



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

SHEMOT > Bo

By Rabbi Simon Jacobson

January 16, 2016

Bo

Learning to Negotiate



Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart Enter the Heart”*

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ABSTRACT

How does one conquer fear?

Negotiation is part science, part art. Knowing how to ask for what, when to hold firm and where to bend is essential to success. As is feeling out your adversary across the table, reading his or her face and keeping yours blank. When either negotiating party senses fear in its adversary, it has won. It can pounce and get the favorable terms it so desires.

Everyone has experienced fear in life: You enter into the boardroom and freeze before the tribunal of perspective bosses about to grill you drier than a well-done cheap steak. Your first day of school or work leaves you intimidated by the unknown, confronted by new teachers or bosses and coworkers.

What if there was a way to face a situation, especially an adversarial one, with transcendent and unwavering confidence? What if you knew that you had the negotiating tools so immensely powerful that you were guaranteed to walk out of that negotiation or adversarial situation with everything you wanted?

Well, you do.

And this week’s Torah reading, *Parshat Bo*, meaning “Come,” reveals that secret gift.

- 1) Come to address the essence; don’t go focus on superficiality.
- 2) Come together with God; don’t ever go it alone.
- 3) Come to own the situation; don’t go just to get by or pass through.

As well, *Yud Shevat* reminds us how to emulate Moses today: walk into the belly of the beast and turn a terrifying experience into freedom!

LEARNING TO NEGOTIATE

1. Negotiating with the Father-In-Law (Joke 1)

On his wedding day, Shlomo's father-in-law Louis comes up to him and says, "I'm a wealthy man, as you know, and for your wedding present I've decided to make you a partner in my business. All I need to know from you now is what department you would like to start in. What about Accounts?"

"Me, in Accounts?" says Shlomo, "why I can't even add two figures together."

"All right then, what about IT?"

"What do I know about IT?" says Shlomo. "For years I thought IT stood for 'in touch' and PC stood for 'private company.'"

Louis is confused. What kind of crazy son-in-law is this? "OK, what about joining the sales team?"

"Look pops, I have a much better idea. How about you just buy me out?"

2. Negotiating with the Mother-In-Law (Joke 2)

Question: What's the difference between a hostage holder and a Jewish mother-in-law?

Answer: You can negotiate with a hostage holder.

3. The Art of Negotiating

Negotiation is part science, part art. Knowing how to ask for what, when to hold firm and where to bend is essential to success. As is feeling out your adversary across the table, reading his or her face and keeping yours blank. When either negotiating party senses fear in its adversary, it has won. It can pounce and get the favorable terms it so desires.

Everyone has experienced fear in life: You enter into the boardroom and freeze before the tribunal of perspective bosses about to grill you drier than a well-done cheap steak. Your first day of school or work leaves you intimidated by the unknown, confronted by new teachers and classmates or bosses and coworkers.

What if there was a way to face any situation, especially an adversarial one, with transcendent and unwavering confidence? What if you knew that you had the negotiating tools so immensely powerful that you were guaranteed to walk out of that negotiation or adversarial situation with everything you wanted?

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4. Negotiation Pattern

Perhaps the single most important negotiation in the history of the world reaches its boiling point in this week's Torah reading.

If you remember the beginning of this whole confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh which began two weeks ago, you can discern a pattern:

Moses comes to Pharaoh demanding, in the name of God, that he free the enslaved Jews, allow them to head to the Promised Land and their destiny. "Let my people go, that they may serve Me."¹

¹ Exodus 5:1, 9:1.

Pharaoh says, “No.” Moses threatens with plagues; Pharaoh capitulates once the threats are enacted.

But he yields only partially. He says, “Yes you can leave but for a few days only,” “and just the men.” Moses counters with his terms: “We will go forever, men, women, children, and all of our livestock and possessions.”

Pharaoh agrees and again backs down. This happens over and over; seven plagues worth of negotiations (in this week’s Torah chapter. Next week’s will relate the final three plagues).

5. A Question: Why the Details?

But I ask you:

Why does the Torah have to relate to us this entire process – all the details of the back and forth ... Moses and Aaron coming and going ... why doesn’t the Torah simply convey the end-result?

There must be a lesson here – indeed there is – one that teaches us how to approach a difficult task, negotiate our terms, and achieve whatever we set out to accomplish.

Moses was negotiating with Pharaoh for the future of the Jewish people and the ideal of freedom for the entire world. Let us not forget that if Moses failed and Pharaoh did not free the Jews, none of the freedoms, democratic values, human rights, or any rights would exist today.

The Jews would never have received the Torah, the very blueprint for universal freedom. Neither would they have been able to teach these principles to the world. There would certainly not have become a template of freedom for any country to follow.

(A humorous if cynical side effect would be no condemnation of Israel for “human rights violations” by the sanctimonious nations of the world ... after all, without the Jews being freed from Egypt and receiving the Torah, there wouldn’t be the concept of human rights. But this for another time.)

Hence, the entire future of the civilized universe hinged upon Moses' negotiation with Pharaoh. If Moses did not succeed, today we may all be slaves in Egypt building pyramids. We'd all still be worshipping the Pharaoh. As the Maharal of Prague writes,² the exodus from Egyptian bondage created the concept of the free man, opening the door of freedom forever.

What was the secret to Moses' success? And how can we emulate it?

Why was Moses not intimidated? What gave Moses the upper hand at the negotiating table in the Egyptian boardroom?

The Torah tells us – in the opening words of this week's Torah portion:

The Lord said to Moses: "Come to Pharaoh."³

Can it be that these few words carry the secret to successful negotiating and navigating the adversarial situations of life?

6. The Zohar Asks: Why "Come" and Not "Go"?

The Zohar⁴ seems puzzled by the Torah verse I just cited. It asks:

*Why does it say, "Come to Pharaoh"? It should have said, "Go to Pharaoh," so why "Come"?*⁵

Answers the Zohar, that Moses feared confronting Pharaoh inside his palace, at the hub of his power.

Why was Moses afraid? Because Pharaoh, as the prophet Ezekiel describes, was "the great serpent who couches in the midst of his streams, who says: 'My river is my own, and I have made myself.'"⁶

² Gevuros Hashem ch. 61.

³ Exodus 10:1.

⁴ Zohar, Bo 34a.

⁵ See Midrash Agadah and Midrash Hagadol for alternative answers to this question.

⁶ Ezekiel 29:3.

Pharaoh represented the epitome of self-centeredness, the root of all evil. Pharaoh's palace was thus most frightening place on earth,⁷ the fulcrum of the entire evil Egyptian enterprise.

So, having been raised in this place and knowing what it was all about, Moses was afraid. How could he go into the Pharaoh's innermost space, into his palace, where Pharaoh had home-court advantage so to speak?

When Moses met Pharaoh during the previous negotiations, he did not meet him in the palace, but at the Nile River or other locations,⁸ and thus Pharaoh did not have an undue advantage in negotiating; but now Moses was to enter into the Pharaoh's core essence,⁹ as the Zohar goes on to explain:

But God brought Moses into a chamber within a chamber, to the ... supernal and mighty serpent from which many levels evolve ... which Moses feared to approach himself because he saw that he was rooted in supernal roots...

Entering into such a negotiation was terrifying for Moses. Not because Moses feared for himself – Moses was after all the humblest person to ever live – but because Moses was concerned for the Jewish people and, indeed, the future of freedom everywhere. Could he overcome the overwhelming power of the “great serpent”? If he made the wrong move in the belly of the serpent, what guaranteed his success in the negotiations?

The answer is – the very command from God: *Come to Pharaoh.*

7. Coming or Going?

What's the difference between coming and going? What's the difference between *Bo*, meaning “come” versus *Lech*, meaning “go”?

⁷ See Sefer Hasichot 5752, vol. I, pp. 280; Sichot Kodesh 5736, Bo (pp. 399).

⁸ See Midrashic sources *ibid.*

⁹ See Zohar *ibid.* Articulated well on meaningfullife.com.

There are three primary differences:

- 1) "Come" connotes entering inward, into an interior. "Go" connotes going somewhere external.
- 2) "Come" implies accompanied, coming together, as in "Come with me" – in this case, God accompanying Moses. "Go" implies going alone.
- 3) "Come" suggests arriving at a familiar place in order to embrace and own it.¹⁰ "Go" suggests going to a foreign place, passing through, but not necessarily taking control of it.

It is to convey these three essential negotiating tactics, mindsets and approaches that, according to the Zohar, God said to Moses, *Come to Pharaoh* and not *Go to Pharaoh*.

Entering into Pharaoh's most essential domain – which metaphorically represents transforming the most essential evil of Egypt – Moses was well aware of the cosmic stakes at hand. He feared failing and wanted to assure his success in freeing the Jews and, ultimately, freeing the very ideal of freedom itself.

God assuaged his fears by stating:

- 1) you come to address the essence of the issue and therefore you have the eternal advantage
- 2) you have God accompanying and negotiating with you
- 3) you come to possess and control the situation; you come to change the world and fulfill your destiny

8. Personal Lesson

William Safire, the columnist, author and language maestro, once said: "If America cannot win a war in a week, it begins negotiating with itself."

This is never a good thing. It comes from not coming, but from going. When you come to a war, to a battle, to a difference of opinion, you come with these three things:

- 1) You come to find and address the core essence, not external superficialities.
- 2) You come together with others, never alone.
- 3) You come to own it.

And then you are never confused, you never begin to negotiate with yourself, for your “self” knows exactly what its purpose is, what it set out to accomplish, and that victory is guaranteed.

The key to negotiations is to be secure with yourself and your position. I am with you, says God, come then with complete conviction to face any challenge and you will leave with everything you desire.

A difficult situation may be addressed in several very different ways:

- You can come to a difficult situation, or you can go to a difficult situation.
- You can come to address the essential core issues or you can go to focus on inconsequential superficialities.
- You can come with God or you can go yourself.
- You can come to own it, or you can go to get it over with and go away.

Don't deal with a challenge; overwhelm a problem. Don't manage a situation; tackle the situation and transform it.

Overwhelm the other side, take control, wow your interviewer, negotiate as if God is sitting on your side of the table – because God is!

The same is with all the challenges we face in life, including painful experiences. Even when you enter a dark place in life (may God protect us), a loss, a setback, a trauma, always know that you are not entering alone: God is saying to you “Bo” – come with Me. I accompany you, and together we can face and overcome any adversary, any difficulty, and transform darkness to great light.

9. Yud Shevat

The 10th of Shevat is an essential day for the Chabad community – it is the anniversary of the Previous Rebbe’s passing and the day (a year later) when the Rebbe formally accepted the mantle of Chabad leadership.

What Moses did for the Jews then, the Rebbes’ teaching does for us now, inspiring us to move forward.

Moses entered into the heart of slavery, achieving freedom for the Jewish people and cosmic freedom for all the world. By looking into the teachings of our Rebbes and discovering how they apply the tools of Moses to our present generation, we are empowered to tackle slavery – whatever that is in our personal lives – head on. This is how we achieve freedom for ourselves, our loved ones, all of Israel, and all of the world.

On *Yud Shevat* we are reminded of this very fact. When the Rebbe stated in his inaugural address – *Basi Legani*, “I Have Come to My Garden” – it is the role of our generation to complete what the previous generation has started, to finally return the Divine Presence to the garden that is earth.

Why? This is our purpose.

How? By following the blueprint that is the Torah.

When? Now!

Who? You and I!

There is no excuse not to – we have the Torah and all the wisdom of the generations ever since then showing us the way.

10. Negotiating Tools (Humor)

I once came across a cartoon that depicted a boardroom with one team of negotiators huddling in the corner, apparently reviewing their strategy.

The cartoon showed the opposing team of negotiators walking through the door into the boardroom. One of the negotiators, whose head was turned to his colleague in evident conversation, was holding an attaché case in one hand and a large missile in the other.

The caption read: "I never rule out any negotiating tool!"

11. Never Alone (Conclusion)

Coming into a boardroom with a missile sure makes a statement. But for a Jew a missile is not necessary.

As a Jew, you come into any negotiation – whether it be peaceful, adversarial, or even mercurial – with much more powerful tools at your disposal. You come in with the Master of the Universe. You negotiate from a position of power, infinite power.

Never underestimate yourself – for you are never only by yourself.

You have the greatest negotiator at your side. So you are guaranteed to win.

It's time to demand freedom. You will get what you demand.

Shabbat Shalom!