



**Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura
Take home Dvar Torah**

5786 Parshat Bo
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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.**

תשפ"ו Parshat Bo

On Rosh Hashanah this year, the Jewish calendar year changed from 5785 to 5786 (Rosh Hashanah means the “head” or the “beginning” of the new year.) This number represents the years that have passed since man’s creation on the 1st of Tishrei.

How, then, are we to understand this verse in this week’s portion *Bo* (Exodus 12:2) that designates a different “first” month?

(ב) הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֳדָשִׁים רִאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה

2) This month is for you the beginning of the months; it is for you the first of the months of the year.

Referring to the month of ניסן (*Nisan*), the verse is saying that *Nisan* is the first of the months. Indeed, the Torah tells us that Rosh Hashanah is the first day of the *seventh* month, and Pesach is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the first month of the year.

How can two different months both be the “first” month of the year?

The answer is that the first of *Tishrei* marks the anniversary of the world’s creation, the day on which Adam, the beginning of Mankind and the reason for creation itself, was created. The month of Nissan, on the other hand, when the Jews left Egypt on the 15th day of the month, marks the anniversary of the birth of the Jewish Nation who became Hashem’s nation when they left Egypt. The prophet Ezekiel (16:4) describes the Jewish people emerging from Egypt like the birth of a child emerging from its mother’s womb:

(ד) וּמוֹלְדוֹתַיִךְ בְּיוֹם הַיּוֹלְדֹת אֶתְךָ לֹא כָרַת שָׂרְךָ וּבְמִים לֹא רָחַצְתָּ לְמִשְׁעֵי
וְהַמֶּלֶח לֹא הִמְלַחְתָּ וְהַחֲתָל לֹא חֲתַלְתָּ

4) *And as for your birth, on the day that you were born, your navel was not cut, you were not washed in water or salted nor were you swaddled at all.*

This verse refers to how needy the Jewish nation was at its birth when it emerged from Egypt. It was like a newborn child who lacked the care that a newborn needs. In the next verses the prophet describes how Hashem tended to all of those needs and made the Jewish nation into the amazing nation that it became.

There is something quite noteworthy about the verse (quoted above) that introduces Nisan as the first month of the Jewish calendar year, the month that includes the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people as a nation, *viz*, the commandment to sanctify the new month through the testimony of witnesses who saw the new moon's first sliver crescent.

Although the new moon appears automatically, Rosh Chodesh, i.e., the start of the month, is not "official" until the High Court proclaims it so. The process requires two witnesses who saw the new moon to come to the High Court to testify that they saw that first crescent. The Court, knowing how the new moon *should* look, would interrogate them to determine that they actually saw it. If their testimony was accepted, the Court would proclaim the new month by declaring, מקודש החודש "מקודש!" (*"the new month is sanctified"*).

Hashem also then told Moshe exactly when each future month would become visible until the end of time, so that Moshe could sanctify them, should, for some reason, the Court be unable to do it. This is how our *Roshei Chodoshim* were and are still sanctified, even though we now lack the High Court.

That the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh was the first mitzvah to be given to the Jewish people carries great significance, as does the Jewish

nation's use of the lunar calendar instead of a solar calendar as do most other nations, indicating the unique Jewish view of time versus the conventional view of time.

The conventional view of time is that time has neither beginning nor end. It has always "just been around," and it will continue to be so, forever. Each second, minute, hour, day ... just follows the one before it and precedes the one after it, as time marches relentlessly onward, waiting for no one. People find themselves caught in the middle of its vast nothingness, but, in reality, they are really nowhere. Time has no specific purpose or destination, it just *is*; and on the vast, endless canvas of time, it really makes no difference who existed when.

The Torah perspective of time, which starts with its very beginning, is the antithesis of this.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:1) teaches us:

א) בַּעֲשָׂרָה מְאֻמְרוֹת נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם

1) *The world was created with ten pronouncements*

This reference seems to refer to all of the times that the Torah declares, "ויאמר אלקים" (*"And Hashem said"*) when creating the world's various components. The problem is that the Torah states ויאמר אלקים only *nine* times. The Talmud responds to this difficulty by asserting that the Torah's first word, בראשית - *"In the beginning,"* is actually the first of the ten statements. The commentaries of course ask, "What was created with this word?" Their answer? "A beginning" was created, *the beginning of time*.

Rabbeinu Ovadia Seforno expresses it like this:

ספורנו עה"ת, ספר בראשית, פרק א פסוק א

א) בראשית. בתחלת הזמן והוא רגע ראשון בלתי מתחלק שלא היה זמן קודם לו

At the beginning of time, which is the very first moment, which cannot be divided, and before which there was nothing.

We are accustomed to thinking that before Hashem created the world there was just eons of time and a vast empty expanse of space into which Hashem placed a solar system with the planets including planet earth. The reality is that before Hashem created the world, there was *nothing, absolutely nothing*, other than Hashem. No time. No space. Just Hashem alone, Who created time and space.

When we contemplate the creation of “*a beginning*,” our thoughts must also include a continuation of that beginning and its end. A beginning means the *beginning of something*, so, a beginning must have an end. If there is a beginning and an end, it must also have a middle, or continuum that takes the beginning to the end. When Hashem created time, He created a finite thing, with a specific duration, for a specific purpose.

The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 97a):

אמר רב קטינא שית אלפי שני הוו עלמא וחד חרוב

Rav Ketina said, *The world will exist for six thousand years, and it will be destroyed for one (thousand years).*

Time in our world has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and, like everything else that Hashem created, it has a purpose. What is that purpose?

Six-thousand-years is the number of years that Hashem has determined suffices for mankind to bring the world to its perfection through our collective actions. Hence, every generation on the timeline

has a unique mission to accomplish at that spot on the timeline and is an essential component in the ongoing task to perfect the world. As such, each subsequent generation builds its contribution on the foundations of the prior generations. As each new generation takes up its position on the timeline, it is endowed with the necessary talents and qualities it will need to accomplish its part in perfecting the world. Our Sages teach us that being so close to the end of the 6,000 years (we are at 5786, with just 214 years left), our actions are more potent and have the ability to accomplish even more than in generations past.

But for what are we striving? What will a perfect world look like? A perfect world is one in which every inhabitant recognizes Hashem as the world's Creator and Master. This is what the Mashiach will accomplish, and we are preparing the world for his arrival by bringing the world to recognize Hashem.

How are do we accomplish this goal? Our job in this world is to do Hashem's holy work through learning the Torah and fulfilling its mitzvot. When we opt to override our personal desires and do what Hashem has commanded us to do, we are demonstrating that we are under Hashem's control, and we are doing what He wants us to do, not what we elect to do.

When a Jew walks to Shul on Shabbat in the bitter cold of a winter morning bundled up like a polar bear, and doesn't get into his cozy warm car, he is stating emphatically that he is subjugating his will to he will of his creator. All who see him making his way through the bitter cold, wonder; "What's wrong with this guy? And, I just noticed, there are tens of these nut cases walking through the snow in the freezing cold! Why don't they all just take Ubers? I forgot, these are religious Jews. They do weird things."

This is a prime example of sanctifying Hashem's name in the world. The world recognizes Hashem through our actions. Moreover, when we follow Hashem's instructions to the "t" they create the framework for a perfect life, one full of goodness, meaning and spirituality. Together the mitzvot comprise a system which mold the Jewish person into a perfect human being modelled after Hashem's perfection. Through following Hashem's mitzvot, the entire world can recognize us as Hashem's holy people.

Six years ago, the Torah learning community took part in a *Siyum Ha-Shas*, a celebration for the completion of the entire Babylonian Talmud ("*shas*"). Many thousands of Jews the world over studied the same new page of Talmud every day, and over the course of seven and a half years completed the entire set of volumes. Such a momentous accomplishment is cause for a major celebration, and, indeed, celebrations were held all over the world on Wednesday, January 1, 2020.

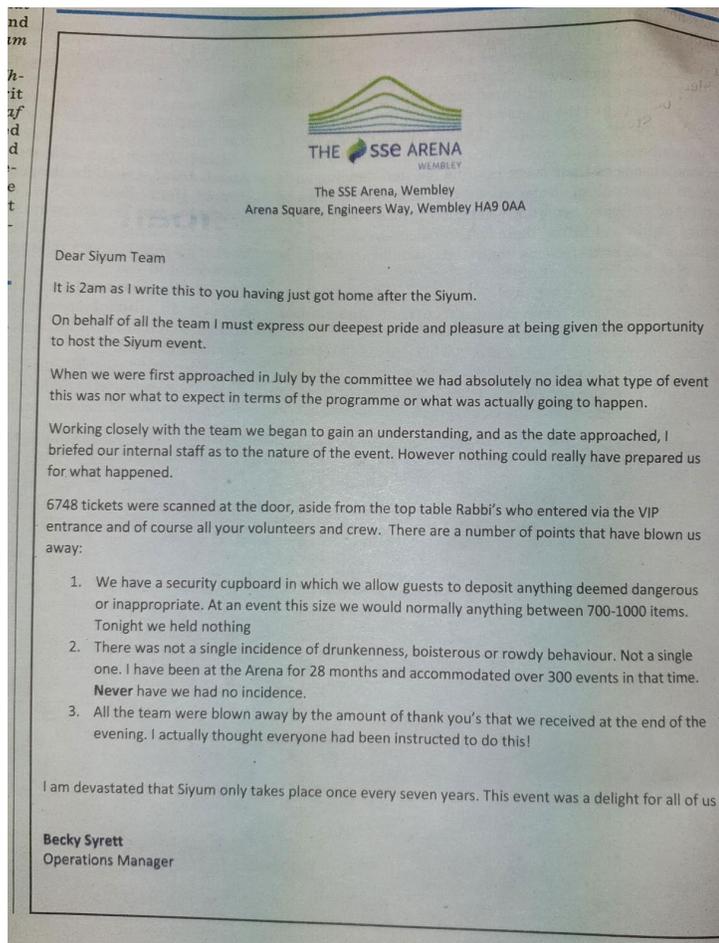
Approximately 90,000 people gathered at the Metlife stadium in New Jersey to attend the celebration. The event's organizers could not get over how orderly and courteous the people were to them, and to each other. People said thank you to the police and the help, no one was drunk, not one altercation or raised voice occurred throughout the entire event, and people did as they were instructed.

Another thing that blew the spectators away was the evening service- *Maariv* - prayed by all, after the event. There was the usual commotion or loud recitation of the blessings and the Shema parts of the prayers, but when it came to the *Amida*, the silent prayer, the entire stadium fell pin-drop silent, for almost ten minutes. There was not one person talking or even whispering to his neighbor. (Everyone was busy davening.) What the observers couldn't understand was what could

possibly cause 90,000 people to suddenly, in one split second, fall silent for ten full minutes without even one breach in silence?

There is only one force powerful enough to accomplish that and that is a relationship with Hashem. At that moment, there was no question that the people who claim to be G-d's people, exhibited G-dly conduct, and showed the world that Hashem exists.

A similar event was held in Manchester England at the SSE Arena, where approximately 6750 people attended the event. The following is a copy of the letter received from the Operations Manager of the SSE Arena, to the Siyum team in Manchester.



This is the perspective from the national perspective, as far as the role that the Jewish nation plays on the world scene.

There is yet a secondary level upon which the unique Jewish concept of time that time has a purpose and a goal, impacts us on a moment to moment basis. This idea is derived from the very word used in Torah for *time*.

In Hebrew, the word for *time* is זמן. The verb form of this word is, להזמין which means *to prepare*. Hashem has given us time on this earth to prepare the world for its ultimate purpose. Instead of time being a meaningless continuation from the moment that preceded it, each new moment in time is a new opportunity to accomplish something new towards the world's perfection.

Hashem has created the perfect system.

Each Jewish soul that enters this world comes with a task to accomplish in the ongoing process of perfecting the world. At birth, the soul is endowed with every talent and capability that it will need to accomplish that goal. The amount of time it will spend on this earth as well as all of its physical attributes will also be tailor made to ensure it is fully equipped to handle its task. its intelligence, personality, height, weight etc. are all finely tuned to enable it to accomplish its purpose in life.

Perhaps the following metaphor could help us conceptualize the idea.

Bereshit Bara Elokim – Hashem created a Beginning.

When Hashem created the beginning of the six-thousand-year continuum, He surely had a clear picture of what He expected those six thousand years to look like as souls would be introduced to the world each with its mission. So, for example, in the year 1948 from the world's creation, a titanic soul was introduced to the world, Avraham Avinu. A hundred years later, another colossal soul, that of Yitzchak was

introduced to the process of bringing the world to its perfection. Sixty years later Yaakov was introduced to perfect the process. Together, through the holy lives that these three giant souls lived, with their children and grandchildren, they brought the world back to its perfection when, at the conclusion of the book of Exodus, we merited that Hashem's presence (Shechina) dwell among the Jewish people as it did with the Patriarchs.

Imagine the 6,000 years process of the world's perfection as one long movie, starting with Adam and concluding with the coming of Mashiach. As time passes new souls enter the playing stage while other players must leave, as they have completed their missions, or have simply run out of time.

Let's go another step. Instead of seeing the movie as a film strip, let's imagine it a one long picture puzzle with millions of pieces of various sizes, colors, and shapes coming together to render the perfect image of the world. Each soul enters the world as a uniquely shaped puzzle piece that, upon perfection, will render that piece of the puzzle and complete yet another step in the process. As each new soul completes its task, it adds its unique and critical part to the ongoing progress of the project.

This is the individual life that we live in this world where we face challenges of right and wrong - right left and center. We are expected to rise to the challenges and overcome the evil, to do Hashem's will and, by doing so, we perfect our piece of the puzzle and the picture becomes complete. Throughout our lives with every correct choice that we make, our piece of the puzzle is broadcasting Hashem's presence in the world, thus contributing in real time to the ultimate revelation when Mashiach comes. Our choices are what are bringing forth the ultimate redemption.

When our soul leaves this world, it goes to the World to Come where it receives the sublime reward for the holy life that it lived.

However, it will not be until the Mashiach comes that we will all be able to stand back and look at the whole picture and see our piece of the puzzle within the fabric of all the other pieces, our fellow Jews, and appreciate the tremendous impact that we had on the process. That pleasure will be indescribably great.

One more metaphor will pull the picture together.

Imagine the Jewish Nation as a world class symphony orchestra. In an orchestra, there are many instruments, each with different sounds and capabilities. Each instrument contributes its special sound to the symphony, creating the explosion of harmonious sound that makes the symphony so beautiful to listen to. The triangle may be played once in an hour-long piece, but, if it went missing, the piece would not be the same. Even though there are many violins in an orchestra, each is vital. There is a story about Arturo Toscanini, Conductor of the RCA Orchestra, who listened to a recording of a symphony, and was able to discern that the orchestra was missing one of its many violins.

Every musician in the orchestra must practice his part of the symphony at home until he has perfected it, so that when he joins the orchestra for the performance, he plays it perfectly.

In the same sense, in our private lives, we are practicing for the great performance which is the placement of our piece of the puzzle into its place in the great puzzle of world perfection. We are given a lifetime to perfect our piece of the symphony, and when we leave this world, our puzzle piece will be added permanently to the picture of the perfect world. At that time, our piece of the puzzle, the unique life lived by our soul in this world, will play its part of the symphony together with all the other instruments in the orchestra, the rest of the Jewish nation. We will all be playing Hashem the most heartfelt praise for allowing us to be part of the picture of the perfect world. From His perspective, Hashem will

reward us very handsomely for all the efforts we have made on His behalf.

By preparing this world for its purpose, we also prepare our place in the world to come. We will be handsomely rewarded for choosing to use our time to perfect Hashem's world through learning Torah and doing mitzvot, instead of squandering it on matters of nothingness. Time provides us with the framework through which we prepare ourselves for the world to come.

Additionally, through learning Torah and performing the mitzvot, we improve and perfect ourselves. They provide direct injections of holiness into our souls that slowly change us from earthy, materialistic people, to holy, spiritual people.

This concept is best described in the verse about Avraham our forefather (Genesis 24:1).

(א) וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַיָּמִים

1) And Avraham was old, he came with his days.

What does that mean? It means that he used each of his days to the fullest, and thus his days of accomplishment were "in" him, and he brought them with him when he left the world.

When personal cameras first came out, the sales pitch for them was, "Capture the moment!" It is so attractive to try to snatch a moment out of time and eternalize it in a picture that will bring us back to relive that moment. When we use our time to do a mitzvah, we are doing exactly that. We are eternalizing that moment, because Hashem is guarding it to reward us for it in the world to come.

The moon is the perfect example of how we should look at time because the moon is forever new, and we can never see a stagnant

moon. This is because there are no two moments when the moon is the exactly the same. Either it is on its way to becoming larger, or on its way to becoming smaller. That is why a month is called a $\Psi\text{Ṭ}\eta$ from the word $\Psi\text{Ṭ}\eta$ which means *new*, since every moment of the lunar month is new. Similarly, we should see each new moment of our lives as a new opportunity to prepare the world and ourselves.

There is another important lesson in the moon. The moon waxes and wanes until it disappears for a full 24 hours. After the lull of 24 hours, the moon returns and steadily grows to reach its full state. This resembles life in many ways, because we also have our ups and our downs. When we are down, we need to look at the moon and see how it comes back full every month, and when we are up, we should not make the mistake of thinking this is the way it will always be. We need to learn from the moon that things wax and wane.

The sun, contrariwise, is the same every day and never changes. It is always out there in full force, with its rays beating relentlessly on the earth. That's not realistic for the human being.

This is why the consecration of the new moon is the first mitzvah to be given to the Jewish people as a nation. This mitzvah sets the proper perspective on what time is. Time is like the moon, that each new second is a new opportunity to perfect the world through perfecting ourselves. In doing that, we also prepare ourselves for the world to come.

The Vilna Gaon cried on his deathbed. They asked him, "What could a person like you, who didn't waste a minute in life, have to cry about?" He answered. "In this world, I can take a few dollars, buy a pair of tzitzit, and gain eternal reward in the world to come for wearing them. In the next world, there are no more such opportunities. I am crying because I'm about to lose those opportunities." This, ultimately, is the message of Parashat Bo. Time is not meant to pass us by; it is meant to be

sanctified. Each new month, each new moment, is an opportunity placed in our hands to perfect ourselves and, through that, to perfect the world. When we use our time for Torah and mitzvot, nothing is lost. Every moment becomes eternal. May we merit to recognize the gift of time, to sanctify it wisely, and to use each new beginning to bring the world closer to its ultimate purpose, speedily in our days.