

PARSHAS BO

תשפ"ה

Parshas Bo is a transitional parsha.

Sefer Bereishis was a sefer of the founding of Klal Yisroel. It centered around the lives of the Ovos and how they developed their relationship with Hashem. Hashem made the Bris Bein haBesorim with Avrohom Ovinu and he was told his descendants will go into golus for 400 years. They will be persecuted and enslaved there. The nation that enslaved them will be judged, and afterward they will emerge with great wealth. It is a strange prophecy. Hashem is telling Avrohom he will found a great nation, but there is no free ride. It comes with nisnoyos and difficulties – even extreme hardships. This great nation has to be worthy of becoming Hashem's chosen people by growing through serious challenges.

The posuk refers to this process as Klal Yisroel going through a smelting pot – the crucible of Egypt. In a smelting pot, all the impurities are burned out of the raw iron ore and only the pure metal remains. So too, by the time Klal Yisroel arrive at Har Sinai, only a fifth of the original population who lived in Egypt managed to leave! Only those who were able to survive the nisyonos of 210 years of shibbud merited to receive the Torah. And while they were able to keep their identity as Ivrim, they were still deeply influenced by the immoral culture of Egypt. Chazal tell us that they sunk to the 49th level of tumoh.

Hashem wanted to help Klal Yisroel shed the culture of Egypt and accept the culture of Torah by bringing them through an entire year of education via the ten makkos. These makkos were not just a bunch of haphazard calamities. They were announced in advanced and introduced with the message they were intended to convey about Hashem's unlimited power and intelligence. Moshe Rabbeinu originally came to Pharaoh in the name of Y-K-V-K, the G-d of Yisroel. Not just the G-d of the Ivrim – an ordinary people with a peculiar set of beliefs. Yisroel means that Hashem is a deep part of their core identity.

Moshe Rabbeinu comes to Klal Yisroel with a message from Hashem that they will serve Hashem on this mountain. Moshe tells Pharaoh they will leave only for a few days, but we still have to take everything with us. Why? Because we don't know what Hashem will ask from us. And indeed, at Har Sinai, Hashem demands that we surrender our very bodies, our very selves, as His servants. Everything we have, everything we are, belongs to Hashem.

But that came after a long process of education where Hashem showed them the sheker of avodo zoro – that there is no other force or power in this world that is worthy of being served. Hashem started with the Nile River, which was the primary god of Egypt. He showed how their source of life became a source of death and destruction. He even tricked the Egyptian priests to make a mockery of their own beliefs by causing them to turn the waters of the Nile into blood. Then comes kinim – a primitive form of life that the chartumim could not create. Hashem sends the next 3 makkos to show that Hashem makes intelligent distinctions between people living on Earth. Then the next 3 makkos show Hashem's absolute power over nature.

At the beginning of Parshas Bo, Hashem tells Moshe that He is bringing these last makkos so that we will tell our children, who will then tell their children, about the wonders that Hashem made for us in Egypt. These lessons will last for all future generations.

Avrohom asks Hashem, how can he have a child with Soroh, who is physically incapable of having children? Hashem takes Avrohom above the system of mazolos and tells him that Hashem's promises

are not limited by natural limitations. Similarly, Klal Yisroel are told to leave Egypt and walk straight into a barren desert with barely any provisions. They need to have total trust that Hashem will provide for them supernaturally. Hashem demands that they suspend all logic and all reasonable expectations and rely on a total miracle to survive. Hashem knew that not everyone is up to this test. Only people who were able to stand up to the tests of the golus and the tumoh of Egypt and retain their core identity for 210 years could stand up to that test. Only such people who go through 10 makkos and learn those lessons, can then go out to a total desert and just rely on Hashem to keep them alive day by day. Only such a people can come to Har Sinai and receive the Torah. It is no wonder that only 20% of Klal Yisroel merited to come out of Egypt, while 80% died during makkas choshech. Leaving Egypt might be a nice idea, but not if it comes with demands to totally change one's mindset and culture. Not if it means putting our lives in constant danger surrounded by snakes and scorpions, and having to rely on Hashem for everything to survive. It takes an incredible amount of emunoh.

At kriyas Yam Suf, Hashem put Klal Yisroel in tremendous danger. He first told them to go south in the opposite direction of Eretz Yisroel. Then he told them to go back north in the direction of Mitzrayim, and then go south to the eastern coast of the Gulf of Suez. They did not know that this was the location where the treasures of Yosef were stored. There was nothing there but desert! They became surrounded on all sides and had nowhere to go but straight into the sea! But Hashem told them to go, and they went. This was the nisoyon which tested their emunoh and made them worthy of getting the Torah – they had to understand that only Hashem runs this world. Only 20% of Klal Yisroel were up to that level.

Hashem told this 20% in this week's parsha, that in order to be the chosen people, you have to reject the entire culture of Egypt you have been subjugated under for generations. You have to take the avodo zoro of your masters, keep it in your house for four days, slaughter it and paint its blood on your doorposts for everyone to see! You are publicly renouncing the identity of your former masters, and Hashem will protect you from the danger that this will entail. This is what was necessary to raise Klal Yisroel to the level where they could say naaseh v'nishmoh.

This is the foundation of Klal Yisroel – it starts with total emunoh by assembling at Succos and setting out into the desert. A nation isn't just a gathering of a bunch of people – they have to share a deep common bond. For us, that is the Torah.

The news today is strange. You hear about the big fight over the value of limud haTorah in Israeli society. The ultimate value of limud haTorah is at stake. But on the other hand, when you hear the interviews of the new American ambassador to Israel and their new representative to the United Nations, they talk very plainly and openly that the Jews have a right to make a homeland in Israel because the Jews are the chosen people and were given this promised land by Hashem. The leftist in Israel are going crazy because these Americans are telling them what we all read in the first Rashi in Chumash!

They asked Trump's new U.N. representative if she believes the Jews should claim sovereignty over the entire West Bank, and she says of course I do – the Bible says it's theirs! No hesitation, no apologies. It is an embarrassment that these Zionist Christians, who are being put in a position to help us, are deeper believers in the words of the Torah

than the Zionists here in Israel! When they asked her about the sharp rise of global Anti-Semitism, she responded that it is G-d's plan to give the Jewish people a homeland in Israel, and those who oppose that, hate G-d!

What binds us as a nation is our going through the fiery furnace of the golus in Egypt and moving out to a barren, desolate desert. It makes no sense. Hashem gives us food and water, but not just an ordinary food. It is manna – and Hashem told Aharon to keep a portion of it in a jar to remind Klal Yisroel for the rest of history that Hashem can provide parnassoh. It may not always come down to us from shomayim through an open miracle, but Hashem showed us that He is dedicated to taking care of His nation's material needs. The Ramban explains that Hashem gives us open miracles at certain times, to let us know that even in other times, Hashem is arranging things through natural means to achieve the same thing.

When the brothers come to Yosef, they tell him a whole story about what Yaakov supposedly told them. He said to tell Yosef not to take revenge on his brothers to pay back the evil they did to you. Yosef knew it wasn't true, and he reassured them that they don't need to make up this story to protect themselves from him. He has no intention to pay them back. Why? Yosef could have viewed himself as the ultimate success story – coming from slavery and prison, to the highest position in the land – all because of his talents. He could have taken credit for everything. But Yosef tells the brothers he had nothing to do with it. He is simply a tool in Hashem's hands to fulfill Hashem's plans to prepare for the golus in the best possible way. Hashem used your bad middos and gave me all my abilities in order to achieve the goals He wanted.

We see a very important idea from Yosef – the ability to see that anything and everything I have, comes from Hashem, and He is giving me these talents and abilities to carry out His purposes. They weren't given to me for my own enjoyment or my own ego boosting. He wants me to use my money, my intelligence, my business acumen, my Torah knowledge, all to further Hashem's goals. We say every morning that Hashem has given me a pure neshomo with all my kochos hanefesh, and the abilities to actualize these kochos in ways Hashem wants. We are a beneficiary of Hashem's complete kindness.

There is a very important part of Rav Avrohom ben HoRambam's sefer, *Hamaspek L'Ovdei Hashem*, that I review many times. It is one of the most incredible mussar seforim that I am familiar with. He talks about

the middoh of nedivus – generosity. To cultivate within ourselves the willingness to benefit people to whom I have no obligation – simply because it is the right thing to do with what Hashem gave me. I am imitating Hashem's middos of chessed when He simply created the world when nothing existed beforehand. A person who is stingy with his gifts and talents and refuses to give to other people for nothing is considered a kofer. Why? Hashem gave you these opportunities for a reason.

Generosity doesn't just apply to giving charity. It means sharing everything you have – your wisdom, your insight into Torah, your sympathy, your friendship. You need to teach whatever Torah wisdom you have to others, and you need to share your emunoh and yiras shomayim with other people through influencing them. Hashem gave us various mitzvos as a vehicle to give different aspects of our character to others. This is a very interesting way of looking at the world.

Yosef looked at his situation in Egypt as simply a tool in Hashem's hands. He announced to everyone around him that he can only achieve anything because Hashem gave him the talent and ability. He never took any credit for the fabulous success he had. This is how each and every one of us should look at our current situation. We have been put here in this yeshiva for this amount of time in order to maximize the opportunity it gives us. Hashem put Yosef in Egypt to make sure that he sets up Klal Yisroel's arrival into golus. And this is true about everyone. Even if you work hard, Hashem still gave you the inspiration and the insight that comes after the hard work. He expects us to use it to share and inspire others in return.

These parshiyos teach us a very deep lesson about the right attitude we need to have towards the situations we find ourselves in. Hashem demands a high level of bitochon from Klal Yisroel – to leave all the comfort and security and just walk into a barren desert – in order to deserve to accept the Torah at Har Sinai. Not everyone could make it, and 80% died in Egypt. Only when you are willing to make that leap, can you then say naaseh v'nishmoh. The manna was an ongoing lesson about how we make our parnassoh till today. See yourself as a recipient of Hashem's chessed, and He expects you to use those gifts and talents for His goals and not just keep it all for yourself.

That is the biggest lesson one can get from Yosef and Klal Yisroel in Egypt.