

SLAVES NO MORE!

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Bo

Slaves No More!

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) observes: The most amazing thing about the Exodus, far greater than the signs and the wonders, is the transformation that occurred to a nation of slaves. Slaves do not understand the idea of obeying laws when no taskmaster threatens them. Therefore, why would a slave obey the commands in our parashah such as matzah, such as korban Pesach, such as "You shall not break a bone of it," or such as "You may not leave over any of it until morning" if no taskmaster is threatening?

The Sages applied to the generation of the Exodus the verse (Yechezkel 16:7), "You have increased and grown great . . . yet you are naked and bare." The midrash explains: The generation was naked of commandments. [R' Soloveitchik continues:] Their life was a naked one, controlled by lusts and desires. And then there occurred the greatest miracle of all: "Bnei Yisrael went and did as Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon, so did they do." The slaves suddenly felt the duty of commandments, the power of a life devoted to higher ideas and goals. They understood what it means to possess spiritual ideals and what it means to enter into a covenant with the Almighty. Suddenly, they stood "hedged with roses" [a term used by the Sages to refer to the laws of family purity, which are kept in private and which no authority could possibly enforce. These laws are in contrast to the lust-filled life of a person who recognizes no laws]. No one threatened them with batons, no taskmasters ran around shouting at them. They could have trampled everything, the roses and the glorious flower bed. But, suddenly, they beheld the power and beauty of the roses. This transformation was a hidden miracle of great import. The Jews were able to distinguish between sacred and profane. (Festival of Freedom p. 72-73)

"Pharaoh summoned Moshe and said, 'Go, serve Hashem, only your flock and cattle shall remain behind; even your children may go with you'." (10:24)

In this verse, which follows the plague of darkness, Pharaoh does not say, as he did on previous occasions, "Go, serve Hashem your G-d." Why?

R' Moshe Botarel z"l (Spain; late 14th-early 15th centuries) explains in the name of R' Sa'adiah Gaon: Ancient Egyptians worshipped the sun. According to their belief, Hashem was "also" a god, but he was the god of Bnei Yisrael only, and not the most powerful deity. That is why, on earlier occasions, Pharaoh, when speaking to Moshe, referred to Hashem as "your G-d."

The plague of darkness shattered that false belief. Clearly, Hashem's powers are superior to any perceived powers of the sun. Thus, Pharaoh now acknowledged Hashem and no longer thought of Him as the G-d of Bnei Yisrael only. (Peirush L'Sefer Yetzirah)

"Moshe said, 'So said Hashem - At about midnight I shall go out in the midst of Egypt'." (11:4)

"It was at midnight that Hashem smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt." (12:29)

Rashi writes: Moshe said "about midnight," which implies near it, either just before or just after it, and he did not say "at midnight" because he feared that Pharaoh's astrologers might miscalculate when the slaughter of the firstborn actually took place, thinking that it was a little earlier or later than midnight, and they would then say, because of this error, "Moshe is a liar."

R' Moshe Sofer z"l (the Chatam Sofer; died 1840) offers the following explanation for why the astrologers were likely to mistake the time. Our Sages teach that all prophecy emanates from Eretz Yisrael. Thus, when G-d told Moshe, "at midnight," He meant midnight in Eretz Yisrael. However, midnight arrives in Eretz Yisrael a few minutes before it arrives in Egypt. Thus, it was likely that the astrologers would note the wrong time. (Torat Moshe)

"This month shall be for you the beginning of the months . . ." (12:2)

Why does the verse say "for you"? Rabbeinu Nissim Gerondi z"l ("Ran"; Spain; 1320-1376; his yahrzeit is this coming week) explains:

There is nothing about the month of Nissan that inherently makes it the "first" month. Indeed, since the heavenly bodies orbit a central point, there is no natural beginning or end to the year, just as a circle has no beginning or end. But, this is the first month for you. It is the month of your redemption and the month when the first mitzvot were given to you. It is fitting that our calendar be based on events connected to Torah, such as the redemption and receiving mitzvot, rather than on natural events, because our very existence is not natural. Everything that happens to us is a consequence of

observing or failing to observe the Torah. (Derashot Ha'Ran No. 3)

"They baked the dough that they took out of Egypt into unleavened cakes, for they could not be leavened, for they were driven from Egypt and they could not delay, nor had they made provisions for themselves . . ." (12:39)

R' Yitzchak Al-Achdab z"l (Spain and Sicily; late 14th-early 15th centuries) writes: Many commentaries write that, at this time, Bnei Yisrael were not yet commanded not to eat chametz for seven days. Therefore, after eating the korban Pesach with matzah, they began to bake bread. However, they were suddenly expelled from Egypt and their bread had no time to rise. In commemoration of this, we eat matzah for seven days.

However, he continues, this is difficult to accept, for if they wanted leavened bread and they were forced to eat matzah, why is that worth commemorating? Furthermore, although it is true that they were not yet commanded not to own chametz for seven days, they certainly were not permitted to bake chametz on the first day of Pesach!

Rather, he writes, after Bnei Yisrael finished eating their korban Pesach and matzah, they began baking matzah for the next day. Suddenly, however, G-d revealed Himself in Egypt and, in the ensuing uproar, which was followed by preparing to leave, Bnei Yisrael were unable to bake the dough which they had prepared. That dough should have risen during the night that followed and become chametz, but a miracle happened and it remained unleavened. It is to commemorate that miracle that we eat matzah for seven days. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Pesach Dorot p.112)

"It shall come to pass, when Hashem will bring you to Eretz Canaan, as He swore to you and your forefathers, and He will have given it to you." (13:11)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes: Eretz Yisrael is where one finds the greatest holiness that is revealed in this world. That holiness has the power to turn the degenerate content within a person or thing into something good and blessed. This is why the Land is repeatedly referred to in the Torah as Eretz Canaan. Canaan is among the most despicable and accursed people mentioned in the entire Torah. [See Rashi z"l to Bereishit 9:22 for a description of Canaan's deeds.] And, in truth, the depraved attributes that Canaan exhibited were put in mankind precisely because of mankind's ability to elevate and sanctify himself, and to change bad to good. The greatest hope for the realization of that potential is through the combined holiness of the Holy Land, on the one hand, and the descendants of the Patriarchs, on the other hand. This is why our verse pairs the land and the promise to our forefathers with a reference

to the depravity of Canaan. These are the tools that Hashem has given us to work with. (Eretz Cheifetz)

Shemittah

We continue presenting halachot relating to "Kedushat Shevi'it" / the sanctity of shemittah produce. As discussed previously, the prohibition on "wasting" shemittah produce is stricter than the general prohibition on wasting food. The following halachot *regarding shemittah produce* are from Shulchan Shlomo: Hilchot Shevi'it by R' Simcha Bunim Lazerson shlita, based on the rulings of his uncle R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l.

Types of produce normally eaten by humans may not be fed to animals unless it is spoiled to the point that humans will not eat it.

Produce normally eaten raw may not be eaten cooked, and vice versa. Produce normally eaten either way may be eaten either way.

The prohibition on wasting produce of shemittah includes doing anything that would not ordinarily be done to that type of produce. The definition of "ordinarily" is that either this person or the general populace normally eats this fruit in this way.

One who is accustomed to eating very spicy foods or very sweet foods may season shemittah produce to his taste even if most people would not eat their foods that way, since for him this is the normal manner of eating.

If shemittah fruits are spoiling, it is a mitzvah to make a compote from them before they become inedible.

Herbal supplements, even those taken by healthy people, are not food and are not subject to shemittah sanctity.

One may squeeze juice from fruits that are ordinarily squeezed--for example, grapes and lemons--but not those that are not ordinarily squeezed--for example, figs and pears. The peels or skins that remain after squeezing should be treated the same as other shemittah leftovers.

One may squeeze citrus fruits in order to drink the juice. However, one should take care not to destroy the fruit that remains. Therefore, one should not squeeze so hard that the pulp becomes inedible. Rather, one should squeeze gently so that the remaining fruit will be edible.

Juice oranges may be squeezed for personal use. However, it is questionable whether the commercial production of orange juice is permitted, because that involves doing business with

shemittah produce.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **[Torah.org](https://torah.org)** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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