



SoulSpa 3.15 • P. Bo
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ברוך אתה יהוה
אלהינו מלך העולם
אשר קדשנו במצותיו
וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה:

Barukh Atah Adonai
eloheinu melekh ha'olam
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav
v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are You, YHVH, our God,
eternal sovereign, who sanctified us
in God's *mitzvot* and commanded us
to busy ourselves in words of Torah.

EXISTENTIAL MEMORY

Implications for ****us****?
God playing both sides?

Exodus 10:1-7

God is with Pharaoh 1. We'll work together

ויאמר יהוה אל-משה בא אל-פרעה
כי-אני הכבדתי את-לבו ואת-לב
עבדיו למען שתי אתתי אלה בקרבו:

1. YHVH said to Moshe, "**Come to Pharaoh**, for I **hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might show these My signs amidst him.**

Pharaoh wasn't so bad? God used him/them?
More difficult for Moses, Egypt, Pharaoh...

But Pharaoh created the situation! – BROTHER!

ולמען תספר באזני בנך ובן-בנתך את
אשר התעללתי במצרים ואת-אתתי
אשר-שמתי בם וידעתם כי-אני יהוה:

2. "And so you will recount in the ears of your son and your son's son how I made a **mockery** of Egypt, and My signs that I did on them, that you will know that I am YHVH."

ויבא משה ואהרן ואלו פרעה ויאמרו
אליו כה-אמר יהוה אלהי העברים
עד-מתי מאנת לענת מפני שלח עמי
ויעבדני:

3. **Moshe and Aharon** came to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says YHVH, **God of the Hebrews**: How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me!

Existentially, or in Pharaoh's experience?

warning → free will

כי אם-מאן אתה לשלח את-עמי הנני
מביא מחר ארבה בגבולך:

4. For if you refuse to let My people go, then **tomorrow** I will bring **locusts** in your **border**.

depth: penetration

symbolism?--> famine → act of REVERSE CREATION

וכסה את-עין הארץ ולא יוכל לראת
את-הארץ ואכל את-יתר הפלטה
הנשארת לכם מן-הברד ואכל
את-כל-העץ הצמח לכם מן-השדה:

5. They will cover the face of the earth, and you will not be able to see the earth, and they will eat what remained [after] the hailstorm: they will eat your every **tree** growing from the field.

Moral / social justice: represents destructiveness of
people-to-people contempt / racism / bondage

ומלאו בתיך ובתי כל-עבדך ובתי
כל-מצרים אשר לא-ראו אבתיך ואבות
אבתיך מיום היותם על-האדמה עד
היום הזה ויפן ויצא מעם פרעה:

6. They will fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians such as your fathers or grandfathers never saw since the day that they were on the earth to this day." **He** turned, and went out from Pharaoh.

Who – Moses? Aharon? GOD? TRANSCENDENCE?

ויאמרו עבדי פרעה אליו עד-מתי יהיה
זה לנו למוקש שלח את-האנשים
ויעבדו את-יהוה אלהיהם הטרים:
תדע כי אבדה מצרים:

7. Pharaoh's servants said to him, "**How long will this man be a snare to us? Let them go, that they may serve YHVH their God: do you not know that Egypt already is lost?**

By now, even Pharaoh's folks are getting it. Why doesn't Pharaoh?!

Alternative Plague is not a driver of free will, but more "an offer you can't refuse."

Is this "cruelty" on God's part? Is it petty?

WHY DOES THIS NEED TO BE SO DRAMATIC? Couldn't God influence them without threatening to destroy them (or actually destroying them)? = (1) God is developmental as WE are ("as below so above"); (2) God mirrors who we are at the time / God evolves because we construct God; (3) in this situation, there is an existential threat to <existence> (4) Pharaoh is really the Pharaonic role / a binding of the people / a WILDING of morality (=paru'a).

“BO TO PHARAOH”

Ibn Ezra, Ex. 10:1

בא אל פרעה. בא אליו זאת הפעם, ואל תשתומם בעבור שחזק לבו עד עתה, כי אני הכבדתי את לבו ואת לב עבדיו.

Bo to Pharaoh – Go to him this time and do not be astonished that he hardened his heart this much, “For I hardened his heart and the heart of his servants.”

Bekhor Shor, Ex. 10:1

בא אל פרעה. לא היה אומר לך כי אם בא ביי"ן (viens)

Bo to Pharaoh – It doesn't say “go,” rather “come.”

R. David Levin, “Don't Give Up”

It is an urging and an invitation; *come* (with Me) to take another look at the situation — things have changed, even if you do not realize it.

R. Les Bronstein, “A Hasidic Lens on Parashat Bo”

[The Kotzker rabbi begins,] “*Bo el Paro,*” come to Pharaoh. Notice he says that the Torah does not say *lekh*, as in like *Lekh Lekha* to Abraham and Sarah, go to Pharaoh, but *Bo*, “**come**” to Pharaoh. He says the reason is that one cannot go from the Blessed Holy One... It is impossible to distance one's self from God.

→ teshuvah, appeal to HEART

→ go deep into the system of oppression ((oppressor and oppressed are toxically linked))

Onkelos, Ex. 10:1

ואמר ה' למשה עול לות פרעה ארי אנה זקרתית ית לבה ונת לבא דעבדוהי בדיל לשואה אתי אליו ביניהון:

God said to Moshe, “**Go into Pharaoh** – for I hardened his heart and [also] the hearts of his servants – so that I will be able to set [perform] these signs in their midst.”

Zohar, Bo, 3:36

מה כתיב בא אל פרעה, לך אל פרעה מבעי ליה, מאי בא. אלא, דעייל ליה קב"ה אדרין בטר אדרין לגבי תנינא חזא עלאה תקיפא, דכמה דרגין משתלשלין מניה. ומאן איהו. רזא דהתנין הגדול.

Why is it written, “*Bo* [=come] to Pharaoh”? Why *bo* and not *lekh* [=go]? To indicate that the Holy Blessed One led Moshe through a labyrinth into the abode of a **supernal dragon**, that is, Egypt's celestial representative – from whom many lesser dragons emanate. This is a great secret to understand.

metaphor; astronomical / astrological? Theology: the “many” distract from the One

R. Shefa Gold, Torah Journeys

At the beginning of the portion God speaks to Moses, the prophet within us, and says, “*Bo!* Come on in! I am waiting for you inside the heart of Pharaoh. The heart of Pharaoh is inside you. It is the place that has grown heavy with the weight of life's experience. It is the place that has hardened – its outer shell cynical, and its inner layers made of fear and unhealed grief. **Through this heart of Pharaoh you must come if you are to know Me, if you are to find your freedom.**”

I HARDENED HIS HEART

Shemot Rabbah 13:3

like, it wasn't Pharaoh's fault?!

כי אני הכבדתי את לבו, אייר יוחנן
מכאן פתחון פה למיניו לומר לא
היתה ממנו שיצשה תשובה...
אי"ל ר' שמעון בן לקיש יסתם
פיהם של מינים, אלא אם ללצים
הוא יליץ, שהקב"ה מתרה בו
באדם פעם ראשונה שניה ושלישית
ואינו חוזר בו, והוא נועל לבו מן
התשובה כדי לפרע ממנו מה
שחטא. אף כד פרעה הרשע, כיון
ששגר הקב"ה חמש פעמים ולא
השגיח על דבריו, אי"ל הקב"ה
אתה הקשית ערפך והכבדת את
לבך, הריני מוסיף לך טמאה על
טמאתך, הוי: כי אני הכבדתי את
לבו. מהו הכבדתי, שעשה הקב"ה
את לבו ככבד הזה שהיא מתבשלת
שניה וארטסיס נכנס בתוכה, כד
נעשה לבו של פרעה ככבד הזה ולא
היה מקבל דבריו של הקב"ה הוי:
כי אני הכבדתי את לבו:

For I hardened his heart – R. Yohanan said: From here there is an opening for heretics to say that **he had no opening** to do *teshuvah*.... R. Shimon ben Lakish said to him: Let the mouths of the heretics be sealed; rather (Prov. 3:34), “To scorers God scorns.” The Holy Blessed One forewarns a person the first time, second and third, and if they do not relent, God locks their heart from *teshuvah* in order to plunder [Ed. – or ‘pay off’] for their sins. The same is true regarding the wicked Pharaoh. Since the Holy Blessed One sent [him warnings] five times [with prior plagues] and he disregarded God’s words, the Holy Blessed One said to him: “You stiffened your neck and hardened your heart; so here I will add impurity to your impurity.” That is: “For I hardened his heart.” What is “hardened”? The Holy Blessed One made his heart like a **liver** – which, when cooked twice, becomes hard. Pharaoh’s heart became like that liver. Because he did not accept the words of the Holy Blessed One, “I hardened his heart.”

Shlomo Katz, “Coming or Going?”

R. Eliyahu Lopian z”l writes: The *Yetzer HaRa* [=negative impulse] has a trick that most people stumble over at some point. If you ask a person, “Why don’t you correct this behavior or that trait?” the *Yetzer HaRa* encourages [them] to answer, “You are right! I know this is a terrible behavior or trait. But, that’s my nature and I cannot change it.”

You should know, declares R. Lopian, that any claim that one “cannot” change borders on heresy! This is evident from Midrash Rabbah, which says that, at first glance, our verse lends support to “heretics” who say that Pharaoh could not change because his heart was hardened.

Why are they wrong? Doesn’t the Torah say that Hashem hardened Pharaoh’s heart and took away his free will? “No!” explains Reish Lakish in the Midrash. Hashem did not take away Pharaoh’s ability to repent; [God] made Pharaoh’s heart “heavy,” meaning that God made [*teshuvah*] more challenging. Reish Lakish says: [God] “locked the door” of *teshuvah* in Pharaoh’s face. But, explains R. Lopian, a locked door does not need to be an obstacle! Granted, a locked door is harder to open than an unlocked door, but it can be opened if one makes the effort to find the key. Or, one can break down the door. Likewise, even when change is difficult, even when one’s heart is “heavy,” there still are ways to change.

We might FEEL like we can’t... but we can.

ON BEING WITH KRISTA TIPPETT (2005)

Exodus 4:10

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה בִּי אֲדֹנָי לֹא
אִישׁ דְּבָרִים אֲנִי גַם מִתְמוּל גַּם
מִשְׁלֵשׁ גַּם מֵאִזְ דְּבַרְךָ אֶל־עַבְדְּךָ כִּי
קָבֵד־פִּה וְקָבֵד לְשׁוֹן אֲנִי:

Moshe said to YHVH, “My Lord, I am not the man of words – not before, long before or now – that Your words to Your servant [say], as I am **slow** of speech and **slow** of tongue.”

Exodus 10:1

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־
פַּרְעֹה כִּי־אֲנִי הַקָּבֵד תִּי אֶת־לְבוֹ
וְאֶת־לֵב עַבְדָּיו לְמַעַן שִׁתִּי אֶת־תִּי
אֵלֶּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ:

YHVH said to Moshe, “Come to Pharaoh, for I **hardened** his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might show these My signs amidst him.

DR. [AVIVA] ZORNBERG: There’s something wrong with [Moses’] speech. Exactly how one is to understand it —

MS. TIPPETT: “Slow of speech and slow of tongue,” in one translation.

DR. ZORNBERG: Yes. “Heavy,” the word he uses: “heavy” – “*kaved peh*” – “heavy mouth.” But the interesting thing is that that word, “heavy,” is the word that the Torah text uses to describe Pharaoh’s heart.

MS. TIPPETT: Right. It’s that same word, is it?

DR. ZORNBERG: It’s the same word. There are several words used of Pharaoh’s heart, as his heart is constantly hardened in the course of the 10 plagues. But one of them is this word “*kaved*,” “heavy,” which means, really, somehow resistant, impervious, closed off. And it seems to me that can’t be by accident, that you have the same word used.

MS. TIPPETT: That echo.

DR. ZORNBERG: Yes. It seems to me that Moses’s sense of himself is – it’s a very deep sense of not being able to open himself to the word of God, to such an extent that he is willing to forgo the opportunity to redeem the people, because he is simply not the right person for this. The most extraordinary image he uses about his speech capacity is when he says he is “*aral s’fatayim*,” which literally means that he has uncircumcised lips. And he says it twice.

MS. TIPPETT: What does that mean? What does that mean? I mean, when it gets translated into English it just doesn’t make any sense.

DR. ZORNBERG: Yes, it is odd. It’s as if an operation needs to be performed on him, as if he is a newborn baby, as his whole people are newborn babies; an operation needs to be performed, which is called circumcision, so as to open up the possibility of healthy communication with the world. There’s a kind of connection

here between language and sexuality, which I find fascinating. Both have to do with the possibility of communicating.

MS. TIPPETT: And relationship.

DR. ZORNBERG: Relationship, yes, yes. And Moses is very sensitive to the problem that he has and that he senses the people also have. So the whole situation as I understand it as the story begins is not a simple one of a cruel, persecuting Pharaoh and poor, helpless victims. **It's poor, helpless victims who will need in some way to arouse within themselves the capacity to be redeemed, that is to open themselves to relationship, to communication.** I'd like to suggest that the whole story really is about the need for the **people to be more than an object that has to be yanked out of Egypt.** But for the people to become, to acquire the kind of life and openness and communicability that makes them want to emerge from that place of death which is Egypt.

MS. TIPPETT: Let's talk about the Pharaoh himself that, for such a long time, as you say, he hardens his own heart and God brings punishment, plagues, which Moses, sort of, I guess he announces doesn't he, the frogs and lice and locusts and pestilence, but it's only after a number of those and after the people get boils, the people of Egypt, that then suddenly the text says that "God hardened Pharaoh's heart," and I don't know, maybe you could tell me if the Hebrew gives more nuance to that. But what is that saying there about the nature of Pharaoh or the oppressor, if that's what he stands for, and also the nature of this God who is rescuing Israel? Talk to me about that part of the narrative.

DR. ZORNBERG: Well, it's really quite a theological problem, actually, which the midrash pays a lot of attention to. And that is that if God hardens Pharaoh's heart, then, obviously, Pharaoh's not responsible anymore for his intransigence. Why should he be punished? It's God who is interfering with his vital organs. And the classic direction to answer it has to do with **reaching a point of no return, that one can make oneself obdurate and closed to all appeal from the outside world to such a point that, in fact, it's as if human autonomy ceases to act altogether.** One no longer has the power to backtrack. And, from that point onwards, I think it's a kind of figure of speech then to say that God hardens his heart.