

PARSHAT SHMOT

by Shlomo Katz

Parshat Shmot
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Today's Learning:
Nach: Yeshayah 35-36
Taharot 6:6-7
O.C. 392:5-7
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Batra 141
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Niddah 10

The Midrash Rabbah on our parashah states that Hashem chastises His children so that they will ultimately love Him, as we read (Mishlei 13:24), "If he disciplines his son, he will [ultimately] love him." In particular, says the midrash, G-d has given us three gifts, but all of them must be acquired through yissurin / suffering. These are: the Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and Olam Haba.

R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (1843-1917; Yerushalayim) explains why these three gifts are acquired only at the price of yissurin:

Studying Torah and observing the mitzvot are contrary to man's nature and his physical desires. Therefore, one who wants to attain the Crown of Torah must accept upon himself "yissurin shel ahavah" / "suffering of love," i.e., deprivation that is not seen as a punishment but as a gift.

Eretz Yisrael is the King's palace. Unlike a subject who serves the king from a distance, one who wishes to stand close to the king must be on constant guard lest he offend the monarch. In reality, though, a person cannot be on constant guard. Therefore, Hashem weakens a person's body and physical desires by imposing yissurin / illness, deprivation, or poverty on him, so that he will not be tempted to sin.

Finally, even if a person has attained the Crown of Torah and merits to live in Eretz Yisrael, he can never relax, for a person is always at risk of sinning. Therefore, Olam Haba also is acquired through yissurin. (Tiferet Zion)

"Bnei Yisrael were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong . . ." (1:7)

The Midrash Rabbah states that the Jewish women in Egypt gave birth to sextuplets. Another opinion says they gave birth to sixty children at a time.

R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (the Maharal of Prague; died 1609) writes: The midrash does not literally mean that women gave birth to 60 children at a one time. Indeed, he observes, if it were possible for one woman to carry that many children, each one would be so small as to not be viable. Rather, the midrash means that women who gave birth, rather than suffering the weakness that normally follows birth, felt so strong that they could have delivered 60 babies if such a thing were possible.

As for the opinion that they gave birth to sextuplets, Maharal suggests that this was G-d's response to the fact that Bnei Yisrael were enslaved six days a week. (Gevurot Hashem ch.12)

"Come, let us 'nitchakmah' / outsmart [Bnei Yisrael]." (1:10)

R' David Ha'naggid z"l (1224-1300; grandson of Rambam z"l) notes that the mitzvot and customs of the Pesach seder parallel Pharaoh's plot to "outsmart" Bnei Yisrael: "nun" for "nisuch ha'yayin" / pouring wine; "tav" for "tavshilin" / the two cooked items on the seder plate; "chet" for charoset; "kaf" for karpas; "mem" for matzah; and "heh" for Hallel. (Midrash Rabbi David Ha'naggid Al Haggadah Shel Pesach p.37)

"[Moshe] went out the next day and behold! two Hebrew men were fighting. He said to the rasha / wicked one, 'Why would you strike your fellow?'" (2:13)

Rashi z"l comments: "Although the man had not yet hit his fellow, he is termed here 'wicked' merely because he had raised his hand against his fellow."

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005) explains: When one's anger becomes manifested in an action, when one lifts his hand against another person, even if he does not hit him, he is called a "rasha" because he is under the rule of the yetzer hara.

R' Wolbe adds: Sometimes, after a person commits a sin or an improper act, he can reconstruct in his mind exactly what circumstances or what defective middah / character trait led him to err. On

other occasions, however, a person commits a sin or an improper act impulsively, and he immediately kicks himself and wonders, "Why in the world did I do such a crazy or harmful thing?" Often, the answer is simply that the person is in the grip of the yetzer hara. This is what our Sages mean when they teach (Shabbat 105b), "If a person tears his clothes, smashes dishes, or throws-away money in anger, he is like an idolator, for such is the modus operandi of the yetzer hara: today, he tells you to do this [commit a seemingly minor sin] and tomorrow he tells you to do that, until, eventually, he gets you to worship idols." Once a person is in the clutches of the yetzer hara, there is no end to what he might do.

Everyone is in the grip of the yetzer hara to some degree, as we confess on Yom Kippur: "Al chet / for a sin that we committed before You with the yetzer hara." When one sins for no apparent reason and for no gain--as is typically the case when one speaks lashon hara--it is because he is under the control of the yetzer hara. (AleI Shur, Vol.I p.152)

"Bnei Yisrael groaned because of the work and they cried out." (2:23)

R' Shimson David Pinkus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) quotes the Zohar (Shmot 20a) which teaches that tze'akah / crying out is a form of prayer that is very dear to G-d and never goes completely unanswered. What is tze'akah? It is prayer without words, as the verse says (Eichah 2:18), "Their hearts cried out to Hashem."

R' Pinkus continues: Tze'akah is "hysteria." However, it does not involve screaming or waving one's arms like a lunatic. Rather, when a person stands silently in prayer with a recognition that he is surrounded by challenges that he cannot overcome without G-d's help, or an appreciation of the fact that the yetzer hara is holding a knife to his throat and is about to overcome him, and he then pleads, "Help me!" - that is tze'akah. In particular, tze'akah is found when a person feels himself unworthy of approaching G-d and cannot find the words to pray.

R' Pinkus adds: Although the Zohar says that tze'akah is a wordless cry, any prayer that a person utters when he cannot articulate his thoughts, even if it involves words such as "Help!" is also tze'akah. We see this, for example, in Melachim I (18:37), where Eliyahu Hanavi prayed, "Answer me, Hashem! Answer me!" It is as if a person is being attacked by robbers, and he calls out to a friend who stands nearby, "Help me!" (She'arim Ba'tefilah pp.41-43)

R' Itamar Schwartz shlita observes that tze'akah that involves a raised voice is an undesirable form of prayer. While a person who is being held up screams "Help!" to a friend who is standing some distance away, he does not need to cry out if he knows his friend is standing right next to him. Thus, a raised voice indicates that the supplicant feels there is distance between himself and Hashem, as Bnei Yisrael felt that Hashem had abandoned them in Egypt. When a person stands in prayer and feels that Hashem is right there with him, he does not cry out. (B'levavi Mishkan Evneh Vol.II p.125)

Based on the foregoing, we must understand why (in Shmot 8:8) Moshe Rabbeinu "cried out" to Hashem to remove the plague of tzefardea / frogs. Surely Moshe Rabbeinu did not feel that Hashem was distanced from him. Indeed, commentaries offer a number of reasons for Moshe's tze'akah:

Sforno - Moshe was asking Hashem to remove the frogs only from the Egyptians' homes, but to leave them in the Nile. Ordinarily, one may not pray to Hashem to perform "half a job." Because Moshe Rabbeinu was violating this rule of prayer, he had to cry out.

Abarbanel - All of the other plagues lasted one week, but Moshe asked that this one end early. Since Moshe Rabbeinu did not know if such was Hashem's Will, he cried out.

Siftei Chachamim - A person must hear himself pray. Since the frogs were so noisy, Moshe Rabbeinu had to cry out.

Shabbat: Equal to All the Mitzvot

Our Sages teach that Shabbat is equal to all of the other mitzvot. R' Chaim ben Betzalel z"l (1515-1588; rabbi of Friedberg, Germany; commonly known as "R' Chaim brother of the Maharal of Prague") writes: This is meant in the same way that a person might say, "The salt is the most important ingredient." It's not that one would eat the salt without the rest of the recipe; it's only that the food without the salt is too bland to enjoy. Similarly, without Shabbat, the other mitzvot would be missing something. There are two aspects to this:

First--truth be told, the mitzvot are a heavy burden, and many of them seem to have the purpose of preventing us from enjoying this world. To counter this, we were given the mitzvah of Shabbat, when we are commanded to relax, eat and drink. Shabbat is such a pleasure, yet its reward is immense. This is definite proof that all of the mitzvot were given to us for our own good.

Second--nearly everyone has doubts at one time or another, if only for a moment, about the truth of our beliefs. After all, we are expected to accept that our ancestors heard G-d speak to them, yet we hear no such thing. When one feels the palpable sanctity that descends on his home as Shabbat enters, or when he returns from shul, he knows beyond any shadow of a doubt that the Torah is true. While we have no prophets and we do not experience the prophecy that our ancestors experienced at the Yam Suf and at Har Sinai, we sense a spark of that "light" in our own homes on Shabbat, and we know that our ancestors really did hear G-d give the Torah at Har Sinai. (Sefer Ha'chaim Part III, ch.6)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics

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