

זכור את יום השבת לקדשו.  
ששת ימים תעבד ועשית כל מלאכתך,  
ויום השביעי שבת לה'

# SHABBAT LASHEM

THE VOICE OF BNEI AKIVA UK

PARASHAT BO

9<sup>TH</sup> SHVAT 5781

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## NEVER ALONE DAVID SHAHAR SHEVET OROT

This weeks parasha opens with the phrase 'וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהֵי מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פְּרָעֹה'. The use of the word בּוֹ is interesting as the possuk reads: "And Hashem said to Moshe, come to Paroh." Grammatically speaking the possuk should say וָלֵךְ (go). Because the torah opted the word בּוֹ over לֵךְ it suggests that Hashem was always with Moshe. So too Hashem is always with us no matter what.

The passuk says 'בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה לִי ה' בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם: (It is because of what Hashem did for me when I went free from Egypt.)' What is the word זֶה referring to? Rashi suggests that זֶה is that we were taken out of Egypt so that we can fulfil the mitzvot associated with Pesach, namely the korban pesach, matzah and maror. Rabbi Yeruchom Levovitz zt"L, the first mashgiach of the Mir Yeshiva rephrases this Rashi to understand it as: the whole enslavement of the Jews in Egypt and then the episode of Yetziat Mitzrayim was orchestrated as such so that we can perform the mitzvot of korban pesach, matzah and maror.

בּוֹ אֶל־פְּרָעֹה nicely with אֶל־פְּרָעֹה as Hashem was there every step of the way as He caused the episode of Egypt so these mitzvot can be done. A fitting parable for this would be a case where parents send their son to boarding school. He will hate it, he might get picked on for being different but ultimately after he comes home post graduation he will be a much better off man than the child he was going into boarding school and only now can he achieve certain things in life which wouldn't have been so accessible to him had he not gone to boarding school. Hashem (parent(s)) sent his beloved children (son), Bnei Yisroel to Egypt (boarding school) so that we can come out ready to accept Hashem and the Torah.

The Ba'al Haturim comments that the word בּוֹ has the gematria of 3 which is the number of makot, plagues, found in this week's parasha. The penultimate maka is that of darkness. Chazal tell us that in the first three days of this plague, the Mitzrim could not see each other but they were able to get around, slowly and cautiously, however the next three days were a completely different story, the darkness was so heavy that the Mitzrim couldn't even move! This plague was the worst one yet.

However, surely one would say, having your water turned to blood, or being pelted endlessly with fire coated hail is worse than not being able to see. One answer I heard is that, the plague of choshech wasn't that people kept stubbing their toes on their bed frames at night, rather, it was that they couldn't see each other, which meant that the Egyptians had to suffer alone, they had no one to support them or to be there to help. This was the plague. This is why the plague of darkness was the worst one yet, at least during the other plagues the suffering was communal and the Mitzrim helped each other. No one should ever have to suffer alone, no matter what they're going through, there are always support networks in place.

The parasha ends with Hashem commanding Bnei Yisroel to consecrate the new moon. This is Rosh Chodesh. The obvious question is why give this commandment here now? Surely Shabbat or something else would be more fitting. I'd like to suggest that this links to the ideas discussed above. As mentioned regarding choshech, the true suffering was that the Mitzrim suffered alone and had no guidance or help. Rosh Chodesh is the antithesis of this as it is a fresh start, a clean slate per say. In the mussaf amidah for Rosh Chodesh we refer to it as zman kapara (time of atonement) and no matter how rough things seem to be going, in no more than 30 days will there be a new moon, a new opportunity.

## DAVID WAS A MADRICH ON ALEPH CHALUTZI MACHANE 5779.

London In: 16:17 Out: 17:30

Manchester In: 16:18 Out: 17:33

Cambridge In: 16:10 Out: 17:27

Oxford In: 16:18 Out: 17:34

Bristol In: 16:24 Out: 17:40

Birmingham In: 16:17 Out: 17:34

Leeds In: 16:10 Out: 17:30

Liverpool In: 16:18 Out: 17:36

Jerusalem In: 16:29 Out: 17:44

# THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

RAV JOEL KENIGSBERG | RAV SHALIACH



Over the past few years, the Shabbat on which we read Parshat Bo has come to be associated with Mental Health Awareness Shabbat. The connection is in the penultimate plague of choshech – Darkness.

Just as there could be a physical manifestation of darkness, so too can there be a spiritual, mental and emotional manifestation of darkness – the feeling of confusion and isolation.

The Chiddushei HaRim has a remarkable explanation of the Torah's words:

לא ראו איש את אחיו – “no man could see his fellow.” These words, he suggests, are not necessarily a result of the darkness that occurred. Rather they are to be understood as the cause for some of the greatest darkness that can exist - the darkness of an egocentric society, where each individual becomes oblivious to the needs of others. The darkness where nobody else shares in one's problems, pain and struggles, and all are left to fend for themselves. The loneliness which was caused by the darkness, or perhaps which created the darkness, is what made this plague so terrifying.

But is all loneliness necessarily a bad thing?

The Midrash (Shmot Rabbah 14:2) records a cryptic argument between the Sages as to what the source of that darkness was. According to Rabbi Nechemia it came from “the darkness of Gehinom” but according to Rabbi Yehuda it came from “choshech shel Maalah” – the darkness of Heaven. If we understand metaphorically that the concept of darkness represents the very idea of loneliness, then what is the meaning that this loneliness originates from up in Heaven?

Rabbi Norman Lamm זצ”ל suggests that the Midrash is teaching us two aspects of solitude. It can come to cause the pain of loneliness but it can also bring about the blessing of privacy and quiet contemplation. In a sermon delivered in 1959, long before the advent of

smartphones, he stated that “Modern life, with its perpetual telephone calls and never-ending glare of television... represents an intrusion upon the privacy of each of us... and modern man succumbs to this attack... seeking to reveal his deepest secrets to an ever-widening circle of friends”. (Drashot Ledorot, pg 47)

If it was true in 1959 how much more so is it true today? In an ironic way, many aspects of the technology which connects us have left us more isolated than ever before. One of the biggest challenges to the mental health of so many nowadays stems not from being unable to see anybody else, but from being able to see everybody else. Picture-perfect selfies have led us to constantly compare ourselves to others – or to a false image of what we think others are like. Life is never as perfect as it seems on social media and more often than not those unrealistic expectations can cause more harm than we realise. It is here that solitude – and the ability to look inwards rather than outwards – can be far from a plague but a tremendous blessing instead.

This Mental Health Awareness Shabbat let's think about those two meanings of being alone. Let's commit ourselves to banishing the darkness of “no man could see his fellow” – of apathy and indifference to those around us. Let's ensure that in that sense no one is ever alone.

At the same time let's remember the power and importance of being alone – of not comparing and not competing, but simply being ourselves and becoming our best selves. Let's make sure to find the time, alone, to quiet the noise around us and grow into the greatest that each one of us can be.

Shabbat Shalom!

**FOLLOW RAV JOEL ON FACEBOOK (RAV SHALIACH PAGE) AND ON TWITTER (@JOEL KENIGSBERG)**

# 'HAPPINESS CAN BE FOUND EVEN IN THE DARKEST OF TIMES...'

SOPHIE HARRIS | SHEVET MORASHA



In Parashat Bo we experience the final 3 plagues the Egyptians were struck by before the Jews were finally freed from their bondage in Egypt. This week also marks Mental Health Awareness Shabbat,

chosen by Jami for the strong symbolism found within this Parasha; the plague and metaphor of true 'Choshech', or 'darkness'. Interestingly, the theme is not just found within this plague but within the others in the parasha; the plague of locusts which preceded it appeared in their numbers "that the land was black with them", and the final Death of the Firstborns holds obvious themes of grief and despair. These plagues were different to those which had come before. Whilst the Egyptians' livelihoods and physicalities had been attacked and destroyed, this final blow was to their minds.

I want to understand, what makes the 'choshech' we experience here so much more than physical darkness, how can this help to deepen our understanding of this Shabbat, and why is this so significant to us in January 2021?

When the 9th Plague descended to smite the Egyptians, the Torah describes it as "a thick darkness descended upon the Land of Egypt. People could not see one another, and for three days no one could get up from where he was" (Shemot 10:22-23).

It is already clear that this was no normal 'night'. Some commentators even maintain that it was so dark that the Egyptians could not see their hands in front of them or even a candle, and that it even became worse - a 'double darkness', that if you were sitting, you couldn't stand and vice versa.

One of the most important things I've ever learnt is that if the Torah has 70 faces, and is eternal, then we must be able to understand it in so many different ways; for each individual and at any point in time. Reading these passages in the middle of a national lockdown, meaning comes to life for us as it may have never done before. Yes, the plague really happened, but the verses and their

commentaries are not simply there to give us a history lesson.

We are all too familiar by now with the feeling of remaining at home, of lounging around, of waiting for the end of this pandemic. It cannot be a coincidence that we are reading this Parasha today in a 'darkness' where we too, in a different sense, cannot 'see one another'; where people stay at home for three days on end. And, for some, although we cannot see them, they may not be able to 'get up from where (they are)'. The parallels are striking.

However at the same time, Bnei Yisrael were not affected by this plague. Why?

The Torah describes how the Israelites had light in their dwellings. And indeed very soon, they were about to sing and rejoice by the Yam Suf in freedom. They are given the first Mitzvah as a people; to establish a lunar calendar - looking to the future, and offer the Pesach sacrifice in gratitude.

Here's where the title comes in. That 'happiness can be found even in the darkest of times, if one only

remembers to turn on the light' is a quote from Harry Potter, and is profound in understanding all of this. Isolation can be a powerful force. Staying home and reading the news can drag us down. But that is where action comes in; that is where we make the decision to 'turn on the light'. Reality is so often what we make it. Mental Health Shabbat is about lifting the cover, spreading awareness, starting the conversation and above all, looking out for others. We can kickstart this light through getting up; getting out; volunteering; making others laugh; building real connections; starting something new. There is so we can give and bring; to see this time not just for its hardships but also its opportunities. And for once in history we can 'see' people simply through switching on our phones.

Just as the Parasha ends with Hashem taking the Jews out of Egypt, we are so close now. Our miracle is the vaccination, and please G-d we will end this singing and dancing, just as Bnei Yisrael did.

**SOPHIE WAS A MADRICHA ON ALEPH WINTER MACHANE 5781.**

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'TURN ON THE LIGHT'.**

# WHAT'S GOING ON?

- Applications are open for **Summer Machane 5781!** Join us from **2nd-15th August** and enjoy a fantastic Bnei Akiva experience full of fun, friends and Ruach! Sign up today at [bauk.org/camps](http://bauk.org/camps) or email [camps@bauk.org](mailto:camps@bauk.org) for more information.

- **Svivot are continuing!** Look out for updates and virtual events from your local sviva or visit [www.bauk.org/svivot](http://www.bauk.org/svivot).

- **WE NEED YOUR HELP!** Coronavirus has hit Bnei Akiva hard, costing us over £150,000. Our Mazkirut, Bogrim and Madrichim have been working tirelessly to put on a range of fantastic programming for our youth, from Machane Aviv in the Spring, to a celebration of Israel like no other on Yom Ha'atzmaut, a packed summer of programming for over 400 children, and Winter Machane. Please support our **Yad Achim Campaign**. Visit [bauk.org/yad-achim](http://bauk.org/yad-achim) for more information and to donate.

One movement, one ideology, one family!  
Sign Up for the Mifgash Olami TODAY!  
<https://www.worldbneiakiva.org/mifgash-olami>

- Keep an eye out for **daily exciting virtual events** for all ages! **Stay Safe > Stay Inspired > Stay BA**

- Each week we will be releasing a **scavenger hunt and challenges** to complete with the whole family! The winners will be announced each Friday on our social media!

- Be sure to like our **Facebook page (Bnei Akiva UK)** and follow our **Instagram (bneiakivauk)** to stay informed of our online content!

- To receive weekly copies of **Shabbat Lashem**, sign up for our mailing list at [bauk.org/contact](http://bauk.org/contact).

- Visit [bauk.org/feedback](http://bauk.org/feedback) for contact details for all Mazkirut members and to leave any general feedback!

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