

Dvar Torah for Parshat Bo

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Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Pidyon Bekhor* 4

“You will separate for God every first issue of the womb. In addition, every male firstling of [kosher] beasts that you own, will be God’s and every firstling of an ass you shall redeem...and you will redeem every firstborn of your sons” (Exodus 13:12–13).

Why is it that two people can witness or even participate in the same event and come away with not only different, but diametrically opposed points of view? For example. let’s choose two people at random, like Moshe and Pharaoh. OK, not random, but archetypical. How they viewed ordinary occurring phenomena and miracles depended on their first principles. How we view and understand things depends on our root. If our root is in Moshe (and the tzaddikim) then we realize that there’s more to God than all-knowingness, everywhere-ness and even almightiness (Nature plus miracles). God has *ratzon*, a desire for something. The best we can state it, ultimately that desire is the desire for the Jewish soul (of each Jew, of each person, of each thing, of all of Creation) to “re-unite” with God (whatever that means!).

On the other hand, if, God forbid, someone currently rooted*

in Pharaoh sees just Nature (and maybe a god or goddess of Nature). Nature and the gods may have to be worshiped, sure, but that's just "making nice" or stoking the engine in order to get more for Pharaoh. That is, Nature may *need* some propitiating to offer up her goods, but she doesn't *desire* anything and asks of Pharaoh no love and no self-sacrifice. This is why, when told that God wanted him to free the Israelites, Pharaoh did not respond, "Who is *Elokim* (the Nature-God) that I should listen to Him?" but (Exodus 5:2), "Who is Hashem (the Infinite, all-everything-God) that I should listen to Him?" Nature wants nothing from me that I'm not willing to give.

One of the lessons of the mitzvah of redeeming the firstborn is to never allow our Jewishness to take root in Pharisaic thinking. Our Jewishness must never degrade to the nature of routine, in which even Shabbat might become "ordinary," God forbid. We have to take care that our Jewishness does not devolve into a god to be worshiped—made nice to or fed—for some benefit that we consider worthwhile. Our *desire* to reconnect our selves and every part of our life must be so great that we are willing to "give our firstborn" to God. There must be a fresh *ratzon* to connect to God, whether we approach with our thinking, speaking and doing (And yes, we must refresh our refreshing, so that each time "the womb" first opens it gives birth to a dynamic approach to our mitzvot.)

agutn Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

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*Yes, in regard to this, one's root can change and one can change his root.