

## **Bo – Thought Life - Sermon # 3**

**Delivered on January 19, 2013 by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick**

Shabbat Shalom! This week we are continuing our Sermon Series entitled, “Control Your Thought Life, Shape Your Destiny.” As we spoke of last week, this service was set to coincide with the reading of the Book of Exodus. And that’s because a great deal of the Book of Exodus is about the battlefield of the mind. Pharaoh has gotten inside the heads of the Children of Israel and made them into slaves, physically, and mentally too. And he’s been very successful. In fact, he’s been so successful that even Moses himself doubts his own abilities... even when Gd has promised him success. And so really, Moses is fighting on three fronts. The first is with Pharaoh, but in a sense that’s the easiest. Pharaoh caves pretty quickly. The second front Moses is fighting on is in his own mind. He needs to tell himself that he has what it takes to triumph, to succeed. And then there is the third front: He has to convince the Jewish People that they are destined for great things, that they can get past where they are at; that their history need not shape their future.

Moses needs to train them to think differently about themselves because that’s the only way they are going to have the courage to get up and leave. They need to think that great change is possible. They need to think differently to release themselves from pain and suffering. That’s the only way they can then release the courage, energy and vitality; the power of transformation that Gd put inside of them. They need to understand that their thoughts, the way they think about themselves and their lives are all that is holding them back.

And the reason we are spending our time focusing on this approach to the parsha is because the same is true for you: Your own thoughts will set the limits for your life. You need to reprogram your thinking to move forward. We need to think about what we are thinking about because our minds are tremendously powerful when it comes to dictating the outcomes of our lives.

I read about a study that was done back in 2002 – it was written up in the New England Journal of Medicine - with people who needed arthroscopic knee surgery. Their knees were worn down and they needed to be cleaned out. So doctors, with permission of the families, took a certain group of patients and instead of performing actual surgery on them, they simply made three small incisions around the knee as if they had done something to them. When the patients woke up after the operations of course, they thought they had had the regular surgery. What’s interesting is that two years later the patients who had the fake surgery reported just as much relief from the pain as the patients that had the actual surgery. And it wasn’t just in their minds... When the doctors examined them over time they could see how their knees were much improved. Their conclusion was that since the mind expected the knee to get better it got better; it actually helped it to heal. And it makes you think about how many people who have, year after year, programmed their minds to expect defeat, failure, and mediocrity. They have said a thousand times “I’ll never get well, I’ll never feel stronger” and the mind gets to work doing just that – make sure he never gets well or feels stronger. How many people go around feeling insecure, intimidated, and unqualified for the challenge? What happens? The mind goes to work saying, “I’ve got my instructions, I know what to do.” Our minds are helping us to become what we believe. But the good news is that if this will work in the wrong direction, it will work in the right direction, too.

And so I want to focus on two keys to thinking differently about yourself, about your life and about your future. In this week's Torah portion the way Gd helps our ancestors to think differently is by commanding them to make a calendar. It seems odd at first. Here they are, about to leave Egypt, Gd is about to deliver the knockout punch, the 10<sup>th</sup> plague, and the Torah stops and says, "Make a calendar and mark this day, the first of Nisan, as the first day of the new year; the first day of the rest of your life." And the Torah takes this side track for two reasons – and these are the keys: The first is that only free people need a calendar. For slaves, every day is the same. For people who are enslaved mentally, every day is the same – no hope, no promise, no future – so what do you need to plan – just let nature take its course.

And that's why the Torah says the first of Nisan is the beginning of the Jewish New Year. But wait, I know what you are thinking: "What about Rosh Ha-Shannah? I thought that was the New Year!" No, the first of Tishray – Rosh Ha-Shannah- is the New Year in nature; the year the whole natural world begins again. But the first of Nisan is when the Jewish PEOPLE began again. That was the day that they realized that they are not just at the whim of nature, or circumstance or fate. Rosh Ha-shannah is the New Year for the whole world – The first of Nisan is the New Year for the Jewish People. That was the day that they realized they could write their own ticket, their own program. It didn't have to be the way it always was. For this reason, in the Jewish world that was the New Year on which a Jewish Kings reign began.

But the second reason that they needed a calendar before they got moving was so that they would all be on the same page, all doing the same thing at the same time – helping each other move forward together. And this is crucial: It's one thing to try to think a new game, and maybe you have tried and failed time and again. But it's not enough to think a new game, you have to follow through. If you want that new thinking to follow through, you have to act on it. And the way to do that is through community, through helping others. Self-talk that does not lead to action will not take root. You need to live it to bring it to life. And that's why it was so important that they all be on the same page and have the same plan. The reason they needed the calendar was so they knew when to celebrate the next Passover, and the next Seder, and the ones after that. It was only when they joined together that they unleashed the power, strength and confidence inside themselves. And we do that to this day. That's why a bar mitzvah is so important- it's our way of showing our kids that if you want to grow as an individual – devote yourself to the good of others. We need to reach outside ourselves to unleash the power within. You are going to feel stronger and more courageous, more empowered by Gd when you follow through helping others. The more you give away, the more you will find you have inside. You have more to give, more capability, more potential than you know. That was the message to our ancient ancestors: Gd said, I believe in you – you've got what it takes to succeed even in the face of mighty challenges, and when you show it to others you'll release that potential and find it in yourselves....