

Is the Lord hardening your Heart?

This weeks reading, from Parashat Bo (*Shemot / Exodus 10:1-13:16*), details the last plagues that God brought upon Egypt and Pharaoh drives the Children of Israel out. In *Shemot / Exodus 10:1* the Lord tells Moshe בא אל-פרעה כי-אני הכבדתי את-לבו ואת-לב עבדיו למען שתי אתמי אלה בקרבם: *10:1 Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, (NASB)* according to the Scriptures, the Lord hardened Pharaoh and his servants Heart for the purpose of performing the signs before them. It is interesting to note, while studying these Scriptures, the Moshe used two different words to describe the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. The Hebrew Bible uses the word חזק in *Shemot / Exodus 4:21, 7:13, 9:12, 9:35, 10:20* and כבד in *Shemot / Exodus 7:14, 9:34, 10:1* to describe the Lord who hardens Pharaoh's heart. It is also interesting to observe that in some instances these words are alternated from one verse to the next, see *7:13-14*, and *9:34-9:35*. What can we learn from the way the Hebrew text speaks regarding the Lord hardening the heart. Do these words reveal different aspects of the hardening process? The BDB Hebrew Lexicon states the word חזק is defined "adj. strong, powerful, vigorous, firm, forceful, intense, overpowering," and כבד is defined "adj. heavy, weighty, massive, burdensome, laborious; difficult, unwieldy."

כתבי הקודש / The Holy Scriptures	
ספר שמות פרק י	Shemot / Exodus 10:1-3
<p>א ויאמר יהוה אל-משה בא אל-פרעה כי-אני הכבדתי את-לבו ואת-לב עבדיו למען שתי אתמי אלה בקרבם: ב ולמען תספר באזני בנה ובן-בנה את אשר התעללתי במצרים ואת-אתמי אשר-שמתי כם וידעתם כי-אני יהוה: ג ונבא משה ואתה אל-פרעה ויאמרו אליו פה-אמר יהוה אלהי העברים עד-מתי מאנת לענת מפני שלח עמי ויעבדני:</p>	<p><i>10:1 Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, 10:2 and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know that I am the Lord.'</i> <i>10:3 Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. (NASB)</i></p>

Studying these words and their usage, the word חזק (H2388) is used 266 times throughout the Hebrew Bible and is used as a means to fasten upon, seize, or be strong. The word כבד (H3513) is used 109 times meaning to make weighty or heavy in a bad sense. Each of these words are used to describe the Lord who is hardening the hearts of Pharaoh and his servants. Why use two different words to describe the Lord hardening the heart? Do these words reveal the different aspects or reasons for hardening the heart? It is interesting that the word כבוד is also used to describe "glory" or "honor" in the Hebrew Bible. Note the use of כבד in *Shemot / Exodus 20:12* **כבד את-אביך ואת-אמך** *20:12 'Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you. (NASB)* Note the location of this verse ואת-אמך ואת-אביך, "honor your father and mother," sits right in the middle of the עשרת הדברות (*The Ten Commandments*). This fact is generally understood as a significant marker that separates the first 4 commandments which address our relationship with God from the remainder which address the interactions between human beings. This commandment could be read as a connection between heaven and earth, honoring our parents and loving one another are related to having peace with God and with men. Note that by honoring our parents we honor God by obeying His commandment. How is this related to the Torah portion (Parashat Bo)? Could the use of these words in the Torah be a reference to the Lord hardening both soul and spirit of Pharaoh and the people? The Scriptures say in *Shemot / Exodus 10:1 Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, 10:2 and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know that I am the Lord. (NASB)* The purpose of the hardening was so the Lord could multiply His signs among the Egyptians, so they would know God's will, and so we could speak to our children how the Lord has worked in our lives. David said in *Tehillim / Psalms 32:4* ה חטאתי אודיעך *32:4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah. 32:5 I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah. (NASB)* Here he uses the same root word to describe the heaviness of the Lord on his life because of his sins and this heaviness continued until he confessed his sins before God. Based on these Scriptures and our analysis of words חזק and כבד, we can conclude that man hardens his own heart by not yielding to the will of God. God hardens man's heart by not yielding to the whims of man but holding man to His will. The Lord God could have yielded to Pharaoh's alternate plan, or offered one of His own, however, the Lord, insisted on something that Pharaoh would not permit. Pharaoh hardened his own heart by resisting the Lord's will and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart by not permitting anything other than God's will be done (*something Pharaoh would not accept*). This seems to be the way the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart in both soul and spirit, Pharaoh did not recognize the Lord physically (חזק) nor did he honor the Lord spiritually (כבד). Is this is how the hearts of men are hardened today? The deceitfulness of sin (*Hebrews 3:13*), and the religious (spiritual) preferences of men today are powerful forces. Have you yielded to the will of God or is the Lord hardening your heart so He can work His will in your life like Pharaoh?