

RABBI GOLDBERG'S *Parsha Perspectives* FOR TODAY

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Bo for your Shabbos Table
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Sponsored by Eli & Sara Malka Neger as a zechus for a refuah shleima for Chaya Esther Tehila bas Arielle Tsiporah and lilui nishmas Yitzchok Moshe ben Aaron Yaakov Yehoshua.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

Moshe's Gratitude to Pharaoh

After Moshe relayed to Pharaoh Hashem's warning about the final of the ten plagues, (the death of the firstborn), the Torah says, וַיֵּצֵא מִעִם פְּרֻעָה בַּחֲרֵי אֶgypt – "He left Pharaoh's presence angry" (11:8). What is the meaning of Moshe's אֶgypt – anger? Why was he "angrier" now than after all the previous times when he warned Pharaoh about the consequences of his ongoing defiance?

Rav Zaydel Epstein explained this *pasuk* to mean that Moshe was disappointed with Pharaoh.

As evil as Pharaoh was, Moshe never lost his sense of הַכְּרִת הַטֹּב (gratitude) for having been brought as an infant into Pharaoh's palace, where he was cared for and raised. Moshe maintained a delicate balance between firmly confronting and challenging Pharaoh, and feeling profound gratitude for all that Pharaoh had done for him.

Moshe did not want Pharaoh to be punished. Throughout this process, Rav Zaydel writes, Moshe hoped that Pharaoh would change, that his heart would be softened, that he would finally recognize the truth and obey God. This is what Moshe wanted. He felt indebted to Pharaoh, and in this indebtedness, he genuinely hoped that Pharaoh would yield to God and avoid punishment.

And so now, after delivering the final warning, seeing that nothing had worked, and Pharaoh remained defiant, וַיֵּצֵא מִעִם פְּרֻעָה בַּחֲרֵי אֶgypt – Moshe left upset, disappointed, and exasperated.

There is a remarkable command in Sefer Devarim (23:8): לֹא תַּהַטֵּר מִצְרַיִם כִּי גַּר הָיָית בָּאָרֶץ – "Do not despise an Egyptian, because you were a foreigner in his land." The Egyptians treated our ancestors with unspeakable cruelty, enslaving them, using their infants as bricks and throwing them into the river. And for this reason, we are not to allow an Egyptian to marry into the Jewish People for ten generations. But at the same time, we must never forget that when Yaakov's family faced grave danger, when they had

no food, they were cared for in Egypt. The Egyptians later enslaved them and killed their babies – but this does not entitle us to forget their earlier kindness.

This is how far the Torah value of הַכְּרִת הַטֹּב extends. Our sense of indebtedness to someone does not end when that person treats us improperly. Both as individuals and as a nation, we recognize the goodness that others have shown us even if we also have legitimate grievances against them.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

The New Opportunities Given by Every Moment

When Hashem presented to Moshe the instructions for the night of Yetzias Mitzrayim, He introduced these instructions with the command הַחֲדֵשׁ הוּא לִכְמָן רָאשׁ חֲדֹשִׁים – the *mitzva* of קידוש החודש, the system of declaring the new months based on the sighting of the new moon. (Nowadays, we use a fixed lunar calendar, but in ancient times, witnesses who saw the new moon would testify before the Sanhedrin, who would then declare the new month based on their testimony.) Rashi, in his famous opening comments to his Torah commentary, observes that this is מזיה ר'אשונה שנגטו בה ישראל – the first *mitzva* given to Am Yisrael as a nation.

What is the particular significance of this *mitzva*, on account of which it was chosen to be the first *mitzva* given to Am Yisrael?

One answer relates to the theme of חידוש, renewal. The month is called חידש precisely because it begins when the moon starts to renew itself, when it has reached its smallest point and now starts growing larger. The very first *mitzva* given to Am Yisrael is the *mitzva* that expresses the idea of renewal, that we are always capable of renewing ourselves just as the moon is renewed each month.

Each morning, we say about Hashem, המחדש בטובו ביום תמיד – "who renews each day, in His goodness, the act of creation." Rav Chaim of Volozhin, in *Nefesh*

Ha'chaim (1:2), explains this to mean that the world exists only because God renews the act of creation at every moment. The world was not just created and then put into motion; all of creation comes into existence anew at every fraction of a second.

This perspective on the world is especially empowering. It means that at every moment, we can recreate ourselves. If all of existence is created anew each fraction, then necessarily, we, too, are being created anew. Therefore, we are never "stuck" in the same place. The way we were last year, last month, yesterday, or even the last moment, does not dictate who we are right now. At every moment, we have the capacity to change. Our past selves do not define who we are now and who we can be going forward.

This is why *חידוש הזה לכם* is such a crucial *mitzva*. It tells us that we are endowed with the power of renewal, given the ability to recreate ourselves at any time.

Tu Bi'Shvat is observed in the dead of winter, when the trees are bare, when nature seems lifeless. But even then, beneath the surface, in the soil, processes are taking place preparing for the beautiful spring blossom. This shows us that even when we seem spiritually "lifeless," nevertheless, deep within our souls we have the capabilities that we need to blossom and to shine brightly. It is never too late to change and improve, regardless of our current condition.

חידוש הזה לכם. At every moment, we have new opportunities, a chance to rewrite our story and recreate ourselves.

DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

The Home as the Center of Religious Life

A large section of Parshas Bo is dedicated to the *korban pesach*, the sacrifice which *Benei Yisrael* offered on the night of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, and which is to be brought each year in commemoration of this miracle, on the 14th of Nissan.

Significantly, the word – *בַּיִת* – "home" – appears fourteen times throughout this section. Indeed, the home and the family play a crucial role in this *korban*. *Benei Yisrael* were commanded to take a sheep for each household (12:3). Moreover, they were commanded to remain home throughout the night (*לֹא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו עד בוקר* – 12:22).

When we consider the way the *korban pesach* was performed on the night of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, we will discover that the home was treated like the *Beis Ha'mikdash*. The blood was placed on the doorposts (12:22), paralleling the *זריקת הדם*, the sprinkling of the blood of the *korban* on the altar. And, whereas normally *korbanos* must be eaten in the *Beis Ha'mikdash*, or within the walls of *Yerushalayim*, the meat of the *korban pesach* was to be eaten inside

home. The home became the *Beis Ha'mikdash*, the place where the blood was sprinkled and where the meat was consumed.

Significantly, this *mitzva* – to turn the home into a *Beis Ha'mikdash* – was given to *Benei Yisrael* right at the beginning, as they were about to become a free nation, teaching us that from the Torah's perspective, the center of religious life is the home. The heart of Jewish practice is found not in the shul, not in the yeshiva, not even in the *Beis Ha'mikdash* – but the Jewish home.

Rav Aharon Lewin, the Reisha Rav, noted that when a gentile enters a Jewish home, what does he notice? Bookcases full of *sefarim*, a *shtender*, pictures of *rabbanim* on the walls, and *kiddush* cups and other religious articles displayed in the breakfront. To him, the Jewish home resembles a synagogue – which it indeed should.

The Reisha Rav explained on this basis the famous *pasuk* in Sefer Yeshayahu (56:7), *כִּי בֵית תְּפִילָה יִקְרָא לְכָל הָעָםִים* – "for My home shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations." This may be understood to mean that, the Jewish home, will be looked upon by *כל העמים*, other nations, as a *בית תפילה*, a shul. In other faiths, the center of religious life is the house of worship. But for us, it is the home. The most important place where we put our values and ideals into practice is within the family unit.

For good reason, then, the *korban pesach*, the *mitzva* given to our ancestors as they prepared to become a free, independent nation, revolved around the home and the family, because the home marks the focal point of religious life.

A similar notion is expressed earlier in the *parsha*, where we read that before the plague of locusts, Pharaoh was prepared to allow *Benei Yisrael* to go and serve Hashem, and he asked, *מי ומני הולכים* – "Who are the ones who are going?" (10:8). Pharaoh had assumed that since Moshe demanded that the people be allowed to leave to serve God, only members of the clergy needed to go. For a religious service, he figured, only the religious figures were included. Moshe replied, *בנשראינו ובזקנו נלך, בבנינו ובבנותנו... כי ח' לנו – ח' לנו* – "We shall go with our young and with our elderly, with our sons and with our daughters....for we have a festival to God." *Avodas Hashem* is a *חג*, a joyous experience, and so it includes everybody. If serving Hashem was only a burden of responsibility, an arduous task, then indeed, it would be reserved for the spiritual elite. But *avodas Hashem* is about living with joy, with meaning and purpose, and so it is something in which everybody, not just the clergy, is included.

Torah life is for everybody, and thus the primary setting in which the Torah is to be practiced is the home, where we live and interact with one another. We are bidden to transform our homes into a *Beis Ha'mikdash*, and to live our lives as a *חג*, as joyous servants of the Almighty, together with our sons and our daughters, as a strong family unit devoted to *avodas Hashem*.