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# פרשת בא
# Parshat Bo

## Ashreinu אשרינו

This week's Ashreinu is dedicated l'iluy nishmat Raizel bat Simcha Yosef

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

Rabbi Akiva Wolk

## Divine Invitation

Rabbi Akiva Wolk

David Barrocas ('22)

Gabriella Asher ('22)

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The parsha begins with Hashem commanding Moshe to go to Pharaoh and deliver the message of the impending eighth plague. The verb used, however, seems off. The pasuk says:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה׳ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה

"Hashem said to Moshe, come to Pharaoh…" (Shmot 10:1)

Shouldn't it be "go" to Pharaoh? Moshe is being sent on a mission; certainly the appropriate word to use here is "go." Why, then, does Hashem say "come"?

To answer this question, the Chozeh of Lublin points us to the first conversation between Hashem and Moshe -- as you recall, this took place at the burning bush seven *perakim* earlier. Hashem tells Moshe that the affliction of His people has become too much and that He intends to release them from the bonds of slavery. Moshe would serve as the leader of this redemption. Hashem delinitates Moshe's crucial mission very clearly: "So now I will send you to Pharaoh, and take My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Shmot 3:10).

Faced with this daunting task, Moshe responds in a manner that we likely can relate to. The Torah continues: "But Moshe said to Hashem, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should take the children of Israel out of Egypt?'" (Shmot 3:11). Moshe does not feel adequate for the job; he does not think that he has what it takes to complete the mission and lead the Jews out of Egypt. In his mind, he's just not worthy.

If it were my place to convince Moshe to head out on this mission, I'd jump into some type of pump-up speech. I'd tell him that he's been a great shepherd, and that leading the people out of Egypt would be the same. I'd tell him that he's a great leader and that he's the perfect man for the job. Certainly Hashem knows all of the wonderful qualities that Moshe possesses, or else He would not have chosen Moshe to be the nation's leader.

Instead, Hashem responds to Moshe with three simple, yet dramatic words: כִּי־אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ - For I will be with you" (Shmot 3:12). With that, Moshe is set. All he needs is the reassurance that he would not be alone on this mission. Hashem promises Moshe that for as long as needed, Hashem would be there right beside him. Moshe would not have to face Pharaoh alone, rather Hashem would be there to lend guidance, support, and confidence.

This is why Hashem says, בֹּא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה --"come to Pharaoh." Hashem is not just sending Moshe off alone on this mission of historic proportions. Rather, He is inviting Moshe to join Him every step of the way, by Moshe's side just as He had promised from the beginning.

## Keeping the Balance

David Barrocas ('22)

ויחזק ה' את לב פרעה ולא אבה לשלחם

"And God strengthened Pharaoh's heart; and he did not wish to release them" (Shmot 10:27).

Many *sefarim* discuss philosophical difficulties such as the one presented in this week's parsha: If Hashem strengthened Pharaoh's heart, doesn't this mean He took away Pharaoh's free will? If so, why should Pharaoh later be punished for a crime he didn't choose to commit!?

In his Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Teshuva 6:3), the Rambam discusses this exact dilemma. His well known conclusion is that Pharaoh was so wicked by his own choice that he had reached the almost unimaginable level where he no longer deserved a chance to repent. Therefore, indeed, God literally hardened his heart and deprived him of the power to do what he obviously wanted to do.

An alternate interpretation by the Dubno Maggid, however, seems clearer and quite defensible based on the text itself. In order for will to be truly free, there must be equal pressure on both sides – from the good inclination and from the evil one. If either side attains an overpowering advantage, the will to choose is no longer truly free.

In Pharaoh's case, the force propelling him to release B'nei Yisrael became greater and greater with each succeeding plague, as his own servants pleaded with him before the locusts came. In order for Pharaoh to have a balanced will in operation, there had to be an equally powerful force to keep him from releasing B'nei Yisrael under duress. So what is the Dubno Maggid stressing here? When the Torah tells us that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, it simply means that such force was applied – leaving Pharaoh with the two opposing forces equally matched. By his free will, Pharaoh allowed the firm voice to drown out the yielding one and refused to release B'nei Yisrael. Never was his free will denied.

There is a very powerful lesson to be learned here and it is meant to pierce through all of our hearts. Sometimes what seems unfair or difficult to understand is actually intended for our benefit. What we perceive to be a punishment may actually be a way for us to achieve greater moral clarity.

May Hashem give us all a bracha to see right and wrong with only clarity and truth.

## In God We Trust

Gabriella Asher ('22)

This week's parsha, Parshat Bo, talks about the Jewish people leaving Egypt in a grand and mirac-

ulous way. As Jews we are constantly surrounded by the influences of "Egypt." Every day we have many opportunities to go "off the *derech*" and be like the Egyptians. In the modern world, our *yetzer hara* is not tempting us to worship idols but rather we might be addicted to electronic devices or be tempted to, God forbid, break Shabbat.

One of the key aspects of *yetziat Mitzrayim* is having trust in Hashem. The Jewish people had so much trust in God that they walked into the Yam Suf not knowing what would happen. However, God of course had a plan. The purpose of *k'riyat Yam Suf* was to receive the Torah, which was the spiritual side of it, and in addition to that Hashem promised our forefathers Eretz Yisrael, which was the material side of the miracle.

As Jews living in an environment that is full of hardships, we have to have *bitachon* in Hashem. If we do not let Him guide us through our metaphorical Mitzrayim, there will be no way to get to our Eretz Yisrael.

In the Igeret haRamban, a letter the Ramban wrote to his son, he states:

כל הכועס כל מיני גיהנום שולטים בו

"Whoever flares up in anger is subject to the discipline of Gehinnom."

One of the core learnings from this excerpt is that if something bad happens in your life but you respond with a positive attitude, Hashem will reward you with compassion. The Ramban gives the example of a person breaking an expensive wine bottle, but the owner reacts graciously and gets a reward for doing so. So too the Jews had a positive mindset when leaving Egypt so Hashem rewarded them with the Torah and Israel, all for having *bitachon*. From this one can see that Hashem treasures our trust to the fullest extent, and having *bitachon* is a very powerful weapon.

## Always There

Zack Mamrout ('25)

This week's parsha is Parshat Bo, the conclusion of the story of the ten plagues. Last week, in Parshat Va'eira, the Torah described the first seven plagues. In this week's parsha, we round out the ten plagues with the final three, the first of which was locusts. A swarm of locusts descended on Egypt, devouring all the crops and greenery. The second of this parsha's plagues was a thick darkness that enveloped the land and covered all surfaces. Last but most definitely not least of the plagues was Makat Bechorot, a plague in which all the firstborns of Egypt were killed at midnight on the 15th of the month of Nissan.

Hashem then commanded the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people as a whole. This mitzvah was to establish a Jewish calendar based off of the cycle of the moon. Hashem then asked them to bring the Korban Pesach, the Passover sacrifice. The Jews were instructed to paint the blood of the sacrifice on the doorpost of every Jewish house so that Hashem would know they were Jewish and pass over their houses when coming to kill all the Egyptian firstborns.

The killing of the firstborns was the breaking point for Pharaoh. He was fed up with these plagues and let the Jews free from Egyptian slavery. While fleeing in a hurry, their dough didn't have enough time to fully rise into dough, making matzah. Before the Jews left, they asked their neighbors for gold and silver so that they could fulfill the promise God made to Avraham that his descendants would leave Mitzrayim with great wealth.

## Keeping the Balance

Rivka Reich ('24)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Bo, the last three *makkot* were inflicted on Mitzrayim. This included *arbeh*, which was locusts, *choshech*, which was darkness, and *makkat bechorot*, which was the death of the first born. In order for the Jewish people to prepare for *makkat bechorot,* Moshe told them to prepare the Korban Pesach and put the blood of the lamb on the doorpost at the en-

trance of their home. This moment is the root of calling this holiday Pesach. There were numerous miraculous moments during this time, so why is this moment chosen to give Pesach its famous name?

The midrash relates that Hashem tells the Jewish people: "make an opening for me the size of a needle's eye, and I will open it for you as wide as the doorways of a palace." This statement refers to someone who is reaching out to Hashem and is making the effort to be close to Him. The small effort of even reaching out is all Hashem needs in order to reach back and help the person. However, the Jewish people in Egypt couldn't make the smallest effort to reach out to Hashem due to both practical and spiritual reasons. Practically, the Jewish people were so exhausted from their back-breaking labor that they barely even listened to Moshe. Their oppression was so heavy that they couldn't even think about the idea of freedom. Spiritually, the Jewish people had been distant from Hashem for so long that they dropped to the level of serving idols. The Jewish people were not in the position to make the first move of reaching out to Hashem to help them, yet they still managed to get out of Mitzrayim with Hashem's help.

The use of the words "entrance" and "entrance way" in both the parsha and midrash tell us that at the moment of "Pesach," Hashem ignored the fact that the Jews were worshiping idolatry and decided to "pass over" it also. Hashem did everything for the Jewish people while they did nothing. He took them away from their physical and spiritual suffering even though they may not have deserved it. This is why Pesach is the name of the holiday – it exemplifies just how much Hashem loves us and the unlimited extent of what He will do for us.

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A KYHS PARSHA PUBLICATION

ravh@yeshivahs.org