

PARSHAS BO

תשפ"ב

We have been going through the makkos. Hashem says He wants Pharaoh to internalize the lessons of makkos. Additionally, Hashem wants Klal Yisroel to internalize the lessons of the makkos. He wants that it will be so much a part of them that they will pass it on from generation to generation to know who and what Hashem is.

Moshe tells Pharaoh that Hashem is waiting for Pharaoh to submit himself to Him. What is the purpose of this?

The Rambam writes in a letter to his son that, while the events of Pharaoh and yetzias mitzrayim actually happened, there is also a symbolic meaning to these events. Pharaoh represents the ultimate yetzer horo which is the human ego. His ego was so great that he claimed to be a god and to have created the Nile. Hashem is not only taking Klal Yisroel out of Egypt. At the same time, He is also teaching us lessons about the stubborn nature of the yetzer horo – the human ego – and how to subdue it.

Pharaoh made himself into an avodo zoro claiming he is superhuman – without having to tend to normal human needs. But the fact is that he is human and he does have to tend to his needs. So every day early in the morning he goes to relieve himself by the Nile. For those fifteen minutes, Pharaoh is confronted with the fact that he is human. But for the next 23 hours and 45 minutes, Pharaoh manages to convince himself that he is a god and doesn't have normal human needs. That is how human beings are. They convince themselves of something that deep down they know is not true. Human beings are complicated, full of contradictions. Chazal say that each human being is an "olom molei" a complete world unto itself. On planet Earth you have half the planet in darkness and on the other half, the sun is shining. One half is summer while the other half is winter – all simultaneously. Full of contradictions. That is Pharaoh. For fifteen minutes he is human and the rest of the day he is a god.

Moshe confronts Pharaoh in those 15 minutes to make him realize he isn't a god and didn't create the Nile. But the human ego doesn't give up so easily. It doesn't want to let go of the deep illusion of power and control. Pharaoh refuses to submit himself to Hashem and let Klal Yisroel go.

The parsha begins by telling us that there are certain lessons Hashem wants to teach us. One of the most critical lessons we learn is when Pharaoh acquiesces to let Klal Yisroel go after the devastating makkos of arbeh and choshech. But he won't let them take their animals along. Moshe refuses the offer because we need to take all our animals with us. Why? Because we don't know what Hashem will demand of us in serving Him. In the end, Hashem demands the entire person. At Har Sinai, Hashem declares that Klal Yisroel are My slaves now. As we will read in the beginning of Parshas Mishpotim, the eved ivri is pierced in his ear because he didn't hear the lesson that he is the slave of Hashem and not of another human being.

In the end, Hashem strengthened Pharaoh's heart and he doesn't let them go. Hashem tells Moshe to tell Pharaoh that there is one more makkoh He will bring. The Egyptians are now overawed by Moshe. They realize he is controlling the situation. Moshe tells them that makkas bechoros will occur "around midnight". In reality, the verse tells us it actually happened exactly at midnight. So why did Moshe not make a more precise prediction?

Rashi explains it was because he was concerned that the astrologers' clocks might be off by a few minutes. Then they would think the makkoh

took place a minute before or a minute after what they thought was midnight, and they would dismiss the whole thing and claim Moshe is a fraud. This is incredible. We have had nine unbelievable, supernatural makkos causing untold destruction and calamity for Egypt. It is clearly coming from a supernatural power beyond this world. And if all the first-born Egyptians and animals will die – even if it's not exactly at midnight – but they all die simultaneously throughout Egypt, wouldn't that also show that Moshe is representing this supernatural power?

This shows that people want an excuse to deny the truth – even though it is hitting them in the face. It doesn't matter how flimsy it is – they will grasp at it. So Moshe has to approximate the time of makkas bechoros.

Moshe threatens Pharaoh personally – his own first-born son will die – along with all the first born of Egypt and there will be total chaos in the entire country. What is Pharaoh's reaction to this threat? He goes to sleep. The term for this is cognitive dissonance. You can talk and talk and the message just doesn't land.

Chazal tell us that on the night of makkas bechoros, the avodo zoros melted and dissolved. All the avodo zoros were destroyed except for Baal Tzefone – the avodo zoro of money. Money is the last power that people hold on to. Klal Yisroel are being chased out of Egypt. As a result, the Egyptian economy collapses because it was entirely based on the slave labor provided by Klal Yisroel.

We will see next week that even after all they've been through, and after the truth has hit them in the face, people don't want to change. They find it very difficult to change how they have been thinking and acting their whole lives. The Egyptians simply can't go on without their slaves! So Pharaoh decides to chase down Klal Yisroel to get them back. He takes horses and chariots. But wait – where did they get these animals from? Weren't they killed in makkas borod?

The answer is that Hashem warned ahead of time that any animals left outside would be killed by the borod and in order to save them, they need to be brought indoors. The average Egyptian ignored the warning and left their property outside. Those who feared Hashem brought their animals indoors, and it was those animals that were now being used to chase Klal Yisroel back to Egypt! But how could this be? They were the ones who feared Hashem! The answer is that they only feared Hashem when it came to saving their money. But when it comes to losing money, they stopped fearing Hashem.

People are complex. You can believe in Hashem until you come to a nisayon of money. We say in kriyas shma that we must love Hashem with all our hearts, our lives, and our money. It means we have to be willing to give all these things up for our love of Hashem. But if we are already giving up our lives, why do we also have to be told to give up our money? Rabbi Akiva explains that for some people, their money is actually more important than their lives.

Money occupies a very high priority in people's lives. It dominates the whole mind. Some people are scrupulous about the smallest detail in Shulchan Aruch when it comes to every chelek – except for Choshen Mishpot. Unfortunately, when it comes to money, people follow their own Shulchan Aruch. But regardless, business deals and money matters is a major part of the Torah. The last avodo zoro that gets destroyed is the avodo zoro of money.

We finish the parsha with the halachos of pidyon bechor. It makes

us remember the lessons of makkas bechoros. The whole interaction between Moshe and Pharaoh teaches us deep lessons about human beings and their refusal to submit to the will of Hashem. The biggest problems people have with accepting Torah is bending our will to a higher will and bending our mind to a higher mind. The human ego doesn't want to submit itself to anyone or anything higher.

People come to me and complain they are angry at Hashem for not letting them do the things they want to do. I tell them that it is no different than being angry at Hashem for not having the ability to fly. Being angry about this is obviously absurd because part of the reality of the world is that human beings cannot fly. You simply have to adjust to the reality of the world Hashem created. So too, you have to adjust to the reality of Hashem's moral will of Torah and mitzvos which dictates how we should live.

I obviously bend my will to the physical reality and I know not to jump out the window flapping my hands, hoping I will fly. But people defy Hashem's moral will thinking they can do as they please and there won't be consequences. It may not be as immediate as falling out of a window, but eventually, defying the reality of Hashem's moral will is

going to catch up with us.

This is the message of the parshiyos in our tefillin. Rabbeinu Yonah in Brochos explains why tefillin and mezuzah are a part of kabbolas malchus shomayim. When I put tefillin on my arm, I am submitting all my physical actions to Hashem's will. When I put tefillin on my head, I am submitting my thoughts and my mind to Hashem's mind. When I put mezuzos on my door posts, I am submitting my home and my money to Hashem's will.

Pharaoh refuses and refuses to bend, until it is too late. His ego is so strong that he goes to sleep in his bed the night before makkas bechoros, as if nothing is going to happen. But then Pharaoh jumps out of bed in the middle of the night – looking for Moshe and Aharon to plead with them to leave Egypt as soon as possible. Now everything is lost.

In the end, everyone bends. You will save yourself a lot of trouble if you bend earlier rather than later. It is the message of pidyon bechor and the message of tefillin. Pharaoh represents the biggest yetzer horo – which is the human ego.