cursed and diseased. Thus, in order to avoid a desecration of G'd's Name, G'd allows disease to also come upon the non-Jew. There is no perceivable difference between the Jew and the non-Jew regarding suffering in the world.

We see that when the non-Jew victimizes the Jew, due to his anti-Semitism, he does so because he believes that he is doing a service to the world. They do victimize the Jew for the sake of persecuting G'd's people. If they were to do so, it would be a desecration of G'd's Name. Therefore, G'd allows the non-Jew to create his own reasons for persecuting the Jewish people. The Jew needs to suffer for the sake of repentance to be a full beneficiary in the world to come.