

Shabbat Spice

PARSHAT BO



The Plague and the Blessing of Darkness?

By Yael Liviem

In Parshat Bo, we learn about the final 3 plagues Hashem punished the מִצְרַיִם (Egyptians) with. One of the plagues was חֹשֶׁךְ - darkness. The מִצְרַיִם were unable to see each other for the first few days and as time went on, they were unable to move either. All communication stopped, and they were isolated from one another. There were no friends, family, society, or support system.

The Midrash asks the question, "What is the source of this terrible darkness?" There are two answers given to this question. Either the darkness came from *Gebinnom*, hell, or it came from Heaven. Rabbi Norman Lamm z"l asks: "How does it make sense that such darkness came from Hashem? One that stopped all communication and didn't allow them to see each other?" When darkness like this falls on a person or community, it can be tragic and devastating. The מִצְרַיִם felt that being alone with their thoughts was torture. Depressive loneliness is something we pray no one ever goes through. On the other hand, loneliness is also a blessing. Being alone can be a precious opportunity to escape the everyday struggles, as well as the constant pulls and demands of life. Loneliness is a good thing too. It's the intimate seclusion of a person's own soul and heart.

It's in this kind of solitude that a person gets to know oneself and ultimately connects deeply to Hashem. Loneliness can be painful, but it can also be precious. That very same darkness viewed as a plague can also be the darkness from Heaven. If we're alone we can connect to Hashem on a personal level.

We learn in Pirkei Avot that Moshe received the Torah from Har Sinai. The Abarbanel teaches us that Moshe Rabbeinu received the Torah in a state of temporary solitude, away from all the people. Being alone on the mountain gave him the opportunity to connect to Hashem and receive the Torah.

Nowadays, this is much more relatable because everything we do and say, every smile, and every frown, is plastered on social media platforms to be viewed, downloaded, judged and of course, shared. Where is the privacy? The quiet? The inaudible communion with Hashem? It's not on social media. It's with me and me alone. If a person can't appreciate that, then it can indeed be a plague. We can view this as a Darkness from Heaven, as a blessing, as Divine, to be able to think, create, and be alone with our thoughts. If we can work on ourselves and learn to use our alone time with Hashem for positivity and holiness, we can live much happier and grateful lives.

Shabbat Shalom!

CANDLE LIGHTING 4:48PM | SHABBAT ENDS 5:57PM

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PARSHAT BO



Escaping Our Personal Mitzrayim

By Nataly Cohen

In this week's Parasha, Parashat Bo, HaShem begins by telling Moshe: בַּאֲל־פִּרְעֹה כִּי־אָנֹכִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת־לִבּוֹ וְאֶת־לִבּוֹ בְּקִרְבּוֹ וְלִמְעַן תִּסְפָּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֶךָ וּבְנֵי־בְנֶךָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלְלִיתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־אֲתֵּיתִי אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַתִּי בָּם וַיְדַעְתֶּם כִּי־אֲנִי ה' "Go to Pharaoh. For I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his courtiers, in order that I may display these My signs among them," (10:1)

וְלִמְעַן תִּסְפָּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֶךָ וּבְנֵי־בְנֶךָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלְלִיתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־אֲתֵּיתִי אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַתִּי בָּם וַיְדַעְתֶּם כִּי־אֲנִי ה' "And that you may recount in the hearing of your child and of your child's child how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them—in order that you may know that I am YKVK." (10:2)

From this we can understand that HaShem not only wanted to show Pharaoh and the Egyptians that He is the One and Only, but also the Hebrews that still didn't believe that HaShem and Moshe would be able to truly free them from Pharaoh. Maybe it could make sense that the Egyptians still didn't believe in HaShem, but the Hebrews? How does it make sense that we would still lack faith in HaShem, even after the 7 plagues that happened in the last *parasha*, the 3 plagues that will happen in this week's portion, and everything HaShem did for us during our 40 years in the desert? All throughout our journey to ארץ ישראל, Hashem graciously made open miracles like the splitting of the Red Sea and מן (*manna*) falling from the sky. Why, after all of that, did we still lack *emunah*? Simply put, slave mentality.

We became so used to and stuck on our lives in Egypt as slaves, where we were fed and had some kind of stability, whereas out of Egypt, we didn't have that. We couldn't change our brains to believe that we were finally free.

How can we connect and relate to this today? Baruch HaShem we are free people in a democratic country, living in one of the most affluent areas in the country. We are able to practice our religion without fear of being persecuted, everything any Jew could ever ask for. But, we are all still living in *Mitzrayim*, our own personal spiritual *Mitzrayim*. We have all fallen slaves to things that are constantly pulling us away from HaShem, like Netflix, Instagram, spending too much money at the Zara sales, bad relationships, bad habits, anything big or small, etc. We all have blocks that are keeping us away from all the good that HaShem wants to show us.

It is known that the *chagim* are a special time to focus on self reflection and bettering ourselves. Not to scare anyone into a panic cleaning, but *Pessach* is in about 10 weeks. That gives us plenty of time to look deep into our lives and ask ourselves: What is it in my life that I have become a slave to? What is something I am spending so much time/resources on, that isn't making me fulfilled? What is blocking me from reaching the real relationship I want with HaShem? Let's not wait until we have fallen too deep into our *Mitzrayim* to realize all of the good HaShem has given us.

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