

EXODUS FROM STUCK-NESS

by Rabbi Label Lam

Moreover, I have heard the groan of the Children of Israel whom Egypt enslaves and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore say to the Children of Israel, "I am HASHEM and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I shall take you to Me for a people and I shall be a G-d to you; and you shall know that I am HASHEM your G-d, who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt. I shall bring you to the land about which I raised My hand to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I shall give it to you as a heritage-I am HASHEM!" So Moses spoke according to the Children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of shortness of breath and difficult service. (Shemos 6:5-9)

What is this "shortness of breath and difficult service" that prevented the Children of Israel from hearing what should have been welcome news?

The Midrash Aggadah asks, "What was this "shortness of breath? The generation was lacking in belief, and they would say that the hand of HASHEM is too short to save them, therefore they attached themselves to idolatry- a strange service." The Mechilta asks rhetorically, "Do you ever find that a person is visited with good news and he is not happy? Why then does it say, "They did not heed Moses"? Rather, it was difficult in their eyes to separate from the idolatrous service of Egypt."

One Midrash says the "shortness of breath" led them to idolatry. The other claims that it was the idolatrous service did not allow them accept the Moshe's proclamation. Which was it? Which is the cause? Which is the effect? What we have here is a portrait of how hopelessly stuck was the Nation of Israel.

When one feels forlorn, it is not unusual to seek substitutes to soothe sore spirits. Once they are made habitual, though, experience tells us that it becomes extremely difficult to unseat the status quo. The "shortness of spiritual breath and vision" may be the initial cause but the "work- holism" or whatever then fills the void and becomes the new reason for being. Anything or anybody that runs interference with it is met with a hostile response. One dare not stand between the drunk and his drink!

A man went to the zoo with his child. In the elephant section, there in open yard stood this multi-ton creature with not more than a kite string around his huge neck that was attached to a slight stick stuck loosely into the earth beside him and a small link chain placed lowly in front. The man complained bitterly to the attendant that the elephant could stampede and trample visitors without

a proper restraint. The zoo keeper assured him everything was alright and explained, "When this jumbo was a little dumbo-baby they put him in that very spot with a thick iron chain around its neck that was attached to a heavy concrete post sunk deeply into the earth. In front of him was placed an electrified fence. Every time he attempted to advance forward he was heavily jolted. Years later all we need is a thin string attached to a stick and a small barrier to remind him. He doesn't believe he can ever move beyond that spot and with confidence we can say that he's going nowhere!"

When King David, the Talmud tells us, went to the bathhouse he became anxious in the moment that was aware that no Mitzvos accompanied him. There is found there no Mezuzah, no Tefillin, and no Tallis! Then when he realized that he was affixed since his earliest days, with a permanent Mitzvah, a Bris Milah, he was comforted. What was his fear? There is an inertia factor in Mitzvos. Violations invite violations. Mitzvos inspire more Mitzvos. There's no standing still. One is either climbing or sinking. Yet how does one get started? One needs a light to find a-light, money to make money, and a Mitzvah to make a Mitzvah. So too, the 10 plague process grooms the Jewish Nation for the gift of a Mitzvah and the initial boost to shift momentum to gain **exodus from stuck-ness**. Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).