



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 16 | Shemos | Sichah 4

No Jew Left Behind

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1.

MOSHE AND AHARON'S "WORK"

“The king of Egypt said to them, ‘Why, Moshe and Aharon, do you disturb the people from their work? Go to your labors.’”¹ Our Sages² note Pharaoh’s nuanced wording: He said, “Go to **your labors**,” meaning, your *own* personal work (Moshe and Aharon’s), and not “to their work,” and not “to their labors” (mentioned in the verse that follows **immediately**).³ From this, the Sages inferred Pharaoh meant not to the backbreaking labor to which the rest of the Jews were subject to, because Moshe and Aharon were exempt from such labor, since “the tribe of Levi was exempt from backbreaking labor.”

Ramban⁴ explains that “it is customary for every nation to have scholars who teach their wisdom”; thus, Pharaoh singled out the tribe of Levi and exempted them from bondage, because they were the “scholars and elders” of the Jewish people. By saying “go to your labors,” Pharaoh meant, return “to the people of Israel,”⁵ meaning, to resume their jobs in instructing and acting as “teachers of their wisdom” to the Jews.

In other words, Pharaoh argued to Moshe and Aharon: Isn’t it enough that you are exempt from the Egyptian bondage so that you can study Torah yourselves and also teach the Jews Torah? Why must you (also) get involved with the (general) lifestyle and activities of other Jews, inciting them to disobey Egypt’s laws and societal norms? It is enough that you teach them Torah periodically!

¹ *Shemos* 5:4.

² *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 5, sec. 16; Rashi on *Shemos* 5:4; see *Tanchuma*, “*Va’era*,” sec. 6.

³ {*Shemos*, 5:5.}

⁴ Ramban on *Shemos* 5:4; similarly, in *Bachaye* on *Shemos* 5:4.

⁵ Ramban and *Bachaye* quote the word “לישראל” — to the Israelites” from *Shemos Rabbah* 5:16; in our editions of *Shemos Rabbah*, this word doesn’t appear.

2.

IGNORING CONVENTION

Zohar states⁶ that Egypt's wisdom "exceeded that of the entire world." Additionally, Pharaoh himself was extremely intelligent.⁷ So his argument was in fact grounded in conventional logic:

From a natural standpoint, the Jews could not flee from Egypt, as our Sages say,⁸ "no slave could ever escape from Egypt." Also, the futility of resistance was consistent with Divine providence, since Hashem's decree was that the Egyptian exile was to persist for "400 years."⁹

So this was the gist of Pharaoh's argument: Why are you attempting to alter nature and G-d's ways? "Go to your labors" — to learn (your periodic classes of) Torah, and let the Jews carry on according to the laws of nature.

The response to this position: Although it may have seemed to be a valid argument, it was still an argument put forward by **Pharaoh**. Were they to accept his argument, the redemption {from Egypt} would have been postponed. As known,¹⁰ the redemption had to be "hurried" because had the Jews tarried in the Egyptian exile for even an additional "blink of an eye,"¹¹ the redemption wouldn't have been possible. The redemption was able to unfold precisely because Pharaoh's words were ignored.

To be sure, according to logic and reason, Pharaoh's argument may have had a degree of legitimacy, but Jews are not bound by the limitations of logic and worldly regimens. Thus, despite the {original} decree that the exile would last for

⁶ *Zohar*, vol. 1, 125a.

⁷ See *Zohar*, vol. 2, 52b.

⁸ *Mechilta*, "Yisro," ch. 18, sec. 11; Rashi on *Shemos* 18:9.

⁹ *Bereishis* 15:13.

¹⁰ Arizal's Siddur on the Haggadah, commenting on "*Matzah Zu*"; *Tzror Hamor*, cited in *Shlah* in his commentary on tractate *Pesachim*, on "*Avadim Hayinu*"; et al.

¹¹ *Mechilta* (and Rashi) on *Shemos* 12:41-42.

“four hundred years,” the redemption occurred a lot sooner, in the manner of “**skipping** ahead to the end {of exile}.”¹²

3.

JUST SAVE LIVES

The lesson from this — a Jew should not think: Since I study Torah, “my own soul has been saved,” especially since I also already give a Torah class periodically to others. Of what special relevance is it to me how another Jew behaves — whether he performs mitzvos; or whether, in his mundane pursuits, he devotes his abilities to Hashem, or, *lehavdil*,¹³ to “Pharaoh, king of Egypt”?

[Involvement in materiality on its own, without Divine light illuminating this involvement, is akin to building Pison and Raamses¹⁴ as “cities for Pharaoh.” As our Sages¹⁵ explain: “Raamses, רעמסס — {everything they had built} collapsed, מתרוסס, one after the other.... Pison, פי תהום — {everything they had built} was swallowed by the abyss, one after the other.” That is, it {materiality, on its own} does not endure.]

We must know this (was) the worldview of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, who said, “go to your labors.” — It suffices that you study Torah. Why are you so concerned about another Jew’s situation? — But that is not how a Jew operates, which is why Moshe and Aharon did not accept Pharaoh’s argument.

Just like when we see a Jewish home on fire, G-d forbid, nobody will sit down and deliberate whether to save the occupants from the flames; nor will anyone calculate: How can I, and why should I, interfere in someone else’s affairs? Everyone has their own lifestyle as determined by Divine Providence — so why should I interfere with G-d’s plans?

¹² See *Pesikta DeRav Kahana* and *Pesikta Rabbasi*, “*Parshas HaChodesh*”; *Shir HaShirim Rabbah*, ch. 2, sec. 8 (a).

¹³ {Lit., “to make a distinction.” This idiom is used when contrasting something G-dly to its antithesis.}

¹⁴ {The two cities built by the Jews during their bondage in Egypt. See *Shemos* 1:11.}

¹⁵ *Sotah* 11a; *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 1, sec. 10.

Obviously, someone witnessing such an incident would not start deliberating whether saving them is consistent with this opinion or the other. Rather, he would immediately run to save the people.

Now, this being the normal reaction regarding a danger to physical life, how much more so when dealing with a danger to physical and spiritual life combined — there is no place to make calculations. Rather, we must do everything we can to save someone from {falling into} the abyss.

4.

TREAT YOUR FELLOW AS YOURSELF

The Previous Rebbe quoted the Baal Shem Tov,¹⁶ who taught that the obligation to love a fellow Jew applies not only to a Jew who you know; you must also love a Jew who lives at the ends of the earth. And this love must be (not simply {in fulfillment of} “you shall love,”¹⁷ which can be limited, but) “as yourself”: Just as we cherish ourselves without limitation, the love we have for another must be in the same measure.

The {Previous} Rebbe would recount¹⁸ how the Maggid of Mezeritch wished to kiss a Torah scroll with the same love and affection that his Rebbe (the Baal Shem Tov) felt for a fellow Jew. And the {Previous} Rebbe added (in the name of the Maggid):¹⁹ Had the Baal Shem Tov known, while living in this world, as he knows now {in the afterlife}, how much he accomplished by showing affection to Jews, his show of affection to his fellow Jews would have been on an altogether different level.

The mitzvah to “love your fellow as yourself” must express itself as follows: Just as concerning yourself, there is the Divine service of “go to your labors” —

¹⁶ See *Sefer Ha'Arachim-Chabad*, entry “*Ahavas Yisrael*,” p. 623 ff.; *Kuntres Ahavas Yisrael*, ch. 9 ff.

¹⁷ {*Vayikra* 19:18 — “You shall love your fellow as yourself.”}

¹⁸ *Sefer HaSichos* 5701, p. 32; *Sefer Hasichos* 5704, p. 163; *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5709, p. 87; *Hayom Yom*, p. 71.

¹⁹ *Sichah* on the second day of Shavuot 5697; cited in the appendix to *Kesser Shem Tov*, sec. 233.

that a Jew should strive to be found in the tent of Torah, prayer and mitzvos — the same must be true with influencing a fellow Jew.

Since Hashem does not make impossible demands of His creations,²⁰ we are no doubt provided with all the capabilities to accomplish this — we only need to recognize that the work cannot be postponed for another week, or for a day, or even for the “blink of an eye.” In fact, possibly, this blink of an eye will determine whether we remain in exile, G-d forbid, or whether we are redeemed — to the extent of a complete redemption.

5.

TREAT YOUR FELLOW AS YOURSELF

Herein is the lesson to be gleaned by all who find themselves in the tent of Torah, including yeshivah students, as well as those under the radiance of Torah’s light:²¹ When we notice a fellow Jew whose spiritual state is less than ideal and is not sufficiently bright, we must not comfort ourselves by thinking that “I have saved my own soul,” especially since all Jews comprise **one** complete body:²² When there is a lack in another Jew’s Torah and mitzvos, it creates a deficiency in the other person and in all Jews.

The Torah says regarding the Jews:²³ “You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your L-rd: the leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officers... from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water.” When soldiers march in a parade before the king, protocol dictates that if a simple soldier’s uniform buttons are not perfectly polished, not only is the soldier held accountable. Rather, the commander must answer for not properly training his soldiers how to prepare themselves to stand before the king.

²⁰ See *Avodah Zarah* 3a.

²¹ {A general reference to Torah observant Jews.}

²² *Likkutei Torah*, beg. of “*Nitzavim*.”

²³ *Devarim* 29:9-10.

We must know that when “you are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your L-rd,” the demand {to ready oneself to stand before Hashem} is made not (only) of the hewers of wood and water drawers. Rather, the primary demand is made of the “leaders of your tribes.” They will not be able to rationalize {any deficiency} based on being preoccupied with their own {spiritual pursuits}.

When Jews all conduct themselves as one complete body, all Jews together — from the leaders of the tribes to the hewers of wood and water drawers — they will all become “one bundle...”²⁴

We will all then merit to “... fulfill Your will with a whole heart,”²⁵ leading to a time that “Hashem will be One and His name will be One.”²⁶

— Based on a talk delivered on *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*, 5717 (1956)

²⁴ Text of High Holiday liturgy.

²⁵ {This continues the previous quote from the High Holiday liturgy.}

²⁶ *Zechariah* 14:9. {In the Future Era, His absolute unity will become revealed for all to see.}