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## **Parshat Bo - When You Meet the Hardened Heart, Come Closer**

with Rabbi Miriam Margles

ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וציוונו לעסוק בדברי תורה

*Baruch ata Adonai Eloheynu melekh ha'olam asher kidshanu bemitzvotav ve'tzivanu la'asok be'divrei Torah.*

Blessed are You Adonai our God, Sovereign of Time and Space, who sanctifies us through your mitzvot and commanded us to engage with words of Torah.

### **Shmot/Exodus 10:1-3**

1. Then YHVH said to Moses, “Come to Pharaoh. For I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, in order that I may display these, My signs, among them,
2. and that you may recount in the ears of your sons and of your sons’ sons how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them—in order that you may know that I am YHVH.”
3. So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and said to him, "So said YHVH, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, and they will worship Me.

א. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כִּי־אֲנִי  
הַקְּבַדְתִּי אֶת־לְבוֹ וְאֶת־לֵב עֲבָדָיו לְמַעַן יֵשְׂתִי אֹתָתִי  
אֱלֹהִים בְּקִרְבּוֹ:

ב. וְלִמְעַן תְּסַפֵּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֶיךָ וּבְזֵרֵי בְנֵיךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר  
הִתְעַלְלִיתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־אֹתֹתַי אֲשֶׁר־שִׁמְתִי בָם  
וַיִּדְעוּתָם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה:

ג. וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו  
כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים עַד־מָתַי מֵאַנְתָּ לָעֲבָדַת  
מִפְּנֵי שְׁלַח עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי

### **Kotzker Rebbe (Menachem Mendel Morgensztern of Kotzk, 1787-1859)**

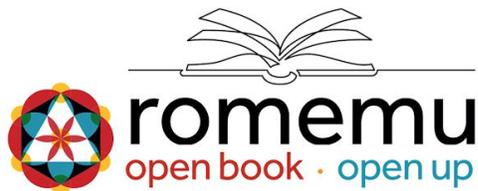
There's no such thing as "going" from God. God fills the world. There is nowhere where God is not. No place can exist if God is not there. You cannot "go" from God. Therefore the expression "Come to Pharaoh" is more apt because it also means, "Come and I will go with you."

### **Toldot Yaakov Yosef, Hayye Sara, 66 end (Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonne, (1710–1784)**

It appears to me from what I have received from my teachers and colleagues that this is how to behave with compassion toward all others. Even when you see something ugly or unbecoming in another person, you should turn your heart to thinking that the Holy One dwells there, too, since there is no place devoid of God. It is therefore for your good that you have seen this, since you have some aspect of this same ugliness in you as well, and this will move your heart to *teshuva*.

Even if you should be distracted from your study of Torah or prayer by someone's conversation, you should pay attention and consider that this is for your good, either because you were not praying or studying properly, or so that you will bring a different intention to your service. In these manners you will come to accept this situation as good, and ultimately that it truly is for your good...

And, when it says, “I have placed God before me (*l'negdi*) always”, it means that even when



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there is some sort of opposition (*negdi'ut*) that might cause me to desist from Torah or prayer, I can understand that this comes from Heaven for my good. It comes from the side of compassion, as in the continuation of the verse “He is at my right hand, I will never be shaken”, which is love (*hesed*) and compassion (*rahamim*). So, the psalm continues, “So my heart rejoices”, since everything is for my good; “my whole being (*k'vodi*) exults”, since thought has 32 paths in it, and the gematria of *kavod* is also 32, which tells me that all good thoughts come from joy in the heart, and the exultation of our whole being – and in this manner compassion is aroused in the world, even for material people and their physical coverings that are called “flesh”, as the verse concludes, “my body rests secure.”

### **Zohar on Parshat Bo 2:34a**

*God said to Moses: “Come in to Pharaoh” (10:1)* Rabbi Shimon [bar Yochai] continued: It is now fitting to reveal mysteries connected with that which is above and that which is below. Why is it written, “Come in to Pharaoh”? Ought it not rather have said, “Go to Pharaoh”? What is the meaning of "Come"? The Holy Blessed One brought Moses in to the innermost rooms, into the abode of the powerful supernal serpent, from which many levels evolve and come down. And what was it? It was the secret of the great serpent.

Moses was afraid and approached only the rivers that were at his level. But he feared the serpent itself, and did not approach because he saw that it was rooted in upper sources.

(When God saw that Moses feared the serpent, God said, “Come in to Pharaoh.”)

אָמַר רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן, הַשָּׂמַיִם אֵיךְ לְגַלְאָה רִזְיוֹן,  
דְּאֵינּוֹן מִתְדַבְּקִין לְעֵילָא וְתַתָּא, מַה כְּתִיב בָּא אֶל  
פְּרַעֲוֹה, לֵךְ אֶל פְּרַעֲוֹה מִבְּעֵי לֵיהּ, מֵאִי בֵּא. אֵלָא,  
דְּעֵייל לֵיהּ קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא, אֲדָרְיוֹן בְּתַר  
אֲדָרְיוֹן, לְגַבֵּי תַנְיָנָא וְחָדָא עֲלָאָה תַקִּיפָא, דְּכַמְּהָ  
דְּרָגִין מִשְׁתַּלְשְׁלִין מִנְיָה. וּמֵאֵן אִיהוּ. רַזָּא  
דְּהַתַּנְיִן הַגָּדוֹל.  
וּמִשָּׁה דְּחֵיל מִנְיָה, וְלֹא קָרִיב אֵלָא לְגַבֵּי אֵינּוֹן  
יְאוּרִין, וְאֵינּוֹן דְּרָגִין דִּילֵיהּ, אֲבָל לְגַבֵּיהּ דְּחֵיל  
וְלֹא קָרִיב, בְּגִין דְּחָמָא לֵיהּ מִשְׁתַּרְשֵׁי בְּשַׁרְשֵׁין  
עֲלָאִין

**Daniel Matt on Zohar Parshat Bo** - God was telling Moses, ‘Come to the nexus of the demonic and the divine.’

**Rabbi Jonah Steinberg, “Come to Pharaoh” in The Huffington Post, Feb 04, 2018 -**  
[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/jonah-c-steinberg/come-to-pharaoh\\_b\\_14593270.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/jonah-c-steinberg/come-to-pharaoh_b_14593270.html)

...The point I will lift out and emphasize is the assertion - the observation, really, in the terms of *Midrash* - that in calling Moses to Pharaoh, God is inviting Moses close, rather than, as we might have expected, sending him somewhere distant from God’s self. God, in the reading of the passage by the Zohar, is calling Moses to approach a mystery, perhaps even a crisis, of God’s own existence.

The mystery and the crisis is the emanation of evil from God - where else would evil come from, in a monotheistic tradition? As far back as Isaiah, Israelite tradition has pondered the problem, the prophet saying in the name of the Divine, “*I form the light and create darkness, I make wellbeing*



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*and create evil; I, the Eternal One, do all these things” (Isaiah 45:7).*

The enormously audacious reading of the mystics ventures to suggest that God’s call for Moses to approach Pharaoh reflects a more widely resounding call from the Divine to humanity at large, saying, in effect, ‘Come help me resolve this’ - or even, ‘come help me out of it.’

In a sense, God is pitting the prophet - and, by extension, all of us - against an aspect of God’s self. At first that would seem the epitome of an unfair match. What chance does the creature have, over and against the Creator? The challenge becomes a more fair fight - or, maybe, it becomes much more difficult - when we realize that the call is very much an imperative to confront our own selves.

As the drama plays out between Pharaoh and God and Moses, grandiosity and stubbornness and selfishness and chagrin and avarice are built up and beaten down again and again, mercilessly, painfully. It takes the most profound loss and experience of helplessness to induce Pharaoh to let go. Even then, after scarcely a moment of relinquishment has passed, the enslaving monarch will go charging after the Israelites again, only to be drowned in the Reed Sea. He throws himself with something like ecstatic passion into the role of the villain in the tale and in the song of redemption and exodus. The pharaonic impulse is strong, perhaps all but indelible.

...In a larger and deeper sense, however - and this is what the mystical tradition would tell us, about God, and about ourselves - where else would evil come from than from within? Collectively - and as an expression of divine creation, to use those ancient terms of legend - we, humankind, are the nexus, made flesh, made drama.

So, even as we combat evil without - fighting those whose selfish actions would cause ill - we cannot ignore two terrifying twin actualities: that something in ourselves collectively has allowed and enabled such forces to arise, and that somewhere within our own selves, however dimly, however differently, lurks something of them. Come close and see that, confront it, says the divine imperative at the start of our reading this week, in the interpretive reading.

...If we are honest with ourselves, and if we give ourselves to the divine project in this world, ...We must heed the call into the darker throne rooms in the nexuses of our selves, there to confront none other than old, hard-hearted Pharaoh - even as we fight for liberty and redemption outside.

**Me'or Einayim, Bo 6** (Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, 1730-1797) [Regarding] the statement in the Holy Zohar, “*Come to Pharaoh*” – it should have said ‘**go** to Pharaoh!’” (cf. Zohar Bo, 2:34a), as well as the question posed by the commentators, which I wrote above – the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt was that the Awareness was in exile with wicked Pharaoh in Egypt; and therefore Israel was exiled there to bring the Awareness from there.