



Arbeh - The Makkah That Moshe Chose

By Ariel Kryzman ('23)

In the very first Pasuk of this week's Parashah, Hashem commands Moshe Rabbeinu, "*Bo El Paroh Ki Ani Hichbadti Et Libo Ve'Et Leiv Avadav Lema'an Shiti Ototai Eileh BeKirbo*," "Come to Paroh for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants so that I shall place these signs of Mine in his midst" (Shemot 10:1). This Pasuk is peculiar in both its language and the nature of its request. Why say "Bo" or "Come" when the word "Leich" or "Go" would be far more appropriate? Also, regarding all other Makkot, Hashem told Moshe what the Makkah would be before Moshe warned Paroh; why is this Makkah, Makkat Arbeh, any different? Furthermore, after this Makkah, Paroh begs Moshe and Aharon to end Makkat Arbeh. In doing so, Paroh uses phraseology that he doesn't use by any other Makkah: "Chatati LaHashem Elokeichem VeLachem," "I have sinned to Hashem, your God, and to you" (Shemot 10:17). While Paroh does state that he has sinned when pleading with Moshe and Aharon to end Makkat Barad, never does he say that he sinned "to you," to Moshe and Aharon. Why does Paroh feel that he has sinned against Moshe, and why does he feel that way specifically by Makkat Arbeh?

These questions are among those asked by Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa in his Sefer Kol Simchah. Rav Simcha Bunim explains that the primary purpose of the Makkot was not to punish the Mitzrim but to teach Bnei Yisrael of Hashem's control of nature. The Makkot also came to teach Bnei Yisrael of Hashem's infinite kindness. One of the ways Hashem showed Bnei Yisrael was through this Makkah of Arbeh. In this Makkah, Hashem told Moshe to choose the Makkah, and Hashem would follow through and employ it. If Hashem picked all of the Makkot, perhaps there would be room for someone to say that Hashem performed the Makkot for Himself. However, Moshe Rabbeinu's selection of Makkat Arbeh teaches that Hashem performed the Makkot for Klal Yisrael's sake. That explains why Parashat Bo opens with the commandment of "Bo" and not "Leich." The Lashon of "Leich" would imply that Moshe was just following Hashem's direct command without any input of his own. The word "Bo" or "Come" places a greater emphasis on

Moshe and Aharon, thereby giving them greater independence in this Makkah and the autonomy to choose the Makkah itself. That is also why Paroh says that he has sinned to Moshe and Aharon as well as to Hashem. Paroh acknowledged that it was Moshe and Aharon's idea and Hashem listened to it. Paroh, therefore, sinned to both Hashem and Moshe, and Aharon.

Nowadays, we should recognize the miracles that Hashem does for us, big and small, and realize that they are given to us by God himself for our own good.

Hashem Can Harden Our Hearts As Well

By Abie Russ-Fishbane ('23)

In Parashat Bo, we come across the continuation and climax of the story of the 10 Makkot, resulting in the Jewish people's salvation by the hand of God. At the beginning of the Makkot in Parashat Va'Era, we face a puzzling scenario seemingly antithetical to our beliefs. Let us begin by looking at the very first Pasuk in Parashat Bo: "וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל-פְּרֹעֹה כִּי-אֵינִי וְהִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת-לִבּוֹ וְאֶת-לִבְ עַבְדָּיו לִמְעַן שְׂתִי אֶתִּי אֶלָּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ: "Hashem said to Moshe, 'Go to Paroh, for I have made his heart and the hearts of his servants heavy, so that I may place these signs in his midst'" (Shemot 10:1).

Hashem explains to Moshe that He has "made his heart and the hearts of his servants heavy," acknowledging the fact that it has been Hashem who has made Paroh so stubborn and resistant to freeing the people. This is consistent with the previous two Makkot in Parashat Va'Era: "וַיִּחְזַק ה' אֶת-לִבְ פְּרֹעֹה וְלֹא: "But Hashem stiffened the heart of Paroh, and he would not heed them, just as Hashem had told Moshe," (ibid. 9:12) and, "וַיִּחְזַק לִבְ פְּרֹעֹה וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּאֲשֶׁר: "So Paroh's heart stiffened, and he would not let Bnei Yisrael go, just as Hashem had foretold through Moshe," (ibid. 35). In all these cases, and continuing for the remainder of the Makkot, the Torah frames the hardening of Paroh's heart as an action that Hashem did to him, as opposed to an action that he himself did, as it was framed in Makkot 1-5. For example: "וַיִּרְא פְּרֹעֹה כִּי הִיטִיל ה'רוּחָהּ וְהִכְבִּד אֶת-לִבּוֹ וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֶלְהֶם כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' "But when Paroh saw that there was a relief, he became stubborn and would not heed them, as Hashem had spoken" (ibid. 8:11). Here, Paroh made himself stubborn! Without Hashem taking

action, he ignored Hashem's mighty signs and acted stubbornly, as he was entitled to do, due to his free will.

While for the remaining Makkot, Hashem overrides Paroh's free will in order to "Place these signs in his midst and so that you shall recount to your son and your son's son how I toyed with Egypt, and the signs that I set among them, and you shall know that I am Hashem" (ibid. 10:1-2). Clearly, this was the intention all along, as we see from Shemot 7:3: "וְאֵיךְ אֶקְשֶׁה" וְאֶת־מִצְרַיִם מְצַרִּים מְצַרִּים" "But I will harden Paroh's heart, that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt." From a first reading, it appears that Hashem somehow rescinded Paroh's free will by hardening his heart.

Rabi Yochanan lays out the importance of this question in Shemot Rabbah: "This provides an opening for the heretics to say: 'He (Paroh) was not allowed by Him (Hashem) to repent.'" Reish Lakish responded to Rabi Yochanan, explaining that Hashem waits for man three times, but no more. In Paroh's case, Hashem gave him five chances, but he ignored them. Hashem, therefore, said to him, "You stiffened your neck and hardened your heart. Behold, I shall add more defilement onto your own defilement." Rambam, in the eighth Perek of the Shemonah Perakim, follows this line of thinking: "וכבר ביאר השם על ידי ישעיה הנביא שהוא ית' יעש קצת המורים כשימנע מהם התשובה ולא יניח להם הבחירה." Hashem, he explains, can make it impossible for some sinners to repent by rescinding their free will. Did Hashem actually remove Paroh's free will? To try to answer this question, we must look at the way the story of the Makkot is organized.

Before the Makkot began, Hashem instructed Moshe and Aharon to go up to Paroh and for Aharon to cast down his staff in front of Paroh and his courtiers. Aharon does this, and it turns into a serpent. But Paroh, unimpressed, summons his sorcerers to do the same, and they do, each casting down their staffs and turning them into snakes. Thus, "וַיִּחְזַק לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע" "Yet Pharaoh's heart stiffened, and he did not heed them, as Hashem had said" (ibid. 7:13). And can you blame him? From his perspective, there was no reason to take the threat of divine retribution against him and his people seriously if his own sorcerers could replicate such miracles. The exact process repeats in the first Makkah, in which Aharon turns Egypt's waters into blood, and Paroh's sorcerers do the same. Paroh hardens his heart due to the sorcerers' actions, as evident in the Pasuk: "וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-כֵן חֹרְטָמֵי מִצְרַיִם בְּלִטְיָהֶם וַיִּחְזַק לֵב פַּרְעֹה" וְלֹא-שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה'" "But when the Egyptian magician-priests did the same with their spells, Pharaoh's heart stiffened, and he did not heed them—as Hashem had spoken" (ibid. 22).

Clearly, the staff-serpent incident and the first Makkah were less serious than the Makkot to come, and the Makkot gradually increased in severity. This is further proven by the

fact that regarding the second Makkah, the sorcerers could replicate Moshe and Aharon's feat. Yet, Paroh still had to beg Hashem to stop, unlike the previous Makkah. And by the third, the sorcerers themselves could not replicate it, causing them to exclaim: "אֶצְבֹּעַ אֱלֹקִים הִוא" "This is the finger of God!" (ibid. 8:15).

By Hashem gradually increasing the severity of the Makkot and having the first few be replicable by man, He desensitized Paroh to the harshness of the Makkot to come. Psychologists today note similar ideas. For example, counselors have been able to systematically desensitize Junior High students to test anxiety (Deffenbacher, J. L., & Kemper, C. C., 1974). They have noted that watching violent media or playing violent video games can desensitize someone from noticing the severity of a violent scenario and, thereby, take longer to help someone in need. In fact, playing a violent video game for twenty minutes and then watching real scenes of violence "decreased skin conductance and heart rate" (Carnagy, Anderson, & Bushman, 2007). It is clear from these studies and many others that it is possible to desensitize someone from the severity of a situation. Perhaps, as we now know, magic is impossible (following the Rambam), Hashem made another 'hidden' miracle, such as letting the sorcerers replicate His divine miracles to desensitize Paroh.

This idea is not limited to psychology; our Sages recognized this centuries ago: "אָמַר רַב הוּנָא: פִּינּוֹן שְׂעֵבֵר אָדָם עֲבִירָה: "וְשָׁנָה בָּהּ — הוֹתֵרָה לוֹ. הוֹתֵרָה לוֹ סִלְקָא דְעֵתְרָה! אֵלָא אִימָא: נַעֲשִׂית לּוֹ כְּהִיתָר" "Rav Huna said: Once a person commits a transgression and repeats it, it becomes permitted to him. Is it actually permitted? Rather, it becomes as though it were permitted" (Bava Metzi'a 27b). By a person doing an action multiple times, they habituate themselves to it and begin to see it as less bad than it actually is. The same can be said about Paroh. By his refusal to recognize the severity of the situation - whether Hashem influenced that from the start or not - throughout multiple Makkot, he habituated himself to that response, and it, therefore, became his natural response to the last five Makkot. We can say that Paroh did have free will, even during the last five Makkot! He could have chosen to let Bnei Yisrael go at any time, yet he didn't because he habituated himself not to.

Perhaps this is why Hashem receives the credit in the final five Makkot for hardening Paroh's heart. As Shadal put it, "Know that all acts are ascribed to God since He is their ultimate cause...In the sense that He is the author of all acts, He hardened Paroh's heart." Hashem created man in a way that allows him to trap himself in his own actions and, like Paroh, to deteriorate from level-headed thought and free will to automation. Thus, Hashem receives credit just at the point where Paroh slips from his own choices to habituation and automation. Through Hashem's subtle nudges and his own sheer stubbornness, Paroh lost the ability to change until it was too late.

The same can be true for us. When we sin or even do something technically permitted, but we know isn't good for us, we desensitize ourselves to the severity of our action and integrate it into our lives, like Paroh. But it doesn't have to be that way. We can recognize our faults and strive to do better, and that is what makes us human; that is our free will. We can change our actions and character and habituate ourselves to good rather than bad. The Sefer HaChinuch writes, "לפי הפעולות, נמשכים הלבבות," that the heart is drawn after our actions. The Ramchal similarly writes, "Our external actions affect our inner feelings. We have more control over our actions than our emotions, and if we utilize what is in our power, we will eventually acquire what is not as much in our power." Be'Ezrat Hashem, we can recognize some of the negative ruts we may have dug for ourselves and learn to habituate ourselves to good.

Challenging your Rabbi?

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Rabbinic Authority - Lo Tasur

On the one hand, Chazal present Rabbinic authority in very strong terms. Chazal interpret Devarim 17:11, the command of Lo Tasur, do not deviate from the Rabbis' instructions, as the source of Rabbinic authority.

The Gemara (Shabbat 23a) goes as far as to say that this Pasuk is the basis for reciting a Berachah on Mitzvot of Rabbinic origin (such as Chanukah lighting). The Gemara famously queries "Heichan Tzivanu," "how can we describe Hashem as commanding Rabbinic Mitzvot?" The Gemara answers that Hashem commanded us in the Lo Tasur directive to adhere to the Rabbis' words. Whenever we have a Halachic question, we must go to the Beit HaMikdash, and the Sanhedrin provide instruction. We may not deviate from their teaching, neither left nor right. Thus, we may describe Hashem as commanding Rabbinic Mitzvot since He commanded us to follow the Rabbanim.

Rashi, citing the Sifri, states that you must follow what they say even if you think it is wrong. So, in Rashi's famous words, we must follow Chazal even if they tell us the right is left, or the left is right.

Ramban, in turn, writes that the Mishnah in Rosh HaShanah (2:9) is a dramatic example of when we must follow the Rabbis even if they tell us right is left or left is right.

The Mishnah relates: "Mishnah: There was an incident in which two witnesses came to testify about the new moon, and they said: We saw the waning moon in the morning in the east, and that same day we saw the new moon in the evening in the west. Rabi Yochanan ben Nuri said: They are false witnesses, as it is impossible to see the new moon so soon after the last sighting of the waning moon. However, when they arrived in Yavne, Rabban Gamliel accepted them as witnesses without concern. And there was another incident in which two witnesses came and said: We saw the new moon at its anticipated time, i.e., on the night of the thirtieth day of the previous month; however, on the following night, i.e., the start of the thirty-first, which is often the determinant of a full, thirty-day month, it was not seen. And nevertheless Rabban Gamliel accepted their testimony and established the New Moon on the thirtieth day.

"Rabi Dosa ben Hurkinas disagreed and said: They are false witnesses; how can witnesses testify that a woman gave birth and the next day her belly is between her teeth, i.e., she is obviously still pregnant? If the new moon was already visible at its anticipated time, how could it not be seen a day later? Rabi Yehoshua said to him: I see the logic of your statement; the New Moon must be established a day later. Upon hearing that Rabi Yehoshua had challenged his ruling, Rabban Gamliel sent a message to him: I decree against you that you must appear before me with your staff and with your money on the day on which Yom Kippur occurs according to your calculation; according to my calculation, that day is the eleventh of Tishrei, the day after Yom Kippur.

"Rabi Akiva went and found Rabi Yehoshua distressed that the head of the Great Sanhedrin was forcing him to desecrate the day that he maintained was Yom Kippur. In an attempt to console him, Rabi Akiva said to Rabi Yehoshua: I can learn from a verse that everything that Rabban Gamliel did in sanctifying the month is done, i.e., it is valid. As it is stated: "These are the appointed seasons of the Lord, sacred convocations, which you shall proclaim in their season" (VaYikra 23:4). This verse indicates that whether you have proclaimed them at their proper time or whether you have declared them not at their proper time, I have only these Festivals as established by the representatives of the Jewish people.

"Rabi Yehoshua then came to Rabi Dosa ben Hurkinas, who said to him: If we come to debate and question the rulings of the court of Rabban Gamliel, we must debate and question the rulings of every court that has stood from the days of Moses until now. As it is stated: "Then Moses went up, and Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, and seventy of the Elders of Israel" (Shemot 24:9). But why were the names of these seventy Elders not specified? Rather, this comes to teach that every set of three judges that stands as a court over the Jewish people has the same status as the court of Moses. Since it is not revealed who sat on that court, apparently it is enough that they were official judges in a Jewish court.

When Rabi Yehoshua heard that even Rabi Dosa ben Hurkinas maintained that they must submit to Rabban Gamliel's decision, he took his staff and his money in his hand, and went to Yavne to Rabban Gamliel on the day on which Yom Kippur occurred according to his own calculation. Upon seeing him, Rabban Gamliel stood up and kissed him on his head. He said to him: Come in peace, my teacher and my student. You are my teacher in wisdom, as Rabi Yehoshua was wiser than anyone else in his generation, and you are my student, as you accepted my statement, despite your disagreement."

These sources indicate that we should not and may not challenge a Rabbi's Halachic ruling.

Questioning Rabbinic Authority

Berachot (55a) seems to take a different stance and strongly encourages questioning Rabbinic authority in sharp contrast with the above sources. The Gemara relates: "When the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Go say to Bezalel, "Make a tabernacle, an ark, and vessels" (see Shemot 31:7-11), Moses went and reversed the order and told Bezalel: "Make an ark, and vessels, and a tabernacle" (see Shemot 25-26). He said to Moses: Moses, our teacher, the standard practice throughout the world is that a person builds a house and only afterward places the vessels in the house, and you say to me: Make an ark, and vessels, and a tabernacle. If I do so in the order you have commanded, the vessels that I make, where shall I put them? Perhaps God told you the following: "Make a tabernacle, ark, and vessels" (see Shemot 36). Moses said to Bezalel: Perhaps you were in God's shadow, and you knew precisely what He said. You intuited God's commands just as He stated them, as if you were there."

Why didn't Betzalel listen even though he thought he was wrong? What is the difference between the Kiddush HaChodesh case and the Keilim of the Mishkan situation?

We answer that the student must voice his opinion. Then the teacher must honestly consider it, review his approach, and even be willing to retract his answer (as exemplified by Moshe Rabbeinu). Then, if the Rebbe maintains his view upon review, the Talmid must follow it (as illustrated by Rabban Gamliel and Rabi Yehoshua)¹.

Two Reasons to Follow Rabbinic Authority

Ramban presents two reasons we must follow the Chachamim even if we think they are wrong. One reason is that if everyone interpreted the Torah as they pleased, pandemonium would ensue, and “there will be many Torot.” Ramban then stunningly presents the second reason: Hashem intervenes and prevents the Chachamim in error. Thus, even if we think they are mistaken, they are correct.

A stunning Mishnah (Yadayim 4:3) supports the Ramban's bold assertion: “On that day they said: what is the law applying to Ammon and Moab in the seventh year? Rabi Tarfon decreed tithing for the poor. And Rabi Elazar ben Azariah decreed second tithing. Rabi Ishmael said: Elazar ben Azariah, you must produce your proof because you are expressing the stricter view and whoever expresses a stricter view has the burden to produce the proof. Rabi Elazar ben Azariah said to him: Ishmael, my brother, I have not deviated from the sequence of years, Tarfon, my brother, has deviated from it and the burden is upon him to produce the proof. Rabi Tarfon answered: Egypt is outside the land of Israel, Ammon and Moab are outside the land of Israel: just as Egypt must give tithing for the poor in the seventh year, so must Ammon and Moab give tithing for the poor in the seventh year. Rabi Elazar ben Azariah answered: Babylon is outside the land of Israel, Ammon and Moab are outside the land of Israel: just as Babylon must give second tithing in the seventh year, so must Ammon and Moab give second tithing in the seventh year. Rabi Tarfon said: on Egypt which is near, they imposed tithing for the poor so that the poor of Israel might be supported by it during the seventh year; so on Ammon and Moab which are near, we should impose tithing for the poor so that the poor of Israel may be supported by it during the seventh year. Rabi Elazar ben Azariah said to him: Behold, you are like one who would benefit them with gain, yet you are really as one who causes them to perish. Would you rob the heavens so that dew or rain should not descend? As it is said, “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you: How have we robbed You? In tithes and heave-offerings” (Malachi 3:8). Rabi Joshua said: Behold, I shall be as one who replies on behalf of Tarfon, my brother, but not in accordance with the substance of his arguments. The law regarding Egypt is a new act and the law regarding Babylon is an old act, and the law which is being argued before us is a new act. A new act should be argued from [another] new act, but a new act should not be argued from an old act. The law regarding Egypt is the act of the elders and the law regarding Babylon is the act of the prophets, and the law which is being argued before us is the act of the elders. Let one act of the elders be argued from [another] act of the elders, but let not an act of the elders be argued from an act of the prophets. The votes were counted and they decided that Ammon and Moab should give tithing for the poor in the seventh year. And when Rabi Yosef ben Durmaskit visited Rabi Eliezer in Lod he said to him: what new thing did you have in the house of study today? He said to him: their votes were counted and they decided that Ammon and Moab must give tithing for the poor in the seventh year. Rabi Eliezer wept and said: “The counsel of the Lord is with them that fear him: and his covenant, to make them know it” (Tehillim 25:14). Go and tell them: Don't worry about your voting. I received a tradition from Rabi Yochanan ben Zakkai who heard it from his teacher, and his teacher from his teacher, and so back to a Halachah given to Moses from Sinai,

that Ammon and Moab must give tithing for the poor in the seventh year.”

Rabbinic Infallibility?

Our Mishnah does not mean that Rabbis cannot err. The Mishnah in Eduyot (1:12-14) records three cases where Beit Hillel conceded to the view of Beit Shammai. In our times, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik and Rav Ovadia Yosef occasionally changed their opinions about certain Halachic matters over time.

In addition, no one Rabbinic authority is ever followed in all cases. As great and influential as the Rambam was, we do not follow his every opinion. Sephardic Jews do not follow Rav Yosef Karo's rulings in every instance, and Ashkenazic Jews do not always follow the Rama. In modern times, some decisions of Rav Moshe Feinstein are not well-accepted, such as his ruling forbidding the use of timers on Shabbat (see my *The Power of Shabbos: Shabbat and Electricity in the Twenty-First Century* pp. 178-179).

However, when a Rabbinic consensus supports a view and emerges as the universally accepted practice among Orthodox Jews, we, following Ramban, assume Hashem has influenced this outcome. The Chatam Sofer (cited in *Chut HaMeshulash*, page 97) told his son, the Ketav Sofer, that a consensus view among fully observant Jews is an expression of divine influence. The Aruch HaShulchan (Orach Chaim 345:18) describes the Halachic consensus regarding relying on community eruvin as if a Bat Kol rang out in favor of this view. Rav Asher Weiss (*Teshuvot Minchat Asher* 1:30) similarly describes the Halachic consensus regarding the prohibition of turning on electric appliances on Shabbat as if a Bat Kol called out in favor of this view².

Conclusion

Nowadays, if a Rabbi issues a Halachic ruling that seems incorrect, we must challenge him. If the Rabbi insists he is correct, we should consult a Rabbi of higher stature. If the consensus view agrees the original Rabbi is accurate, we apply the rule of following the consensus even if they tell you right is left and left is right.

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¹ The Rambam in his Peirush HaMishnahyot to our Mishnah, presents a lengthy defense of Rabban Gamliel's position. Briefly, the Rambam explains that the Chachamim had planned calendars (see Mishnah, Rosh HaShanah 2:8) and were not only guided by witness accounts but also on their independent calculations.

² I think the Sefer HaChinuch's celebrated statement that Lo Tasur applies to “the Torah giants of each generation,” refers to when there is a consensus view of the generation's leaders.