

Commission on Jewish Continuity
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Dvar Torah - Parashat Bo

There is a story, probably true, about Harav Yehuda Amital, a Holocaust survivor and great religious Zionist and founder and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion in Alon Shvut. Whenever he would be asked to give a Dvar Torah in the Yeshiva, he would invariably utilize a word or phrase from the first pasuk/verse of the weekly Parasha and build his entire Drasha/lecture from that pasuk.

Once, during a rare opportunity that the American men studying for their year-in-Israel after high school had to meet with the Rosh Yeshiva, one of the guys got up the nerve and asked the Rabbi - why is it that you always use the first Pasuk of the Parasha as the source for your Divrey Torah? Each Parasha has so much in it.

He smiled and his eyes twinkled as he immediately responded: "you know, you are absolutely right, but when I start looking in the Parasha each week, I always start at the beginning and invariably, a word or a phrase catches my eye, and I am totally enthralled with an idea or sequence of thoughts that are catalyzed by that word or phrase and I can't continue any further into the Parasha. That's why my shiur on the weekly parasha is always from the first pasuk."

With Rabbi Amital's permission, I want to say a word about the 2nd pasuk in this week's Parasha, but only since it starts with the "vav hachibbur" a conjunctive vav that inextricably links the first two psukim together.

The first verse tells us that HaShem asks Moshe to return to Pharaoh another time. This is the Pharaoh who has repeatedly waffled on whether or not the Hebrew slaves can be freed and, each time, has brought increasingly terrible calamities on himself and his Egyptian society. Why has G-d engineered this state of affairs? The verse continues that it is "in order to demonstrate the definitive signs of G-d's power and mastery to the Egyptians and, according to the 18th century scholar and mystic R. Chayim Atar of Morocco, even to the Jewish people as well (to renew our faith)!

OK, so the leader and people in Egypt need to see G-d's power. Maybe that would induce their leader to free the slaves - indeed this does happen. But comes the next verse and continues the purpose of the Makkot, "and in order that you shall recount to your children and grandchildren what I did in Egypt, and the wonders that happened there, so that you will all know that I am HaShem."

Who are the "Banim and Bnay Banim" that the Torah is describing?

There is a beautiful answer provided by Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Neriah, another profoundly important religious Zionist, a devoted student of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook (the first Chief Rabbi of Israel), and one of the inspirational leaders of the Bnei Akiva (religious youth) movement in Israel (and today around the world).

He reminds us that there were only two Jewish children who were not present in Egypt during all the miracles and wonders that were directly observed by the people. They are Gershom and Eliezer, the two sons of Moshe. Where were they during all the time that

comprised Yetziat Mitzrayim - the Exodus? They were with Yitro's family in Midian. Moshe leaves them there after the experience of the "sneh", the burning bush where G-d instructs him to return to Egypt and bring the people out.

Wait a minute, are we saying that the children of the greatest leader of our people, the man who received the Torah on Sinai and came as close as any person to experiencing what being close to HaShem is like, it was his children who were not present to see the outstretched hand of G-d?

Answers R. Neriah: When all the parents of children who left Mitzrayim gathered the next year on the anniversary of the Exodus to recount the story (the Seder night), there wasn't much to say. After all, they had ALL been there. They had a shared memory, a shared excitement.

Ah, but there was one father, one teacher, who could sit in his tent with his family and tell the story of the Exodus in its full glory, with each of its special and transformative events, to provide his family with an experiential and dramatic telling of the story so that the adults could re-experience the deliverance from Mitzrayim. This person was Moshe and the spellbound listeners of this great story were his own children, Gershom and Eliezer.

This story, destined to be retold generation after generation was inspired by Moshe's telling of the story to his family and it continues to bring sparkles to the eyes of our children and grandchildren to this very day.

It is no coincidence that this Mitzvah of Sippur (retelling our Jewish story), begins with us, the adults. G-d wanted it to be such; that we, as the adults, would take the responsibility of not only caring for our story but use it to strengthen our faith, our Emunah, in our amazing past and our glorious future.

By volunteering our time and energy on behalf of the Commission, and, by extension, our unique and vibrant Boston Jewish community, we demonstrate how important it is to take the best of the blessings we are provided and ensure that our Jewish story is not only preserved but also strengthened for our brothers and sisters and the generations that will follow us.

R. Neriah concludes: "yesh le-chayot et chaye ha-sha-ah b-omkan" (we must live/experience our present, our lives, fully and deeply) "u'lehagi-ah l'oto n'kudah she-bah heyim govlim im chaye olam" (and yet, we must work hard to reach that special moment, the "tipping point" as it were, where our present merges with our future, where we have ensured our Continuity).

May G-d bless the good work that we do here and in all parts of our lives and may we all be blessed with a Shabbat Shalom; not only a Shabbat of Shalom: peace and tranquility of spirit, but also a Shabbat of Shaleym: fulfillment and completeness.

Shabbat Shalom