



PARSHAS BO

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New Beginnings

Introduction

This week's parsha begins with Hashem commanding Moshe to go to Pharaoh. The Zohar¹ on Parshas Bo begins by quoting Rabbi Yehuda who introduced the lessons of the parsha by quoting the verse in Tehillim - "אַשְׁרֵי הָעַם יוֹדְעֵי תְרוּעָה ה' בְּאֹר-פְּנֵיךְ יְהִלְכוּן"², 'Fortunate is the nation who knows how to blow (shofar); Hashem, they will go by the light of your countenance.'

This Zohar is extremely puzzling because there seems to be no connection at all between this verse from Tehillim and the contents of this week's parsha.

The Purpose of the Ten Plagues

Hashem created this world with ten Ma'amaros - utterances³. With each Ma'amar, utterance, a different aspect of creation came into being, as described in Parshas Bereishis.

Through the sins of the generations, the ten Ma'amaros were obscured. The powers of evil, greatly strengthened by the sins of mankind, concealed The Designer of creation.

The Ten Plagues destroyed these evil powers and Hashem was revealed as the maker of His world. Afterwards, when it was revealed that Hashem created the world with the ten Ma'amaros, He transmitted the Ten Commandments - which correspond to these Ten Ma'amaros - to the Jewish people.

Each of the ten plagues corresponded to one of the ten Ma'amaros. Each plague destroyed the Kelipah – evil power - that cloaked the Ma'amar to which it corresponded. Thus, each Ma'amar was revealed in one of the Ten Commandments⁴.

The Division of the Makos (Plagues)

Only seven of the ten Sefiros are manifest in our physical world. These are חג"ת נה"ם: חסד – Loving Kindness, גבורה/דין - Strict Justice, תפארת – the balance between Chesed and Din, נצח – Victory/Eternity, הוד – Subservience/Gratitude, יסוד – the balance between all the Middos, מלכות – Kingship. These seven Ma'amaros are termed 'Middos' because they comprise the character of a person.

The other three Ma'amaros are heavenly in nature. They will be incorporated into this physical world only with the initiation of the heavenly era of Mashiach. These are חכמה – Knowledge, בינה – Understanding, and כתר – Desire/Intuition, the most sublime of all the Middos. These three Sefiros are referred to as 'Mochin' – intelligence – because these are manifest in the mind of a person.

The plagues, too, were divided into a group of seven and a group of three. Parshas Vaera discusses the first seven plagues which correspond to the seven Ma'amaros and Parsha Bo discusses the last three plagues which correspond to the 'Mochin', the first three sublime Ma'amaros, which will be revealed with the coming of Mashiach.

Matching the Ma'amaros to the Makos

The first three utterances of Hashem correspond to the last three Makos, backwards. The plague of the firstborn corresponds to the first utterance, the plague of darkness to the second, and the plague of the locusts to the third.

The first Ma'amar of Hashem was the word Bereishis – in the beginning⁵. This Ma'amar corresponds to the last plague, Bechoros, the death of all Egyptian firstborns.

The plague of Bechoros did away with the 'Reishis' – first/primary – of the kelipah. Through the death of the firstborn of the wicked Egyptians - it was revealed that the primary nation of Hashem – his firstborn (so too speak) - is the Jewish people.

In addition, our sages note that the word 'Bereishis' is to be understood – not only as 'in the Reishis (beginning)' – but also 'for the sake of the Reishis.' This is the Jewish people who are referred to as 'Reishis'⁶. With the destruction of the 'Reishis' of evil powers, it was revealed that Hashem created the world for the sake of the Jewish people who are the 'Reishis' of holiness.

The second Ma'amar was – “There shall be light”. This utterance created not only the photons that enable us to see, but also a completely sublime and spiritual light with which it is possible to see from one end of the world to the other.

This light is called the Or Haganuz – the hidden light. It was hidden from mankind and reserved for the righteous who will be worthy of enjoying it after the Ultimate Redemption. However, we sometimes do get a glimpse of this light.

The second to last plague, Choshech (darkness), corresponds to this Ma'amar. Hashem did not sprinkle an intense murkiness over Egypt; rather, he revealed the light of the Or Haganuz. The holy Jewish people greatly benefited from and enjoyed this light. The Egyptians were blinded by it and thus they endured the plague of Choshech.

The third to last plague, Arbeh (the plague of locust), corresponds to the third Ma'amar of – “There shall be a firmament (sky).”

Arbeh was the eighth plague; it was the first plague to correspond to the heavenly spheres, after the seven plagues which corresponded to the seven lower Ma'amaros. Appropriately, the Ma'amar which corresponds to Arbeh is the one with which Hashem created the heavens.

Furthermore, the locusts concealed the earth. Dry land did not appear until the fourth Ma'amar, it was still concealed with the third.⁷

A Hint of Rosh Hashanah is Found in this Week's Parsha

Parshas Bo describes the Plague of the death of the First-born which corresponds to the first Ma'amar from which the world originated. It thereby contains an aspect of Rosh Hashanah, the first of Tishrei - the day in which the world was created.

Furthermore, on Rosh Hashanah the light of the Or Haganuz was enjoyed by Adam⁸. Afterwards it was concealed until the days of Mashiach. The Midrash⁹ explains that the verse in Tehilim which states – “Hashem is my light” – refers to Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Hashanah, the G-dly light of the Or Haganuz shone for Adam and every year we receive a glimpse of it again.

In this week's parsha, we enjoy the Or Haganuz along with the Jews in Egypt during the Plague of Darkness just as Adam did on Rosh Hashanah.

There are two opinions as to which day of the calendar marks the origin of creation. Some say it is the first of Tishrei; others, the first of Nissan.

The first of Nissan is discussed in the parsha; the commandment of designating the day of the renewal of the moon as the first day of the month was for the first time performed on the first day of Nissan.

From multiple perspectives, the origin of creation is contained in Parshas Bo.

The Shofar Transforms a time of Harsh Judgment to one of Divine Favor

On Rosh Hashanah, through the blowing of the shofar, it is possible to change or overturn any harsh decree.

On Rosh Hashanah, Hashem engages in judging the affairs of the world from a position of strict justice. When the Jewish people blow the Shofar, Hashem transforms His approach to one of compassion. The Shofar has the power to transform harshness into compassion.

Through the blowing of the shofar, the Jewish people – on Rosh Hashanah – can transform the divine harshness into divine favor. This is the meaning of the verse in Tehillim – “How fortunate is the nation who knows how to blow [shofar], Hashem, with the light of your countenance they will go.” The Jewish people can transform harshness into favor when they are at - ‘the light of Hashem’s countenance’. The - ‘light of Hashem’s countenance’ - refers to the Rosh Hashanah when the Or Haganuz shines.

We now understand why the Zohar introduces its discussion of the parsha with the verse – “How fortunate are those who know how to blow Shofar.” This week’s parsha contains multiple hints of Rosh Hashanah.

This Shabbos we have hints of the beginning of the year according to both opinions of the Sages. We also have the plagues which correspond to the beginning of creation. It is a time apt for a completely new beginning, a turnaround for the better.

¹ שמות ה"ב דף ל"ב ע"ב

² תהלים פט:טז

³ אבות ה:א

⁴ חידושי הר"ם

⁵ ר"ה ל"ב ע"א

⁶ רש"י בראשית א:א

⁷ אמונת עתיך תשנ"ג

⁸ מדרש רבה בראשית י"א סימן ב'

⁹ תהלים כז, סימן ד'