



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת בא תשס"ט • Parshas Bo 5769

FREE AT LAST

In what many schoolchildren undoubtedly consider an accurate analogy, the Jews' bondage in Egypt can be compared to a typical school year. Confined to certain premises to perform tedious tasks against their will, the process continues for what seems like an interminable amount of time to those involved.

DEPARTURE TIME

Yet we find a surprising difference between the two. In a school setting, anticipation has been building for the end of the school year. When the bell rings on the last day, the students – who had long been yearning for their freedom – are only too eager to respond. When that clarion call comes, they waste nary a second in tearing out of the building, and the mass exodus from the schoolyard to summer vacation takes place with a sense of immediacy and urgency.

One would have thought that the same would apply to the (obviously more severe) situation in Mitzrayim (Egypt). Having been decimated by ten awesome plagues, Pharaoh decides that he's finally had enough and releases the slaves, as recounted in this week's *parshah*. This act should have triggered an immediate response. After experiencing years of the most backbreaking labor imaginable, the Jewish people are told by their Egyptian slaveholders that they are free to go. Surely, they should have poured out of Mitzrayim at the first possible second, without stopping to think.

But that is not how it happened. Freedom was granted to the Jews by their overlords in the middle of the night, on the heels of the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn. Yet the Exodus did not take place until the next morning, "In the midst of the day," (*Shemos 12:51*). Why the delay?

It appears that the reason for their delay was a technical one: the Jews had been instructed to partake of the Pesach offering that night. As part of that service, they had been commanded by Hashem to remain indoors throughout the evening ("And you shall not leave the entrance of your houses until morning"; *ibid.*, v. 15). True, Pharaoh announced their freedom already at night; when they received the news, however, they were already bound by the Torah's injunction to remain inside until morning.

As R' Yaakov Kamenetsky (*Emes L'Yaakov*) points out, this was quite a prodigious feat on the part of the Jewish people. They had been waiting for *centuries* for this moment. Any "normal" person, under similar circumstances, would literally jump at the opportunity of being released from such long and torturous bondage and would not have hesitated a second to leave, not for all the money in the world. Not only that, but Pharaoh had displayed tremendous duplicity and stubbornness regarding his slaves. He would agree to free them while the plague was raging, only to change his mind once things settled down. Who was to say that he would not follow the same pattern this time around, and shortly regret the freedom he granted?

And so the Jewish people were faced with a dilemma: On the one hand, they had a religious obligation to stay put the entire night. On the other hand, the greatly anticipated call to freedom had just been issued; who could withstand the excitement and the temptation to flee? Perhaps they should just grab this opportunity and go – especially in light of the very real danger that by the time morning arrived, it could be too late!

Yet no one stirred. Despite the real possibility that their long-awaited freedom could well slip through their fingers, the B'nei Yisrael dared not violate a prohibition of the Torah.

Dedicated in honor of
ר' כהריאל בן רחל
by the staff of Chevrah Lomdei Mishnah

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of גאלדא בת נתנאל ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her neshamah.

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As we know, of course, the rest is history. They passed this first test as a nation and merited a glorious redemption the next day.

PROPHETIC LOGIC

An incident involving the Brisker Rav illustrates this idea on an individual level as well:

Toward the beginning of World War II, the Brisker Rav joined a group of Jews who were attempting to flee the Germans. As they were journeying, the time for *Minchah* approached.

Technically speaking, the travelers did not need to halt their journey but could *daven* as they traveled. As the Mishnah in Berachos (4:6) states:

הִיָּה יוֹשֵׁב בְּסַפִּינָה אוֹ בְּקָרוֹן... יִכְנֹן אֶת לְבוֹ כְּנֹגֵד בֵּית קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוּשִׁים.

“One who is traveling on a boat or wagon (when the time to *daven* arrives)... need only direct his heart toward the Holy of Holies in Yerushalayim (i.e., he need not stop his journey, but can pray as he proceeds).”

The Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim*, 94:4), however, adds a caveat: as circumstances and individuals differ, each situation needs to be evaluated separately. Depending on such factors as the spiritual level and concentration powers of the individuals involved, a pause in the journey may be in order.

Hence, the Brisker Rav preferred to stop the wagons so that he could *daven* properly. Not wanting to impose on the others, however, he urged them to continue; he would try to catch up on his own.

The Rav’s fellow travelers attempted to convince him of the danger involved, but to no avail. “What’s the difference?” he later explained. “There are Germans everywhere. Here there is danger, there there is danger. In the meantime, I might as well *daven* with *kavanah* (proper concentration).” Seeing that the Brisker Rav was adamant, the party decided to wait out of respect for him. When he finished *davening*, the journey resumed.

Arriving at the next town, the travelers found that it was completely empty of Jews. A gentile woman informed them that only moments before, the Germans had rounded up all the Jews of the city. She advised them to flee immediately.

As the party again set out on their way, the awesome realization dawned on them: had they not delayed their journey for those few minutes (that it took the Brisker Rav to *daven Minchah*), they, too, would have fallen into the hands of the cursed Germans. They looked at him in amazement.

For his part, the Brisker Rav was relatively unfazed. “What happened is stated explicitly in the Medrash (*Devarim Rabbah*, 4:5),” he explained. “Hashem states: ‘Whoever keeps My Word will not lose out,’” (*Bemechitzasam*, p. 162).

Just like the Jews in Mitzrayim.

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