



Parshat Bo: Midnight Mindfulness

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

The most awesome moment leading up to the Exodus from Egypt, was the moment Hashem executed the plague of the firstborn. Precisely at midnight Hashem Himself, smote the Egyptian firstborn while all the children of Israel, were ensconced in their homes eating the Pascal lamb.

So much about this plague is unusual. First, this is the only plague for which a precise time is indicated, it was performed without the use of an intermediary, and the Israelites seemed to need protection through the performance of a specific *mitzvah*. Our firstborns still continue the commemoration of this great kindness by fasting on *Erev Pesach*.

The Medrash tells us that the angels actually challenged Hashem's decision to save the Israelite firstborn. After all, they argued, both the Egyptians and the Israelites worship idols. Why save the Israelites? But Hashem, out of His great love for us whom He considered His firstborn, spared us.

The Sifsei Chaim explains that when we celebrate the *Seder* each year, we reenact the Israelite experience of that night, and we merit the great revelation of Hashem's presence, just as it was revealed on that first Passover night. Hashem descending as an Individual without any "aides" is a revelation of His total strength and glory. It is an overwhelming experience.

The Sifsei Chaim explains based on the Netziv that a firstborn child has a greater capacity for spirituality than subsequent births, so much so that all firstborns were originally destined to be the priests in the *Beit*

Hamikdash. This heightened spiritual capacity was also inherent in the Egyptian firstborn. But the Egyptians were so immersed in depravity that they were incapable of receiving the gift of Divine revelation. The shock to their system when Hashem revealed Himself so powerfully was what killed them, rather than an act of God. The phrase "*uvemorah gadol*", and with great awe (or fear, or terror) appears with no other plague save with the death of the firstborn.

In contrast, says the Alei Shor, The Israelite response to this great revelation was one of *dveikus*, of forging an intimate relationship with Hashem. This clarity of vision became the eternal hallmark of the Jewish people, marking the reciprocal love between us and Hashem. It is the recognition of our own smallness, says the Sifsei Chaim, that suppresses our ego and impels us to perform *mitzvot* out of love. We understand that we are unworthy of all that Hashem gives us, that He sustains us and showers us with blessings as a result of His love for us rather than as a reward or merit for our performing *mitzvot*. This love, says Rabbi J. Sachs is unconditional and irrational, and manifests itself through Hashem's giving to us irrationally. Similarly, our love and performance of *mitzvot* should also be a tribute to Him of our unconditional love for Him. Indeed, the *mitzvot* Hashem asked us to perform in Egypt prior to our redemption were irrational and even dangerous. Our males were to undergo surgery just before undertaking a major journey, and we were to take a deity of Egypt, a lamb, tie it up for four days in full view of our oppressors, and then slaughter it as an offering to Hashem.

The Shvilei Pinchas explains that with the performance of these *mitzvot*, we showed Hashem how dedicated we were to His will. We were symbolically taking our own blood and applying it to the doorposts of our homes, for hadam hu hanefesh, blood is the actual life force of man. We were indicating that we want to take our our negative drives, uproot them from our being, leave them outside our homes, and become total servants to Hashem.

Rabbi Jonathan Sachs based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that according to strict justice, the Israelites should have succumbed to this plague. But Hashem defies characterization. He is both strict justice and pure loving kindness. Each half of the night represents one of these attributes. As night descends and goes deeper into darkness, it portrays harsh justice, and as it then progresses toward the light of day, that darkness is held back, permitting the light of loving kindness to emerge. Midnight is the synapse of these forces, the moment God chose to make His presence immanent on earth through both of these attributes, slaying the Egyptian firstborn and saving the Israelite firstborn.

Netivot Shalom notes that we were drowning in the dark waters of Egyptian culture. There was not a moment to lose. Our Father, even though He was still wearing His Kingly robes, jumped directly into that maelstrom to save us. This act was a demonstration of absolute love, a love we feel throughout our history as He continues to support us through our long and challenging exile.



Keeping the Mind Connected in Prayer Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tzipora Heller

The third kind of revival is *techiat hameitim*, the revival of the dead which will take place during the Messianic era. When a person dies, his body disintegrates but his soul lives on. Most people on a gut level know this and that is why we have death rituals, we respect the dead and bury them with honor.

This world is one where Hashem gives us many choices and many times we may falter and choose wrong. After *Mashiach* comes, evil will become irrelevant and we will reach a point where the soul will rejoin the body and now make choices between good and higher levels of good. If you observe how a seed rots and then regenerates, you can believe that a body can disintegrate and become alive again. If you've ever repented for something, you know the soul can find redemption. But only Hashem, who holds all the cards in His hands, can make this happen.

The blessing of *Mechaye Hameitim* begins with the words, "You are powerful to the world Hashem." In Hebrew, the word *olam* means

the world in a sense of its physical reality. But it also means eternity. Everything that occupies space and exists in time is called the world. But *olam* can be turned into *hitalem* which means concealed and refers to Hashem's invisible hand, necessary to maintain free choice.. "You Hashem are powerful." You hold all the cards, but you chose to hide behind the Japanese mask of nature.

"Great is your saving power." Every time we make a mistake, Hashem gives us the opportunity to start again. Almost parenthetically, we then put in our request for rain. When rain comes down to the earth, it makes what seems dead come alive again. The Gemara says that a rainy day is greater than the day the *Torah* was given. What we see when rain falls, is life force descending to the world. We're witnessing revival but we're so sunk in physicality that we don't even notice it.

The blessing of *Mechaye Hameitim* isn't so much a request for rain, as much as it portrays

Hashem's power as a reviver, although He's hidden in the world. Through rain, Hashem nourishes the world with kindness. When there's no rain, the problem isn't Hashem failing to sustain us, but us not living the way He willed us to live.

"You support those who are falling." This is written in the present tense. As people fall, Hashem holds them up and keeps them from obliterating themselves. "You heal the sick." Although, our bodies contain toxins, we don't die. Hashem miraculously enables the body to heal itself. "Who is like you, Master of powers." There are a lot of sources of power in the world, but none are comparable to Hashem. Only He holds the critical keys of survival, rainfall that brings life to the world, life and death, sustenance, and the ultimate revival of the dead. The cycle of life and death isn't an endless circle. It's a spiral. Every generation brings the scattered pieces that will ultimately form a whole, closer together.

Shir Shel Yom Shlishi Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

"*Ani amarti Elokim atah.*" Hashem says, I made you my partner to create the world along with me. But if you don't judge properly, you will reduce yourself to a level of a human who has no part of the divine essence within him. Then we will need to tell Hashem, "*Kuma Hashem shafta ha'aretz...*" - Rise up Hashem and judge the world." Take charge and rescue the poor and destitute that were judged without justice. "*Ki ata tinchal b'chol hagoyim* - All the nations are your possessions."

On the third day of creation, Hashem commanded the waters to gather into rivers and oceans and dry land was revealed. As long as the whole world was covered with water there was no way for humans to exist. The beginning of existence of humanity was enabled when the waters moved away and created dry land for humans to settle. On a deeper level, after earth was revealed, creation began. Hashem commanded the earth to bring forth trees, fruits, flowers etc. Living creatures also came also from the earth as did man. Everything came from earth and will eventually return to earth. Chazal say,

"*Hakol hayhe m'eafar* -Everything came from earth. *V'afilu galgal chama* -even the sun." Earth is the unifying life source. It's like having ten children in a family where everyone is different. They are still one family because they come from the same parents. Earth unites all the details into one composite. Two is a couple while three is considered a group. The concept of a whole is connected to the third day and the creation of earth.

Adato refers to *Klal Yisrael*. Every person is an individual. But the Jewish nation is considered one because we come from one source and will return to one source. We were created for one purpose, to fulfill the will of Hashem and we are united by this mission. We take everything that was created and bring it back to Hashem by the way we use it. There are many creations in this world, each an entity on its own. But if there are people who serve Hashem, who use all of creation to elevate His name, then they unite the world into one creation that was created to serve Him. Not only does this connect all of creation to Hashem, it connects all of us to each other.

Chazal say that there are 600,000 letters in the *Torah* and every Jew corresponds to one letter. The *halacha* is that if one letter is missing in the *Torah*, it becomes unfit to be used. Although we are many, we are one. That is why when the *Torah* discusses the seventy people of the house of Yaakov who went down to *Mitzrayim*, the *Torah* refers to them in the singular form, "*Kol hanefesh habaah im Yaakov.*" They were one soul, one entity. In contrast, when the *Torah* counts the people of Eisav it refers to them as nefashot- many individuals.

Our body is made up of numerous parts, each a marvelous perfect entity on its own. Yet at the same time all these parts make up one human. What makes it into one is the soul. The moment the soul departs, it's not one anymore. What creates togetherness is the spiritual source. It's the same with the Jewish nation. When we are connected to Hashem, when each one of us lives up to the fact that we are each a letter in the *Torah*, that we are holy, we become one.