



ALYSSA GREENBERG
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PLAGUES – TAKE TWO

Parshat Bo begins with the eighth plague and continues until (spoiler) Pharaoh lets the Jews go free, in what will become one of the most celebrated and remembered moments of our collective national history. It is interesting to note that the parsha begins in the middle of the series of plagues, as opposed to presenting all ten together. Clearly, there must be significance to this separation.

A possible understanding is taught by Rav Moshe Lichtenstein: the objective of the first seven plagues was for the Egyptians to recognize Hashem, and this is fulfilled by Pharaoh saying, “חטאתי הפעם ה' הצדיק ואני ועמי הרשעים” (Shemot 9:27). The final three plagues serve to destroy Egypt and its economy, thus forcing Pharaoh to let the Jews go immediately. The locusts finish off all grains and crops, the darkness brings the people to a complete standstill, and the plague of the firstborn is the ultimate destruction and ruin.

Another understanding is that of Rav Ezra Bick. According to Rav Bick, in Parshat Va'era the goal of the plagues was for the Egyptians to recognize Hashem's power. However, for the final three plagues, the purpose is that the Jews recognize Hashem's power. Hashem tells Moshe at the start of the parsha, “ולמען תספר באזני בנך ... וידעתם כי אני ה'” (Shemot 10:2).

In the final plague, the Jews for the first time must take action in order not to be part of the Egyptian punishment. The Egyptians have already acknowledged Hashem's sovereignty in the previous parsha, and now the Jews must stand up and do the same. Marking the doorposts was more than acknowledging Hashem; it was acting on those beliefs. The difference between the Egyptian acknowledgment of Hashem and ours is that we took a step forward and actualized our beliefs with blood. Only once we have the courage to mark our doorposts will we be able to step through the doorway and become Hashem's nation once and for all.

Shabbat Shalom!





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CHOOSING FREEDOM

Freedom is more than just leaving slavery; it is the freedom to be ourselves and the power to choose our own actions. It is deciding who we listen to and whom we ultimately serve. Throughout the parsha, we see that freedom is not just something you get; it is something you have to keep.

Indeed, just as quickly as Pharaoh kicked us out of Egypt, he ran after us to re-enslave us. Pharaoh was free to do the right thing, but he easily re-enslaved himself by returning to his old ways.

When the Jewish people left Egypt, they did more than just escape a bad situation; they chose to take responsibility for their own lives and their own identity. That choice is the reason we exist as a free nation today.

The Maharal of Prague explained this idea beautifully. He taught that freedom is not just about where you are standing, but about who you are on the inside. A slave is someone who has no “center” of their own; they simply do what others tell them. A free person is someone who owns their own soul.

“A slave who is released is just a ‘former slave.’ But a person who connects to their soul becomes a ‘free being.’ One is a change in your situation; the other is a change in who you are.”

Even today, thousands of years later, there are still people who do not want the Jewish people to be free. Yet we continue to choose freedom every single day-through our values, our good deeds, and our connection to Hashem. Every time we choose to do what is right instead of what is easy, we are leaving Egypt all over again. ■

Seeking Shalom

What do we mean by the word “shalom”? Which takes precedence when there is a conflict, “shalom” or “emet”?



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Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter

University Professor of Jewish History & Jewish Thought | Rosh Chaburah, RIETS | Yeshiva University



Opening remarks
Rabbanit Malke Bina

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