

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES

Portion of Bo

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Dedicated by the Ostrovsky Family

In Loving Memory of

Haskel Ostrovsky z'l

Son of Wolf and Sima

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. G'd's Tolerance of Pharaoh

The Torah states regarding the ninth plague, darkness, **"...and there shall be darkness upon the land of Egypt, and the darkness will be tangible...and there was a thick darkness throughout the land..."** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the plague of darkness extended over six days. During the last three days, the darkness intensified to such a degree, that those who were standing could not sit and those who were sitting could not stand. The Midrash states, "The darkness that G'd sent (upon the Egyptian people) was difficult and painful. Why did they suffer to such a degree? It is because they did not submit to the dominance of G'd."

Eitz Yosef (commentator on the Midrash) explains that since Pharaoh was not willing to submit to the word of G'd, He caused them to suffer to a greater degree. If Pharaoh had not previously submitted to the word of G'd after the previous plagues, why did G'd choose to intensify the suffering at this particular moment?

The Torah states several times that **"G'd hardened the heart of Pharaoh and his servants."** Sforno explains that G'd did not withdraw the power of choice from Pharaoh and the Egyptian people by hardening their hearts. Rather, he gave them the inner strength to be able to withstand the traumatizing effects of the plagues, so that they should not be overwhelmed. After experiencing the first five plagues, Pharaoh and his subjects would have been compelled to send out the Jewish people because they could no longer tolerate the emotional trauma that was wrought upon them. They would have not sent out the Jewish people due to their recognition of G'd, but rather they would have freed them because they had no choice to do differently. Thus, every time Pharaoh remained obstinate and did not send out the people, it was due to his free choice. Thus he was fully culpable for his decision.

The Torah states regarding the plague of hail that Pharaoh was affected to such a degree that he spoke as one

who was truly penitent for his errant behavior. He said, **"This time I have sinned; Hashem is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones..."** All of the previous plagues that Pharaoh had witnessed and experienced were manifest within the context of nature. The earth being transformed into lice, although it was not attributed to sorcery (as the sorcerers themselves had attested to), the infestation of lice is something that exists within the natural order. However, the plague of hail, which was an intermingling of fire and water, which are two forces within nature that are contradictory and cannot coexist; nevertheless, they did. As Chazal tell us, "Fire and water made peace between themselves to do the Will of their Maker." Until experiencing the plague of hail, Pharaoh believed that all of the powers that existed were bound by the laws of nature. He believed that all the forces that dictate existence, which were the deities, are bound by the physical. However, when he had seen two contradictory forces coexisting, he realized that there is a Supreme Being that is outside of existence that dictates all that exists. The G'd of the Jewish people is the Omnipotent One. He thus expressed himself as a penitent by saying, **"This time I have sinned; Hashem is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones..."** However, after the plague, when he assessed the damage that was caused by the hail, he realized that the wheat and spelt crops were not destroyed. This was an indication to him, that the G'd of the Jews was not the supreme all-encompassing Being. If He were, then why were the wheat and spelt crops not destroyed? Evidently, the force that dictates the wheat and spelt crops, which are staples of life, is stronger than the G'd of the Jews. As a result of this observation he continued to defy G'd. He reversed his decision to allow the Jews to go free. G'd's intention of leaving the wheat and spelt crop intact was only a ploy to give Pharaoh and his subjects a false sense of security, which would be taken from them through the plague of the locusts.

Once Pharaoh and his subjects witnessed the plague of the locust, they realized that there is no aspect of existence that is not willed by the G'd of the Jews. There

was no longer a basis to justify his rejection of G'd. At that moment, Pharaoh should have submitted to G'd's Will and allowed the Jewish people to leave Egypt; however, he did not. G'd therefore intensified the suffering during the plague of darkness and brought greater pain upon Pharaoh and his subjects.

The Torah tells us that the Jewish people were not vulnerable to the attack of Amalek until they complained that they had no water to drink and that they would die of thirst. Prior to the lack of water, they complained to Moshe that they would die in the desert, because they did not have food to eat. Moshe said to them that after they receive the quail and Manna they will realize that G'd had taken them out of Egypt. Until receiving the Manna the Jewish people complained continuously regarding their precarious state. They had complained that it was not G'd who had taken them out of Egypt, but rather Moshe and Aaron had done so. Moshe and Aaron were thus responsible for their suffering. However when G'd had provided them with the quail and Manna, it was a confirmation that G'd had taken them out and not Moshe and Aaron. Therefore, from that moment onward, if they should complain regarding their material needs, it would be an affront to G'd. Therefore, when they complained that they did not have water drink and they would die in the desert, Moshe said to them, "Why are you testing G'd?" They had questioned, "**Is G'd in our midst?**" Subsequently they were attacked by Amalek for their lack of faith.

2. One's Expression, A Confirmation of One's Being

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.**" What is the value of communicating to the generations how G'd made a mockery of Egypt? It would seem that the Jewish people recognized G'd as the Omnipotent One due to the revealed miracles that they had witnessed, what is the additional value of understanding that He made a mockery of Egypt?

The Torah states, "**The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives (Yocheved and Miriam)...When you deliver the Hebrew women, and you see them on**

the birthstool; if it is a son, you are to kill him and if it is a daughter, she shall live.' But the midwives feared G'd and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them, and they caused the boys to live." Yocheved and Miriam defied the king of Egypt and did not follow his dictate. When Pharaoh realized that they did not obeyed him, the Torah states, "**The king of Egypt summoned the midwives...Why have you caused the boys to live!**" Whenever Pharaoh addressed the midwives, the Torah refers to him as "**the king of Egypt.**" However, when the midwives responded to him, the Torah refers to him as "**Pharaoh.**" As the verse states, "**The midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women....'**" Why does the Torah use these two references to Pharaoh? Pharaoh understood that he was the most powerful monarch in the world who ruled the most advanced civilization. He understood that when he would summon an individual with the full force of him being "**the king of Egypt,**" he would instill fear and trepidation. Regardless of his expression of power, the midwives were not intimidated by his presence. They thus referred to him as "Pharaoh" and not the "king of Egypt." This was because Yocheved and Miriam had fully internalized G'd's Presence in their lives. They regarded Pharaoh as a mere mortal who was allowed by G'd to be the king of Egypt. They thus were able to maintain their calm, despite the accusation of the "king of Egypt. They **feared G'd**" and not Pharaoh.

The Jewish people were the slaves of the mightiest civilization in existence. Pharaoh's empire as it had evolved was seen by all as if it were invincible. During the ten months during which the plagues came upon Egypt, G'd destroyed Egypt and reduced it to rubble. G'd had displayed His Omnipotence through the plagues. However, because the Egyptians were the masters over the Jewish people, it was important for them to realize that the Egyptians were only in a position of mastership because G'd allowed them to be so. This could only be appreciated when they understand how G'd made a mockery of a seemingly invincible empire. For the Jewish people to fully appreciate the mastership of G'd, they had to internalize the fact that Pharaoh and the Egyptian people were not their masters. They were no different then the puppet being controlled by the puppeteer. This concept is stated in our prayers on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, "G'd coronates kings, but He is The King....." This belief was a prerequisite for the redemption, which was a precursor to the receiving of the Torah at Sinai.

It is therefore important that the Jewish people understand and communicate to their children and

grandchildren how G'd made a mockery of Egypt in order to instill into the people, that it is only G'd Who has dominion. The verse concludes, "...that you may know that I am Hashem." Seemingly, seeing the open Hand of G'd in the miracles would be sufficient to understand that He is G'd. Why is it necessary to appreciate that G'd had made a mockery of Egypt? The verse indicates that they are in interlinked.

Rambam writes that the Amidah (silent prayer) is a Torah obligation. He explains that it is divided into three sections. The introductory blessings that acknowledge G'd for who He is, section of requests, and concludes with blessings of thanks. Rambam writes that if one only recited the introductory blessings and gives thanks to G'd without making a request for one's needs, one does not fulfill his obligation of prayer. Seemingly, if prayer is "the service of the heart" and one acknowledged G'd for who He is and gave thanks for what He had provided, although he had omitted his supplication for his needs, why should it not be considered a valid prayer? If one truly believes that G'd is the Omnipotent One who provides every aspect of his needs such as health, mental capability, material needs, etc. and acknowledges Him as such, how could one not make a request of G'd? If one does not make the request it clearly an indication and confirmation that he truly did not internalize that G'd provides all one's needs. His introductory and closing blessings are only "lip service."

If one is able to communicate to one's children that G'd had made a mockery of Egypt, then he is able to instill in them that they should fear G'd and not a mortal king. If one does not communicate this to his children, one did not fully internalize that G'd is the all-determining factor.

3. Addressing Avraham's Potential Claim

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...**" Why does the Torah use the term "please" to indicate that Moshe needed to plead with the Jewish people to borrow the precious vessels from the Egyptians? Rashi cites Chazal, "G'd asked Moshe plead with the Jewish people to make the request so that the devoutly righteous Avraham should not claim that the first half of the decree was fulfilled (the Jewish people were enslaved and afflicted in a land that was not their

own); however, the second half of the decree regarding leaving with great wealth was not fulfilled. As it states, '**You shall know that your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not their own....The nation that will enslave them will be judged and then they will go out with great wealth.**' Therefore Moshe pleaded with the Jewish people to borrow the wealth from their Egyptian masters." If G'd promised Avraham that the Jewish people would leave with great wealth, evidently it that G'd will fulfill. If so, why do Chazal give the reason the Jewish people needed to borrow the wealth was so that Avraham should not come with a claim?

One would think that after experiencing nine plagues that had reduced Egypt to rubble, it would have been sufficient for the Egyptian masters to acquiesce to the request of their Jewish subjects to relinquish their wealth to them. However, the Torah states that G'd performed a miracle that caused the Jew to be seen as special in the eyes of the Egyptians. He had given them special charm, so that Egyptian should feel privileged to lend his precious effects to the Jewish people who had requested them. Why was it necessary for G'd to perform this miracle if it was possible for the Jewish people attain the wealth without a miracle? 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 as people of status by the Egyptians.

The Midrash tells us that the Jewish people amassed wealth on three occasions: during the plague of blood, the borrowing of the precious vessels, and the spoils of the Sea. 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 was transformed into blood. The Jewish people were not affected by this plague. If an Egyptian needed water, he had to purchase it from the 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 of a Jew, while the Jew was sipping water from the vessel, the Egyptian would draw blood from it. This accumulation of wealth would have been sufficient to fulfill the promise that G'd made to our Patriarch Avraham. However, there were to other occasions in which the Jewish people accumulated wealth. If the they had already become wealthy during the plague of blood, why was it necessary for them to borrow the precious vessels from the

Egyptians? It is evident that at each juncture when the Jewish people acquired wealth had another level of value.

In order for the Jewish people to extricate themselves from their state of bondage they needed to undergo an internal process, which was a prerequisite to become G'd's holy people at Sinai. Since the Jewish people had been enslaved and regarded as lowly chattel, they needed to regain their standing and appreciate their own self worth. The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, "Wealth is referred to as 'y'kum (to stand).' Why is it called this? It is because possessions/wealth allows one to stand on his own two feet." When one has wealth, he feels secure. It was necessary for the Jew to have a sense of his being. Thus, during the plague of blood, the Egyptian master needed to turn to his Jewish slave to purchase water from him in order to live. The Jew was in a position to dictate life or death to his master. If the Egyptian was willing to pay for the water, it would remain water and he would live.

After the plague of blood, the Jewish people had enough wealth to leave Egypt; however, their sense of self-worth/self esteem needed to be restored. This was brought about by the Jew being seen as special in the eyes of his master. This occurred when the Egyptians felt privileged to lend their most precious possessions to the Jewish people.

When G'd told Moshe to plead with the Jewish people to borrow the silver and gold vessels, it was not for the sake of their financial value, but rather for the sake of the Jew sensing his true self worth – that he is in fact deserving of being a master. The wealth that was given by the Egyptians to the Jewish people was only a means to an end. Having a sense of being special was a prerequisite for them to receive the Torah at Sinai and to be taken as G'd's kingdom of priests and holy people. This what G'd was addressing regarding Avraham's claim. It was not the wealth itself, because it was already achieved at the time of the plague of blood, but rather, it was the restoration of the self worth of the Jewish people that was necessary for Sinai.

4. 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.

5. *For My Glory I Have Created It* (from Va'eira)

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, ‘Because Pharaoh had acted obstinate towards Me, it has become revealed to Me that when the nations of the world 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 explains 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 was only because Pharaoh did not do a proper 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.” G’d thus hardened the heart of Pharaoh so that he should not repent in a superficial manner, so that the world should understand and appreciate that Pharaoh was truly deserving of the plagues that came upon him.

Chofetz Chaim writes that at one time in history it was rare that Jews en masse should abandon their observance of Judaism and not live their in accordance with Jewish tradition. It was unheard of that Jews would openly desecrate the Shabbos not observe dietary laws. Although Jews in the past may not have truly believed in the value of living by the dictates of the Torah, they remained observant because of the fear of being ostracized by their family and community. However, today, Jews in large numbers are openly abandoning all Jewish tradition. Chofetz Chaim asks, “Why does G’d allow this to happen?”

He explains this in a manner that is similar to the words of the Sifsei Chachamim. It is an indication that we are nearing the end of time when G’d will judge all humanity. If Jews would remain observant in practice; however, in their hearts they have heretical beliefs, the

only one who would be aware of this is G’d Himself. At the time of judgment, those individuals who only displayed Judaism as a façade will be severely punished and condemned forever. If this were to happen it would be a desecration of His Name. It would appear that observant Jews are being punished as those who abandoned their Judaism. Thus, G’d changed the dynamic of existence and allows Jews in great numbers to disassociate themselves and cast off the yoke of Judaism to openly pursue their rebellious ways. It will be obvious to all at the end of time why these individuals deserve to be punished. It would thus not be a desecration of His Name.

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 Kiddushin
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: Beiah 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: Beiah 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: Beiah Sunrise Capital 600 Lexington (23 rd FL)