



A Marvelous Interpretation of Moshe Rabeinu's Kal Va'chomer from the Chozeh of Lublin

If Bnei Yisrael Who Are Subservient to Pharaoh Will Not Listen to Me Why Would Pharaoh the Embodiment of Evil Listen to Me

This week's parsha is parshas Vaeira. We will focus on the "kal va'chomer" that Moshe Rabeinu presents to HKB"H (Shemos 6, 12): **"וידבר משה לפני ה' לאמר הן בני ישראל לא שמעו: "Moshe spoke before Hashem, saying, "Behold, Bnei Yisrael did not listen to me, so how will Pharaoh listen to me? And I have a speech impediment (blocked lips)." Rashi notes that this is one of ten instances of "kal va'chomer" in the Torah.**

The commentaries point out an obvious problem with this "kal va'chomer." The Torah states explicitly why Bnei Yisrael did not listen to Moshe (ibid. 9): **"וידבר משה כן אל בני ישראל—Moshe spoke accordingly to Bnei Yisrael; but they did not listen to Moshe, because of shortness of spirit and hard work. Clearly, these conditions did not apply to Pharaoh; so, perhaps he would be inclined to listen to Moshe.**

In this essay, we will present a marvelous explanation found in the immaculate teachings of the holy Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak HaLevi, the Chozeh of Lublin, zy"va, in the sefer Divrei emes. It teaches every Jew a fundamental principle concerning one's day-to-day life. It addresses the extreme danger that exists for those whose livelihood depends on reshaim, who deny the validity of Hashem's Torah. It is imperative that they make every effort to avoid having their souls and spiritual selves also being enslaved.

The Grueling Slavery to the Corrupt Decadent Egyptians Caused Bnei Yisrael to Sink to the Forty-Ninth Level of Tumah

We will begin to shed some light on the subject with the Rabbi of Lublin's interpretation of the following pesukim in last week's parsha (ibid. 5, 1): **"ואחר באו משה ואהרן ויאמרו: אל פרעה כה אמר ה' אלקי ישראל שלח את עמי ויחוגו לי במדבר... ויצו פרעה ביום ההוא את הנוגשים בעם ואת שוטריו לאמר, לא תאספון לתת תבן לעם ללבון הלבנים כתמול שלשום... כי גרפים הם על כן הם צועקים לאמר גלכה נזבחה לאלקיני, תכבד העבודה על האנשים ויעשו בה ואל ישעו בדברי." Afterwards, Moshe and Aharon came and said to Pharaoh, "So said Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael, 'Send out My people that they may celebrate for Me in the midbar . . . On that day, Pharaoh ordered the taskmasters over the people and the guards, saying, "You shall not continue to give straw to the people to make the bricks like yesterday and the day before yesterday . . . for they are becoming lax; therefore, they cry out saying, 'Let us go and bring offerings to our G-d.' Let the work lay heavier on the men, and let them engage in it, and let them not engage in false words."**

The Rabbi of Lublin wonders what benefit Pharaoh thought would accrue from increasing the labor on the men. Seemingly, that would only increase their desire to be released from Mitzrayim by any means possible. He

explains the matter based on that which is written in parshas Bo (ibid. 12, 39): "ולא יכלו להתמהמה"—**and they could not delay.** In the siddur of the Arizal—Siddur Rabbi Shabtai (Haggadah shel Pesach)—he explains that there are fifty levels of tumah; had Yisrael delayed even one moment longer, they would never have left Mitzrayim, because they would have sunk to the “sha’ar hanun”—the fiftieth level of tumah.

Accordingly, the Rabbi of Lublin explains how it was possible for Yisrael—the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov—to sink to the depths of the forty-ninth level of tumah in Mitzrayim. For, this is the nature of slavery. When a slave is subjected to backbreaking labor and is deprived of every personal freedom, the more physical freedom he loses, he also loses his spiritual freedom, bit by bit. Eventually, he acquires all the personality characteristics of the one enslaving him.

Thus, as Bnei Yisrael were thoroughly enslaved to the Egyptians—who were the root of tumah—they lost their personal sense of worth and their kedushah. As a result, they became mired in the tumah of Mitzrayim. This, indeed, was Pharaoh’s intent when he announced (ibid. 1, 10): "הבה נתחכמה לו פן ירבה... ויעבידו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך, וימררו את חייהם בעבודה קשה." **Come, let us act wisely with him . . . The Egyptians enslaved Bnei Yisrael with back-breaking labor. They embittered their lives with hard work.** To summarize, Pharaoh cleverly schemed to enslave Yisrael with arduous labor, so that they would eventually sink to the depths of tumah, the fiftieth level, and never be able to leave Mitzrayim.

Increase the Intensity of the Labor so that They Will Sink to the Sha’ar HaNun

In this light, the Rabbi of Lublin asserts that when Pharaoh saw that Bnei Yisrael still wanted to go offer korbanos to Hashem in the midbar, he understood that they had not yet sunk to the fiftieth level of tumah. Therefore, he decided resolutely to subject them to even harder labor to accomplish this goal.

This is implicit in the remark Pharaoh made to his taskmasters: "כי נרפים הם"—**they are becoming lax**—in other words, we have not yet worked them hard enough. **“Therefore, they cry out saying, ‘Let us go and bring offerings to our G-d.’”** Therefore, we must proceed as

follows: **“Let the work lay heavier on the men, and let them engage in it, and let them not engage in false words.”** This will cause them to sink to the Sha’ar HaNun of tumah; then they will no longer desire to bring offerings to Hashem; and they will never be able to leave Mitzrayim.

This also explains very nicely the passuk: **“Moshe spoke accordingly to Bnei Yisrael; but they did not listen to Moshe, because of shortness of spirit and hard work.”** On account of the grueling labor Bnei Yisrael were subjected to by the Egyptians—the source of evil and tumah—they, too, sunk to the forty-ninth level of tumah. Thus, they were incapable of heeding Moshe Rabeinu’s words of kedushah.

In this manner, he explains the “kal va’chomer” of Moshe Rabeinu: **“Behold, Bnei Yisrael did not listen to me”**—despite the fact that they themselves and the roots of their neshamos are inherently kadosh, since they are the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Yet, because of their enslavement to the corrupt Egyptians, they have sunk to the forty-ninth level of tumah. **“So how will Pharaoh listen to me?”** After all, Pharaoh is the very root of tumah; he, most certainly, will not listen to me. This concludes his sacred insight.

How to Survive in Galus among Worshipers of Avodah Zarah

It appears that we can substantiate this illuminating insight of the Rabbi of Lublin, zy”a, by referring to what is written in parshas Vaeschanan (Devarim 4, 28): "ועבדתם שם אלהים מעשה ידי אדם עץ ואבן אשר לא יראו ולא ישמעו ולא יאכלו ולא ירוחו." **There you will worship gods, the handiwork of man, of wood and stone, which do not see, and do not hear, and do not eat, and do not smell.** Rashi comments: **This is to be understood as rendered by the Targum. Since you serve those who worship false gods, it is as if you worship them.** Thus, we are taught explicitly that even if a person merely serves idolators but has no intention, chas v’shalom, of joining them; nevertheless, they exert a significant influence on those that serve them. So much so that the passuk concludes: **“There you will worship gods, the handiwork of man.”**

Thus, we can appreciate the advice the Torah adds for Jews who are perforce in galus among worshippers of avodah-zarah. To avoid their profound, negative influence

”ובקשתם משם את ה' אלקיך ומצאת כי תדרשנו בכל לבבך ובכל (ibid. 29): **”from there you will seek Hashem, your G-d, and you will find (Him), if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.** In other words, in the event that you are compelled to work for those who worship avodah-zarah, intensify your connection with HKB”H by praying to Him to save you from falling into the clutches of those you work for. Thus, they will not succeed in corrupting you spiritually in a way that is opposed to the Torah.

It is apparent that this is what Bnei Yisrael did in Mitzrayim. Although they sank to the forty-ninth level of tumah, they cried out from the depths of their hearts to Hashem, as it is written (Shemos 2, 23): **”ויאנחו בני ישראל—Bnei Yisrael moaned because of the work, and they cried out. Their outcry because of the work went up to G-d.** Elsewhere, it expresses this even more explicitly (Devarim 26, 7): **”ונצעק אל ה' אלקי אבותינו וישמע ה' את קולנו וירא את ענינו ואת עמלנו—then we cried out to Hashem, the G-d of our forefathers, and Hashem heard our voice and saw our affliction, our travail, and our oppression.** In keeping with this discussion, we can suggest that this outcry to Hashem is what saved them from sinking to the Sha’ar HaNun of the tumah of Mitzrayim.

The point is that the Sha’ar HaNun of tumah is the denial of and blasphemy of Hashem. As Pharaoh, the leader of the klipah of Mitzrayim, proclaimed (Shemos 5, 2): **”מי ה' אשר—who is Hashem that I should heed His command to release Yisrael? I do not know (recognize) Hashem!”** This is alluded to by his remark: **”מי ה',”** in that the gematria of the word **”מי ה'”** is fifty. Thus, it alludes to the fiftieth level of tumah to which someone who denies the existence or divine authority of Hashem falls and proclaims: **”Who is Hashem that I should heed His command?!”**

Therefore, by crying out to the G-d of their forefathers, even when subjected to the arduous physical and spiritual enslavement in Mitzrayim, causing them to sink to the forty-ninth level of tumah, the following held true of them: **”From there you will seek Hashem, your G-d, and you will find (Him), if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.”** This prevented them from sinking to the Sha’ar HaNun of tumah. This then is the message

HKB”H conveyed to Moshe Rabeinu (ibid. 3, 9): **”ועתה הנה צעקת בני ישראל באה אלי וגם ראיתי את הלחץ אשר מצרים לוחצים אותם, ועתה לכה ואשלחך אל פרעה והוצא את עמי בני ישראל ממצרים.”** **And now, behold! The outcry of Bnei Yisrael has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. And now, go and I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall take My people, Bnei Yisrael, out of Mitzrayim.**

Tzlach: They Left Mitzrayim due to the “Neshamah Yeteirah” that Remained Unscathed in Mitzrayim

Continuing on this sacred journey, we will proceed to explain in greater depth the reason that Bnei Yisrael did not sink to the Sha’ar HaNun of tumah in Mitzrayim. To do so, we will combine the illuminating insight of the Chozeh of Lublin with the illuminating words of the great Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, the author of the Responsa Noda B’Yehudah, in Drushei HaTzlach (38, 6). He addresses what the Tur writes in O.C. 430. The Tur attributes the appellation **”Shabbas HaGadol”** to the great miracle that occurred on the Shabbas preceding the exodus from Egypt—**”yetzias Mitzrayim.”** The exodus took place on a Thursday. On the preceding Shabbas, the tenth of Nissan, every Jew was commanded to take a lamb for his family as a Pesach offering and tie it to the foot of his bed. When the curious Egyptians would ask about this strange ritual, the Bnei Yisrael would respond that they planned to sacrifice these animals to their G-d. The Egyptians, who worshipped the lamb, were powerless to react and were forced to watch in silence.

Now, we are familiar with an oddity the commentaries discuss at length. All of the festivals and holidays mentioned in the Torah, and also Chanukah and Purim, are celebrated on the dates that their respective miracles actually occurred; they are not celebrated on the day of the week that the miracles occurred. Yet, this is not the case with Shabbas HaGadol. The miraculous taking of the Korban Pesach occurred on the tenth of Nissan, which does not necessarily fall on Shabbas. So, why do we always celebrate this miracle on the Shabbas prior to Pesach rather than on the tenth of Nissan? The Tzlach answers that the miracle of the taking of the lamb for the Korban Pesach is specifically related to Shabbas kodesh. Here is a translated summary of his sacred words:

During the galus in Mitzrayim, they did not even have inclinations to perform teshuvah, because their lives in galus were so immersed in the tumah of Mitzrayim. Hence, they required divine assistance, beyond the realm of nature, to arouse them to perform teshuvah. And he admonished them (ibid. 12, 21): “Withdraw and take”—instructing them to withdraw their hands from the tumah of Mitzrayim. That is when the redemption of their beings began. And since their beings were immersed in the depths of the abyss of Mitzrayim, they did not possess the power to detach themselves (from the tumah) except on Shabbas kodesh. For then, the “neshamah yeteirah” that comes only on Shabbas shone for them, whereas it goes back up (to heaven) throughout all the weekdays. Hence, the “neshamah yeteirah” was not sullied with the tumah of Mitzrayim.

In truth, the Tzlach does not actually explain for us why the “neshamah yeteirah” is not sullied by the tumah of Mitzrayim. After all, during the galus in Mitzrayim, Yisrael sank to the forty-ninth level of tumah. They did not depart physically from the servitude to Pharaoh or spiritually from the forty-ninth level of tumah until HKB”H extricated them with signs and wondrous feats. That being the case, how was the “neshamah yeteirah” not damaged when it descended to Mitzrayim on every Shabbas?

A Fascinating Combination of the Chiddushim of the Rabbi of Lublin and the Tzlach

By combining the insight of the Rabbi of Lublin, zy”a, with the insight of the Tzlach, we can explain the matter very nicely. Let us introduce a Midrash (S.R. 1, 28) related to the passuk (ibid. 2, 11): “ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלותם”—it happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and saw their burdens. According to the Midrash, he saw that they did not have any respite; so, he appealed to Pharaoh on their behalf. He argued that without a day of rest once a week, the slaves would surely die. Pharaoh conceded and told Moshe to give them a day of rest. Moshe established Shabbas as their day of rest.

This also explains very nicely the teaching in the Midrash (ibid. 5, 18) that they were in the possession of scrolls. They would read from them and delight in them on every Shabbas; for they raised their spirits and gave them hope that HKB”H was going to redeem them. Furthermore, we

find the following elucidation in the Midrash Shochar Tov related to the passuk (Tehillim 119, 92): “לולי תורתך שעשועי אז אבדתי בעניי - ספרים היו להם והיו משתעשעים בהם משבת לשבת, לכך נאמר לולי תורתך שעשועי וגו'.” The passuk says: “**Had not Your Torah been my preoccupation, then I would have perished due to my affliction**”—they had sefarim, and they would delight (amuse and entertain themselves) in them on every Shabbas. Therefore, it says: “**Had not Your Torah been my preoccupation, etc.**” Thus, since Yisrael rested on Shabbas and did not work as slaves, they were removed from the tumah of Mitzrayim and were able to fortify and uplift themselves with words of Torah.

According to this scenario, the “neshamah yeteirah” would not have been affected by the harmful tumah of Mitzrayim and was able to retain its full glory, purity, and splendor. With this understanding, the wonderful chiddush of the Tzlach makes perfect sense. HKB”H instructed Yisrael to take the lamb for the Korban Pesach on the tenth of Nissan, because it was Shabbas. This provided them with the assistance of the “neshamah yeteirah,” which gave them the strength to withdraw from the “avodah-zarah” of the lamb and sacrifice it as a Korban Pesach to Hashem. Thus, the insights of the Rabbi of Lublin and the Tzlach go hand in hand magnificently.

This also beautifully explains a teaching in the Midrash (ibid.) related to the passuk: “**Let the work weigh heavier on the men . . . and let them not engage in words of falsity.**” **This teaches us that they were in possession of scrolls that they would delight in from Shabbas to Shabbas, to say that HKB”H would redeem them.** They were able to learn from them, **since they rested on Shabbas. Therefore, Pharaoh said to them (the taskmasters), “Let the work weigh heavier on the men and let them engage in it; and let them not engage . . .”—i.e., let them no longer delight (in the false words of their Torah), and let them no longer rest on the day of Shabbas.**

From this, it is evident that even Pharaoh, the head of the klipah of Mitzrayim ultimately realized that the reason Yisrael had not sunk to the Sha’ar HaNun of their tumah was because they did not work on Shabbas. This was why their “neshamah yeteirah” was unsullied by the tumah of Mitzrayim. Therefore, he decreed that they resume working on Shabbas. He was never able to implement this decree,

because HKB”H subjected him and his people to the ten plagues. For this reason, Yisrael did not sink to the Sha’ar HaNun of tumah and were able to leave Mitzrayim.

Let us combine the two reasons we have mentioned for why the intense labor in Mitzrayim did not cause Yisrael to sink to the Sha’ar HaNun of tumah. Because of the “neshamah yeteirah” that visited them on Shabbas, when they were allowed to rest, they were able to cry out to Hashem even during the week when they were subjected to intense, backbreaking labor. So, on account of both Shabbas-observance and the outcry to Hashem, they did not sink to the Sha’ar HaNun of tumah.

The Amazing Relationship between Shabbas Kodesh and Yetzias Mitzrayim

We can now truly appreciate the wonders of the Torah based on the chiddushim of the Rabbi of Lublin and the Tzlach. Based on their combined insights, we can achieve a better understanding of the mitzvah of Shabbas as presented by HKB”H to Yisrael in the second dibros (Devarim 5, 12): “שמור את יום השבת לקדשו כאשר צוך ה' אלקיך, ששת ימים תעבוד ועשית כל מלאכתך, ויום השביעי שבת לה' אלקיך לא תעשה כל מלאכה אתה ובנך ובתך... וזכרת כי עבד היית בארץ מצרים ויוציאך ה' אלקיך משם ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה, על כן צוך ה' אלקיך לעשות.” Guard the day of Shabbas to sanctify it, as Hashem, your G-d, commanded you. Six days shall you work and accomplish all your work; but the seventh day is Shabbas to Hashem, your G-d; you shall not do any work—you, and your son, and your daughter . . . And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Mitzrayim, and Hashem, your G-d, has taken you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm; therefore Hashem, your G-d, has commanded you to make the day of Shabbas. The commentaries discuss at length what the possible connection between “yetzias Mitzrayim” and Shabbas-observance might be.

Thankfully, we can shed some light on the subject based on our current discussion. Now, in the first dibrot, we are commanded to remember the Shabbas throughout all six days of the work week. By doing so, “all your work will be accomplished,” and you need not be concerned that you will be overwhelmed and mired in mundane matters of Olam HaZeh. “But the seventh day is Shabbas to Hashem,

your G-d; you shall not do any work”—in other words, in the merit of Shabbas, you will be able to rise above all matters of Olam HaZeh even during the six weekdays.

HKB”H provides the proof for this in the second dibrot: “And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Mitzrayim, and Hashem, your G-d, has taken you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm.” For, on account of observing Shabbas kodesh in Mitzrayim, Pharaoh was unsuccessful in his attempts to drown you in the Sha’ar HaNun of tumah. In that merit, HKB”H extricated you from the forty-nine levels of tumah to which you had sunk.

In truth, with this passuk, HKB”H conveys a more profound message to us: “וזכרת כי עבד היית בארץ מצרים ויוציאך ה' אלקיך משם ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה” Indeed, every single Shabbas, while we were still in Mitzrayim, HKB”H took us out of galus despite the efforts of Pharaoh to the contrary; “על כן צוך ה' אלקיך לעשות את יום השבת”—but even today, long after the exodus from Mitzrayim, HKB”H takes us out of the galus of the six weekdays, on which we are occupied with matters of Olam HaZeh; this happens on a weekly basis in the merit of Shabbas observance.

Establishing Set Times for Torah Study Is an Auspicious Practice to Avoid Being Mired in Matters of Olam HaZeh

It gives me great pleasure to conclude this essay with another wonderful suggestion HKB”H gave us concerning how to avoid being consumed by matters of Olam HaZeh during the six weekdays. It is by fulfilling the mitzvah of setting fixed times daily to study Torah. By setting fixed times to study Torah daily, the Torah acts as a protective shield protecting a person from the pitfalls of materialism and physical desires.

This is the lesson taught by the Mishnah (Avos 2, 2): “יפה תלמוד תורה עם דרך ארץ שיגיעת שניהם משכחת עון”—Torah study combined with “derech erez” (worldly endeavors and proper conduct) is good; for exertion in both eliminates wrongdoing. So, on the one hand, a person must work and pursue worldly endeavors for the sake of his livelihood. These pursuits, however, may cause a person to be consumed with materialistic desires and values. Hence, it is necessary to set fixed times to study Torah to avoid

this calamity; it is important to balance our material and spiritual needs and maintain a proper perspective.

In this light, we can reconcile the following statement in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 7a): "אמר רב המנונא, אין תחילת דינו של אדם נידון אלא על דברי תורה"—**Rav Hamnuna said: The beginning of a person's judgment (in Olam HaBa) is based exclusively on matters of Torah.** Yet, this seems to contradict a teaching in Maseches Shabbas (31a), which Tosafos addresses there: "אמר רבא, בשעה שמכניסין אדם לדין אומרים לו נשאת ונתת באמונה קבעת עתים לתורה"—**Rava said: When they escort a person to his heavenly judgment, they ask him, "Did you conduct business transactions in good faith? Did you set aside fixed times for Torah-study?"** In other words, according to this Gemara, a person's judgment in heaven begins with how he conducted business transactions and not with setting aside times to study Torah. Based on what we have discussed, however, we can suggest that the two are not at odds with each other.

After all, when a person is involved in business dealings and other work, there is a risk that he might become immersed in mundane, worldly matters. So, he requires a mechanism or device to keep him in line and ensure that he conducts himself properly and honestly. This is accomplished by means of regular, consistent Torah-study. This is one of the unique, auspicious qualities of Torah; it protects a person from the pitfalls of Olam HaZeh, as stated so eloquently in the Mishnah above: "יפה תלמוד תורה עם דרך ארץ שיגיעת שניהם משכחת עון". Hence, the Gemara in Maseches Shabbas juxtaposes these two questions: **"Did you conduct business transactions in good faith? Did you set aside fixed times for Torah-study?"** Because, in reality, the two things go hand in hand and complement each other. Thus, Rav Hamnuna's statement is correct, since **"conducting business transactions in good faith"** is intimately related to the matter of **"setting fixed times to study Torah."**



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