

WORDS OF WISDOM FROM RABBI YITZI

לרפואה שלימה ליוסף יצחק בן ברכה

PARSHAS SHEMOS

To Be Truly Free

In the story of the Exodus, the Torah tells us how the Jewish people suffered under Egyptian bondage, "And they made their lives bitter... with mortar and bricks."

The essential life of a Jew is not his or her physical life but rather spiritual. And if the Torah tells us, "And they made their lives bitter... with mortar and bricks," which is completely physical, it would make sense that this would make their physical lives bitter, but how could it affect their spiritual lives? True, the hard labor would be time-consuming and exhausting, and it wouldn't leave a lot of time for the spiritual, but it wouldn't make their spiritual lives "bitter." So what does it even mean to make our spiritual lives bitter?

When a Jewish person is so destitute that he sells himself into slavery, the law is that his master isn't allowed to make him do --avodas perech , work that crushes the spirit. The Rambam explains this to mean "Work that has no end and no purpose."

The Haga'as Maimoni explains that this is learned from the servitude in Egypt. That means that the servitude in Egypt was "Work that had no end and no

purpose." This will help us understand how the crushing and bitter servitude, "With mortar and bricks," made their spiritual lives bitter.

When we work in accordance with the Torah, it is work that has an end and a purpose because the Torah gives us a limit as to how much time and energy

one may put into making a livelihood. Only what is necessary to make a vessel for Hashem's blessing. This also means that there is a limit as to which of your strengths to put into it. You should put in "the effort of your hands in order to eat," hands, meaning

your lower faculties, but not the higher ones like the mind and heart. Of course, you will need to use your heart and mind somewhat, but only the minimum amount necessary. Your heart and mind should be for serving Hashem.

The time that one spends at work is also meant to be limited, with set hours, leaving times for prayer and Torah study.

When one does business in this manner, it has purpose. Because when you do business in the Torah way, you merit Hashem's blessing, "And Hashem your G-d will bless you in everything that you do."

However, when a person puts his entire mind into making a livelihood, constantly thinking of ways to get ahead and making a little more profit, it becomes "Work that has no end and no purpose."

It has no purpose because the livelihood of a person comes from Hashem, and his constant thinking of how to get ahead, will not get him anywhere. If anything, it will only make things worse.

It is also work that has no end. There is no end to his toil; at the end of the work day, when everyone else working for him has gone home, he is there thinking about how to get ahead. When he finally closes up the business, instead of having set times for Torah study, he is at work, in the rat race, either physically or in his mind. He is constantly thinking about it. And what kind of family life does he have? He comes home late; when he is eating dinner, his head is in the business. When he is with his wife and children, he is distracted, ignoring them. Even when he finally goes to bed, he dreams about his business. He is in a self-imposed servitude that has no end.

This is also true for some Torah scholars, ones that have false pride and an overblown ego. If someone G-d forbid slighted him, or even if he imagined that someone slighted him, he can't let it go. In his delusion of grandeur, he thinks, "it is not me who was disrespected, but the Torah itself." He can't get it out

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of his mind; he has to stand up for the honor of the Torah. He becomes obsessed with revenge, he will have to show him. And because "The righteous are similar to their creator," he has to act like Hashem, and exact punishment measure for measure, if not double. He can't get past it until he even dreams about it when he sleeps.

When somebody thinks about taking care of his body, it usually has a limit. And there is nothing wrong with taking care of your body and being healthy, as the Rambam says, "that (maintaining) a healthy and complete body is following the ways of Hashem." Because in order to serve Hashem, you have to have a healthy body.

The Alter Rebbe tells us that Hashem Himself chose the bodies of the Jewish people. That means that our bodies are precious, and we have to take care of them. So taking care of your body has purpose.

However, for one who is obsessed with work or has delusions of grandeur, there is no limit to it. It is "Work that has no end and no purpose."

Now we will understand how the crushing servitude, "And they made their lives bitter," made their spiritual lives bitter.

Everything that Hashem created in the world is limited or finite. The only thing that is unlimited, "it has no end," and is truly altruistic, "it has no (selfish) purpose," is the neshama. The neshama is one with Hashem, and since He is infinite, our neshamas are too. It is from our neshamas that we have the ability to be unlimited. We also have the ability to serve Hashem in a way that "has no purpose," to serve Him lishma, totally for His sake, without personal gain.

When one uses the infinite power of the neshama for holy things, his spiritual life is sweet. However, when he uses it for the wrong thing, for the mundane, then it becomes "Work that has no end and no purpose," and his neshama suffers. His spiritual life becomes bitter.

The spiritual life becoming bitter can also come in a more subtle way, in a case where he only uses his neshama for holy things.

The evil inclination knows that it is futile to ask a Jewish person to do an outright sin, so he takes another tactic. He tries to get a person to do something other than what he is supposed to be doing.

In general, Jewish people are divided into two categories. There is the businessman and the Torah scholar.

The businessman is busy during the day with work. His obligation to Hashem, aside from daily prayers and daily Torah study before and after work, is doing good deeds, and at the top of that list is giving Tzedakah.

The Torah scholar's main occupation is the study of Torah. Of course, he is also obligated to do good deeds, but that is not his main thing.

The evil inclination convinces the businessman that he wants to be a scholar. All of a sudden, he doesn't have time to help another because when he is supposed to be helping, he is busy studying and praying at length. When he is needed, he is not available because he has become very holy, and then he has no time for another because he has to run off to work.

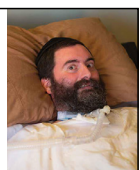
The same is with the Torah scholar who suddenly has no time to learn Torah because he is busy doing good deeds.

In these cases, their happiness trading places will be short-lived because they are not true to who they are, and their neshamas are bitter because they are not fulfilling their purpose. To the evil inclination, this is a victory.

This is also why we find that the Exodus from Egypt came about through taking the lamb of the Passover sacrifice. The lamb was one of the deities of Egypt and Hashem wanted them to slaughter the deity of Egypt right in front of the Egyptians. This was serving Hashem in a way of "no end," beyond understanding. And that set the Jewish people on a path of freedom, freeing their neshamas from the bonds of any physical constraints. Since we were freed spiritually, the physical redemption was automatic.

May we merit to see the ultimate redemption, when we will be truly free, spiritually and physically, with the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.

Despite facing one of life's most difficult challenges, Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz continues to spread joy and faith to thousands around the globe. Diagnosed in 2012 with ALS, Rabbi Yitzi is now 95% paralyzed and no longer able to speak or breath on his own. Thanks to the miracle of technology, Rabbi Yitzi continues to spread his wisdom through his eyes, focusing on each and every letter of these Torah articles. Rabbi Yitzi, his wife Dina and their seven children are the Rebbe's Shluchim to Temecula, California.



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