



A vort from the Rosh Hayeshiva shlita

ויצו פרעה ביום ההוא את הנוגשים בעם ואת שוטריו לאמר. לא תאסיפון לתת תבן לעם ללבן הלבנים כתמול שלשום, הם ילכו וקששו להם תבן. ואת מתכנת הלבנים אשר הם עושים תמול שלשום תשימו עליהם לא תגרעו ממנו

That day Paroh commanded the task masters saying, 'Do not provide straw to make bricks as was previously, they should search and gather their own straw. The same quota of bricks which they made previously should be put on them now, do not reduce it.'

Paroh prohibited the task masters from providing straw, so the *Yiden* now had to collect it on their own while still manufacturing the identical number of bricks. The reason for this decree was to make the *Yiden* work harder and not think about their freedom. This decree seems very illogical. Had he wanted them to work tirelessly, he should have continued providing the straw and demand they double their output per day. He would now gain two-fold. They would have to really slog to fulfil their quota of bricks and he would have double the number of bricks available for building. By withholding straw, he just made them work harder without any financial gain.

The *possuk* uses the term *perach* to describe the way the Egyptians enslaved the *Yiden*. What is *avoidas perach*? The *Rambam* in *Hilchos Avodim* explains-

כל עבד עברי אסור לעבוד בו בפרך, ואיזהו עבודת פרך זו עבודה שאין לה קצבה, ועבודה שאינה צריך לה, אלא תהיה מחשבתו להעבידו בלבד, מכאן אמרו חכמים שלא יאמר לו עדור תחת הגפנים עד שאבא שהרי לא נתן לו קצבה, אלא יאמר העדר עד שעה פלונית או עד מקום פלוני וכו' וכן לא יאמר חפור מקום זה והוא אינו צריך לו.

A Jewish slave may not be enslaved with avoidas perach. What is avoidas perach? This is an avoidah with no limit or work which has no need or purpose. Therefore, the chachomim said, one cannot command 'Go hoe under the vines until I come'. This is prohibited since there is no limit given (as he might not come). One should rather say 'Hoe until this hour', or 'Hoe until you reach this place'. Similarly, one may not say 'Dig in this place' when he has no need for this.

These types of work are forbidden because they break the spirit of man. To work hard is manageable but to work for no purpose, meaninglessly, breaks the morale of the worker.

Paroh's primary concern was not financial gain. His main objective was to break the Jewish spirit. He intentionally did not provide straw despite this not being economical. They would scatter over the land to find straw and possibly climb mountains, travel down many valleys, and cross many fields, without being successful. They might have spent a week trying to get straw without accomplishing anything at all. There was no limit to their work for it was impossible to gather enough straw for their purpose. Also, no time limit was given as to how

long they should spend gathering. He was just interested in adding to their misery and breaking their spirit.

This can be further understood with the following story. A king had a prisoner who was held in a prison camp. He had been sentenced to ten years of hard labour and was woken up early each morning to carry heavy pails of water from the wells and springs in the prison camp and then pour them into the stream some distance away. The stream ran beyond the camp walls, and he had no idea where it led to. He had encouraged himself over the years thinking that the stream was likely to lead into gardens where he was irrigating the flowers, trees, and many plants. In this way, at least he was accomplishing something and not wasting his time.

When the time came that he was freed he was anxious to know where the stream led to and where were the gardens and trees he had irrigated were. To his shock and disbelief, the stream travelled across barren rocky land into the sea. He had wasted ten years of unbearable work on nothing. The pain was too much to bear and he fainted on the spot. That is the pain of someone toiling for no purpose.

We now appreciate what we say everyday הוא יפתח לבנו בתורתו ויראתו וכו' ולעבדו בלבב שלם - *Hashem should open our hearts to His torah and fear, so we can serve Him wholeheartedly, so that we do not toil in vain nor produce futility.* We declare that we know, had *Hashem* not given us the *torah* and *mitsvos* to serve Him with, we would be toiling in vain. Our primary goal therefore should be serving *Hashem*, so that we have a purpose to our life.

As the *Rambam* writes in his introduction to the *mishnayos*, 'We have analysed all deeds of mankind, each deed, and concluded that one deed is the main objective of all his work, and other deeds are there just to guarantee his survival and enable him to perform this deed to his maximum capability. This primary deed is to acquire intellect and to be knowledgeable of the truth. To know how to apply intellectual knowledge to every situation. The human is different to animals through his power to think and acquire intellectual knowledge, and the greatest intelligence is to appreciate the oneness of the Creator.' Pursuing *torah* and keeping *mitsvos* is what is giving our life meaning. The whole point of all our other work is just to sustain us while we acquire more *yiras shomayim* and *yedias hatorah*. Let us not miss the point.

In *Devorim* the *possuk* says - ועתה ישראל שמע אל החוקים ואל המשפטים אשר אנכי מלמד אתכם **למען תחיו** *Listen now Yisroel to all the chukim and mishpotim which I am teaching you today in order that you should live.* The *Netsiv* asks that since not listening to the *chukim* and *mishpotim* is not punishable by death, what is the *possuk* saying? The *possuk* is teaching us that through listening to the *chukim* and *mishpotim* and toiling in *torah* to grasp its depth, one gets a whole new appreciation to life. So much so, that anything else is like being devoid of any life.

Chazal say that four people are considered dead, the poor, a blind man etc. This is because the quality of life of one who can see versus someone who cannot is so vastly different that it is comparable to lack of all life. The same is true of someone learning and keeping the *torah* and *mitsvos*. The life of someone who loves *torah* and *yiras shomayim* is the truthful life, and anything else seems to lack life.