

## Rav Tzadok HaCohen of Lublin: Bo

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*“It came to pass when Pharaoh let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines because it was near, for God said, ‘Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see war and return to Egypt.’” (Genesis 13:17)*

The verse states explicitly that the Israelites might be tempted to return to Egypt in the face of war. Yet we find that when the Israelites are faced with wars against Amalek and Canaan, they still wanted to return to Egypt, so how did travelling through the desert help them?

Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshischa says that when the Torah speaks of war in the verse “When you go out to war against your enemies ...” (Deuteronomy 21:10) it is not referring to a physical war, but rather a war against the yetzer harah – the evil inclination. The ‘war’ in our verse is a war with the Israelites idolatrous inclinations.

The Midrash relates that when Pharaoh finally freed the Israelites he cried ‘woe’ and regretted his decision. (Exodus Rabbah 20:7) After the terrible plagues that took place, he should have been glad to see them go. The Midrash explains that the Israelites retained a connection to Egypt’s idolatrous practices. It was this realisation that convinced Pharaoh to pursue the Israelites and recapture them. If the Israelites had completely severed their ties to Egypt, Pharaoh would have given them up as a lost cause.

When we battle against our desires and temptations to sin, victory does not remove the original temptation. We are likely to retain an attraction towards that transgression and so must constantly guard ourselves against it, as the Gemara says (Kiddushin 30b) ‘Man’s evil inclination gathers strength against him daily and constantly seeks to slay him.’

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