

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Bo

January 17, 2013

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. Internalization is the Objective

At the beginning of the Portion of Bo, G'd conveys 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 objectives regarding the last three plagues. Firstly, the purpose of G'd's hardening the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was to create a context to be able to bring more miracles upon Egypt. Secondly, so that the Jewish people should understand that G'd had made a "mockery" of Egypt, which must be communicated to the future generations.

Sforno explains the first objective of hardening of Pharaoh's heart was in order to give him an opportunity to repent from his evil ways. G'd did not want Pharaoh to send out the Jewish people as a result of being overwhelmed by the suffering brought about by the plagues. He wanted Pharaoh to have the internal strength and stamina to be able to make a rational choice to send out the Jewish people. As Sforno writes, "So that he should recognize My Greatness and repent."

The second reason G'd hardened the heart of Pharaoh was so that each Jew should relate to his children and grandchildren how G'd made a "mockery" of Egypt. What is the value of understanding and appreciating how G'd had made a "mockery" of Pharaoh and the Egyptian people?

The objective and value of the revealed miracles of Egypt that were witnessed by the Jewish people was to establish G'd as the Omnipotent One, Who is the Master of all. He is the only One Who Wills and Dictates every aspect of existence. G'd is the King who coronates kings. If one would fully grasp and understand Who G'd is, he would appreciate that a mere mortal king is nothing more than the pawn of G'd. The mortal king only carries out the dictate of the Almighty One. He has no innate importance

unto himself. If one were to appreciate and internalize this fact, he would not fear the mortal king.

The purpose of G'd making a mockery of Egypt was to establish that a mortal king is no more than a insignificant being that is empowered by G'd. Although Pharaoh was the most powerful king in existence and leader of most advanced civilization, G'd demonstrated to him and the world that he has no understanding of reality. He had no grasp that reality is based on G'd and not himself. By making a mockery of Egypt, G'd provided a lesson to the Jewish people that the one needs only to fear G'd and not any mortal, regardless of who he may be. It is not sufficient to "know" (intellectually) that G'd is the Master, but rather one must internalize this to the point that it manifests itself in his behavior.

We say in the Haggadah, when we fulfill the positive commandment of telling over the story of the bondage and redemption of Egypt that each generation must experience the exodus as if he personally was in bondage and was redeemed. It is not sufficient to communicate the story of the exodus to one's family how G'd had made a mockery of Egypt, but rather, one must feel that he actually experienced the negative and positive events, with all of their ramifications, to be able to achieve what the Jewish people had in Egypt. This is to establish the mindset to secure one's belief that all that matters is G'd's Will.

The Torah states during the plague of hail, **"Pharaoh sent and summoned Moshe and Aaron and said to them, 'This time I have sinned; Hashem is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the evil ones."** Pharaoh, believing that all was going to be destroyed by the plague of hail, recognized his evil ways and repented. However after the plague had ceased, he assessed the extent of the destruction that was caused by the hail. He realized that everything in the field was destroyed except for the wheat and spelt. He thus reverted to his arrogant rejection of G'd, believing that G'd is could not be the Omnipotent Being if the wheat and spelt were spared. He was misled to believe that G'd was not able to destroy the wheat and spelt crops. However, what he did not realize is that G'd was only toying with him in order to make a

mockery of him and the Egyptians in the eyes of the world. It was to give them false hope that their future was secure. They did not realize or understand that these crops were only spared so that the locusts would come upon them to ravage what was left.

2. *The Culpability of Man*

The Torah states, “**and He (G’d) hardened the heart of Pharaoh.**” Rambam in the Laws of Repentances explains that initially Pharaoh had the ability to choose to free the Jewish people and repent his evil ways. However, after witnessing the first five plagues, which were revealed miracles, his ability to choose was withdrawn from him. Thus, from the sixth plague onward, Pharaoh no longer had the ability to choose. Despite the fact that he had no choice over his decision to retain the Jewish people, he was nevertheless, held accountable and culpable for his irrational behavior. If G’d had denied Pharaoh the power of choice after the fifth plague, why was he held culpable and punished for his behavior going forward? One is only held liable for his actions because he has the choice to do or not to do. However, if one is classified as incompetent because he has no control over his behavior, he is not held accountable.

Rambam explains that one’s ability to choose is a G’d-given privilege. G’d endows every individual with the ability to control his behavior – thus classifying the individual as a person with choice. However, if one chooses to ignore the truth multiple times in instances where the correct behavior is obvious, it is possible that G’d will withdraw that individual’s ability to choose as a punishment. G’d brings about a state of insensitivity that causes the individual to be irrational, which is a punishment for choosing to ignore the truth when one had the ability to recognize it. Although Pharaoh witnessed five revealed miracles, through the first five plagues, which were undeniably the Hand of G’d, he chose to ignore the truth. He chose to be oblivious of G’d’s existence and thus he did not send out the Jewish people. Consequently, G’d withdrew Pharaoh’s power of choice from the sixth plague onward. It was Pharaoh’s choice to forfeit his power of choice. He had abused his privilege of choice and was culpable for all the evil that he perpetrated. We find something similar in a positive vein.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk z’tl asks, “After Moshe had received the Torah on behalf of the Jewish people, did he continue to have the choice to become a heretic?” He posits that after Moshe received the Torah at

Sinai, he no longer had the choice to become a heretic. Since Moshe is the basis for the authenticity of the Torah and was responsible to transmit it to the Jewish people, if he were to choose to become a heretic he would undermine the authenticity of the Torah. (If that were to occur, the entire objective of creation would be undermined.) Therefore, it was necessary for G’d to withdraw Moshe’s ability to choose in this particular area. If Moshe no longer had the choice to become a heretic was he nevertheless deserving of reward for his pious behavior after receiving the Torah? Reb Meir Simcha explains that since Moshe had chosen to advance his spirituality to the point where he was worthy and qualified to receive the Torah and to be G’d’s spokesman, he chose to have his power of choice in this particular area taken from him. Just as Pharaoh forfeited his choice causing a negative consequence, Moshe relinquished his choice which brought about a positive result.

The verse states in the Portion of Va’eira, “**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 will repent. However, it is revealed before Me that it will not be a complete repentance with a full heart. If so, I must bring upon them further plagues and tragedies because their repentance was not be valid. When the nations of the world will see this, they will say, ‘This is the way of G’d, that he brings destruction upon those who repent.’ They will not realize that it was only because Pharaoh did not repent properly that he was punished further. 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 reason Pharaoh forfeited his power of choice was to avoid a desecration of G’d’s Name. Rambam in the Laws of Repentance explains that Pharaoh’s power of choice was withdrawn as a punishment for not choosing to recognize the truth when he had the ability to do so. Rashi does not necessarily argue with the position of Rambam regarding the abuse of one’s free choice, but rather Rashi in the context of Pharaoh explains that it was to avert a desecration of G’d’s Name.

3. *G’d Provides More than the Material*

The Torah tells us that the first of the Ten Plagues that came upon Egypt was the plague of Blood. All the water of Egypt turned to blood. Chazal tell us that the Jewish people were not affected by this plague. If an Egyptian needed water, he had to purchase it from a Jew. If the Egyptian would take the water from the Jew without payment, it would turn to blood. Chazal tell us that if an Egyptian were to insert his straw into the glass of water from which a Jew was drinking, he would draw blood while the Jew would draw water.

The Midrash tells us that the Jewish people became wealthy as a result of the plague of blood. There were two other occasions during which the Jewish people amassed great wealth from the Egyptians. Before the tenth plague, the Jewish people were told by G'd to borrow silver and gold vessels and garments from their Egyptian masters. This accumulation of wealth was a fulfillment of the promise that G'd had made to Avraham, our Patriarch at the Covenant Between the Parts. The Torah states, **“You shall know that your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not their own. There, they will be enslaved and afflicted for 400 years...The nation that will enslave them will be judged and then they will go out with great wealth.”**

The third time the Jewish people accumulated wealth was after the Sea had closed upon the Egyptian armies that were pursuing them. The Sea cast out the remains of the Egyptians along with their horses and chariots upon the seashore. The chariots and horses were bedecked with gold and precious jewels from the treasuries of Pharaoh. Chazal tell us that the spoils of the Sea were greater than the spoils of Egypt. Although each Jew had left Egypt with no less than forty pack animals laden with gold and silver, the spoils at the Sea were even greater.

If the wealth that the Jewish people had borrowed from their masters was a fulfillment of the promise that G'd had made to Avraham that they would leave with **“great wealth,”** what was the purpose G'd allowing them to accumulate great wealth in these other two instances? It is evident that G'd had intended that each event had its own specific purpose and objective.

The Torah states that the bondage that was meant to come upon the offspring of Avraham was four hundred years. Maharal of Prague z'tl writes that the significance of the number four is that it connotes being totally opposed. If one is surrounded from all four sides, he is trapped with no way of escape. A slave is limited and controlled in

every aspect of his being - physically, mentally, and emotionally. The slave is no more than a chattel to his master. He exists within a context that he cannot exercise his free will to do as he chooses. The Jewish people needed to be extricated from a state of bondage for them to become free. To bring this about, they needed to undergo a number of experiences prior to their arrival at Sinai where they became G'd's holy nation through the giving of the Torah. Firstly, it was an imperative for the Jew to realize his self-worth, although he was still in a state of bondage.

The process for this realization began with the plague of blood. It was at this time that the Egyptian master needed to turn to his Jewish slave to purchase water from him for the sake of survival. The Jew understood that he was in a position to dictate life or death to his master and the other Egyptians. If the Egyptian was willing to pay for the water, it would remain water and he would live. Not only did the Egyptians become totally dependant upon the Jew, the Jewish people became financially wealthy through the sale of the water. This was the beginning of the extrication process for the Jew to realize who he truly is. Simultaneously they understood that it was G'd who had brought this all about. However, it was not until Sinai, after they received the Torah that the Jewish people truly became free.

The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, “Who is the free man? The one who engages in Torah study.” The one who is dedicated to the study of Torah and lives his life in accordance with its principles and dictates is considered to be truly free. This is because through its study, one sheds the draw of physicality and is able to internalize a perspective that G'd is the True Master G'd is the One who dictates every aspect of life. The Jewish people needed to receive the Torah at Sinai to complete their ascent to freedom. This level of realization was not possible for the Jewish people to achieve unless they underwent all of the various stages of experiences (redemption) prior to Sinai.

After Egypt had been devastated by nine plagues 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...”** Ramban writes, one would think that after experiencing nine plagues that had devastated Egypt and reduced it to rubble, that the Egyptians would have despised the Jews. However, to the contrary, G'd had performed a miracle that caused the Jew to be seen in a

special light together with Moshe. This was the basis for the special charm that they had found in the eyes of the Egyptians. Thus when the Jewish people requested the wealth from the Egyptians, they felt a sense of privilege to give it to the Jew. Why was it necessary for G'd to perform this miracle if it was possible for the Jewish people to receive the wealth without being so esteemed?

Again, the Jewish people, experiencing a sense of special value because their masters perceived them as special to the point that they would entrust them with what was most precious to them, was another important stage in extricating them from the effects of slavery.

By receiving wealth in the context of the plague of blood and the borrowing of the personal effects of their masters, the Jewish people had attained a sense of confidence that allowed them to fulfill the mitzvah of the Pascal Lamb without any fear of their Egyptian masters. Although the lamb and goat was a deity of the Egyptian people, the Jew did not hesitate to purchase it for slaughter.

The Midrash tells us that on the Shabbos preceding the 14th of Nissan (the day the Pascal lamb was to be brought as a sacrifice), the Egyptian masters entered into the homes of the Jews and noticed that each family had a sheep tied to their bedposts. They had asked, "What are you doing with the sheep?" The Jews answered, "We are going to slaughter it in a number of days as an offering for our G'd." The Egyptian masters, upon hearing this, gritted their teeth and walked out. This is the miracle that had transpired on the Shabbos preceding the eating of the Pesach sacrifice. It is thus called throughout Jewish history as, "the Great Shabbos (Shabbos HaGadol)."

G'd foresaw that although the Jewish people would receive the Torah at Sinai they would sin with the Golden Calf. As a consequence of the sin, they would need to build a Mishkan so that it should be the location of G'd's Presence in their midst. The magnitude of wealth that was needed for the Mishkan would have placed a burden on the Jewish people, despite the wealth that they had taken from Egypt. G'd thus presented another opportunity for them to amass even greater wealth at the spoils of the sea, which were even greater than the spoils of Egypt. G'd provided the Jewish people with the means to participate in the building of the Mishkan location of His Presence, without any hesitation or impediment.

4. Belief and Faith, the Spiritual Backbone of the Jewish People

The Torah states after Moshe explained to the Jewish people all the details regarding the Pascal sacrifice, "**The Children of Israel went and did as Hashem commanded Moshe and Aaron, so did they do.**" Rashi explains that they were deserving of reward not only for the performance of the mitzvah of the Pascal sacrifice, they also were rewarded for the going to perform the mitzvah. Although the preparation for a mitzvah is categorized as "*hechsher mitzvah*" (prerequisite for a mitzvah) because it was a necessity for its performance, the Jewish people were rewarded for it. Rashi continues, "When the Torah states, '**and they did as Hashem commanded**' it is to tell us the praiseworthiness of the Jewish people, that they did not deviate to any degree from what Moshe and Aaron had commanded them." Rashi explains, "Although the Jewish people were commanded with the mitzvah of the Pascal Sacrifice at the beginning of the month (of Nissan), since they accepted upon themselves to perform it (on the 14th of Nissan) it was considered as if they had already had performed it." Why does the Torah need to tell us that the Jewish people did not omit or deviate to any degree from their obligation of the Pascal Sacrifice? One would think that it is understood that they would do what was required of them.

Although Chazal tell us that the Jewish people merited to be taken out of Egypt because they did not change their names, dress, or language; nevertheless, because they were devoid of mitzvos, they needed a spiritual worthiness to be redeemed. As the Prophet Yechezkel states regarding the spiritual state of the Jewish people in Egypt, "And you were naked and devoid (of mitzvos)." In order for the Jewish people to have spiritual worthiness, G'd presented them with the mitzvos of circumcision and the Pascal lamb. As the Prophet Yechezkel concludes, "It is through the bloods that you shall live..." The Gemara explains that the term "bloods" is referring to the blood of circumcision and the blood of the Pascal lamb. What is the unique significance of the mitzvah of the Pascal lamb? G'd could have given them any of the 248 positive commandments.

The Jewish people, who were about to be redeemed, were initially pagans. They needed to extricate and divorce themselves from the idolatrous past. The sheep and the goat were deities that they had once worshiped. By slaughtering it and attending to the rituals that have relevance to the Pascal sacrifice, it would

confirm their nullification of their idolatrous past. This would surpass any verbal declaration of negation of the idols. In addition to their statement of negation by sacrificing the deity that they had worship, the Jewish people put themselves in physical jeopardy in order to fulfill the mitzvah of the Pascal Lamb. Hundreds of thousands of Jews needed to purchase lambs and goats for this ritual. They would slaughter them and sprinkle their blood on the lintel and doorpost of their homes. The performance of the mitzvah was not done in concealment. They were not concerned that it was to be public knowledge. Despite the danger of performing the mitzvah in public, they were not concerned for their lives. Their meticulous performance of the mitzvah in public established and demonstrated their faith and trust in G'd. This was the basis for their worthiness.

G'd had revealed Himself through the plagues that came upon Egypt as the Omnipotent One who controls every aspect of existence. By demonstrating their belief and faith in Him, through the meticulous performance of the Pascal sacrifice, the Jewish people were worthy of being taken out of Egypt to become G'd's people at Sinai. Although during the tenth plague the Egyptian firstborn died, G'd did not allow the Angel of Death into the homes of the Jewish people. It was because of their unique attachment to Him through their belief and trust.

Maharal of Prague z'tl explains in his work *Gevuras Hashem* that one who is lacking in belief in G'd is affected by anything that touches his life. He must rely on relationships with others to assist him with his existence. This reveals a frailty and deficiency in his own ability. However, if one cleaves to the source of everything, G'd Himself, then he has no concern or fear. By living one's life within the parameters that were established by G'd through the Torah, if one has internalized his belief, he will have faith and thus feel no fear. Because of what the Jewish people had witnessed throughout the period of the plagues, they had no fear to slaughter the deity of the Egyptians and were able to fulfill it with all of its aspects and details. This demonstration of belief and faith gave them the worthiness to be taken out of Egypt.

5. A Glimpse of Truth Will Reveal the Full Picture (from Va'eira)

The Torah tells us regarding the first two plagues of blood and frogs, that Pharaoh dismissed them as witchcraft because his sorcerers were able to replicate

them. However, when the plague of lice had come upon Egypt and its livestock, Pharaoh's sorcerers declared, **"This is the finger of G'd!"** They were not able to replicate the plague of lice because it was beyond the realm of witchcraft. As the Gemara tells us, witchcraft cannot affect something that is smaller than a lentil. Thus, Pharaoh's expert sorcerers acknowledged this phenomenon as an act of G'd.

There is an argument that is cited in the Haggadah regarding how many plagues had actually come upon Egypt. The Torah tells us that there were ten plagues in Egypt; however, the term that is used that refers to the plagues is "etzba" (finger). The Torah states regarding the miracle of the splitting of the Sea, **"G'd took them out with a strong hand..."** One opinion regarding the number of miracles performed at the Sea was that there were fifty miracles. This is based on the calculation: If the plagues of Egypt are classified as "etzba (finger)" and a hand has five fingers, thus there were fifty miracles at the Sea. However, if each of the plagues of Egypt was the equivalent of four plagues, and it is expressed as "etzba" then the miracles that took place at the Sea are five times as much, which is 200 etc. Seemingly, this calculation is difficult. The sorcerers only proclaimed that the plague of lice was the finger of G'd and not the other plagues. If this is so, how does the word "etzba" (finger) indicate that it is the equivalent of ten plagues?

Although Pharaoh chose to ignore the plagues and not allow himself to be affected by them, it was nevertheless confirmed that every one of the miracles had come about because G'd had Willed it to be. The plague of lice, which was acknowledged by the sorcerers (as the Finger of G'd) was a confirmation that all that had transpired and would come about later was not rooted in sorcery by brought about by G'd Himself. Thus, "etzba" regarding the lice is the equivalent of the ten plagues. Where do we find something similar to Pharaoh's behavior?

The Torah states after the Sinai event, "G'd spoke to Moshe saying, **"In you, they (the Jewish people) will believe forever."** Meaning, there will never be a time when the Jewish people will contest the authenticity of Torah because they will all believe that Moshe is the spokesman of G'd for eternity. If this is so, how do we understand the incident of Korach and his community who attempted to usurp Moshe's authority and questioned the authenticity of Torah? Korach claimed that the Torah was fabricated by Moshe and it was not the word of G'd,

despite the fact that he and his congregation stood at Sinai. What had transpired at Sinai, regarding Moshe being the prophet of G'd was an irrefutable event. Korach and his congregation chose to ignore and deny that fact. If one chooses to deny truth, it does not change the essence of the matter because of its irrefutable and uncontested context. Thus, the Jewish people will believe in Moshe forever.

Once the plague of lice was recognized by the expert sorcerers as the "finger (etzba)" of G'd, then all of the miracles that preceded and followed it were all as a result of G'd's doing.

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 – Duties of the Heart
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Sanhedrin
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:30 – 12:30pm	Talmud: Chagigah Location: Sunrise Capital 600 Lexington (23 rd 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: Chagigah Location: Sunrise Capital 600 Lexington (23 rd FL.) Enter on 54 th Street
1:00—2:00 pm	Maharal Gevuras Hashem Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

11:00 –12:00pm	Duties of The Heart Location: Yad Avraham
12:30 – 1:30 pm	Talmud: Chagigah Sunrise Capital 600 Lexington (23 rd FL)