

Parashat Bo 5782, 2022:

For I Will Be With You

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The first *pasuk* of our *parasha* continues the narrative of the Ten Plagues and serves as a prologue to the Plague of Locusts: “Hashem said to Moshe: ‘*Bo* (Come) to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, in order that I may place these signs of Mine in his midst.’”

(*Sefer Shemot* 10: 1, all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

This verse presents us with an exegetical challenge. Why did the Torah write “*bo*,” instead of the much more commonly found, “*lech* (go)?” This question has long intrigued Torah commentators, as demonstrated by its presence in the 12th or 13th century midrashic compilation, *Midrash Aggadah*: “Why does the Torah state regarding this plague, ‘*bo* to Pharaoh,’ when it [*bo*] is found by no other plague; for in every other instance we find, ‘*lech* to Pharaoh.’” (Solomon Buber edition, Parashat Bo, 10:1, translation my own)

As one might expect, *Chazal* have suggested many answers to this question. One of my favorite responses is offered by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgenstern of Kotzk *zatzal* (the Kotzker *rebbe*, 1787-1859):

“*Lech* to Pharaoh” is not written here; instead, we find, “*bo* to Pharaoh.” The reason for this linguistic change is that one can never walk away from before the Holy One blessed be He; moreover, it is impossible to distance yourself from Him. This is the case since He is found everywhere. [As the prophet Yeshayahu said:] “And one [Angel] called to the other and said, ‘Holy,

holy, holy is the L-rd of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.” (6:3) Therefore, it is written, *bo*,” [in our verse] connoting the notion that [Hashem is telling Moshe,] “*Bo with Me*, for behold, I am with you wherever you shall go.” (Rabbi Ya’akov Greenberg, *Itturei Torah*, page 78, translation and brackets my own)

Quoting Yeshayahu’s celebrated verse, the Kotzker *rebbe* focuses on Hashem’s omnipresence in the world emphasizing the notion that the Almighty was ever with Moshe. My *rebbe* and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *atzal* (1903-1993), known as the “Rav” by his followers and disciples, presents a strikingly parallel analysis in his posthumous work, *Festival of Freedom*:

When God chose Moses, he was very reluctant to accept the mission...*Moses said to God: Who am I [mi anochi], that I should go to Pharoah, and that I should take the children of Israel out of Egypt?* (3:11)—who am I, that I am worthy of becoming the redeemer? God answered him, *For I will be with you [ki eyeh imach]* (3:12). God promised Moses that he would never desert him; He would participate in the implementation of the mission, and together they would enter Pharoah’s chambers. Therefore, when God instructed Moses to appear before Pharoah, He used the imperative *bo* instead of *lech*. When Moses addresses Pharoah, God will be present; when he raises the staff, God will be with him. In effect, God says, *bo imadi el paroah, Come along with me to Pharoah.* (Pages 149-150 underlining and brackets my own)

Moshe’s question, “*mi anochi*, who am I?” is something many of us ask ourselves when facing life’s challenges. Like *Moshe Rabbeinu*, we can take comfort in Hashem’s assurance, “*ki eyeh imach*, I will be with you.” We are never alone. As the Kotzker *rebbe* and the Rav teach us, Hashem is ever-present in our lives and whispers to each of us, “*bo imadi*, come with Me.” May we be *zocheh* to feel His grace as we walk upon the path of life. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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The email list, *b’chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email rdbe718@gmail.com.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav zatzal](#)