

Torah Talk - Bo

- Yerachmiel Seplowitz. "Pharaoh's Brother"

TORAH TALK

BO (Exodus, 10:1-13:16)

Pharaoh's Brother???

One of the unsung heroes of the Exodus from Egypt is the Pharaoh's older brother. He was the one who finally brought the Pharaoh to his senses.

What's that? You've never heard of the Pharaoh's older brother? Well, I did tell you he was an UNSUNG hero!

Plague after plague, devastation after devastation, the king of Egypt watched his empire crumble before his very eyes. Warning after warning went unheeded. The king just didn't seem to care.

He did, at various times, offer a few compromises. He suggested that:

- 1) Moses and the Israelites serve G-d in Egypt;
- 2) Only the men leave,
- 3) The entire nation could go, leaving their livestock in Egypt.

These options were all unacceptable to Moses. The entire nation, lock, stock, and barrel, were going to leave Egypt, and serve G-d in the desert.

Not only that, said Moses, the Israelites were anticipating GIFTS of livestock from the Egyptians.

Pharaoh lost it.

"Get outta here!" he screamed. And don't ever come back! If you dare come to see me again, you're a dead man!?" (Loose translation of Exodus, 10:27)

In reply, Moses presented the Pharaoh with his last warning:

"G-d said, 'At about midnight, I will go out into the midst of Egypt. Every firstborn will die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who was to sit on his throne, to the firstborn of the (Egyptian) slave girl behind the millstone, and the firstborn animals as well. There will be a great outcry throughout Egypt - so that you will know that G-d has made a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites.' After that, I will leave!" (Ibid, 11:4-7, 9)

With that, Moses left. The king of Egypt, the most powerful man on earth, sat there on his throne, about to lose everything. His country was a disaster area. Livestock were dead, produce was ruined. His own advisors had admonished him two plagues ago:

"Let them go! Don't you realize yet that Egypt is lost?!?" (Ibid, 10:7)

Now, on the eve of the Tenth Plague, the line had been drawn in the sand. The end of Egypt was approaching. Pharaoh didn't seem to care. Every prediction of Moses had come true, and now he was predicting the demise of every firstborn in Egypt, including the Pharaoh's own firstborn son. The Crown Prince was going to die, and his father didn't care. He was not going to let Moses and his G-d push him around!

G-d kept His promise:

It was at midnight that G-d struck every firstborn in the Land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who was to sit on his throne to the firstborn captive in the dungeon, and every firstborn animal. (Ibid, 12:29)

Pharaoh finally woke up:

Pharaoh rose at midnight? there was a great outcry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was no corpse. He called to Moses and Aaron at night, and said, "Get up, leave my people! You, the Israelites, go serve G-d as you said. Take your sheep and your cattle, as you said, and GO!!!

And also" (Ibid, verses 30-32)

"And also" Also, WHAT? What was the final order/request/decreed that Pharaoh was issuing? What was so important to the Pharaoh, now that he saw the devastation he had brought upon his own people?

Now here's where Pharaoh's older brother comes in. Pharaoh's older brother provided the impetus for him to finally release the slaves. You see, the reason why you've never heard of Pharaoh's older brother is that he didn't have one!!!!

What was Pharaoh's last request, as he granted permission for the Hebrews to leave? In his desperation, he woke up to the fact that he, Pharaoh, the mighty king of Egypt, was a marked man. He had no older brother because he was a firstborn!

He told Moses to leave. He demanded that Moses leave. He BEGGED Moses to leave. And he added one more frantic plea:

"And also Pray for me!!!"

He ignored all the warnings. He watched his son die. He didn't care. Had Pharaoh had an older brother, he probably wouldn't have cared about him either. Only when he realized that he personally was at risk did he finally relent. Only now did he ask Moses to pray. Pray for whom? "Pray for ME!!!"

In the Passover Seder, we make reference to Four Sons referred to by the Torah. Who are these sons?

They are quotations from the Torah, three of them from this week's Torah Portion, and one from Deuteronomy:

"When your children will say to you, 'What is this Service to you?' you will say, 'It is a Passover Service for G-, Who passed over the houses of the Israelites when He struck the Egyptians, but he saved our households'"
(12:26-27)

"Tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is for this reason that G-d acted on my behalf when I left Egypt.'" (13:8)

"When your son will say to you in the future, 'What is this?' say to him, 'G-d took us out of the house of slavery with a Strong Hand.'" (13:14)

"When your child asks you in the future, 'What are the testimonies and decrees and ordinances that our G-d commanded you?' say to your child, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and G-d took us out of Egypt with a Strong hand'" (Deuteronomy, 6:20-21)

Therein lays the difference between Pharaoh and the People of Israel.

We are nothing without our children. The Torah exhorts us to teach our children about the past, for they are our link to the future. Jewish parents would do almost anything for their children.

Pharaoh was concerned only with himself. His son, the Crown Prince of Egypt, represented Egypt's future! Moses warned him, "Save your son! Save your future! Save your people! Release the slaves before G-d unleashes His fury and destroys everything!"

Pharaoh didn't listen. In the end, he showed that all he cared about was saving his own miserable skin.

And that, my friends, is why the glory days of Egypt are written up in the "Book of the Dead," and represented by a few shiny trinkets stolen from the pyramids in the "City of the Dead."

And that is why for us, the receivers of the Book of Life, the best is yet to come!

Have a great Shabbos.
Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

>From last year's message -- "Lox, Cream Cheese, and - UNLEAVENED BAGELS??!!!"

You don't have to be religious to feel Jewish...

Pharaoh no longer refused to let the Israelites leave. Not only did he permit them to leave, he **INSISTED** that they leave. Immediately!

We had to leave so quickly ... On a simple level, it seems that reason that they couldn't delay was due to Egyptian pressure to leave. However, many commentaries explain that there was another reason. We had already learned too much corruption from the Egyptians ... Had we sunk any further ... it would have been too late. We would have been beyond hope. We would have been unredeemable.

... we have been in exile for close to two thousand years ... How is it that our ancestors would not have been able to withstand a moment more than 190 years of exile, while we continue to exist into our third millennium?

... there is a very big difference between our generation and that generation...

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576515>

>From two years ago -- --"The Dog Days of Egypt"

... G-d wanted to show how He discriminates between His "friends" and His "enemies."

G-d now wanted to demonstrate that He would not even allow a dog to let out a natural bark when an Israelite walked by. Every Egyptian would be subject to the snarls and growls of Egypt's canine population. In the face of the Hebrews, however, the meanest junkyard dog was transformed into a whimpering puppy. ... Dogs act upon instinct. They don't know the difference between right and wrong. (Sorry, Lassie lovers.)

... He's doing it again... That obnoxious know-it-all at the office who always manages to grate on your nerves. He "knows" who's going to win the primaries and who's going to win the Super Bowl. He's got an opinion about everything, and he's consistently full of baloney.

You really want to put him in his place. You'd love to tell him, just this once, exactly what you think of him and his crazy notions. Still better, you'd just love to punch him in the nose! ...

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576415>

>From three years ago -- "If I Could Only Be Like ____"

... G-d said to Moses, ..."Go to Pharaoh, because I have made his heart stubborn ...

Was this fair? It looks like a set-up! It looks like G-d is forcing Pharaoh to stubbornly refuse to release the Israelites, and then He plans to

punish Pharaoh for being stubborn!

Why should Pharaoh be punished? He should plead "Not Guilty, by reason of Divine Coercion!" ...

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576315>

>From four years ago -- "Nissan Maximum"

... How can we celebrate the first of Tishrei in the fall as the New Year, when the Torah tells us very clearly that year really begins on the first of Nissan in the spring? ...

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576215>

>From five years ago -- "Don't Confuse Me With The Facts...I've Already Made Up My Mind!"

... Egypt is in shambles. The king's own advisors have begged him to wake up and smell the coffee and realize that he is destroying his own country by continuing to disregard G-d's demands.

Now it's time to take off the kid gloves and get tough! ...

<http://www.torahtalk.net/index2.htm?576115>