WHEN YOU SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER
YOU ARE NOT ALONE
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- Parasha in the context of the two Torah portions before and the one that will follow
    - BEFORE: central story of the Jewish people. Pharaoh was not scared of God only the plagues, his heart was not hardened
    - AFTER: The Israelites cross the red sea and arrive on freedom's shore
- One of the most power and fear inducing commandments in the Torah
    - BO EL PARAOH – Go to pharaoh
    - You Moses and Aaron, you have to go to the king, who has just suffered through 6 plagues and tell him again to let the Israelites go. And no matter what he says or does, I God have hardened his heart, I've made him stubborn so I can prove a point and more are coming,
    - Hardest thing to do is to go tell someone with power over you that they are in the wrong
        - Parent to child
        - Player to coach
        - Employee to employer
        - Student to teacher
    - I think of MLK on this weekend, how many times did he BO EL PARAOH? How many times did speak truth to power. Knowing he

faced hardened hearts, knowing they held him responsible for the economic and social ramifications of his unrelenting drive for justice.

- How do you do it, how do you find the courage of your convictions to stand up when everyone else is sitting down out of fear and say this can't go on?
- Moses was not a particularly courageous man at this point?
    - He had a stutter that made him doubt his ability to speak convincingly
    - He ran away after confronting the Egyptian taskmaster in fear for his own life.
    - He reacted like many of us might have when God picked him to lead the people, he suggested that God pick someone else, anyone else
- So what gave Moses the courage? What gave MLK the courage, what gives us the courage to speak truth to power? To fight for what is right in the face of overwhelming odds or at risk of personal, social, financial, emotional safety and security?
    - The answer is in the name of this parasha, a two letter Hebrew word made up of the second letter and the first letter of the alphabet in that order. BO.
    - We translate it as GO to pharaoh, but really it means COME to pharaoh. At 12th century torah commentator Joseph ben Isaac made this observation, he taught that in context the

phrase Bo el Paraoh spoken by God to Moses really means, come WITH ME to pharaoh.
    - Who is the ME Joseph ben Isaac is referring to, its God.
    - What gave Moses the courage, MLK the courage, us the courage?
    - When you speak truth, when you say what is right and needs to be said, even in the face of overwhelming opposition, or especially in the face of overwhelming opposition. **God comes with you.**
- Moses could do it with Pharaoh. MLK could do it with Bull Conner and George Wallace and all the Pharaohs of the segregated south because they knew they literally had God on their side.
- We can do it too, when we speak the real truth. Not the truth of opinion or perspective, but everybody knows it truth, truth that is grounded in the core of justice and righteousness, holy truth, unadulterated truth, unmitigated truth then God stands with us. God is on our side and as they sang in the spirituals of the south, we shall not be moved.
- The rabbis argue over how you could sum up the whole Torah in a sentence or an idea. Shammai says its impossible, Hillel says it's the golden rule, others say its three things, or 10 commandments.
- I say its this week's parasha, its *Bo el paraoh*.
    - Go to the pharaohs in your life, in our community, speak what my grandma Vera

from Augusta Georgia would say is the God's honest truth (southern twang) and God goes with you, God comes with you.

- That's what it means for us as Jews to be a chosen people, a selected people a light unto the nations. We are here to speak truth to power, to be as my teacher Al Vorspan called us *Nudniks for Justice.*
    - Who the pharaoh in your life?
    - Who oppresses you, or our community or our nation unfairly, unjustly?
    - You don't have to be Moses or MLK. But can you be the Jewish voice of conscience you were created to be? True to yourself and your tradition.
        - Can you go to pharaoh and say its not right, it has to change?
        - Can you ground your argument in God's honest truth?
        - Can you stand up even when they intimidate you, force you to sit down.
        - If you can you don't have to Go it alone, God, your tradition, your faith and your people **they come with you.**