

Introduction to Parsha #15: Bo¹

<i>Torah:</i>	Exodus 10:1 - 13:16
<i>Haftarah:</i>	Jeremiah 46:14-28
<i>B'rit Chadasha:</i>	Romans 12: 1-21



***Tell the mighty things I have done in Egypt
in the hearing of your sons and your son's sons.
[Exodus 10:2(a)]***

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #12, *Sh'ma Koleinu - Hear Our Cry!*

***Vayomer Adonai el-Moshe* – and the Holy One said to Moshe ... **Bo** ['Go!'] Exodus 10:1a.**

The greatest mass migration of human beings in the history of the world is about to begin. What we are about to witness will be a march of millions. From vantage points above this is going to look like a great swarm of insects exiting the Nile Valley and heading out into the desert. What a scene! What a story! What an exodus! Fortunately for us Torah's Author is intent on providing us a front row seat from which to take in all the action.

***Please Take Your Seats, Ladies and Gentlemen!
The Greatest Show On Earth is About to Begin!***

The powerful series of 'great nations' contractions that Egypt has been experiencing are about to enter the critical final stage. We will soon be set free from Pharaoh's dark domain of materiality, idolatry, death-obsession, sexual perversion, and sentimentality. Accompanied by a mixed multitude from every nation, tribe, and tongue who, like us, have had all of Western Culture they can stomach, we will 'Bo' - and thus will begin the Greatest Adventure of human history.

A rapid succession of traumatic events will unfold before our eyes. Out of all the trauma, however, something wonderful beyond human imagination is going to

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come forth: another facet of the promised ‘*Messiah protocol*’ is going to be revealed. Messiah will be seen in the form of a gentle lamb by Whose Blood the doors to redemption and deliverance will be thrown open. Meanwhile, Yosef will take center stage once more. Though at the beginning of the parsha Yosef’s remains will lay very, very still in a box carved from Egyptian wood, by the end of the parsha those bones will lead the way out of the dark, foreboding shadow of Egyptian bondage and into the glorious light of Divine Deliverance.

***Embracing the Marks of Distinction
the Holy One Has Designed for Us –
For the Sake of the Grand Redemptive Plan***

In the course of *Bo* the Holy One will reveal a set of marks of distinction that He wants all citizens of His model collective to embrace – signs that clearly reveal that our identity is not defined by, nor our citizenship of, any nation, culture, ethnic group, philosophy, ideology, and religion of this earth. What are to be the critical marks of distinction that the Holy One has in mind to set us apart from the ‘raging nations’ among which we are deployed, yet simultaneously *increase our ability to inspire and bring hope of redemption to all people?*

1. *The faith-based, gentle, meek, kind, peaceable disposition*

vs.

the hardness of heart and inciteful rhetoric distinction

The world has more than enough offended, outraged, self-righteous, lashon *hara*-speaking people in it. Bullet-point parrots, propaganda-spreaders, complaint-peddlers, profane chant-spouting protestors, pop-theology debaters, and angry rant addicts are a dime a dozen. What the world needs – and what the Holy One wants to provide in us - is a healthy, inspiring alternative. There are multitudes of critical, cynical, sarcastic, depressed, name-calling, blame-placing, label-pasting people in all the nations - people who are, like Pharaoh of old, absolutely supercharged with negativity. People of such a mindset approach every situation ready to incline their ear to gossip and hype, then rush to judgment and/or outrage based on how their flesh reacts to that gossip and/or hype. You can find these folks everywhere. We are supposed to recognize them, and love and care about them just as we love and care about every other lost, sick, broken, perverse soul in need of redemption – but we are never, ever supposed to look like, think like, eat like, talk like, react like, or behave like them. We are called to be radically different. We are called to be – and bear the distinctive marks of - a ‘counterculture’. No matter what the world throws at us, what we are called to do is stay calm. Our first essential mark of distinction is that we choose to resist the negative energy and outrage that keeps coming in waves from the world around us. We are to remain joyful. We are to stay meek and peaceable. We are to keep focused on and engaged in the tasks to which the Holy

One has assigned us instead of getting distracted and caught up in the fruitless drama of the news of the day. And we are always to trust the Holy One to judge, discipline, or redeem men and nations as He in His Wisdom and sole discretion sees fit – instead of whining, complaining, or insisting on airing our own opinion in the marketplaces of angry voices and failed ideologies.

Wear this mark of distinction well! Until you do, your impact on the world will be minimal, and the amount of blessing and gifting the Holy One can entrust to you is seriously limited.

2. The ‘radiating light’

vs.

the ‘absorbing darkness’ distinction

The second mark of distinction the Holy One reveals for His Covenant Partners in this world is that we are always supposed to emanate and draw people to Divine Light – instead of absorbing and getting obsessed by the world’s dark energy. Divine Light is the energy of wisdom, and is focused on redemption, restoration, and reconciliation. Divine Light focuses the attention of men on the spiritual inspiration of beauty, potential, majesty, and wonder. It speaks the language of humility, faith, hope and inspiration. Darkness, on the other hand, is the energy of folly. It is obsessed with the negative emotions of blame and shame, accusation and labeling, disgust and abhorrence, and crime and punishment. Darkness always focuses the attention of men on base fleshly fears and urges, ignominy, ugliness, and failure. It speaks the language of condescension, sarcasm, irreverence, and pseudo-intellectual cynicism.

So ... are you emanating Divine Light as you have been called and empowered to do? Or have you gone over to, and aligned yourself with, the ‘dark side’?

3. The Calendar of Glorious Divine Redemption

vs.

the calendar of Pharaohs, Popes, and Caesars distinction

The world counts its years and chooses its days of rest and/or celebration by the decree of mere men; we, by contrast, are called to view and relate to time in ways that draw attention to the great unfolding plan of redemption and restoration authored by our Covenant Partner in Heaven. Whatever they do, whatever they decree, whatever they celebrate – we are to be on a very, very different schedule.

So ... how are you doing on this? What day, what month, what year do you think this is? And what is the next special day you intend to celebrate or observe? The answer to these questions will tell you very quickly which – and whose - calendar you are most closely aligned with.

4. The blood of the Covenant on our doorposts

vs.

a door left open for the death angel Distinction

The world opens its minds, hearts, homes, and hearths wide to every destructive, death-causing idea, concept, and force in the universe. The world celebrates and throws banquets in honor of everything unclean and common profane. Then they wonder why their children suffer. The Covenant People of the Holy One are called to remain focused on *sh'ma*-ing and walking out in real time the Holy One's wise instructions. We are to have the blood of the lamb on our doorposts, and we are to keep our children focused on their identity, mission, and destiny in the Covenant rather than the entertainment and perverse ways of the cultures around us.

There are, of course, a few more important marks of distinction that the Holy One is going to lay out for us in *Bo*. I will not spend time pointing them out. Consider it your task, this week, to find them, embrace them, and begin to walk in them. Just remember –you are not better than anyone else in the world; but you ARE different from them. The marks of distinction to which the Holy One has called you are not supposed to isolate you from the world; they are instead supposed to inspire and draw the people of the world.

The Final Contractions of the Great-Nation Birthing Narrative

Welcome to *the parsha of the Mighty Hand and the Outstretched Arm*. Welcome to the parsha in which the Divine season of deliverance the Creator promised to Avraham in Genesis 15:14 and the Divine season of visitation promised to Avraham's seed in Genesis 50:24-25 come forth simultaneously in real time. Welcome to *the parsha of lamb's blood, bitter herbs and matzah*. Welcome to *the parsha of the midnight cry*. Welcome to *the Parsha of Prototypical Travail*. Welcome to the parsha of finally awakening to, embracing, and walking in radical separation and redemption.

This is the parsha that chronicles the events leading up to actual departure of our ancestors from the dark land of puzzles, pyramids, and pathos. And this is the week the Holy One has ordained to break us free from the land of seemingly pleasant distractions that trap the unwary in a swirling cycle of captivity, enslavement, and death. Each year when we delve into this parsha the sheer power of the narrative causes something within us to shudder and to tremble. That is, of course, by Divine Design. The story virtually leaps off the pages to breathe life into dry bones, to defibrillate diseased hearts, and to awaken sleepwalking souls.

The four action-packed chapters of this parsha focus on by far the messiest and most traumatic part of the fascinating process of Divine Nation birthing. This is the

monumental week when the deliverance of the Holy One becomes manifest in real time. Near the end of this parsha over 600,000 Hebrew men, along with probably twice as many Hebrew women and children, accompanied by a multitude of persons of mixed descent [*i.e.* many nations/ethnicities/cultures] who cast their lot with the Hebrews, will walk right out of *Mitzrayim* to begin the most amazing odyssey the race of mankind has ever known.

In this parsha the Holy One will finally make good on His promise to redeem the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov from bondage to the cultures, mindsets, and self-obsessed patterns of thought, speech, and behavior that appear to rule in this world. In the process He will wean the confused hearts and conflicted affections of the people He has chosen away from the seductive embrace of, and their fatal attraction to, their neighbors' *worldview, priorities, and lifestyle*. The process of deliverance will not be *pretty*. It will by no means be either *painless* or *bloodless*. But then again, the birthing process *never is*.

The Grand Symphony of Redemption

Bo contains all the elements of a grand symphony. Its narrative consists of four clearly distinguishable movements, each of which possesses its own unique style, mood, and tempo. The opening section, a captivating *allegro*, centers around the great locust invasion. The second section, an eerily quiet *adagio*, focuses upon the three-day plague of supernatural darkness. The third part, a frenzied *scherzo*, describes the flurry of activity and raw emotions of the fortnight that culminated in the awesome night the Angel of Death struck down the firstborn. And the fourth and final movement, a *glorious crescendo*, captures the exuberance and triumph of the morning of great departure – the bright new dawn for humanity when a mixed multitude from all nations joined the descendants of Yisrael in a great march from a state of *tohu v'vohu v'choshek* to freedom and far, far beyond.

The narrative of *Bo* constantly challenges our minds even as it inspires our souls. It compels us to stop, weep, and humbly give thanks for our undeserved deliverance even as it propels us to dance for joy through the doorway it throws open into *zeman cheruteinu* – *the season of our freedom*.

In order to prepare ourselves for the monumental week to come – replete with an invasion of locusts, three days of lost time under a complete blackout of supernatural darkness, the *first rampage of the Death Angel*, and the *first Great Exodus*, let's step back and review a little. After all, especially at this critical stage in the nation-birthing story, it is very important to keep all the events about which we read *in perspective*.

Looking Back ... Before Forging Ahead

Two weeks ago as we relived the events of parsha *Sh'mot* we learned that the Holy One had, in response to the 'cry' of innocent blood in Egypt, *opened a portal of Divine Communication* on Mount Sinai. The portal started manifesting in the form of *a holy fire*. A thorn bush suddenly burst into flame. But that was *only the beginning*. An eighty-year-old shepherd and fugitive from Egyptian justice witnessed the spectacle and soon found that he had *caught the fire* that burned in the thorn bush. That same fire now burns in a man's *eyes*, in his *heart*, in his *hand*, and even in his *shepherd's rod*. He is no longer a shepherd. He is no longer a *fugitive*. He is no longer hiding in the wilderness, content merely for himself, his wife, and his children to survive. He is no longer running from either his past or his destiny, or nursing his hurts, or cowering in fear of either rejection or reprisal. He is no longer seething with anger over things he cannot change or refusing to acknowledge the simplicity of his calling. He is now a prophet of the Most High God. He is finally settling into that role. And he now *stands in the very courts of Pharaoh's government* without the slightest twinge of fear of what any man or army of men could do to him. He now *speaks the decrees of Heaven's government in Pharaoh's ear* – though he knows full well that Pharaoh is not going to – was not intended to – believe or listen to anything he has to say. And he *punctuates his delivery of Heaven's decrees by calling forth signs and wonders*.

Moshe the prophet has finally learned that he has not been sent to argue Pharaoh – or anyone else into or out of anything. He now knows that Pharaoh is never going to either *like him* or *agree with him*. He now knows that he has not been called forth so dramatically at such an important time as this to *win friends* or *influence people* - or to establish a ministry mailing list.

Moshe now knows that what he is called to, like *Shifra* and *Puah*, is a form of *midwifery*. *Shifra* and *Puah* were called to oversee and walk women in the midst of the pangs of labor through the trauma of giving birth to Hebrew babies. Moshe, on the other hand, is called to oversee and walk the nation of Egypt, as it experiences the pangs of labor, through the trauma of giving birth to *the Hebrew nation*. And if in the course of doing what he was created to do, he perishes ... well, he just perishes. But if he perishes he knows that it will not be by reason of any Egyptian lance or arrow or sword. If he perishes he knows that it will be by reason of being *consumed by the great fire that has burned in his heart and mind and soul since the day he stared into the thorn bush on Mount Sinai*.

Isn't it time we all caught a fire like that? Isn't it time such a fire burned in our eyes? Isn't it time such a fire burned in our *prayers*? Isn't it time such a fire burned in our *hearts*? Isn't it time such a fire burned in our *souls*? Selah, Dear Reader. It is

indeed time for all these things.

The First Seven Wonders Associated with The Birth of the Hebrew Nation

In last week's parsha we read about the first seven of the ten signs and wonders with which the Holy One performed to validate Moshe's message that *the kingdom of Heaven was at hand*. We saw the Holy One begin to "appear" last week and make Himself "known" - to *Pharaoh* and all *Mitzrayim* [Egypt], on the one hand, and to a rag-tag bunch of recently out-of-work slaves beginning to regather at a semi-oasis area in the delta region of Northern Egypt known as "Goshen", on the other hand.

If you will recall, *Va'era* began the sheep-herder-turned-prophet tentatively standing in front of the most powerful king of the most powerful nation on earth with a request he knew the monarch did not want to hear: ***Shalach et-ami!*** ["Send my people out!"]. The "appearing" of the Holy One quickly proceeded to a phase of what looked to an outsider like a duel between magicians. Then, however, it got deadly serious as wave after wave of inexplicable, indeed supernatural occurrences punctuated the crazy Hebrew prophet's "***Shalach et-ami!***" ["Send my people out!"] message with bold exclamation point after bold exclamation point.

During the course of last week's readings we in one sense *observed as spectators* and in another sense *personally experienced* the first seven supernatural occurrences that English speakers have come to call 'the plagues'. We saw *the Nile River running red with blood* for seven days. We saw a nightmarish *invasion of swamp creatures* throw both populace and palace into a panic. We saw *specks of dust throughout Egypt turning into blood-sucking parasitic creatures* something like lice that attacked both man and beast. We saw *waves of predatory beasts*, from lions, tigers, bears, jackals and wolves to scorpions emerge as if from everywhere and cause terror in every Egyptian city, village, and neighborhood. We saw *thousands of horses, donkeys, camels, oxen and sheep owned by Pharaoh stricken with disease* and die. We saw handfuls of ash from Pharaoh's furnace tossed in the air by Moshe and Aharon spread across Egypt, fall on the remaining animals and on all Egyptians, and cause *horrible and incapacitating blisters, boils and running sores*, almost like anthrax. And most recently we saw the entire crop of barley and flax destroyed – and some stubborn men and their animals killed – by *a hailstorm the likes of which has never been seen*.

Do you wonder what it was like to live in Egypt at such a time as this? Perhaps it would help us prepare for this week's parsha if we looked at what has been going on through the eyes of Pharaoh instead our own. Let's read a few excerpts from

what might have been *Pharaoh's diary*!²

A Few Pages From Pharaoh's Diary

I am none other than Pharaoh – the Bright and Morning Star. I am *the avatar of the great Horus* – the god of the sun, moon, sky, and war. I am *the son of truth*. It is I, and I alone, who has the right and responsibility to determine on earth who should live and who should die, who should eat and who should starve, and who should live in opulent splendor and who should suffer in poverty. But lately something strange is happening ... to me ... to my land ... to my people. Everything seems to be *changing, crumbling, before my eyes*.

My earthly kingdom - the kingdom the gods entrusted to my fathers - is in the height of its majesty - yet, suddenly it *shakes like a reed in the wind*. My mighty army - which has run roughshod over every nation, tribe, and clan it has ever faced - *cowers helplessly in fear and shame*. My wise men - who oversee nations and govern continents with the utmost of sagacity - suddenly *babble nonsense like village idiots*. The priests of the Temples of Amon and Re - whose incantations transform reality into whatever I choose or direct - *sulk like scolded children*.

My legacy - the great storage cities that are designed to declare the majesty of Egypt and its superiority over all other lands as well as *my superiority over all mere kings of earth* - sit *uninhabited like ghost towns*. Those marvels of engineering were only half-completed when the terror we cannot explain, and which we thus far seem powerless to stop, brought all the work to a halt as the slave peoples - and my overseers - all *ran like rabbits for shelter*.

Even my own son - the heir to the kingdom of Egypt, who lives in a fortress palace surrounded by the strongest bodyguards and armed guards in the world - *cannot sleep for fear of his life*, from some unseen force no one understands. I too - though I cannot explain it and dare not let it be known – have for the first time in my life experienced what mortals speak of as *fear*. What *is this* that is happening?

And who is doing this to me?

No vast horde of raging Mongols or Visigoths would dare to threaten me - their mighty men bow before me as a god and their chieftains pay me tribute and tremble when I speak. No mastermind of superior weapons of war has been

² The following literary monologue is of course not a historic document. No 'diary' has been found discussing the events of the Exodus from Pharaoh's perspective. What I present here is therefore merely a literary device invented to assist the reader in 'personally experiencing' the awesome signs and wonders the Holy One performed on our behalf to win our deliverance, earn our trust and affection, and prepare us not only for the betrothal ceremony He has planned for us on Mt. Sinai, but for life on earth as a 'kingdom of priests', as a peculiar treasure people for Him, and as a 'holy nation'.

arrayed against me – my war chariots, mobile archery towers, catapults and armor are unmatched in the world. So ... *who then could it be?* Who has wrought these horrifying waves of devastation and destruction upon my kingdom? Is it - could it be - *the two Hebrews?* Can it really be that a stuttering Hebrew magician and his loud-mouthed brother - armed only with a silly shepherd's rod - are somehow responsible for dismantling the greatest empire the world has ever known? It is inconceivable. I will not entertain the thought. It cannot be the Hebrews. It cannot be. It *cannot*.

But if not the wild-eyed ones called Moshe and Aharon, then who? Their “*God*”?

I know not their “God”!

I am the earthly avatar of *Horus*. I know the great *Amon*. I know the awesome *Re*. I know *Osiris*, *Isis*, *Sobek*, *Khensu* the moon god – all these I know. All the hosts of Egypt, the consorts of my fathers for centuries, I know. These have been my aloof companions, and have brought to me and to my fathers before me abundant honor, success and prosperity. These have given me pre-eminence over all the noblest of races of the earth. These have made all other peoples - *including the Hebrews* - mere slaves of mine. *These* are gods!

And what kind of deity could Moshe's “*God*” be - whose people are helpless slaves, who have no king, who have no land of their own, and who depend upon me and my land for their very existence, much less their food. This “*Yod-hey-vav-hey*” of Moshe's cannot be much of a “*God*”, surely. And yet when I stand before the images of *Amon* and *Re* and *Osiris* in these horrible dark hours and offer my prayers and incantations and call for fire to consume Moshe and his brother - the gods of my fathers are strangely mute. They stand like stones, with hollow eyes. And they neither speak nor act. And no fire comes forth.

Meanwhile Moshe and his brother keep spouting their blasphemy and demanding - it is unthinkable - that I “let their people go”. They walk in and out of my palace and my court at will - and no one can, or at least will, stop them. What is worse, while my gods are deathly silent, whenever the Hebrew stands before me he talks as if his “*God*” lives and breathes and speaks to him - and - what is more insane - *listens to him!* Moreover, whenever he says his “*God*” will do something - something totally farfetched and impossible, usually - lo, the thing invariably happens just as the Hebrew said. And when he prays to his “*God*” for the thing to stop - lo, the moment he lifts his hands and blesses his “*God*” the thing really does stop - as suddenly as it started!

What strange magic is this?

I have never heard of such a thing - a “*God*” who is so close, so intimate, so

responsive, to those who call upon him. In my experience, gods do not respond to mere men. In my experience gods have no affection whatever for – and very little interest in – any human being who is not a prophet, a priest, a warrior, or a king.

No, I know not such a “God” as Moshe proclaims. I do not even want to think of knowing him. The thought *repulses me*. I shall not think of it again. It is not like a Pharaoh of Egypt to think such things. And I *am* Pharaoh. And my *son* shall be Pharaoh, too.

But even if this “God” is real - as it now has begun to appear ...

Why does he trouble me so?

Is it really over these rabble slaves from Goshen? What could any “God”, even a little one like this one of the Hebrews, possibly see in *them*? They are the simplest and most backward people on the face of the earth, and all the while the most stubborn; they are laughable, with their hooked noses and strange manners of speech and dress. They are truly slaves - that is all they are good for. If I did not enslave them surely someone else would. If what this “God” wants is a people to worship him why does he not at least choose a nobler people? And why has he chosen to suddenly appear out of nowhere *at this hour, on my “watch”*? *I* did not make slaves of his precious Hebrews - that was done generations ago by my ancestors – and if I understand correctly with the consent and the help of one of their own, a dreamer named “Yosef”. They were sold into slavery *by their own brother* for grain and a place to live - a payback, I am told, for a sale they themselves made of Yosef in prior years!

Why does this Hebrew “God” blame me?

Why does the God of these Hebrews make our precious Nile run red with blood *now*? It was not on my watch that the Hebrew people’s man-children were ordered thrown into the river. It was not *me* who determined that the man-children were inconvenient and interfered with the lifestyle desired by my ancestors. It was not *me* who caused the Nile to run red with Hebrew blood so many years ago. Why did this “God” sit silently by during those events and let them occur without so much as a whimper, and then let their perpetrators live and die at ease – but *now* choose to visit the sins of my fathers upon my generation? And why have these Hebrews suddenly decided to worship this “God” *now*? They did not do so at any time during the reign of my father - or of his father for that matter. They have not in fact worshipped him *for over two hundred years*! They have done the bidding of their taskmasters. They have not once mentioned leaving Egypt. They have never once shown any interest in worshipping this “God”. They have not even so much as spoken His name, in my entire lifetime! *Why are they doing so now - in my reign?*

And what am I, Pharaoh, supposed to do?

It was one thing when Moshe and his “God” were just playing entertaining magic tricks - changing sticks into crocodiles and turning the water of our great river into blood. That was insulting, considering that our people have always been the acknowledged masters of the occult arts, but it was also amusing in a twisted sort of way. But I am not amused any more.

The swamp creatures, leeches and lice were bad enough. The swarms of wild beasts, poisonous snakes, and stinging scorpions that descended on us from every remote part of the earth and invaded our land and our very houses - even my palace - were worse. The sudden, still unexplained simultaneous death of all my livestock - while the livestock of the Hebrews thrived and prospered - was shocking. The blisters that appeared on all who revere me as god - but not on the Hebrews, of course - were infuriating and humiliating. The thundering from the heavens, the torrents of hail, all mixed with shooting flames of fire - none of which we have ever seen in Egypt before - made even my closest associates run for cover, and threatened our very lives - indeed, make some of us feel that we are doomed and that our great kingdom and way of life will never to be the same. And now some of my closest advisors look at me as if this is *my fault*, and demand that I do *something* to stop it.

But what can I do?

Am I, Pharaoh of Egypt – the avatar of the great Horus - to give in to such arrogant bullying? Am I to surrender my sovereignty and forfeit my divinity in favor of something - or someone - I cannot see? How can I allow my fellow gods, my ancestors, my people, my kingdom, to be so disgraced? How can I do what he demands? How can I just give in?

And secretly, I believe - no, I dare say I ***know*** - that even if I did what he demands it would not be enough. He does not, I fear, just want me to let his “people” go. No, even as distasteful and humiliating as that would be, that would never be enough for him. He has not come forward from the unseen world at this time and in this manner just for *that*. He wants *something more*. This YHVH wants - dare I speak it - for me to acknowledge that he is a greater king than I - than my father - than the ancient ones who built the pyramids - than Amon or Re themselves! He wants me to accept him as my God - to bow ***my*** knee to him, and to abandon the gods and the ways of my ancestors, and to serve ***him*** only. He wants me to believe that there is only ***one*** true God - Him. He wants me to choose not to be Pharaoh, not to live in palaces and command armies, and build store cities for the glory of Egypt – to acknowledge, worship, and serve him. And he wants me to tell my sons and all the people whose lives I hold in the palm of my hand to do the same thing.

He is a strange “God” indeed. Yet still there are moments when ...

I would gladly let his people go ...

Those loathsome slaves are far more trouble than they are worth. As far as that goes, this “God” of Moshe can have them - and good riddance! But every time I determine in my mind to do what this stuttering Moshe asks, and let the people go, it is as if some invisible force suddenly grips my heart, and I begin to shake - and I just cannot make myself do it! No, I cannot! I ... *dare* not! I ... *must* not! I ... *shall* not! I ... *will* not! But I wonder – *what will happen next?* Will my *kingdom* survive? Will my *people* survive? Will *the great store-cities* I envision be built? Will *my son* be Pharaoh? Will *Egypt survive?* Alas, I cannot think such thoughts. I am Pharaoh. I am the Bright and Morning Star. I am the avatar of the mighty Horus. I must not do what the God of the Hebrews wants. *I* must rule. I must show this upstart Moshe and his Johnny-come-lately “God” just who is in charge around here. And no, NO, *NO* – emphatically NO! - I will *not* let those people go!

[... To be continued ...]

A Parsha Bo Travelogue

Let’s take a few moments and view a *Bo* travelogue. Keep in mind as you take this journey that Pharaoh’s heart is now very, very hard. He keeps promising to let the Hebrew slaves go out to the desert to worship the Holy One – then he keeps renegeing on his promise. So the Holy One is about to raise the stakes significantly.

1. The Curtain Opens – in a Labor Room!

As the curtain opens on parsha *Bo* we find that Egypt is about to give birth. A new nation has been formed in its womb. That embryonic nation has dropped into the birth canal, and things are getting intense in the birthing room.

The entire land of the pyramids is now fully in the throes of travail. Moshe and Aharon are serving as midwives. Pharaoh is the one being effaced and dilated. The appointed time draws near for all the parties involved in the process to move from the transitional phase of this very special episode of travail into its birth phase. It is time for hard labor. And that means the pain is about to become unbearable, exhaustion is about to set in, and the urge to push is about to awaken.

2. The First Contraction of Transition Phase Labor

The process of nation birthing will enter its next phase with the onset of a **Great locust plague**. This plague will equate to the first contraction of the transition phase of Egypt’s labor. The Holy One will bring *vast swarms of locusts* into Egypt on an unseasonable Easterly wind. Millions of the dreaded insects will descend upon the land of Egypt with a vengeance, devouring everything in their paths. In

the process they will devour the only food supplies remaining in Egypt after the last plague – i.e. the fields of wheat and the spelt that are just emerging alongside the Nile.

There will be a brief respite, then will come the next transition phase contraction.

3. The Second Contraction of the Transition Phase

What will happen next in the birthing process will be a complete ‘black-out’. The Holy One will cause a thick, tangible *supernatural darkness* to settle upon Egypt that prevents not only visibility but movement. This contraction will last for three long, miserable days.

4. The Prophetic Interval Leading Up to the Fateful Contraction

The lifting of the plague of darkness will see Pharaoh’s heart grow even harder. And during the interval between contractions a number of things will happen to get all persons involved ready for the final push. Pharaoh will order Moshe never to look on his face again. The focus of the parsha’s attention will then begin to shift away from Pharaoh and the Egyptians to the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov. First the Holy One will introduce to His people the concept of a *Divine calendar* according to which He intends for all people He redeems to structure and arrange their lives. Unless and to the extent we are in bondage, Beloved, the calendar the Holy One reveals in this parsha should be our primary calendar as well.

With the calendar of Heaven introduced upon the earth, the Holy One will instruct Moshe in the first and primary *mitzvah* [life instruction] of the new nation He is birthing – i.e. a prototypical protocol for appropriating the blood of a lamb as the sign of our Covenant of deliverance, salvation, and sanctification, and for adopting *matzah* - the bread of humility and pilgrimage - as our national food. All Hebrew fathers will be given the first *mitzvah* of Torah. They will be instructed to take a lamb into their home, let it dwell with them for four days, then slaughter it as evening begins to fall on the 14th day of the month. They will be told to put some of the blood of the lamb on the lintel and the two side posts of the door of their dwelling to serve as a sign to the Holy One of their faith in Him, and then to remain in their homes and stand, clad in sandals, and with staff in hand, while they and their families eat a special meal of the roasted flesh of the lamb in the merit of whose blood the Holy One has agreed to pass over their houses.

5. The Final Contraction – and the Urge to Push

And then will come the final contraction – in the form the *Great Rampage of the Death Angel*. Every first born in Egypt will die suddenly in the night – including Pharaoh’s own son. Pharaoh will be completely effaced and dilated. And at that

point he will finally succumb to the urge to ‘push’ the Hebrew nation out of the four-sided birth canal of Egyptian culture, worldview, economy and dominion.

At midnight – even as the Hebrews who *sh’ma* the Holy One’s instructions are feasting with their families on roasted lamb behind doors marked with lamb’s blood – a great cry of travail will arise from Pharaoh’s chamber. He will call for the midwives – Moshe and Aharon – and the pushing stage of labor will begin.

As Pharaoh is in the throes of pushing, all Egypt will take note. The Holy One will move the hearts of the Egyptian people to shower the people He is redeeming from bondage with gold, silver, and precious garments. Just consider it *a baby shower*.

6. The First Great Exodus

Somewhere in the course of the night, though he once swore he would never do any such thing, Pharaoh will issue a decree forcibly expelling the children Israel from his land. This time there will be no conditions - other than the departure begin *with haste*. And at long last, Pharaoh will finally ‘know’ the Holy One. At first light on the morning after the Death Angel’s rampage the realization will set in that we have not only escaped the Death Angel – but are free for the first time in our lives. With that the *First Great Exodus* will officially be on – and its challenge ingrained forever in our collective souls.

Lessons from the Hebrew Name of this Parsha

As we have discussed, in Hebrew the name of this week’s parsha is called **Bo**. Spelled *beit, alef, bo* is a form of the Hebrew verb root spelled *beit, cholem-vav, alef*, which means: “go” or “come”, or “change position”. When as here it is used in the second person imperative *bo* means *under no circumstance are you to stay where/as you are!*

There is going to be a lot of movement going on this week. There will also be the usual commotion that goes with mass movements. You will probably not conclude this week at the same place you began it. Oh, it is possible that the geography around you might not change. Your latitude and longitude and address may actually remain the same. But you will almost certainly move *in your spirit*. You will almost certainly move *in your emotions*. You will almost certainly move *in your heart*, and *in your soul*, and *in your mind*. The Holy One has bought you a one-way ticket out of your present mindset and worldview. A berth on *the freedom train* has your name on it. The Spirit and the Bridegroom say ‘*Bo!*’ A powerful beacon of Divine Light emanating from the fire of Divine Love that the Holy One has ignited on Mount Sinai is *calling you, drawing you* toward the mountain of the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya’akov. The rhythm of His Heartbeat is causing the very earth beneath your feet to shake. Do you not feel it? The resultant

temblors are causing powerful worldly economies, kingdoms and religions to collapse before your very eyes. Do you not see it? The fire the Holy One has kindled on His holy mountain is burning brighter than ever. Do you not feel the warmth of its flames?

The portal the Holy One has opened upon earth is *calling you toward it*. Do you not hear it? In the face of such a call *inertia* is not a viable option. *Business-as-usual* is not a viable option. *Paralysis* and *stagnancy* are not viable options. Continuing in the *spectator sport lifestyle* of moaning-and-groaning and wishing-and-hoping are not viable options. Another week of seeing the world fall apart for those who follow the counsel of the ungodly, of catching the fall-out from those around you who stand in the way of sinners, and of having your spirit poisoned by the venom spewed out of the mouths of those who sit in the seat of the scornful is not a viable option. No Beloved, the cost of clinging to what is familiar to you, of holding onto the situations and scenarios of bondage and limitation and co-dependency in which you start the week is simply too high. Resisting the flow of the movement going on in the Spirit realm is simply far, far too great a price for a child or household of the covenant to pay. Do not even consider it. Betting that things will ‘eventually get better’ if you just hold out and hang on a little longer as you are and keep doing the same things that you have always done is *the ultimate fool’s bet*. Please do not, under any circumstances allow yourself and your family *to be left behind* when the great Divinely orchestrated movement comes.

If you will receive it, Yosef, your time in prison is done. A King has had a troubling dream. Your presence is required elsewhere. A robe and a ring have been prepared for you. Take a good look around. Lock the image of what you see around you this day away in your memory banks. *You will never pass this way again*.

A Look Ahead At Haftarah Bo

Yirmayahu [Jeremiah] 46:14-28

Our haftarah meditations this week will be drawn from the prophecies of Yirmayahu. Yirmayahu was called forth as a prophet to the nations at a time when the world was dominated by two world powers. Babylon ruled the Eastern reaches of civilization; Egypt controlled the Western ones. As Yirmayahu began to take up the burden of prophecy the influence of Babylon was in a remarkable state of ascendancy. While Babylon had been an important city and a lesser nation for a long time, it had not become a dominant force in the world until recently. The catalyst for this sudden rise in influence seemed to be the fall of the previous Eastern superpower, Assyria. But there was something bigger going on. Unbeknownst to Egypt or the rest of the world, the reason Babylon was suddenly

ascending in power was that *the Holy One was aiding it*. Babylon was, you see, the Holy One's chosen vessel to discipline His own people – now represented only by the Southern Kingdom of Y'hudah - for wandering off into apostasy and idolatry and refusing every prophetic call to return. Assyria had been the Holy One's chosen vessel to discipline Efrayim [the Northern Kingdom] for its apostasy and idolatry; Babylon was being called forth to fulfill the same function for Y'hudah.

Egypt, however, stood in Babylon's way. Egypt resisted Babylon's ascendance just as fiercely as it had resisted Assyrian ascendance. The Pharaoh of Yirmayahu's era, *Necho*, led his mighty army out to challenge Babylon. Just a few years previously Necho's armies had waged a successful war against the Assyrians. The decisive battle of that campaign was fought in Babylon's backyard, at a place on the Euphrates River called *Carchemish*.

A second Battle of Carchemish prepared to unfold in Yirmayahu's day. And as the superpowers took up their positions for the battle the Holy One spoke to Yirmayahu and told him to declare:

*Who is this who rises up like the Nile, whose waters toss themselves like the rivers?
Mitzrayim rises up like the Nile, and his waters toss themselves like the rivers:
and he says, I will rise up, I will cover the eretz; I will destroy cities and the inhabitants of it.
Go up, you horses; and rage, you chariots; and let the mighty men go forth:
Kush and Put, who handle the shield; and the Ludim, who handle and bend the bow.
For that day is [a day] of the Holy One, the Holy One of Hosts;
a day of vengeance, that he may avenge him of his adversaries:
and the sword shall devour and be satiate, and shall drink its fill of their blood;
for the Holy One, the Holy One of hosts,
has a sacrifice in the north country by the river Perat. Go up into Gil`ad, and take balm
virgin daughter of Mitzrayim; in vain do you use many medicines; there is no healing for you.
The nations have heard of your shame, and the eretz is full of your cry;
for the mighty man has stumbled against the mighty, they are fallen both of them together.
[Jeremiah 46:7-12]*

The battle occurred in 605 BCE. It went just as the Holy One had said it would. Egypt's forces were indeed crushed. Nebuchadnezzar – then only crown prince of Babylon - stood poised to completely destroy Necho's army. In the midst of the battle however he received word his father, King *Nabopolassar* of Babylon, had died. Nebuchadnezzar immediately returned to Babylon to be crowned as King. Necho and what was left of his army escaped and returned to Egypt with nothing but their lives.'

Somehow Necho regrouped. He put another army together over the next few years, and the next time he confronted Nebuchadnezzar he actually won a limited victory. This event – Necho's limited victory over Nebuchadnezzar – in its own way sealed Y'hudah's fate. For when Y'hudah's kings and princes [those not already in captivity in

Babylon] heard of Necho's success against the Babylonians, they had to 'choose horses', so to speak. Would they side with Babylon [which had, albeit peaceably, taken some of their best leaders – men like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshech and Avednego – away to be trained as pro-Babylonian 'puppet leaders'], to whom they had been paying exorbitant 'tribute? Or would they make an alliance with Necho, *rebel against Nebuchadnezzar*, and attempt to *cast off the Babylonian yoke*.

The leaders of Y'hudah chose to disregard the prophecies of Yirmayahu and 'bet the farm' on Necho. Alas, they picked the wrong horse. And they would have a very heavy price to pay. It was at this point that Yirmayahu received another prophecy from the Holy One – the prophecy that makes up this week's haftarah. Here is the essence of what the Holy One revealed to Yirmayahu:

*The daughter of Mitzrayim shall be disappointed;
she shall be delivered into the hand of the people of the north.*

*The Holy One of Hosts, the God of Yisra'el, says: **Behold, I will punish Amon of No, and Pharaoh, and Mitzrayim, with her gods, and her kings; even Pharaoh and those who trust in him: and I will deliver them into the hand of those who seek their lives, and into the hand of Nevukhadretzar king of Bavel, and into the hand of his servants; and afterwards it shall be inhabited, as in the days of old, says the Holy One.***

Notes On the Brit Chadasha Reading for Parsha Bo

Romans 12:1-21

Shaul of Tarsus is writing to people who live in Rome – right in Caesar's backyard. Some of the families to whom he is writing are Hebrews who have chosen to follow Yeshua; others are God-fearing gentiles. In chapters 9 through 11 of this letter – the chapters which immediately precede and lay the foundation for this week's reading - Shaul discussed in detail the past, present and future of the natural descendants of Ya'akov. It was in these three chapters that Shaul explained most beautifully *the basic process of prophetic engrafting* - i.e. the way in which gentiles who accept the Messiah of Torah become engrafted into, but do not displace, the true living 'vine' of natural Israel. Shaul has also discussed *the purpose of the prophetic season of gentile ascendancy* - i.e. to provoke the remnant of natural Israel to jealousy.

Shaul has just written eloquently of *the temporary blinding of the Jewish people* of the First Century as a sovereign act of the Holy One. This temporary blinding was designed by the Holy One to bring about a greater salvation – the salvation of people from *all nations* and *all tribes* and *all tongues* of the earth. This has been the Holy One's plan all along.

Shaul has brought the discussion to a glorious crescendo with his dramatic

declaration that ‘*All Israel will be saved*’ [Romans 11:26] because ‘*the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*’ **Romans 11:29.** It is with this background and understanding that Shaul is going to speak to us in this week’s reading. He will give us inspired instructions as to how we are to live, in light of the truths he explained. He is going to describe for us the Divinely ordered inter-relationship that is supposed to exist between natural Israel and all persons the Holy One has redeemed from among the *goyim*.

You may be amazed how Torah-consistent his instructions for us are – right down to the final words of the reading, where he even quotes directly from the Torah:

*Do not seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath.
For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Holy One."
Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink.
For in doing so, you will heap coals of fire on his head."
Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Shaul is not talking about just any enemy. He is talking about a *specific* enemy. And the enemy Shaul is talking about is not Caesar. It is not Rome. The enemy Shaul is talking about is none other than blinded men of 1st Century Israel – i.e. Hebrews who, for whatever reason, chose to reject Messiah and His Way. After all, Shaul just explained to us: *Concerning the Good News they are enemies has for your sake. But concerning the election they are beloved for the fathers' sake.* **Romans 11:28.**

Shaul is saying that the way to deal with blinded, hardened elements of Israel is not to look down upon, mock, attack, or persecute them. Nor is it to blame them for Yeshua’s death. Nor is it to engage them in debate, trying to prove ourselves better/wiser/more spiritual or more faithful to the Creator than they. *For God has shut up all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all.* **Romans 11:32.**

Romans 12 is not a ‘new law of love’ being laid down. Nor is it merely a *drash* on Torah - though it certainly is based in and flows from Torah. Romans 12 is nothing short of *the Holy One’s Divine plan of ‘evangelism’ for Avraham’s seed.* We can - we must - pray for the peace of Jerusalem. We can – we should - support the groups who assist poor Jews throughout the world to 1. overcome anti-Semitism, and 2. make aliyah to Eretz Yisrael. We can establish centers of 24-hour praise and worship and intercession for Israel. But in Romans 12 the Holy One has revealed to us the precise way in which we who follow Messiah are to ‘*provoke Israel to jealousy.*’ If we forsake the Holy One’s way in favor of our own – thinking we know better - He will find someone else who will *sh’ma*.

All Israel *will* be saved/delivered/redeemed/brought forth. It *will happen.* We can choose to participate according to His plan – or we can watch from the sidelines,

scratching our heads and wondering why nothing we do seems to ‘catch on’.

*May we all sh'ma the words of the Holy One,
And live lives that provoke Israel to jealousy the Holy One's way.*

The Rabbi's son

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week

Petition No. 12: ***Sh'ma Koleinu*** [*Hear/Be Responsive to our Cry*]

Sh'ma koleinu Adonai Eloheinu
Be attentive to our cry, O Lord our God

Chus v'rachem aleinu
Show compassion and mercy to us.

v'kabel b'rachamim v'b'ratzon et t'filateinu
Accept our prayers gently and lovingly.

Ki el shomea t'filot v'tachnunim atah
For You are a God who listens to prayers and supplications

V'mil'feneichah malkeinu rekom al-t'shiveinu
From your face, our King, let us not turn away empty.