



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles
Study Guide

Take home Dvar Torah

Parshat Bo תשפ"ד

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

***Partners in Torah
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of
wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until
now, lacked access.***

Thank you for joining us!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

The Jews are finally out of Egypt. By killing every first born, Hashem delivered the knockout punch to Pharaoh who could not get rid of them fast enough. This chapter in Jewish history, the slavery and the process of freedom from 210 years of Egyptian subjugation, underlies many of the Torah's 613 commandments and provides the theme of most of our festivals.

We are commanded to remember the Exodus from Egypt twice daily, morning and evening, which we fulfill by reciting the third paragraph of the *Shema* during the morning and evening services which contains this verse (Numbers 15:41).

(מא) אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים :
אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם :

*41. I am Hashem, your G-d, **Who brought you out from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you; I am Hashem your G-d.**"*

In the Friday night *Kiddush*, we recite that the Sabbath constitutes a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt. So, too, in many of our prayers, we mention "*a remembrance to the Exodus from Egypt.*"

Many of the mitzvot that we perform also serve to remind us of the Exodus from Egypt. Tefillin, for example, reference the Exodus on their internal parchments. The mezuzah, placed on the doorways of our homes, reminds us that Hashem passed over the doorposts of the Jews during the tenth plague: the killing of the first born.

When the Holy Temple stood, there was an obligation to participate in the קרבן פסח - the *Pascal offering* which simulated the Pascal offering brought the 15th of Nissan, the night before the Jews left Egypt. Eighteen of the nineteen commandments given in this week's Torah reading, deal with the Pascal offering which, unfortunately, we cannot bring today, because we do not have the Holy Temple.

The most famous of the commandments relating to the Exodus directs us to relate story of the Exodus to our children.

This is derived from the verse (Exodus 13:8)

(ח) וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא

8) *And you shall relate it to your son on that day...*

We fulfill this commandment by having a Seder the first two nights of Passover. Families all over the world join to hear the elder of the family or someone knowledgeable recite the Haggadah, which was composed to tell the story of the slavery and redemption from Egypt. This mitzvah of *telling the story* of the exodus to our children differs fundamentally from the daily mitzvah to remember it. The former instructs us to elaborate on the story, adding as much detail as we can to paint the most vivid picture possible of the Exodus for our children and grandchildren. This way, from their earliest childhood memories, they grow up with this most crucial event in our history, deeply etched in their minds.

But why? *Why* must every Jewish child know about the Exodus, and why does it have so many commandments to commemorate it? And when we remember it daily, exactly what are we supposed to think about?

When Hashem appeared to Moshe at the burning bush and instructed him to tell the Jewish people that He had appeared to him, Moshe responded with, “They won’t believe me!” This was not a criticism of the Jewish people but rather a complement. Why should they? The Jewish people are by nature quite skeptical and will not commit to something unless they can verify it.

Moreover, if you are going to tell me that I must change my life and adopt a lifestyle that is different and demanding, you had better have solid proof that it is warranted. Every other religion in the world started when one person claimed that G-d appeared to him and taught him his religion, but it requires no sacrifice and no change. So, what the heck? I’ll

drink the Cool aid, tout the slogan, carry on with my life, and I'm good. It makes no difference if it's true or not. Judaism, on the other hand, comprises a holy way of life which requires one to embrace it with all its rigors. You had better have compelling evidence to convince me that I should accept it.

The real G-d would want the reality of His existence to be clear and obvious to each of His adherents. The revelation must be open and unchallengeable. It cannot result from a whisper from person to person with the hope that the religion spreads successfully.

This is the one time in world history that Hashem parted the curtain of nature and revealed Himself and His awesome power for all to see, Jew and gentile alike. He demonstrated once and for all, by changing the laws of nature, that He created it with its laws, the world, and everything and everyone in it. He turned water into blood and combined fire and ice into one hailstone. He split the sea with walls of water on each side, allowing his nation to pass through on dry land, and He drowned the pursuing Egyptian army in the same sea. He then, in the climax of it all, touched heaven to earth when He gave the Torah on Mt. Sinai. Hashem's might and awesome power shook forever the entire civilized world. They all knew that Hashem took the Jewish people out of Egypt to be His nation.

The events of Egypt and the Exodus were undeniable and acknowledged by all. Even Christianity and Islam, two of the world's major religions, with over 3 billion adherents - ***because they could not deny the Exodus event*** - agree that the Jewish people *were* Hashem's chosen nation. They claim, however, that the situation has changed. The Christians claim that G-d became angry with us and chose them instead, and the Moslems assert that their prophet Mohamad was the final prophet and supersedes all previous prophets (Moshe) and all their teachings.

The Sefer HaKuzari, written by R. Yehudah HaLevi, (740 CE), tells the story of the king of Khazar, who despite his efforts to be perfect in his service to his god, had a recurring dream. In his dreams, an angel repeatedly told him that his heart and intentions were beloved by G-d, but that his actions were not. In his efforts to determine what the desirable service to G-d was, he invited a priest, an imam, and a rabbi to find out what they believed so that he could choose the correct religion for himself.

Initially, he was inclined to go with Christianity because they had the largest number of followers and he figured that they were probably correct.

The rabbi objected and said, “Your highness, the Jews are the majority in this matter!”

“How so?” asked the king incredulously. “The Jews are miniscule in number compared to the others!”

“It’s very simple,” said the rabbi. “The Christians and the Jews both agree that it is not the Moslems, and the Moslems and the Jews both agree that it is not the Christians. Therefore, they are both in the minority, outnumbered 2 to 1. But all three religions unanimously agree that the Jews were chosen by G-d to be His nation, two of them claiming that something has changed. The burden of proof lies upon the them to prove that something *has* changed. We, the Jews, say that nothing has changed and can prove it. Upon hearing the rabbi’s argument, the king had to agree. He chose to learn about Judaism from the rabbi and eventually converted to Judaism along with many people from his country.

This is what is so important about the events of the Exodus, and what Hashem wants us to be constantly aware of. Our belief in Hashem does not derive from hearsay; it follows from events that an entire nation experienced. Every Jew who left Egypt witnessed the Egyptians suffering from the plagues and how he himself was unaffected. Each Jew walked

through a sea with walls of water miraculously standing up on both sides, and then watched the Egyptians perish as the waters crashed down upon them as they resumed their natural state. They were the ones who broke out in song and praised and thanked Hashem for their salvation.

As we think about these concepts during our prayers and while performing the mitzvot, we must bear in mind that nothing has changed. Hashem still controls the world and everything and everyone in it, and He is still involved in our daily lives.

During the 40 years of the Exodus and the wandering in the wilderness, Hashem operated in a “revealed” mode where everyone could see Him clearly. Now, Hashem is operating in “stealth mode,” hidden behind nature, keeping His involvement hidden from us. Yet, if we keep our intellectual eyes and ears open, we can perceive Him clearly in every nook and cranny of nature and in every aspect of our lives.

How many Jews followed Moshe out of Egypt and witnessed all of that?

The Torah tells us in Exodus 12:37:

לִזָּה וַיִּסְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִרַעְמִסִּס סִכְתָּה כְּשֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף רַגְלֵי הַגְּבָרִים לְבַד מִטָּף

*37. The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, **about six hundred thousand men** on foot, aside from children:*

Statistically, there are about as many women as there are men, so the number of adults was about 1.2 million people. If they had 3 kids apiece, we are talking another 1.8 million children (600,000 X 3), yielding a conservative estimate of about 3 million people. This number excludes the “mixed multitude” whom the Torah tells us left with them, who could have been as numerous.

A rabbi sat in the dentist's chair. The dentist, a devout Christian, was pestering the rabbi about why he doesn't believe in Jesus. After numerous attempts to evade the question, the dentist finally said to the rabbi, "Rabbi, stop beating around the bush. Tell me why you don't believe in Jesus?"

The rabbi said, "If you really want to know, I will tell you. You are a medical man, right? What would you say if a young lady came into your office visibly pregnant, and said, 'I was never with a man, this child is from G-d'?"

"I would say she was nuts!" replied the dentist.

"So why are you asking me why I don't believe in Jesus, this is what you are telling me!"

"OK," said the dentist, "Let me ask you a question. If someone came into your office one day and said, 'Rabbi, you are not going to believe what just happened! I was fishing on the Detroit River, and, all of a sudden, the water split and the dry river bottom could be seen!' What would you say?"

"I would say he was nuts!" replied the rabbi.

"But don't you believe in the splitting of the Red Sea?"

"Of course, I do!" said the rabbi.

"But didn't you just say that the guy was nuts?!"

"Let me explain the difference," said the rabbi. "If one person came and said it, I would say that he was nuts. If two people came, I would want to know what they were smoking. Ten people, maybe a hoax. But if a thousand people came, all telling the same story, that they were sitting at the riverbank and they saw the water split, you would be unable to dismiss their claim out of hand. Perhaps a large boat sped through and in its wake, you could see the bottom of the river, but they must have all

seen something or they would not all be telling the same story with the same details. Here we have *3 million people*, all saying that they together shared the very same experiences! This is something that could not be falsified.”

It was the 14th day of ניסן-Nissan, and the Jewish people in Egypt were busy preparing for the very first Seder ever, which would take place that night. There was much to be done. The Pascal offering needed to be slaughtered and roasted, and its blood needed to be placed on the doorposts and the lintel. The matzahs needed to be baked, and they also needed to obtain some bitter herbs, because they would be eating those three things together at the Seder.

The verse (Exodus 12:8) states:

(ח) וְאָכְלוּ אֶת הַבֶּשֶׂר בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִי אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת עַל מְרִירִים יֹאכְלֶהּוּ :

8. They shall eat the flesh (of the Pascal offering) on that night -- roasted over the fire -- and matzos; with bitter herbs shall they eat it.:

These three foods symbolize what was happening to them. The bitter herbs represented the bitter Egyptian slavery. The Matzoh symbolized their leaving so quickly that their dough lacked sufficient time to rise, and the Pascal offering represented how Hashem passed over the houses that had blood on the doorposts, sparing the first born inside.

When the children, bewildered by all the sudden activity, asked their parents: “What’s going on?” their parents told them of the exciting events that were going to transpire that evening, and that they would be leaving Egypt for good the next morning.

That Seder was in the year 2448, (1,285 BCE) 3,336 years ago (we are now in 5784). From that Seder and until today, on the 15th of Nissan, Jewish families all over the world have joined to celebrate the day that the Jewish people left Egypt. They all eat the same symbolic foods and tell the same story: our ancestors were slaves in Egypt, and Hashem performed

many miracles and took them out to make them free. Throughout the ages, many Jews have risked their lives to have a Passover Seder, and almost anyone who calls himself a Jew celebrates Pesach in some way. Statistically, it is the most celebrated holiday on the Jewish calendar.

This is but one of a myriad of practices passed down from parent to child in an unbroken chain from when the Jewish people became a nation and started doing them more than 3,300 years ago.

If these events never happened, how could this great lie have started? If someone would have tried to foist this lie upon his children, the children would have just said, “Huh? You want me to eat these tasteless crackers for seven days because Who took whom from where? When was that? What are you talking about?”

In general, how do we know that history’s recorded events and happenings are true? Maybe they are apocryphal? Why couldn’t someone come today and question the existence of George Washington or Abraham Lincoln? Maybe they are fictitious people inserted into American history to build pride and honor for the American people? What *proves* their existence?

The proof comes from the people who lived during their lifetimes, who knew them and interacted with them, and who contemporaneously recorded their statements and deeds. Written documents speak about them. Were those documents false, when they first appeared there would have been an outcry from all quarters contesting the claim and demanding honest history. If such a situation did not occur, we can rest assured that the history is true.

Similarly, if an event took place, there should be third party testimony recorded in the history of the times. Cataclysmic events that affected so many people would not go unnoticed by objective observers.

This obtains as well in regard to the plagues in Egypt. The Leiden Museum in the Netherlands contains a papyrus written in hieroglyphics by the Egyptian historian Ipuwer, which Sir Alan H. Gardiner translated in 1909. Here are some of the events described in that document:

Plague is throughout the land. Blood is everywhere.

The river is blood.

Men shrink from tasting - human beings, and thirst after water.

That is our water! That is our happiness! What shall we do in respect thereof? All is ruin.

Forsooth, grain has perished on every side.

Forsooth, that has perished which was yesterday seen. The land is left over to its weariness like the cutting of flax.

There are many more entries that correspond to verses in the Torah.

There is also much other outside evidence, like this shrine discovered in El Arish:



A black granite naos or shrine discovered at El Arish in the 1860's. It gives the account of Pharaoh Thoum and his army pursuing their enemies only to perish at the "Place of the Whirlpool."

It has been only about 80 years since the end of WW II, yet there are Holocaust deniers despite the many survivors who testified to the horrors that occurred. Can you imagine what people will say two hundred years from now?

“The holocaust? It never happened! The Germans were the most polite and cultured people in the world. They could never have done something like that to human beings!”

How do we deflect this future? By assembling the available documentation and testimony so that when someone questioned the truth, the clear and readily available evidence would be produced. If Holocaust Memorial Day would still be observed in two hundred years, that would prove it conclusively. How could such a day have been added to the calendar if the event never happened? Who would have let it happen?

The holidays of Passover and Sukkot, and all the mitzvot that we still do to remember the Exodus, comprise Hashem’s way of documenting the events for the future. That which we still keep the traditions that we received from our fathers, who received them from their fathers all the way back to our ancestors in Egypt, is the greatest testimony to the veracity of the events.

There is yet another layer of unshakeable proof. Just 50 days after the Exodus from Egypt, the Jewish nation stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai and received the Torah. At that event, the entire Jewish nation heard the first two of the ten commandments directly from Hashem. This means that they heard Hashem speak to them and as such, all became prophets. This alone was conclusive proof of Hashem. But it goes further.

At the end of his life, Moshe Rabbeinu wrote a Sefer Torah for each of the tribes, and an extra one to be placed in the Holy Ark in the Holy of Holies. The Sefer Torahs we read from in Shul every Shabbat were flawlessly copied from those Sefer Torahs, and are identical.

In the Sefer Torah, we read the story of the Jewish people in Egypt, the events of the Exodus, and the subsequent episodes throughout the 40 years in the wilderness. Those events were written into the Torah by Moshe as they occurred. They received the completed document at the end of Moshe's life, just before they entered the land of Israel with Joshua. They read the very same narrative that we read, yet they were reading about the events that happened *to them!* They had been a part of everything that happened during those forty years. *They* collected the manna every morning for forty years! *They* drank water from the well that traveled with them for forty years! *They* followed the cloud that led them during the day, and the pillar of fire that led them during the night, for forty years! *They* were witness to Korach being swallowed up by the earth, as well as many, many other miracles that occurred during that time. And, after reading the entire book, they accepted it. Not only did they accept it, but they also vowed to give their lives for it. Had there been one mistake or one exaggeration in the book, would they have accepted it?

Imagine that a business acquaintance told you that he had a private meeting with President Biden in the oval office. After giving you elaborate details about the meeting, you were convinced that he was telling the truth.

But how would you react if he told you that you were there with him? "*Don't you remember? You were wearing your pinstripe suit with a blue tie!*" No sane person who would believe something about himself that he knows is untrue, no matter how charismatic and convincing the other person was.

Many verses in the Torah talk directly to the Jewish people. (Exodus 19:4)

(ד) אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרָיִם

4. ***You have seen what I did to Egypt,***

(Deuteronomy 29:1)

(א) ויקרא משה אל כל ישראל ויאמר אליהם אתם ראיתם את כל אשר עשה
ידוד לעיניכם בארץ מצרים לפרעה ולכל עבדיו ולכל ארצו :

1. *Moses summoned all of Israel and said to them, "You have seen everything that Hashem did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land.*

If even one word was untrue, how could they accept the Torah? They would insist that it be changed or reject it out of hand.

The Torah is brutally honest. It criticizes, reprimands, warns, and punishes the Jewish people numerous times. Very unbecoming to them, yet, they still gave it to their children?

The Jewish people accepted it with a full heart, for this was the truth. This very Torah resides in thousands of Synagogues around the world. It has been copied, read from, and studied faithfully for 3,336 years without interruption. How fortunate we are to know and to be able to prove that the Torah that we have and everything in it is true.

This is the 8th of the 13 Principles of Faith listed by Maimonides:

ח - אני מאמין באמונה שלמה. שכל התורה המצויה עתה בידינו היא הנתונה
למשה רבנו עליו השלום :

I believe with complete faith that the Torah that we have today in our hands is the same one that was given to Moshe.

This clear and simple truth is what we must remember and review numerous times a day when remembering the Exodus from Egypt, for it was there that Hashem revealed Himself to the world. The Torah and our performance of the many mitzvot that commemorate the exodus, that are still done with love today, are proof positive that these events indeed occurred. Our belief in Hashem is not based on hearsay, or blind belief. It is founded on events that were witnessed by millions of people and handed down from father to son for thousands of years. How fortunate

we are to know that we have the truth, and how compelling a reason it is, to embrace the mitzvot.