

THOUGHTS OF SHABBAT

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Shemos

Thoughts of Shabbat

Midrash Rabbah records that, while Moshe lived in Pharaoh's palace as a young man, he convinced Pharaoh that slaves work more efficiently when they are given one day of rest each week. Pharaoh instructed Moshe to implement this idea, and Moshe arranged for Bnei Yisrael to have Shabbat as a day off.

At the end of the parashah we read that Pharaoh decreed (5:9), "Let the work be heavier upon the men and let them engage in it; and let them not pay attention to false words." Midrash Rabbah explains that Bnei Yisrael used to gather on Shabbat to read scrolls that had been passed down from their ancestors, in which it was written that they would be redeemed in the merit of Shabbat observance. Therefore Pharaoh proclaimed: Take away their day of rest so that they will not have time to dream of freedom.

R' Moshe Chaim Luzzato z"l (Ramchal; 1707-1747) observes that the yetzer hara uses the same strategy to distract a person from focusing on his task in this world. Man's task is to reflect upon every step he wishes to take and every action he wishes to perform and to ask himself: Will this step or action bring me closer to G-d or will it distance me from G-d? The yetzer hara knows that if man would merely think about his actions, he would certainly begin to regret his deeds, Ramchal writes. To prevent this, the yetzer hara makes sure that we are always busy with all types of activities and tasks that appear to be very pressing. (Mesilat Yesharim ch.2)

In this light, perhaps we can understand why Shabbat observance, in particular, brings the redemption closer, for it gives us the opportunity and the peace of mind to reflect on our purpose in the world and the need to become a nation that merits redemption.

"Bnei Yisrael were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong--very, very much so; and the land became filled with them." (1:7)

R' Yosef ben Moshe Tirani z"l (Maharit; 1568-1639) writes: No one, not even Pharaoh, could deny that the growth rate of Bnei Yisrael was miraculous. Therefore, perhaps the verse (1:9), "He said to his people, 'Behold! the people, Bnei Yisrael, are more numerous and stronger mimenu'" [usually translated "more numerous and stronger than we"] should be translated, "more numerous and stronger from Him." If this is the correct translation, Maharit continues, then the next verse, "Let us outsmart lo" [usually translated "it," referring to Bnei Yisrael] perhaps should be translated, "Let us outsmart Him," again referring to G-d. Indeed, our Sages say that Pharaoh said, "Let us outsmart the Redeemer of Bnei Yisrael." That, of course, is none other than G-d. (Tzofnat Panei'ach)

"The Egyptians enslaved Bnei Yisrael b'ferach / with crushing harshness." (1:13)

The Gemara (Sotah 11a-b) cites the opinion of Rabbi Elazar that "b'ferach" is a contraction of "b'feh rach" / "soft-spoken." Rashi z"l explains that the Egyptians enticed Bnei Yisrael with words and with rewards to begin their work; then they enslaved them.

R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (Maharal of Prague; died 1609) comments: Rabbi Elazar does not mean to negate the pshat / plain meaning of the verse, i.e., that the Egyptians enslaved Bnei Yisrael with crushing harshness. Rather, Rabbi Elazar is adding that the oppression felt so much harsher because Bnei Yisrael had, so-to-speak, been stabbed in the back after believing in Pharaoh's soft-spoken words. (Gevurot Hashem, ch.15)

"A man from the house of Levi [Amram] went and took the daughter of Levi [Yocheved] . . ." (2:1)

Our Sages say that Yocheved was born on the day that Yaakov Avinu arrived in Egypt. If so, writes R' Avraham ibn Ezra z"l (1089-1164), she was 130 years old when Moshe Rabbeinu was born! Why is this miracle not mentioned in the Torah?

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270) answers: The Torah records only those miracles that were foretold by a prophet or an angel. Those miracles that served the personal needs of an individual tzaddik, such as the miracle of Yocheved giving birth at age 130, are not recorded.

Maharal of Prague offers another answer: Many wonders that occurred are not recorded in the Torah, for the Torah is not a storybook. Rather, the Torah is G-d's teachings. When there is a reason for something to be written in the Torah, it is written. Specifically, those events which are the foundation for the world's existence--for example, the events that befell the Patriarchs--are described in the Torah. And, once the Torah is describing the lives of the Patriarchs at length, it tells us, as well, how old Sarah was when Yitzchak was born. [In contrast, Yocheved's age at Moshe's

birth, while interesting, is not significant to our history.] (Gevurot Hashem ch.16)

"During those many days, it happened that the king of Egypt died, and Bnei Yisrael groaned because of the work and they cried out. Their outcry because of the work went up to G-d."
(2:23)

Why did they cry out now that Pharaoh died? R' Meir ibn Gabbai z"l (15th - 16th centuries) explains that it is common for a newly crowned king to grant a general amnesty to political prisoners. In this case, however, Pharaoh died and the new king did not grant amnesty to Bnei Yisrael.

Why did this fact draw Bnei Yisrael closer to G-d? Because the fact that they were not freed caused them to recognize that their slavery was not a natural phenomenon, but rather a Divine decree.
(Avodat Ha'kodesh Ch.34)

"It happened in those days that Moshe grew up [literally, 'became big'] and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens." (2:11)

Rashi z"l comments: "He set his eyes and mind to share in their distress."

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l elaborates: Moshe did not observe passively. Rather, he paid attention to the suffering of Bnei Yisrael and suffered with them.

R' Wolbe continues: Moshe displayed the trait known as "nosei b'ol" / "carrying another's burden." This does not refer to consoling someone by telling him, "I share your pain." That is polite, but it is not truly carrying the other's burden. R' Wolbe writes, "I don't know if there is a more difficult trait than carrying someone's burden, entering his situation to feel his pain. I [says R' Wolbe] have never succeeded in doing this."

He continues: R' Simcha Zissel Ziv z"l (the "Alter" of Kelm; 1824-1898) was known to have a glow on his face on Shabbat that made him appear to be a different person than he was on a weekday. One Shabbat, that glow was missing. After havdalah, the Alter sighed and said, "Peretz Smolenskin died. [R' Wolbe explains: Peretz Smolenskin (1842-1885) was a virulently anti- religious Hebrew language novelist whose works mock the Torah and Torah scholars.] What will Peretz Smolenskin's soul say when it goes up to Heaven and realizes that it lived a lie?" The Alter's face lacked its usual glow for the entire Shabbat because he felt the pain of Peretz Smolenskin's soul. We [says R' Wolbe] might have said, "Let his name be blotted out," but great people like the Alter of Kelm say, "This is a Jewish soul; I suffer because it is suffering."

R' Wolbe relates further that his teacher, R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l (1873- 1936; mashgiach ruchani of the Mir yeshiva) once went with another gadol to visit a person who was paralyzed. When they left, the other rabbi asked R' Yerucham, "How many times do you turn over in bed before falling asleep?" R' Yerucham responded, puzzled, "What difference does it make?"

"Because," responded his colleague, "this person cannot turn over at all unless three people help him."

R' Wolbe concludes: Our pasuk says that "Moshe became 'big' - a gadol, a great person." Only a great person can feel another's pain to the extent that it is called "carrying his burden." (Shiurei Chumash)

Shemittah

This week we begin discussing the sanctity of the fruits of shevi'it / the seventh year. [Applying the laws presented here also requires defining what is a "fruit of shevi'it," a discussion we leave for a future issue.] The halachot below are taken from chapter seven of Sefer Ha'shemittah by R' Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky z"l (1872-1955; Yerushalayim).

When we say that the fruits of shevi'it have kedushah / sanctity, we do not mean the same thing that we mean when we say that a Sefer Torah has sanctity. Rather, the term, which does appear in the Torah with reference to fruits of shevi'it, means that money that is exchanged for these fruits takes on the legal status of the fruits themselves [and the laws below apply to the money as well].

The kedushah of the fruits is manifested in the following ways:

- (1) They must be eaten. Some say that a mitzvah is fulfilled by eating them. In either case, they may not be wasted. (2) They may not be fed to a gentile. If they are fit for human consumption, they may not be fed to animals.
- (3) Those fruits which are fit for use by humans other than as food or drink may be used in that alternative manner, provided that they are consumed in the process. For example, oil may be used for fuel.
- (4) Business may not be done with them.
- (5) They may not be exported from Eretz Yisrael.
- (6) As noted above, money that is exchanged for them attains the same legal status as the fruit itself.
- (7) Any fruit that remains at a certain point in the year must be destroyed. [Many of the above laws will be discussed in greater detail in future issues.]

The purpose of all these laws, especially the last law above, writes R' Tukachinsky, is to impress upon us that the world and everything in it belongs to Hashem. When one makes no preparations for next year and even destroys what he has at the end of shemittah, he demonstrates his absolute trust in Hashem.

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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