



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 21 | Beshalach | Sichah 1

## Moving On

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Translated by Rabbi Eliezer Zalmanov

General Editor: Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | Editor: Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

Content Editor: Rabbi Zalmy Avtzon

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## 1.

### OCCUPIED WITH THE SPOILS

On the verse,<sup>1</sup> “Moshe led Israel away from the Reed Sea,” the Midrash remarks<sup>2</sup> — and this is quoted in Rashi’s commentary — “He led them away against their will.” (Meaning, Moshe had to force the Jews to leave the Reed Sea). Our Sages explain<sup>3</sup> the Jews were busy gathering the “spoils at the sea.” (This spoil “was greater... than the spoils they had taken from Egypt”). Hence, they were reluctant to leave.

We need to clarify: At the splitting of the sea, Hashem appeared to the Jews, as it says, “He revealed Himself to them in His glory.”<sup>4</sup> (When the Jews declared, “**This** is my L-rd,”<sup>5</sup> “they pointed to Him with a finger.”)<sup>6</sup> In fact, “a maidservant saw at the sea what the {future} prophets would not.”<sup>7</sup> That led to the Jews singing *shirah*<sup>8</sup> to Hashem — words of praise and thanksgiving.

After all they had experienced, how was it possible that the Jews were so preoccupied with, and immersed in, the “spoils at the sea”? What significance did silver and gold hold for them compared with the revelation of Hashem at the splitting of the sea?

There is an even greater quandary: The Jews knew that “when you take the people out of Egypt, you will worship Hashem on this mountain”<sup>9</sup> — that from the sea, they would continue on to {Mount Sinai to} receive the Torah. Moreover, they counted the days until the Giving of the Torah (because of their yearning to receive the Torah).<sup>10</sup> So how was it possible that after all this, they would have

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<sup>1</sup> *Shemos* 15:22.

<sup>2</sup> *Tanchuma*, “*Beshalach*,” sec. 16 (Buber ed.); *Yalkut Shimoni* (quoting *Tanchuma*) and *Midrash Lekach Tov* on *Shemos* 15:22. This accords with one opinion in *Mechilta* on *Shemos* 15:22, but **not** because they were preoccupied with the spoils at the sea (but for another reason; see there).

<sup>3</sup> *Tanchuma* and Rashi on *Shemos* 15:22.

<sup>4</sup> Rashi on *Shemos* 15:2.

<sup>5</sup> *Shemos* 15:2.

<sup>6</sup> Rashi on *Shemos* 15:2.

<sup>7</sup> Rashi and *Mechilta* on *Shemos* 15:2.

<sup>8</sup> {Lit., “song,” referring to the Song at the Sea (*Shemos* 15:1-21.)}

<sup>9</sup> *Shemos* 3:12.

<sup>10</sup> *Aggadah* quoted by *Ran* at the end of *Pesachim*.

considered the spoils of any importance, more important than preceding and **hurrying** to receive the Torah? {Delaying was the complete} **opposite** of them counting {the days until the Giving of the Torah} — which they also did on the very day that they gathered the spoils at the sea!

We must say, therefore, that the Jews' reluctance to leave the spoils was not because they ascribed importance to the silver and gold **per se**, but because they had presumed that it was **Hashem's will** that they collect the spoils.

[This may also be the connection between **this** explanation of “against their will” (that it was as a result of them being preoccupied with the “spoils at the sea”) and the explanation<sup>11</sup> that the Jews did not want to take leave of the Divine revelation {experienced} at the splitting of sea — because:

It was the Divine revelation at the splitting of the sea that inspired them to fulfill the {presumed} will of Hashem and pick up the plunder at the sea.

## 2.

### FULFILLING THE DIVINE WILL

One explanation for this — also according to *pshat*<sup>12</sup> (and halachah):

At the exodus from Egypt, the Jews were **commanded** to “borrow each man from his fellow... silver vessels and golden vessels.”<sup>13</sup> The purpose of this was (not only for the Jews to amass “great wealth,”<sup>14</sup> but also in order that) “you shall **empty** Egypt”<sup>15</sup> — completely despoiling Egypt of its silver and gold, etc. (in the words of our Sages,<sup>16</sup> “like a trap in which there is no grain; like an abyss without fish”).

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<sup>11</sup> *Tzror Hamor* (quoting *Midrash Hane'elam*; See *Zohar*, “*Beshalach*,” 60a).

<sup>12</sup> {The plain meaning of Scripture.}

<sup>13</sup> *Shemos* 11:2.

<sup>14</sup> {Hashem's promise to Avraham in} *Bereishis* 15:14.

<sup>15</sup> *Shemos* 3:22.

<sup>16</sup> *Berachos* 9b.

Accordingly, when the Jews saw (at the Reed Sea) that the Egyptians still had silver and gold, the Jews felt **obligated** to collect the spoils, as they had been commanded: “you shall empty Egypt.”

Now, although this caused them to **delay** going to receive the Torah, they had not been commanded to go and receive the Torah **immediately**.

When Hashem said, “When you take the people out of Egypt, you will worship Hashem on this mountain,” it wasn’t said as a **command**, but as a description of coming events (after their exodus from Egypt).<sup>17</sup> Also (**and primarily**), there was no mention of a timeframe for this “worship.”

Therefore, it could not supersede the command, “you shall empty Egypt,” which, if not now, then when?<sup>18</sup>

### 3.

#### PRIORITIES

This answer, however, is insufficient, because as soon as Moshe instructed the Jews to leave, they knew clearly that this instruction was based on Hashem’s command. Hence, the original difficulty returns.

The explanation: Even if the Jews had understood that journeying to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah was predicated on Hashem’s command, nonetheless, the Jews believed that this should to be **delayed** until the completion of the first commandment — “you shall empty Egypt” — especially since the “spoils at the sea” was, as mentioned, a mitzvah that would expire, which is not suspended for the sake of Torah study (i.e., for the Giving of the Torah).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> And said to Moshe individually (see Rashi on *Shemos* 3:12).

<sup>18</sup> {*Avos* 1:14.}

<sup>19</sup> See *Moed Katan* 9b. {Generally speaking, Torah study takes precedence over the fulfillment of most mitzvos, particularly those that can be fulfilled at a later time. The obvious exception is a mitzvah that only applies for limited time, and if postponed, will no longer be in force.}

Moshe's command to leave **now** (and for the Jews **not** to busy themselves with the “spoils at the sea”) proved that Hashem's desire at **this** point was to suspend observance of His {previous} command, “you shall empty Egypt” (despite this being a mitzvah that would expire) in order to give Torah study (that is, receiving the Torah) priority. Nonetheless, carrying it out in reality — their {actual} departure — was “**against their will.**” This was because, according to their understanding (commensurate with their understanding and knowledge of **Torah**), the law ought to stipulate that they finish gathering the spoils first, in order **not** to abrogate the commandment “you shall **empty** Egypt.”

#### 4.

##### FORCED TO DEPART

Based on the above — that the Jews' preoccupation with the “spoils at the sea” was in order to fulfill the command, “you shall empty Egypt” — we can resolve another quandary relating to this topic:

Why were the Jews so enthusiastic about collecting the “spoils at the sea” (to the extent that they had to be forced to leave? What benefit would they have from the abundance of silver and gold heading into the **desert**, “a land through which no man passed and where no person settled”)?<sup>20</sup>

This question is especially pertinent since (they had more than enough resources to purchase their necessities from gentile peddlers,<sup>21</sup> and) they had accumulated silver and gold from the spoils they had taken with them from Egypt. As our Sages say,<sup>22</sup> (upon leaving Egypt) “there was not **one Jew** who did not have **ninety** Nubian donkeys laden with Egypt's silver and gold.”

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<sup>20</sup> *Yirmiyahu* 2:6.

<sup>21</sup> See *Yoma* 75b.

<sup>22</sup> *Bechoros* 5b.

On the other hand, if the Jews had expected then (prior to the Divine decree issued because of the sin of the spies),<sup>23</sup> shortly after the splitting of the sea, that they would enter the Land of Israel<sup>24</sup> (and that the redemption from Egypt would be eternal, not followed by another exile),<sup>25</sup> their attempt to accumulate huge quantities of silver and gold should have been out of the question when they were preparing for the eternal redemption!

But based on the above, this can be understood simply: The Jews were attempting to fulfill Hashem's command (that "you shall **empty** Egypt"). Thus, they gave no forethought to the benefit they would receive from the spoils. They fulfilled Hashem's will with "all their hearts and all their souls";<sup>26</sup> therefore, leaving before fulfilling Hashem's command completely could only be imposed upon them "against their will."

## 5.

### COMPLETE DEVOTION

The above explanation can be made more palatable based on a (deeper) explanation of the idea to "empty Egypt."

Why was such importance placed on leaving Egypt with "great wealth,"<sup>27</sup> to the extent that Hashem refused to allow the Jews to forgo it?<sup>28</sup>

This refusal relates to (and is consistent with) the prohibition of *bal tashchis*<sup>29</sup> and the Torah's concern about the prudent management of Jewish finances.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> {Hashem decreed that the generation that left Egypt would wander in the desert for 40 years; they were to die in the desert and not enter the land of Israel; see *Bamidbar* 14:29-35.}

<sup>24</sup> See *Sifri*, "Devarim," 1:2; Rashi on *Bamidbar* 10:29, 10:33.

<sup>25</sup> See *Nedarim* 22b; *Shemos Rabbah*, beg. of sec. 32.

<sup>26</sup> {*Devarim* 6:5.}

<sup>27</sup> {*Bereishis* 15:14.}

<sup>28</sup> *Berachos* 9b.

<sup>29</sup> *Devarim* 20:19 {the prohibition to destroy objects without purpose}.

<sup>30</sup> *Rosh Hashanah* 27a. {In the original, "*chasa al mamonom shel Yisroel*."}

“Great wealth” (also) refers to the sparks of holiness embedded in Egypt’s silver and gold. By this silver and gold coming into the possession of the Jews, these embedded sparks became elevated — from the most profane land, Egypt, into the possession of the Jewish people — to holiness.

Since the *avodah*<sup>31</sup> of elevating the sparks is a focal point in a person’s Divine service to the extent that through this *avodah*, the entire purpose of Creation is achieved — Hashem desired an abode (specifically) in the **lower realms**<sup>32</sup> — they were, therefore, not allowed to pass up on the “great wealth.”

The same idea would apply to the “spoils at the sea”: Knowing the significant accomplishment achieved by elevating the sparks in these spoils, the Jews performed this *avodah* excitedly. Moreover, the revelation then of the *Shechinah* to the degree {that led them to declare} that “this is my L-rd — the Jews pointed to Him with a finger,” intensified their absorption in collecting the spoils, doing so “with all your might.”

[We see this {practically}: When a Jew knows and feels that Hashem is “scrutinizing”<sup>33</sup> his mitzvah observance, he performs it with his whole heart, soul, and might. Every single one of his capabilities is engaged in fulfilling the mitzvah.]

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<sup>31</sup> {Divine service.}

<sup>32</sup> *Tanchuma*, “*Naso*,” sec. 16; *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” beg. of ch. 36.

<sup>33</sup> As described in *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 42.

## 6.

### TIMELY MITZVAH

This is also the deeper meaning of the verse, “He led them away against their will”:

Not that the Jews didn’t **want** to listen to Moshe after the splitting of the sea — surely they fulfilled Moshe’s command (which was Hashem’s command) to leave the Reed Sea — with complete joy.

So the (deeper) meaning of the phrase, “against their will,” is that it was “against the will” of their comprehension and understanding of Torah (relating to “you shall empty Egypt), since they were **completely engrossed** in the *avodah* of elevating the sparks embedded within the “spoils at the sea,” with all their heart, soul, and might. Tearing themselves away from this {*avodah*} could only occur “against their will,” doing so with complete subservience to adhere to Hashem’s **will**; but obviously, still with complete joy.

We can posit even further: After Hashem commanded them to go **immediately** towards {Mount Sinai for} the Giving of the Torah, the Jews knew (despite their not fathoming it intellectually) that they had completed the fulfillment of, and (thus) the time frame associated with, the **mitzvah** of “you shall empty Egypt.”

[Consequently, there would have been no (spiritual) advantage to them continuing to collect the spoils at the sea. This resembles {the limitations of the mitzvah of} eating matzah, which is referred to as “food of faith,”<sup>34</sup> since (the actual physical) matzah enhances a person’s faith. But this only happens by eating matzah during Pesach. Eating matzah after Pesach, however, does **not** accomplish this, because Hashem instilled in (the eating of) matzah the power to fortify a person’s faith only for a limited time. Once that time passes, and there is no longer a mitzvah to eat matzah, this power in it ceases.]

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<sup>34</sup> See *Zohar*, vol. 2, 41a, 183b.



## COMPLEMENTARY OPPOSITES

A fundamental lesson in our divine *avodah* can also be derived from this discussion:

When a Jew is occupied with something related to his divine *avodah*, he must be completely devoted to it, with all his energy and all his capabilities, to the point of “with all your might” — beyond any limitations and constraints. This leaves no room for any other *avodah*. (In fact, the prospect of moving from one *avodah* to another becomes like something that is “against his will”).

However, once there is instruction based on *Shulchan Aruch*, from the extension of Moshe within each generation,<sup>35</sup> that the first *avodah* must now end and another must begin, paradoxical reactions are expected of the Jew:

On one hand, from the outset, moving to another *avodah* needs to be “against his will,” as discussed, since he is devoted with all his soul and all his might to the present *avodah*.

Conversely, however, this feeling (of it being “against his will”) must lead him to realizing that “against your will **you are alive**.”<sup>36</sup> Meaning, the person should start to **live** with his new *avodah*, exhibiting a vitality so genuine it is beyond any limitation and constraints.

Since he was **completely** dedicated and devoted to Hashem’s will in his previous *avodah*, as expressed by his feeling that he was being forced to leave it, as discussed, he will be imbued with exuberance in carrying out his new *avodah*.

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<sup>35</sup> *Tikkunei Zohar*, *tikkun* 69 (112a; 114a).

<sup>36</sup> *Avos* 4:22.

## 8.

DO BOTH, COMPLETELY

This also offers a practical lesson for both Torah scholars and lay people:

Although Torah scholars are required to be involved completely in their Torah study, *Shulchan Aruch* says that when a mitzvah with a deadline comes up, like the obligation to save a life, and so forth, even Torah scholars must tear themselves away from their Torah study and get involved with saving lives, spreading Torah and Judaism, etc. Therefore, they must do so **joyfully and enthusiastically**.

One can attempt to rationalize: It is a lot more enjoyable to remain “inside,” to be entirely devoted to Torah study. Why bother going “**outside**”? True, anyone who says, “I have only Torah,” doesn’t even have Torah,<sup>37</sup> and thus Torah study must be accompanied by good deeds.<sup>38</sup> So he does perform good deeds. But only because he is **forced to** (for otherwise, “he doesn’t even have Torah”).

A person must know that from his acting contrary to his will (feeling forced to tear himself away from Torah study), there needs to emerge — “you are alive.” He gets involved in the life-saving activities of spreading Torah and Judaism, etc. joyfully and enthusiastically, to the extent that during these times, **this** becomes who he is.

A similar lesson applies to lay people whose primary *avodah* is performing good deeds: They must realize that their obligation to fix times for Torah {study} is not just for specific times (according to the requirements determined in the Laws of Torah Study),<sup>39</sup> but it must also be fixed in **their souls**. When they learn Torah, they must be completely engaged, just like someone whose “Torah {study} is his primary occupation.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Yevamos* 109b.

<sup>38</sup> *Likkutei Torah*, “*Vayikra*,” 5a.

<sup>39</sup> Alter Rebbe’s *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 3.

<sup>40</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos* vol, 12, p. 229; vol. 17, p. 307, at length.

## 9.

DO BOTH, COMPLETELY

An additional lesson from the verse, “He led them away against their will”:

Since the Jews were preoccupied with the “spoils at the sea” in order to elevate all the holy **sparks** within the physical silver and gold — ensuring that not a single spark remains unelevated — even more so do we need to be preoccupied with the *avodah* of drawing fellow Jews (who became distanced from Judaism) closer to observing Torah and mitzvos.

A Jew might argue: He already brought so many Jew closer to Judaism; he should now be allowed to rest from this work and (not to waste his time, G-d forbid, but) to focus on a different *avodah* (more pleasurable, in keeping with his nature and intellect).

He must realize that he ought not to calculate how many Jews he has already brought closer to mitzvah observance because there is still one Jew remaining who he can reach, and he has not yet brought this Jew close.

This remains the case until he receives a clear directive from *Shulchan Aruch* — from the extension of Moshe of every generation<sup>41</sup> {which extends} all the way to the Rebbe, the leader of our generation — that today, or from today on, he must focus on a different *avodah*. Until then, he may not abandon this *avodah* of drawing still yet another Jew closer to Judaism.

This is especially so regarding Jews, since every Jew is an “entire world.”<sup>42</sup> Although he has already brought many Jews closer, there is still (one Jew who was not brought close, and therefore, there is still) an **entire world**, a **brimming world**, that has yet to be elevated.

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<sup>41</sup> {*Tikkunei Zohar*, *tikkun* 69 (114a) teaches that in every generation, there is a Jewish leader who is an “extension” of Moshe.}

<sup>42</sup> *Sanhedrin* 37a.

This would hold true were it only **one** Jew who was distant. How much more so when there are many who still need to be drawn close to Judaism — he must surely be completely involved in this *avodah*, with complete enthusiasm, to the point that were he to be removed from that *avodah*, it would only be done **against his will**.

Even more so when considering that by {spiritually} refining a Jew and bringing him closer to Torah and mitzvos, ultimately, this Jew who was refined will eventually himself refine others, drawing other Jews closer to Judaism. Because one mitzvah leads to another, including (and especially) the mitzvah of loving your fellow **as yourself**, his actions will have a domino effect, bearing fruit for multiple generations until the end of the {present physical} world..

— From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Shemini*, 5734 (1974)