

Politics & Mysticism in the Weekly Torah Portion

Parshat (Portion) Bo

by Ariel Bar Tzadok

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Shalom & welcome all.

This week's Torah portion is called Bo (Exodus 10:1-13:16).

This Week

- ***Mind or Spirit, which rules?***
- ***Can you handle the supernatural?***
- ***How do you explain the unexplainable?***
- ***Is God created in your image, or you in His?***

I have noticed a trend today in many so-called thinkers. This trend is to minimize anything and everything to a least common denominator, and to make everything as simplistically rational and logical as can be done. It seems that the minds of the mad men have succeeded in tearing out their own hearts. Now they seek to rip out the hearts and destroy the souls of all those not made in their rationalistic image.

I cannot understand how one can possibly expect to embrace the Torah, as it is, exclusively within the realms of the rational. Now, some things indeed can be and should be considered rationally. Great portions of the TaNaKh (Bible) deal with rational, down-to-earth reality. Yet, while this is true, one must never use this as an excuse to dismiss, or to deny, those portions of the Torah, Prophets and Writings, that are indeed far beyond what modern logic can explain, or even understand.

We can bandy about words like supernatural, magic, mysticism and spiritual all we want. The rationalist will always apply his definitions to these words, and then boldly proclaim, for all to hear and accept, that his understandings are the right and rational ones, and that anyone denying these is certainly irrational, deluded, deceived, unintellectual, and on and on with the name calling.

Trying to change the way people think is God's job. Heaven is very good in creating situations forcing people out of their little self-made mental shelters of rational acceptability. Indeed, the story of the Biblical exodus of Israel out of Egypt was orchestrated by Heaven specifically to do just this.

The Egyptians were the highest educated people of their day. They were well advanced in sciences like astronomy and architecture, and equally advanced in the arts, including philosophy. The Egyptians were a deeply religious people. Yet, the Egyptian religion existed within the framework of what, for them, was their understanding of nature and natural forces. Even Pharaoh acknowledged the existence of a Creator God, Elohim.

What Pharaoh couldn't understand, nor was he willing to accept, was that there was some "lower case G" god of the Hebrews who could possibly have the power to threaten his

nation and culture. God's purpose in bringing the ten plagues upon Egypt was not just to punish them for what they were doing to Israel, but also to introduce Himself to the world, so that all would know that YHWH was not just some "lower case G" god, but rather that YHWH, He is Elohim Itself. This was a shocking revelation, one that to this day, 3500 years later, is still debated and denied throughout the world.

The plagues that struck Egypt were, in a way, all natural occurrences. Yet, at the same time, these natural occurrences all seemed to occur at very opportune moments, to emphasize and prove the power that Moses, and his God, held over Egypt.

Natural disasters do happen. This is just the natural relationship between the forces of nature, and their interactions with human civilizations. Anytime and everywhere a natural disaster occurs, the human beings so affected by it turn inwards towards the mind and soul, and seek meaning. They then apply said meaning to the natural event, in a way that the society, or individual finds meaningful. This is, after all, human nature. We always seek the deeper meanings of things, whether or not they are truly there.

Here in Egypt, nothing was different. The populace had known previous hardships. It wasn't that long ago when Egypt had that terrible famine which changed the course of their society, transforming it into a socialist dictatorship, the likes of which eventually led to the enslavement of the Hebrews in the first place. No one at that time sought deeper meaning as to why the famine occurred in Joseph's days, and what it was supposed to mean for Egyptian society. So, here they were, two centuries later, and other natural disasters are striking the country, causing tremendous economical and social chaos. Yet, does it have any kind of meaning beyond the simple fact that these are just forces of nature, acting naturally, as they naturally would do?

To answer this specific question is the reason why YHWH, the God who controls and directs natural forces is acting as He is. Nature is expected to act naturally, in accordance to very rigid and set rules. The Egyptians knew this very well. In those days, Egypt had advanced knowledge of both building and astronomy. They knew the clockwork actions of the Heavens, and with building they understood the natural forces, and order of things, here on Earth. They knew Elohim, the God who controls nature. And then along comes, what for the Egyptians, is some strange "God" called YHWH, and this "God" seems to be in control of nature, in control of Elohim! What's up with this?

How can this be? Nature acts as nature is. How is it that all these natural, normal occurrences all seem to be happening, one after another, in clear sync with this upstart Moses? It seems like that nature itself is cooperation with Moses to bring about economic and societal chaos and change to Egypt. What is going on here? Who or what is this YHWH of the Hebrews?

These were the thoughts and feelings of the everyday Egyptian of the day. They knew what they saw. They did not see miracles and supernatural events. Yet, of the natural events that they did see, they knew there was something very unnatural about them! What is one to think when the natural begins to act unnaturally? Do we have here the hand of the supernatural, that which is above nature itself, that which overrides and supersedes nature at will? Because this is YHWH! YHWH is the supernatural! YHWH is the force that underlies nature and can thus override it as well. Nature is never contradicted! Nature is

just bent and used in accordance to a higher purpose, in this case, the purpose of its Creator, this purpose being the exodus of Israel from Egypt.

What is natural anyway, if not just the limitations of human perceptions as to why and how the universe operates. The definition of nature, is always subjective and subject to expansion. This is why the rationalist attitude of denying the mystical and the supernatural is horribly narrow-minded, limited in perspective, and completely subjective to the limited insight of the individual.

Let's be blunt, what is rational and logical today was once thought to be completely irrational, completely illogical, and thus fundamentally wrong. Who would have thought it possible in the year 1869 that Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin would walk on the moon one hundred years hence. What do we scoff and laugh at today that will be accomplished fact by the year 2113?

As the frontiers of the human mind and experience expand, so too does human knowledge. Thus, what was once irrational is now rational, and what remains irrational might very well be rational tomorrow. Therefore, when the modern-day rationalist mocks, laughs and scorns, those today with vision, the visionary takes comfort in knowing that he is in good company with the likes of Issac Newton, Leonardo daVinci, Nicola Tesla and Albert Einstein. Every visionary knows that discovery is never a function of science, rather it is an expression of art.

In ancient Egypt, the exact same struggle that exists today, existed way back then. This is why the Egyptian exile is understood to be an archetype of our modern-day exile, away from proper and grounded spirituality, and insights into Torah.

The Egyptians could not handle the fact that there was a God over nature that was causing all their troubles. They could understand natural disasters. They very well understood natural occurrences. If there was some physical, natural reason for what was happening in their land, they would have sent messengers around the world looking for the cause rather than ascribe their misfortune to the Hand of some stranger God.

Remember this, Egypt was the super-power of its day. The King of Egypt had diplomatic relations with countries far and wide. Everyone in Pharaoh's court saw what was happening to Egypt, and made the appropriate reports back to their home governments. Essentially every one in the world, who had diplomatic relations with Egypt, knew what was happening there.

If there was some far-away natural disaster that was the cause of the plagues, somehow, someone would have discovered it, and reported the events back to Pharaoh. Armed with such knowledge, Pharaoh would certainly have never let the Israelite slaves go free, nor would he have tolerated an upstart like Moses, who would have been viewed as a deceiver, taking advantage of natural phenomena for the purpose of economic and social gains.

Needless to say, Pharaoh had no such out. Pharaoh had no legitimate justification to discount Moses and the power of his God. The rationalists in the Egyptian court were stunned into silence. They could not respond. They could not understand. They could not assimilate in their minds what was happening to their beloved Egypt.

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Now, learn from this! Egypt is the archetype for modern times. As ancient Egypt suffered from its unexplainable plagues, brought about by a Hand that could not be explained, so too when the time of modern redemption comes, will modern-day Egypt crumble, fall and succumb to a Higher Hand, that even the best and most-bright of rationalist minds will not be able to compute or fathom.

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Today, society prides itself in its technological achievements. The god of today is human intellect. Rationalism is the new world religion of the new world order. These are the idols of modern-day Egypt. Torah teaches us clearly that God hates idols. God hates idols because Heaven recognizes the psychological harm they cause to human beings. When man worships himself, and declares that God is created in his own image, God in Heaven watches. When God decides to act, God will remove our modern day idols just like He removed them in the past. Egypt will fall, all over again. This is inevitable. It is, after all, only natural that the Lord of Nature acts in order to restore the natural order.

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As for the rationalist, I guess that he will have to stay within the proud and arrogant limitations of his own self-constructs, until comes the time when he will be able to broaden his horizons, as new discoveries and revelations become too apparent to ignore.

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God commands us to take His words, and to bind them upon our hearts and between our eyes. We have a millennia-old tradition as to how this is supposed to be done. Of course, it doesn't make much sense, but this is what we have been taught to do, and understand it or not, we do it, because, for us, this is the right thing to do.

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Those who question, for the sake of argument, division and strife, will forever have questions. God will never grant them peace of mind, or the answers that they seek, but can never receive. Those who refuse to see are choosing blindness. Not even God can cure the voluntarily blind. Not for naught does the ancient legend teach that a sizable segment of Israel itself died during the plague of darkness. Those who died were the ones who did not want to be redeemed.

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You see, giving one freedom is one thing. Yet, once offered, it must be received, protected, and cared for. Freedom can never be defined rationally, because freedom is a state of the heart, not a state of the mind. Freedom is a passion, as is love. Freedom is not an idea, any more than is love. Even a slave can be free in his head, but this is not the freedom promised by God to real, free men!

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Modern day Egypt, modern day Egyptians, who would have thought that both would be found smack in the middle of modern day Israel and modern day Judaism? Yet, the good news is, as we were redeemed once in the past from our bondage in ancient Egypt, so too will we be redeemed from our bondage to modern day Egypt.

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Let all the rationalists speculate. In the end, only those with vision, will see and know how to be redeemed. As for the rest, well, maybe there will be yet a third redemption, maybe in another 3500 years, just for them. After all, who knows what God will do with those wayward unlearning souls that refuse to see.

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