

## **TorahFax: Bo**

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Monday, Shevat 1, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / January 23, 2023

Today is Rosh Chodesh, the first day of the new Hebrew month, Shevat. In the Torah the months are not identified by name, only by numbers. Shevat is the eleventh month in the Hebrew calendar year.

Q. How is it possible that the month of Shevat, which is five months from Rosh Hashana – the Jewish New year, should be the eleventh month?

A. The answer to this question is in this week's Parsha, Bo. Two weeks before the Exodus, G-d gave the Jewish people the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh – designating the first day of each month as a special day. In honor of the Exodus, G-d assigned the month of Nissan, the month of our redemption, which is the seventh month after Rosh Hashana, as the head and first of all months of the year.

Thus, in the Jewish calendar, Rosh Hashana is celebrated in the seventh month, while seven months later is Nissan, which is considered the first month.

In the Parsha we read about the mitzvah of Tefillin; "It shall be for you as a sign upon your hand and as a remembrance between your eyes."

This refers to the mitzvah of Tefillin which every Jewish male is required to perform every day, except for Shabbat and holidays. The Tefillin are two black boxes containing four parts of the Torah. One box is placed on the arm and one on the head. The hand Tefillin is placed first and then the Tefillin on the head. The hand Tefillin is one compartment, but the head Tefillin consists of four compartments.

Q. Why do we put on the hand Tefillin first?

A. The binding of the Tefillin on our hand and head is to show that we are binding ourselves to G-d's service. The Tefillin on the hand represent action and deeds. This symbolizes the performance of mitzvot, G-d's commandments, that our actions will be dedicated to G-d. The Tefillin on the head represent thought, study and intellect. This symbolizes that our mind and intelligence will be dedicated to the study of Torah. The Talmud says, "It is not the study which is most important, rather, it is the action which is most important."

Putting on our hand Tefillin first symbolizes that action is most important.

The following story illustrates the point: Reb Shneur Zalmen, first Rebbe of Chabad and his son, Reb Dov Ber were both engrossed in Torah study. As they were so involved in study, Reb Dov Ber's child happened to fall out of bed. Reb Dov Ber being so engrossed in study didn't hear his child crying and continued studying. His father, Reb Shneur Zalmen, who lived on the second floor, did hear the crying and came down and attended to the child.

When he later asked his son, why he didn't attend to the child, he told his father that he was so engrossed in study that he didn't hear the child crying. His father reprimanded him and said, "When one doesn't hear the cry of a child because of their Torah study, there is something wrong with that study!"

This is the lesson of putting the Tefillin of the hand first to show that action is what comes first and counts most!

Wednesday, Shevat 3, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / January 25, 2023

In this week's Parsha, Bo, we read about the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt.

Before bringing upon the Egyptians the final plague, G-d told Moshe, "I request that you speak to the people [of Israel] and tell them to borrow from their [Egyptian] neighbors silver and gold ornaments and clothes." The Torah continues, "And the children of Israel did as Moshe told them and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver and jewels of gold. And G-d gave the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians and they lent them" (Exodus 12:35-36).

Q. The expression the Torah uses is "V'yishalu" - "they shall borrow." Why did G-d want them to take it as a loan? The Egyptians would have given it to them as a gift for, as the plague of the first-born was raging throughout Egypt, they were anxious that the Israelites leave as fast as possible.

A. By telling them to "borrow" the gold and silver, G-d wanted to teach them that one must consider wealth as a loan. Therefore, it must be used properly, and a percentage given to charity. For, if it is not used as G-d intended, He may at any time take it back, for it is with us only on loan!

A Jew became rich, and his lifestyle changed. Previously, he gave to charity, cared for others and helped them as much as he could. Now that he had become wealthy, he became hard-hearted and miserly. He was too busy with his business so he had no time for the poor anymore. The poor people complained to the rabbi. The rabbi decided to visit him.

The rich man showed off his beautiful home and boasted about his great wealth. The rabbi called him over to the window. Pointing outside, he asked the wealthy man, "What do you see?"

"I see poor people on the street trying to earn a living. I see poor people begging for help," he replied.

Walking over to a large mirror the rabbi told the rich man to look in. "Now what do you see?"

"I see myself, of course," he replied.

"I don't understand," said the rabbi. "Both the window and the mirror are made of glass. Yet, from the window you see the poor people outside but when you look at the mirror you see only yourself. Why?"

"The reason is simple!" said the rich man. "The mirror has a silver coating on the back which prevents you from seeing through. However, the window has no silver coating, so you can see through."

"Exactly!" the rabbi nodded. "It seems that when the silver gets in the way all you see is yourself! Maybe you'd be better off without the silver!" The rich man now got the message. He promised to improve his ways and he began giving to charity once again. Giving charity is showing our appreciation and saying, "Thank you G-d for all the good You have blessed me with."

Thursday, Shevat 4, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / January 26, 2023

In this week's Parsha, Bo, the Torah relates the story of the Exodus from Egypt. After being in Egypt for 210 years, G-d finally took the Jewish people out of Egypt.

Parshat Bo begins, "G-d said to Moshe, come to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, so that I will be able to set these signs in his midst."

The Parsha tells of the three final plagues: locust, darkness, and the death of the first-born. When G-d brought the plague of the death of the first-born, Pharaoh finally drove the Jewish people out of the land.

The numerical value of "Bo" is three ( $2+1=3$ ) and hints to the three final plagues told in the Parsha which G-d brought upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

The name of the Parsha, "Bo" consists of the first two letters of the Hebrew Alphabet, Bet and Aleph. These two letters represent the Torah, which was the purpose of the Exodus.

Here is how these two letters represent the Torah: The first letter of Torah is BET. The book of Genesis, which is the first book of the Torah, begins with the word, Breishis, which begins with the letter "Bet."

The Ten Commandments begin with the letter, Aleph." (Anochi). Thus, the name of this Parsha which speaks about the Exodus, hints to the fact that the purpose of the liberation of the Jewish people from Egypt was to bring them to Mount Sinai to Give them the Torah.

Q. How was the tenth and final plague, when G-d killed every first-born Egyptian, a punishment measure for measure, for enslaving the Jewish people?

A. G-d refers to the Jewish people, "My first-born son." Because Pharaoh and the Egyptians enslaved G-d's, "first-born" and threw them into the river, G-d killed the Egyptian's first-born.

To this day, we commemorate the miracle of the plague of the first-borns, in which only the Egyptian first-borns died, while the Jewish ones lived. It is the mitzvah of Pidyon Haben – redeeming the first-born son, from the Kohen, thirty days after the baby's birth.

Q. How many people came out of Egypt at the Exodus?

A. The Torah tells us that 600,000 men, from the ages of 20 to 60, came out of Egypt, except for women and children. Although there is no exact figure for the total amount, surely a few million people came out.

Here too we find a connection between the number 600,000, who left Egypt and the Torah. Our sages say that there are 600,000 letters in the Torah. Here is another between the Exodus and the Torah.

Friday, Shevat 5, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / January 27, 2023

The mitzvah of Tefillin, which is found the first time in the Torah, at the end of last week's Parsha, Bo, is a very important mitzvah. This mitzvah consists of two parts. The Tefillin which we place on the hand and the Tefillin which we place on the head.

The Torah and Mitzvot were given to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. But the mitzvah of Tefillin is one of a few mitzvot which G-d gave them, even before coming to Mount Sinai, while they were still in Egypt.

This mitzvah is performed every day, except on Shabbat and holidays which are mentioned in the Torah.

Q. Why was the mitzvah of Tefillin given to the Jewish people at the time of the Exodus?

A. The Torah states the reason for this mitzvah, "And it shall be to you for a sign on your hand and for a remembrance between your eyes.. for with a strong hand has G-d brought you out of Egypt." The mitzvah of Tefillin is connected to the Exodus. It is an everlasting remembrance that G-d took us out of Egypt so that we will serve Him.

Q. The Tefillin boxes and straps are painted black. What is the source for this?

A. As with many of the other mitzvot, many of the details of the mitzvot were given orally to Moshe when he was on Mount Sinai and were transmitted orally. Only later were they written down in the Talmud. This is also true about the details of this mitzvah.

Q. How often should the Tefillin and Mezuzot be checked?

A. The rule is that Tefillin should be checked every seven years. Mezuzot should be checked twice in a seven years period. Unless there is good reason for one to suspect that something may have damaged the Tefillin and Mezuzah, then they should be checked immediately.

Q. Why is the Tefillin put first on the hand and then on the head?

A. This is the order in which they are written in the the Torah; "And it shall be to you for a sign on your hand and for a remembrance between your eyes." The Tefillin on the hand represents our actions and good deeds, which is most important and takes priority.

Q. Why do we put on the Tallit first and then the Tefillin?

A. When we need to perform two mitzvot, then the mitzvah which is performed more often comes first. The Tallit is put on everyday, including Shabbat and holidays. But the Tefillin are not worn on Shabbat and holidays; thus, we place the Tallit first and only after the Tefillin.