



A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA

פרשת שמות

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם, לָמָּה מוֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן תַּפְרִיעוּ אֶת הָעָם מִמַּעֲשֵׂי, לָכוּ לְסַבְּלִיתִיכֶם. וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה, הֲנִי רַבִּים עִתָּה עִם הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁבַּתֶם אֹתָם מִסַּבְּלִיתָם. וַיֵּצֵא פַרְעֹה וְכו' לֵאמֹר. לֹא תֹאסְפוּן לַתֵּת תְּבֹן לָעָם לְלַבֵּן הַלְּבָנִים כְּתִמּוּל שְׁלֹשָׁם, הֵם יֵלְכוּ וְקִשְׁשׁוּ לָהֶם תְּבֹן. וְאֵת מִתְכַּנֵּת הַלְּבָנִים אֲשֶׁר הֵם עֹשִׂים תִּמּוּל שְׁלֹשָׁם תְּשִׂימוּ עֲלֵיהֶם, לֹא תִגְרַעוּ מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי נִרְפִים הֵם, עַל כֵּן הֵם צֹעְקִים לֵאמֹר נִלְכָּה נִזְבַּחָה לְאַלְקֵינוּ. תִּכְבַּד הָעֵבֶדָה עַל הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בָּהּ וְאֵל יִשְׁעוּ בְּדַבְרֵי שִׁקְרָה. (שמות ה, ד-ט)

The king of Egypt said to them, "Moshe and Aharon, why do you disturb the people from its work? Go to your own burdens." And Pharaoh said, "Behold! the people of the land are now numerous, and you would have them cease from their burdens!" And Pharaoh ordered ... saying, "You shall no longer give straw to the people to manufacture the bricks as yesterday and before yesterday; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But the quota of bricks that they were making yesterday and before yesterday you shall impose upon them – do not reduce it – for they are lazy; therefore they cry out saying, 'Let us go and bring offerings to our G-d.' Let the work be heavier upon the men and let them engage in it, and let them not pay attention to false words." (Shemos 5:4-9)

The Torah relates that when Moshe and Aharon conveyed Hashem's message to Pharaoh asking him to free *Klal Yisroel*, he was not willing to listen. Pharaoh rudely dismissed them and accused them of disrupting the Egyptian economy by encouraging the Jewish labourers to use fantasies of serving Hashem as an excuse for idleness. Convinced as he was that the people were simply looking for excuses to shirk their responsibilities, Pharaoh decided that the best cure for Moshe's incitement was to make the people work so hard that they would have neither the time nor the energy to bother with his "false words." He ordered the taskmasters to no longer provide straw to manufacture the bricks, and instead, *Klal Yisroel* had to find their own supply of straw while still producing the same number of bricks.

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* queries why Pharaoh stopped providing straw. If he desired for them to work harder, why did he not continue to provide straw, just changing the quota of bricks needed to be produced? This would have had the desired effect - keeping *Klal Yisroel* busier with work, with the side benefit of the production level increased. Why did he decree that they should have to scrounge for straw which only accomplished one objective – to make them work harder?

The answer is that Pharaoh did not intend to make *Klal Yisroel* work hard just for the sake of it. The *posuk* (1:13-14) says: וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפִרְיָהּ וְכו' אֶת כָּל עֲבֹדָתָם אֲשֶׁר עֲבָדוּ בָּהֶם בְּפִרְיָהּ, *The Egyptians enslaved Klal Yisroel with crushing harshness, ... all their labours that they performed with them were with crushing harshness.* The term עֲבֹדַת פִּרְיָהּ used in the Torah to describe this type of harsh labour is defined by the Rambam (*Hilchos Avodim* 1:6) when describing the labour a master is prohibited to impose upon a Jewish slave. The Rambam designates this prohibition as work without a clear end or that which is unnecessary. Such work is only intended to keep the slave busy and has no real objective, and is therefore forbidden as the Torah (*Vayikra* 25:43) states regarding an *eved ivri*: לֹא תִרְדֶּה בוֹ בְּפִרְיָהּ, *Do not rule over him with crushing harshness.*

Pharaoh's desire to make the Yidden work was not just driven by financial gain. He had an additional agenda - to crush the Jewish spirit. By keeping them constantly busy, he aimed to cause them

emotional distress and frustration. When Pharaoh decided to increase their workload, he was not focused on productivity or profitability. He was determined to make their work harder and more taxing, with the intention of crushing their spirits. Requiring the Jewish slaves to search and gather their own straw for their work involved climbing mountains and traversing valleys and fields, which often proved unsuccessful. This resulted in hours of wasted effort, and the never-ending nature of the task made it even more overwhelming. The workers had no way of knowing how long the job would take, or whether they would even be able to find the straw they needed. Creating a job for them with no clear end in sight and being unaware if they would succeed, was עבודת פֶּרֶךְ, the ultimate form of cruelty, in line with Pharaoh's goal of making the Jews miserable and breaking their spirits

This concept can be illustrated in the following story. There was once a prisoner who had been sentenced to harsh labour for many years. From dawn to dusk, he was forced to draw heavy buckets of water from a well located within the confines of the prison camp, and then pour it into a water duct that ran beyond the camp's walls. He did not know where the water was going, but he assumed that it was irrigating trees and plants in some far-off area due to his efforts. Finally, the day of his release arrived, and he was eager to see the fruits of his labour. To his complete shock, horror, and disbelief, he discovered that the pipe led nowhere. All around the prison walls, there was only barren rocky land, and all of his years of exertion had been in vain. When he realised that he had achieved absolutely nothing with his lifetime of sweat and hard work, he immediately collapsed. The agony of labouring in vain was too much to bear.

We say, daily at the end of *Shacharis*, the following *tefillah*: הוא יפתח לבנו בתורתו, וישם בלבנו אהבתו ולא נלד לבהלה למען לא ניגע לריק, ומען לא נלד לבהלה למען לא ניגע לריק, ולא נלד לבהלה למען לא ניגע לריק, *May He open our heart through His Torah and imbue our heart with love and awe of Him and that we may do His will and serve Him wholeheartedly, so that we do not struggle in vain nor produce for futility.* In this *tefillah*, we are recognising and understanding how our sole purpose in life is to do the will of Hashem. We acknowledge that only by elevating ourselves from our gentile surroundings and keeping Torah and *mitzvos* do our lives have a purpose. The Rambam (*Introduction to Seder Zeraim*), mentioned last week, affirms at length that our single mission in coming to this world is to fulfil the will of Hashem by knowing Him and learning His Torah. A life devoid of Torah and *mitzvos* is a life bereft of meaning, akin to the sorrowful prisoner who toiled his life away in futility.

May we all be *zoche* to lead lives filled with Torah and *mitzvos*. This will ensure that we do not *chaveshalom* labour in vain or produce things that are meaningless, but rather fulfil our true purpose in life and lead fruitful lives!

To receive this Devar Torah by email please register your interest by emailing parshasheet@gyalumni.org.