

## BO

Since every word of our holy Torah carries within it many layers of significance and importance, it is incumbent upon us to understand why a particular word is employed by the Torah to describe a certain situation. Thus, the word "Bo" that appears at the beginning of this week's reading contains a deeper nuance of a meeting, in the opinion of all the commentators to the Torah. The fact that the word "Bo" is then followed by the Hebrew word "el" which translates not only as "to" but, perhaps more literally, as "into", gives us an insight into what the word "Bo" in this context truly signifies. It was not sufficient for Moshe merely to visit or come to the Pharaoh of Egypt to deliver the warnings from God regarding the plagues that were now going to descend upon the Egyptian nation because of their refusal to free the Jewish people from slavery and bondage. Moshe could have delivered that message by proxy, by messenger, by letter or any other means that human beings used at that time to communicate one with another. Rather, it was necessary for Moshe to come to Pharaoh in order to penetrate his thoughts and feelings. It is this need to understand Pharaoh's mindset that propels the entire narrative of this week's reading and will lead to the great moment of freedom and emancipation for the Jewish people. It is as though the Lord wants Moshe to truly recognize the stubbornness and almost suicidal behavior of Pharaoh, and to appreciate that this intransigence will be his undoing and the destruction of Egypt.

It is as though the Torah teaches us that, if one is unable to comprehend the depths of the personality of evil, that person can never really combat that evil in a practical and powerful fashion. In fact, it is the recognition of the evil lurking at first only in the background of events that helps fight that evil and prevent it from triumphing. The Jewish people were fooled by Pharaoh into volunteering for their own forced labor and eventual slavery. They did not recognize that Pharaoh's call for patriotism was hiding the true evil that lay behind his national appeal to the Jews. The Jewish people were so willing to be recognized as good Egyptians that they volunteered to become their own worst enemy and submit themselves to centuries of slavery and servitude.

Jewish people for centuries have often been unable to perceive that it is they themselves who plant the seeds of their own destruction. In the rush for acceptance and approbation by others, Jews are sometimes blind to extent that they even willfully overlook the evil that is arising around them. It is insufficient to simply come to the Pharaoh to argue one's case. One must be able to come into Pharaoh and to see what are his true motivations and how they have led to the present situation of sadness and servitude. This lesson is naturally recorded for us in the Torah, since the Torah contains messages that apply in every age of Jewish existence, and to all circumstances of political, social, and national life.

Shabbat shalom

Rather Berel Wein

## AN ADDICTION CURED

For the first few decades of my sojourn here in Jerusalem, I was absolutely addicted to hearing the news seven or eight times a day. Since this included the time of the two intifadas, two Gaza wars, numerous Israeli elections, American political upheavals, and other assorted interesting events, I did not feel that I was necessarily overdoing it. For the rest of the day, I often wondered whatever happened to a particular story from that day and why, if it was so important and shattering in the morning, that it received no further attention thereafter. I have also been concentrating more on my writing—I am in the midst of, God willing, producing two more books in the near future—and writing requires concentration that should not be easily broken by listening to the radio broadcast distracting news. And finally I have reached an age where the rest of the world is passing me by: I am no longer so interested in the daily vagaries of human behavior. To me, at my stage of life, no news is good news, and I do see no reason why I should go looking for trouble, causing myself stress and aggravation over events that I cannot control, and that rarely affect me on an individual basis.

I firmly believe that every citizen here in Israel should be well informed. But many stories and pseudo-facts somehow make it into the news broadcasts here in our wonderful little country. There is no reason for me to know about the private lives of certain people, nor about the speculations and predictions made by others concerning events over which they have no control and, in most cases, little expertise or foreknowledge. So now I listen to news broadcasts in Israel at the most twice a day, and there are entire days when I remain blissfully ignorant regarding politics, predictions, and expert opinions of others. I have noticed that this in no way diminishes my interest in life or in world and national events. However, I have placed it in its proper perspective, so that it no longer dominates my day, abuses my mind, or raises my blood pressure. By not listening that often to the news broadcasts, I find that I have time and patience to truly assess the events that occur around me, and to form an intelligent position on issues that are current. I feel that I am no more ignorant than I was before, but that I am a lot calmer and more settled, once I have been able to get over that absolute addiction of listening to news programs many times a day.

I often wonder if we are much better off in terms of lifestyle than our ancestors who did not have radios, TVs, smartphones or, in most cases, even newspapers. Somehow, entire societies function without these items, but are aware of national important issues and make decisions based upon their own personal knowledge, experience, and beliefs. I do not advocate a return to the dark ages, nor do I favor remaining technologically backward in the fast-developing technological wonderland of our world today. Nevertheless, a few moments of self-contemplation during the day, of self-criticism and thought analysis, free from distractions of the technological gadgets that have come to run our lives, would certainly be in order and benefit to all concerned. We are so busy with the outside world that we have no time to realize that it is the world within us that really counts and should motivate and drive our behavior and attitudes. The distractions of life are many; they always obstruct the development of our spirit and personality, of our true being, and our mission on earth. I certainly agree that it takes a great deal of discipline to purge the information addiction that infects us. However, as is the case in conquering all addictions, the road is hard and the climb is steep. And there always is the danger of backsliding and reverting to previous behavior. However, again with addictions, the road of discipline leads to success and, at least in my case regarding the cure for being a news junkie, I am delighted that I have that monkey off my back.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein