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Parsha

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Reflective
Question:

Where in your life do you feel hardened, and what might open if you paused to choose differently?

Gematria on the Parshah: The Secret to Redemption

By: Moshe Herskovits



In Parshah Bo, we see the beginning of the Exodus and the first mitzvot given to Yisrael as a nation. The Kotzker Rebbe teaches that this story is not merely historical. The Exodus contains within it the exile and redemption of every Jew, in every generation, and even the blueprint for the future Messianic redemption. What secret does Parshah Bo reveal for bringing the final redemption?

The Ruzhiner Rebbe offers a powerful analogy for exile and redemption. A Jew in personal exile, he explains, is like someone who has fallen into a deep well, struggling to stay afloat. How does one escape such a place? Only when a rope is thrown down from above. The Ruzhiner teaches that this rope is the tzaddikim of each generation. They extend the means to climb out of exile, but the challenge remains ours: to grasp the rope and rise from our personal exile.

What can we learn from the leaders of Yetziat Mizrayim? What "rope" did they cast to help Am Yisrael escape exile? The Talmud provides us the answer.

In Chullin 89a, the humility of Moshe and Aharon is compared to that of Avraham Avinu. Avraham Avinu declared, "I am dust and ashes," while Moshe and Aharon did not refer to themselves as I. Instead, they asked Hashem, "What are we?" The Talmud implies that this was not a one-time expression of humility, but a consistent way of seeing themselves.

Moshe and Aharon did not view themselves as individuals. They saw all of Am Yisrael as a single being. The gematria of the three leaders of the Exodus משה + אהרן + מרים (Moshe+Aharon+Miriam) is 891, the same as יציאת מצרים (Exodus from Egypt). This teaches that the Exodus itself was brought about through their unity, and through the way they embodied and modeled that unity for the entire nation.

When Moshe was chosen as leader, Aharon had no jealousy. Miriam prophesied that her brother Moshe would be the redeemer, she too harbored no jealousy. All three grasped a deeper truth: that all Yisrael is one soul.

The Alter Rebbe raises a profound question connected to this idea. Hillel famously teaches (Shabbat 31a) that the entire Torah can be summarized as "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," and the rest is commentary. This is reflected in the gematria of the full verse ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני (You shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am Hashem) is 907, the same as שני לוחות אבנים (Two Tablets of Stone / The term for the Ten Commandments). This reveals that this single mitzvah encompasses all Ten Commandments, and by extension, the entire Torah. Yet the Alter Rebbe asks: How can this be so? How can mitzvot such as tefillin or the prohibition of shatnez fulfill "love your neighbor as yourself"?

He answers that every action of a Jew is interconnected. All of Yisrael is one body and one soul;

whatever one Jew does affects every Jew in the world. A Jew who truly lives with Ahavat Yisrael cannot sin, for he understands that every action ripples through the entire nation.

The Korban Pesach reflects this truth as well. The Noam Elimelech teaches that the lamb must be eaten together, expressing humility and the awareness that our "I" exists only as part of a collective. Just as the lamb is shared, so too are our mitzvot, our struggles, and our redemption.

Redemption emerges when we reach this level of consciousness. We no longer see another Jew as separate, but as an extension of ourselves. We recognize that all of Yisrael together reveals the glory of Hashem.

Challenge for the week: When temptation or negative judgment arises, remember this truth: All of Yisrael is one being. Let us act with awareness, knowing that every action affects each Jew, and this awareness will bring us one step closer to the final redemption.

Do I Really Have Free Choice? It Depends

By: Adam Klasner



One of the most disturbing questions in the story of the Exodus is also one of the most human.

God tells Moshe that He will harden Pharaoh's heart. Over and over again. Pharaoh will refuse to let the Jewish people go, not only because he chooses to, but because God strengthens his resistance.

So the obvious question is this. If Pharaoh's heart is hardened by God, where is free choice? And if there is no free choice, how can Pharaoh be blamed or punished?

The Torah treats free will as sacred. Without it, nothing matters. Responsibility collapses. Growth becomes meaningless. So this question is not philosophical trivia. It goes to the core of what it means to be human.

Many classic answers are given. Some say Pharaoh lost his free will only after years of cruelty. Others explain that God strengthened Pharaoh so he could still choose freely despite overwhelming fear. But the Chassidic teaching of Reb Nachum of Chernobyl offers a different lens, one that speaks directly to our inner lives.

He says the true exile of Egypt was not physical. It was an exile of awareness. Das. Consciousness. Perception.

Both Egyptians and Jews had information. They had tradition. They had stories and rituals. But they lacked lived awareness. The kind of knowing that changes how you experience reality. The kind that allows you to feel that nothing exists outside of God, even nature, even power, even chaos.

Pharaoh was brilliant. Sophisticated. He believed in nature, control, and manipulation. But when

Moshe said, "Let my people go," Pharaoh answered, "Who is God that I should listen to Him?" Not because he lacked intelligence, but because his awareness was sealed. His heart was closed.

Here is the radical insight. God did not harden Pharaoh's heart by removing his freedom. God hardened Pharaoh's heart by strengthening the patterns Pharaoh already lived inside. Pharaoh became more Pharaoh. More entrenched. More identified with control, power, and denial.

And this is where it becomes personal.

Free choice does not disappear all at once. It erodes slowly. Every time we live on autopilot. Every time we react instead of respond. Every time fear masquerades as logic. Over time, patterns harden. Awareness narrows. And what once felt like choice starts to feel inevitable.

This is not punishment. It is consequence.

Redemption, then, is not just leaving Egypt. It is reclaiming awareness. Learning to notice the moment before reaction. The place where something in us tightens, hardens, insists. That moment is where choice still lives.

The Exodus is not only a story of power and miracles. It is a map of the human nervous system. Of how awareness goes into exile. And how slowly, patiently, it can be restored.

What the Darkness Exposed

By: Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski



In Parshas Bo, the Torah records the final three plagues brought upon Egypt: locusts, darkness, and the death of the firstborn. When describing the plague of darkness, the Torah lingers on its intensity and progression. For three days, an oppressive darkness filled the land, so thick that people could not see one another. This was followed by another three days in which movement itself became impossible. And yet, in striking contrast, the Torah tells us that Bnei Yisrael had light in their homes.

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains that two significant events took place during this period. First, many Jews who were unwilling to leave Egypt died during the plague of darkness, hidden from the Egyptians so that they would not claim that the Jews were suffering just as they were. Second, the Jews were able to enter Egyptian homes under the cover of darkness, observe their valuables, and later request them as they prepared to leave Egypt (Rashi on Shmos 10:22).

At first glance, these two outcomes seem difficult to reconcile. How can the same darkness conceal the death of many Jews while simultaneously facilitating the fulfillment of Hashem's promise that Bnei Yisrael would leave Egypt with great wealth?

A closer look at the Midrash (Shmos Rabbah 14:3) suggests that these events are not contradictory at all, but intertwined. The Midrash states that there were Jews in Egypt who had become comfortable – economically, socially, and culturally. They enjoyed security, status, and prosperity, and they had no desire to leave. Their resistance was

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not born of denial, but of attachment. For them, Egypt had become home. Hashem therefore caused their deaths to occur during the darkness, preserving the distinction between Egypt's punishment and the Jewish path toward redemption.

At the same time, that very darkness became a test for those who remained. As they entered Egyptian homes unseen, surrounded by silver, gold, and fine garments, they took nothing. Their restraint reflected a deep integrity and trust in Hashem's promise, even at the cost of immediate material security. Later, when the Egyptians claimed they had nothing to give, the Jews could point precisely to where the valuables were located. The Egyptians reasoned that had the Jews intended to deceive them, they could have taken everything during the darkness. Because they did not, the Egyptians willingly lent their possessions.

The plague of darkness, then, was not merely a punishment for Egypt. It was a moment of clarification for Bnei Yisrael. In that same darkness, one group remained trapped by comfort and complacency, while another revealed faith, restraint, and readiness for redemption.

Often, it is in moments of concealment that a person's true loyalties are exposed. Parshas Bo teaches us that light is not only something we receive – it is something we earn, through the choices we make, even when it is dark and no one else is watching.

Come to Paro

By: Rabbi Adam Law



ויאמר ה' אל משה בא אל פרעה

There's a famous question on this pasuk. Why does it say "בא אל פרעה," come to Paro? G-d is sending Moshe on a mission. It should say "לך אל פרעה," go to Paro.

There's a famous Baal Shem Tov story about a lonely king. He wanted to have a relationship with his subjects. But really he wanted to know if they desired closeness, or if their actions were only because he was king.

So he builds a giant fortress refuge, and the approach consisted of ten giant walls. As these walls entered further in, the tests had more powerful sentries and devious traps. But whomever would pass all of the obstacles would come to the king in his chambers!

A royal announcement was sent to the kingdom that any hero who would test himself to reach the king would get more and more fabulous prizes the farther he was able to survive this challenge.

Some contestants came to get all the riches in the world. Others had aspirations for royalty. There was even a credible rumor that he who passed all the walls would marry the princess!

One young man, however, really did want to meet the king. The first walls were difficult tests of strength, mountain climbing, and swimming. As he approached the middle walls there were archers sniping from corners, deadly spiked pit traps and alligator-filled moats. Our hero bravely escaped these challenges with some scrapes and bruises, but in good spirits. After each level, he found remarkable treasures, but that wasn't why he was here.

The final walls and tests were psychologically terrifying and devastatingly deadly. He faced his worst fears and losing everything. He seemed almost broken.

Through all of the tests our faithful subject persevered. The others fell on the way or gave up when they received their prizes. But our hero wanted to meet the king so much.

When this servant reaches the king in His glory, he falls to his feet and cries as the king looks on. The servant asks- "O King, why did it have to be so hard?"

The King softly replied to him- "Turn around, my son." When he turns around, he sees all of the barriers dissolved and were never there at all. He was always in one chamber with the king the whole time.

That's the Torah here too. Moshe has to steel himself to face the enemy time and time again. When G-d says to Moshe- "Come to Paro," he is really saying "Come to Me." Don't be afraid. I am here behind the screen, behind all the Paros in the world. All the tests are just from Me. You're getting closer all the time. Come to me and I will raise you above the darkness of this world, and show you I was really with you the whole time.

Also see Mei HaShiloach vol. 2 here.

G-d is already there!

By: Rabbi Jacks



The loneliest place in the world is the hallway leading toward your greatest fear. In this week's Torah portion, Parshas Bo, we encounter Moses standing in that very hallway, paralyzed by the prospect of confronting Pharaoh. But in the opening words of the parsha, Hashem offers a linguistic shift that changes the architecture of human courage: He does not say Lech, "Go," but rather Bo, "Come."

This distinction is the difference between being sent on a mission and being invited into a partnership. To "go" implies a destination where you are currently not; it suggests that you must leave the safety of the Divine presence to enter the den of the lion alone. But to "come" implies that the Speaker is already there, waiting for you. Hashem was telling Moses that He was already in the palace, standing right next to the throne, waiting to hold Moses' hand as he spoke truth to power. He was telling Moses that the "Great Crocodile" of Egypt was merely a backdrop for a much deeper meeting between a creator and His child.

We all face our own "Pharaohs." These are the towering obstacles that seem designed to break our spirit. Whether it is a looming crisis in our career, a shadow over our health, or the quiet, suffocating weight of internal anxiety, our instinct is to feel abandoned in the face of the storm. We feel we are being sent out into the cold to fight a battle we didn't ask for. But the message of Bo is that there is no corner of human suffering, no "palace of darkness," where the Divine is not already present. You are never sent into a difficulty that Hashem hasn't already entered to prepare the way.

When we shift our perspective from "I have to go deal with this" to "I am coming to meet Hashem within this," the nature of the struggle changes. The burden of the outcome no longer rests solely on our shoulders because we aren't the primary actors; we are simply walking into the room with the One who created the room. This week, as you face whatever Pharaoh is standing in your path,

remember that you aren't being exiled into your problems. You are being invited to find the Light that is already standing in the heart of the dark, waiting for you to arrive.

Beginning Again (Rosh Chodesh, Light, and the Inner Point)

By: Yacov Aboudi



Parshat Bo begins with the continuation of the final plagues, yet in the very heart of that upheaval Hashem introduces something entirely new. Before the Exodus itself, before the splitting of the sea, and before anything changes externally, Hashem gives Klal Yisrael a new kind of power – the power to sanctify time:

"הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֹאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים."

"This month shall be for you the head of the months." (Shemot 12:2)

Redemption, the Torah suggests, begins not only with miracles, but with intention – with the ability to say that today can be different.

This message feels especially resonant as we enter the month of Shevat, a time associated with התחדשות – renewal and reawakening. Even while winter still dominates the landscape, the sap begins to rise beneath the surface. What is unseen begins to stir before it is revealed – a living metaphor for Rosh Chodesh itself.

The Bat Ayin captures the inner work this renewal demands:

"כָּל הַתְּחִלּוֹת אֵינָהּ בְּאֵלָא עַל־יְדֵי הַסֵּרֶת הַקְּלִפָּה" "שְׂקִדְמָה לָהּ."

"Every true renewal comes only by removing the covering that preceded it." (Bat Ayin, Bo)

Rosh Chodesh, then, is not just a date on the calendar; it is a spiritual posture, asking what we need to release so something new can enter. The Arizal deepens this idea, teaching that every Rosh Chodesh brings a completely new light into the world:

"בְּכָל רֹאשׁ חֹדֶשׁ מִתְחַדֵּשׁ אוֹר חֹדֶשׁ שְׁלֵל הִיָּה מְעוֹלָם" (Arizal, Sha'ar HaKavanot)

Yet, he adds, that light descends only according to the vessel we prepare for it:

"וְהָאוֹר אֵינוֹ נִתְפָּשֵׁט אֶלָּא כְּפִי שְׁעוֹר הַכֵּלִי" (Etz Chaim)

So Rosh Chodesh – and especially Shevat – is both gift and responsibility. Hashem renews the light; we are asked to renew the vessel.

The Sefat Emet brings this cosmic idea into the heart of the individual:

"בְּכָל רֹאשׁ חֹדֶשׁ מִתְחַדֵּשׁ הַקִּקְדָּה הַפְּנִימִית שֶׁבְּלֵב יִשְׂרָאֵל."

"On every Rosh Chodesh, the inner point in the heart of Israel is renewed." (Sefat Emet, Bo 5643)

Renewal is not only external. It is the quiet re-awakening of something alive within us – a point of connection that may have been dulled, but is never lost.

As this new month begins, what part of you is asking to be renewed – and what are you still holding onto that may be preventing that light from entering?

