

Bo - Rabbi Lerner - January 22, 2012

Leaving with the Wealth of Egypt

An important issue that comes up twice in parshas Bo, a total of four times in the Torah, is the taking of the wealth of Egypt. We first hear about this in the Bris Bain Habesorim when Hashem tells Avraham about the future Galus Mitzrayim 15:14: *And also the nation that they shall serve I shall judge, and afterwards they will leave with tremendous wealth - Rechush Gadol* - huge possessions. In Shmos 3:21-22 Hashem tells Moshe *I will grant this nation favor in the eyes of the Egyptians so they will not leave Egypt empty-handed; each woman will ask of her neighbor - **Mishechentah** - and from the one who lives in her house - **Megoras Baisah** - vessels of gold and silver, and clothing, and they will place them on their sons and daughter, and they will empty out the land of Egypt.* In 11:2-3, after the plague of darkness, Hashem once again tells this to Moshe, saying *Please speak into the ears of the nation: Let each man and woman will ask of their fellow - **Rey'eyhu** and **Re'usah** - vessels of silver and gold; Hashem caused the Jews to find favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, and Moshe has become great in the eyes of all of the people - **Be'eynai Ha'am**.* Finally, in 12:35-6 the people did what Moshe commanded, *they asked of the Egyptian people silver and gold vessels and clothing; Hashem had the people find grace in the eyes of the Egyptians and they emptied out the wealth of Egypt.* By repeating this request and insisting the Jews act, it is obviously a very important thing to Hashem.

A question the meforshim first grapple with is how could it be written **Vayishalu** - we know from Parshas Mishpatim 22:13 that this word is the language of borrowing - but, the intention here was not to borrow, but to keep it? **Rev Hirsch**: only in Mishpatim does the word mean borrow; rather, as it says in Perek 2 of Tehillim, it means to ask for something for keeps, not just temporary use as with a borrower.

A classic reason given for the clearly documenting the specifics of the transfer of Egypt's wealth to the Jewish people is given in the Gemorrah Sanhedrin 91: There once was a situation where a delegation from Egypt came to present a complaint against the Jews to Alexander the Great. They argued that the Jews borrowed immense amounts of gold and silver, and the Egyptians complied with the intent of only lending it. Now they wanted it back. They wanted justice from Alexander to return the borrowed gold. An ordinary Jew, Geviyah, asked the Rabbis for the right to be the defense attorney - he told the Rabbis that if he lost, the Rabbis can always say that this simple person did not speak for the Jews, enabling a repeat trial; and if he won, then we can say that the Torah of Moshe has prevailed. He was given permission to defend the Jews. He asked the Egyptians where was their proof, and they said it was written in the Torah. He then said he would bring a proof from the Torah to bolster the Jews' cause: it documents that they served as slaves in Egypt for 430 years and he now asked these Egyptian plaintiffs for the wages for 600,000 people working for 430 years. When Alexander heard this he demanded an answer from the Egyptians; they asked for three days, could not find an answer and they ran away because they would have lost. All of the meforshim cite this as the reason for spelling out the circumstances of the looting of Egypt so clearly in the Torah: it was quite ethical for the Jews to be compensated for their labor; they had a right to ask for it.

What does it mean that the Egyptians came to like us, that we found grace in their eyes? **Ramban**: the Egyptians did not hate us because of their being stricken by the plagues; on the contrary, the plagues caused them to have increasing love of the Jews; they realized that the plagues afflicted them because of their sins; they were clearly miraculous plagues, and God was

punishing them for their corruption and evil. Moshe became great in their eyes even though he was bringing the plagues; they realized he was God's agent, His instrument of the plagues. The plagues were a wake-up call, a divine retribution. **Abarbanel**: in a similar manner, he says that despite all of the evil and punishing plagues that hit the Egyptians, they now had love for the Jews; because they were guilt-ridden, they were hoping that if they gave the Jews all of their wealth and appeased these poor people who they had abused, that maybe the Jews would pray for them to stop the punishment; their generosity would be Teshuvah, the Jews would forgive them, and, in turn, Hashem would forgive them. He quotes the **Ralbag** who says that the Egyptians even gave more than the Jews asked for; they were so anxious about getting the plagues to stop, to save Egypt from the wrath of God, that they gave all that they had to the Jews, far more than they had requested.

Chizkuni: there is a different meaning to the word *She'ayleh* than the other meforshim say - it means that they are borrowing, and not taking. It was indeed borrowing and not a gift - it was a ploy that God deliberately insisted upon to set up the Egyptians for their final destruction. The Egyptians would want their wealth returned and would go after them in hot pursuit, setting up the greatest miracle of all, the splitting of the sea. It was God's strategy, to mislead the Egyptians, to effect divine retribution. It was not deceit, Genaivas Da'as, on the part of the Jews - God instructed them to do this - the Egyptians were evil people who needed punishment; God wanted the Jews to do this, to set up the Egyptians for their punishment.

What was all of this about the love the Egyptians had for the Jews and Moshe? In 11:3 it says that Hashem and Moshe became favorites of the Egyptian people, Pharaoh and his officers. **Meshech Chachmah**: when it says in the eyes of Pharaoh's servants and the people, there are different things that impressed different people. What impressed the regular people was that Moshe could perform miracles, plague after plague; when a human can pull off the supernatural, that wows them. But the officers and magicians of Pharaoh could replicate some of the plagues; they saw the greatness of Moshe when they saw his mettle, his sterling character traits; they were impressed by his Midos - he was kind, he was true to his word, he was respectful of Pharaoh - the officers saw a different side of Moshe and were impressed by it. **Ramban**: when it says he found favor in the eyes of the servants of Pharaoh and the eyes of the people, it means the Jewish people - the Jews now came to regret what they said to Moshe at the end of parshas Shemos, when things initially worsened, they blasted him for this, and Moshe's reputation was tarnished for a long time. It was only now that his reputation was restored. Moshe finally won over both sides, the Egyptians and the Jews. **Oznayim LaTorah**: how was it at this point that the Egyptians were finally won over? What caused the change of heart? It was after the plague of darkness; it lasted three days; the Egyptians were completely paralyzed and could not move for three days. They could not move, eat or drink by themselves. At the behest of Moshe, the Jews fed the Egyptians; they took care of their Egyptian oppressors; they brought them food and drink. Instead of using the opportunity to steal from them, to harm or kill them, they showed great humanity. This stirred the Egyptians, caused them to feel tremendous guilt for the terrible evil they had perpetrated upon the Jews. They realized the incredible rachamim of the people. They changed completely during this plague - Moshe instructed the Jews to behave this way, and that is why Moshe became great in the eyes of the Egyptians.

Why does Hashem plead with the Jews to take the wealth - "*Please* beg the people to take the money" - why the language of *Naw*, please? **Oznayim LaTorah**: there was a burning issue at this point in time, as was seen again thousands of years later after the founding of Israel in 1948, of whether to accept reparation money, to take blood money so that the oppressors could appease

their consciousness. The issue raged in Israel, where many did not want to take anything from the Germans that would have allowed them to assuage their guilt over the Holocaust. Likewise, many Jews were completely opposed to taking Egyptian money. Hashem wanted the Jews to take their money even though they were reluctant; Hashem wanted Moshe to implore the people to take the money, insisting that it wasn't unethical to take it.

Why does the Torah say *Speak into the ears of your friends* - **Re'eyhu** - it implies someone close to you, a friend? **Rabbeinu Bachya**: this language implied that before the Torah was given, all humanity was equivalent and all were compatriots - all mankind was Re'eyhu - all operated under the laws of the seven mitzvos of Bnei Noach. After the Torah was given, the term Re'achah implied only Jews - after that point we operated on a different level than the rest of the world. **Vilna Gaon**: there is a different reason for referring to the Egyptians as Re'eyhu - there were two different commandments given here. First there was the Jews asking money from the Egyptians - there it says to borrow from their neighbors. It is only in the second Perek where it talks about Jews borrowing from friends - it means borrowing from other Jews. In order to justify the Egyptians loving the Jews, Hashem required that the Jews show love to each other first; they must act with brotherly love, build the bonds of Jewish unity in order for the Egyptians to love the Jews. **Bais Halevi**: What is the whole point, this lesson of the slavery in Egypt, that is indicated by the last thing that happens in Egypt is that the Jews borrow money? It is a lesson of Jewish pride. The Egyptian slavery began when the Jews became populous and started to fill the country - they broke out of Goshen and wanted to enter into the Egyptian society; they stopped being Jewish, stopped Bris Milah; they did not want to be identified as Jews. This made Hashem angry and caused the enslavement. The more we tried to be like the Egyptians, to get them to like us, the more Hashem made them hate us. At the end when we stood completely apart from them - when we identified with Hashem, and did Bris Milah - that is when they admired us. When we show Jewish identity, that we are true to whom we should be, that is when they will love us and whatever we ask of them will be granted.