

Parashat Bo: Opening the Heavy Heart

Dear Friends,

First of all, I want to thank all those who read last week's drasha and responded! The journey to economic freedom for the Kehilla has just begun and there is still much to do. (If you didn't get a chance to read last week's message, [here is the link to it.](#))

Parashat Bo is an epic one; larger than life. Rashi famously states that the Torah should have started from this parasha, but for all sorts of political reasons it begins with Bereishit.

In Parashat Bo Am Yisrael leaves Egypt. Rabbi Yehuda Halevi says to the King of Kuzar (in "The Kuzari"), that the Exodus story is *the* formative story of humanity, and it is proof of the existence of the Divine. The king of Kuzar does not understand, of course, but he is curious enough to continue the conversation. At the end of the story he is convinced. So am I, by the way.

This year we will focus on just one phrase; a seemingly small one; almost an aside: **Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh. For I have made his heart heavy..."** (Shmot 10:1)

We are all familiar with this feeling. There are times in our lives, as well as moments in our day, in which our heart becomes heavy. It is then hard for us to decide. All options seem problematic and there is no light at the end of the tunnel. We are not whole-hearted with the task at hand, and thus unable to take action. Everything feels oppressive, bearing down on us. In these moments our joy of life is gone.

A heavy heart is unable to think straight. Good ideas or anything outside the mind's sealed box cannot be found.

How does this happen?

Our heart feels heavy when we are very worried, like Pharaoh was, and afraid, as he was.

Pharaoh looked out the window of his palace. A ferment was beginning. People were talking about freedom. They wanted to leave the familiar place in which they had become entrenched. They wanted to celebrate; to celebrate life: **“Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Let My people go that they may celebrate a festival for Me in the wilderness.”** (Shmot 5:1)

Indeed, the Torah tells us that they just wanted to celebrate, that’s all! To get out of the mud, out of the heaviness, out of the narrow straits, out of the tyranny of Mitzrayim.

But a heavy heart cannot hear such a calling. A heavy heart is obsessed with worry: what will happen? How will I manage? What will all the others say? Now they will all want to celebrate life, God forbid! Maybe I, too, will even want to celebrate, to be happy, to breathe?! No!!! That is dangerous and worrisome.

A heavy heart is afraid of living, afraid of losing control.

And when one’s heart is heavy one cannot hear, not to mention heed, any voice other than the voice of the heavy heart, warning us with concern: **And Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD that I should heed Him and let Israel go?** For God’s voice is the voice of freedom, of joy, of life, the voice of the promise of infinite possibilities.

When the heart is heavy it isn’t possible to hear the enlivening voice that we most need to hear at that moment!

So, remember, when your heart is heavy - and it sometimes will be, this is only natural - it is not telling you anything truly significant, so DO NOT take it too seriously, or seriously at all, for that matter. It is just the voice of concern, worry, and fear. Fear of losing control.

Remember, a heavy heart is not a wise heart! The inner dialog is clouded, and nothing good can come of it.

Yet, the heavy heart does have meaning! While it is not too smart, it signals to us that we are not seeing reality clearly at the moment, that we are too fearful to hear the more worthy voices of life itself. A heavy heart reminds us that there is something within or around us which desires freedom; which seeks relief from all that is stifling life. It reminds us of this **by** feeling heavy.

Indeed, it is God who makes the heart heavy, not anyone or anything else: **“For I have made his heart heavy.”**

Why would God cause a heart to become heavy?

The Ramban (Nachmanides, Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman) explains the heavy heart is **“so that I can put these signs (plagues) upon them... so that the Egyptians will know my power... so that you (Moshe) and all of the coming generations of Israel will relate the power of my acts, and know that I am God, and everything I wish, I will do in heaven and on earth.”**

In other words, says God, I am life. I am reality. I am free choice. I am freedom itself. No person can stop the power of life, the passion of life, the desire for life and its continuous flow. The heart of anyone who tries to control life because of fear or for any other reason, will become heavy and that person will experience great suffering - plague after plague. But instead of the plagues opening the heart and bringing an end to this misery, the heart will only become progressively heavier.

A heavy heart, then, is a friendly Divine reminder: we have grown fearful - of life, of reality, of the Infinite which flows through everything. This is freedom, and when we resist this freedom (unconsciously, of course), the heart becomes heavy, our thinking becomes clouded, our wisdom is stuck and limited, and nothing good can come of it.

What can we do in this situation? Only one thing: we can remember: **This day shall be to you one of remembrance** (Shmot 12:14).

We remember not to take an anxious heart seriously. It is not a good frame of mind to make intelligent decisions from. We can thank it for its service - it is looking out for us, after all! - reminding us of that which we have forgotten - to celebrate life: **This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD throughout the ages; you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time.**

And when we finally remember and give thanks to our heavy heart - and not taking it too seriously - an amazing thing may happen. As though on its own accord, our heart will open up, and -

We will return to the celebration of life - the Life which is always there deep under our anxious thinking, just waiting to be lived.

We return to the celebration of unseen vitality which breathes life into everything.

We return to celebrate freedom - and woe to the person who tries to imprison it.

Shabbat Shalom,

Elisha