

This week's *Parashah* covers a period of more than 200 years, including the beginning of *Bnei Yisrael's* subjugation in Egypt and the beginning of its end. *Hashem* tells Moshe (3:7-8), "I have seen the affliction of My people that is in Egypt and I have heard its outcry because of its taskmasters, for I have known of its sufferings. I shall descend to rescue it from the hand of Egypt..." Yet, despite these words, notes R' Chaim ben Attar z"l (1696-1743; Morocco, Italy and *Eretz Yisrael*; known as the "*Ohr Ha'Chaim Ha'kadosh*"), the Exodus did not take place until a year later! Indeed, we read (12:39), "For they could not delay," which our Sages understand to mean that *Bnei Yisrael* would have descended irreversibly into the 50th and lowest level of impurity had the Exodus been delayed another moment. What does this mean, and why did *Hashem* wait until the last second before redeeming our ancestors?

The *Ohr Ha'Chaim Ha'kadosh* explains: Between *Pesach*, the festival of the Exodus, and *Shavuot*, the festival of the Giving of the Torah, we count 49 days, paralleling the 49 *Sha'arei Binah* / "Gates of Understanding" that our ancestors attained in preparation for receiving the Torah. Such lofty levels are not attained effortlessly, writes the *Ohr Ha'Chaim*. Rather, each level was attained as a reward for the efforts *Bnei Yisrael* made to resist falling into another level of impurity. (Note that they were rewarded even though their efforts were apparently unsuccessful.) It follows, continues the *Ohr Ha'Chaim*, that the Exodus had to be delayed until *Bnei Yisrael* had reached the 49th level of impurity. Otherwise, they never would have merited to attain the 49th level of understanding.

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Shabbat

***Hashem* said to Moshe: "I have a good gift in My storehouse, and its name is 'Shabbat.' Go and tell them!" (Shabbat 10b)**

R' Aharon Perlow z"l (1736-1772; *Chassidic Rebbe* of Karlin) observes: *Hashem* did not say, "Go and give it to them!" He said, "Go and tell them!" -- i.e., tell the Jewish People that this gift is in My storehouse so that they will make the effort and self-sacrifice needed to acquire this treasure.

(Quoted in *Otzar Peninei Ha'chassidut: Shabbat Kodesh*)

From the same work:

R' Yitzchak Kalish z"l (1920-1993; *Amshinover Rebbe* in Brooklyn, N.Y.) writes: The phrase, "Go and tell them," can be understood through a parable: A man is sick and needs a certain medicine that is not readily available. As soon as he is told that the medicine is on its way, that already makes him feel a little better, even before the medicine arrives.

Similarly, even if we do not feel the holiness of *Shabbat*, the mere knowledge ("Go and tell them!") that *Shabbat* is a special gift enhances our observance. This is why *Shabbat* is one of the six things that a person is commanded to mention daily. [A list can be found in many *Siddurim* after *Shacharit*]. Merely mentioning the holiness of *Shabbat* on a weekday gives a person a share in the treasure that *Shabbat* is. For the same reason, the above *Gemara* describes *Shabbat* as being in *Hashem's* "storehouse." Even when *Shabbat* seems hidden from us, we benefit from talking about it.

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“He went out the next day and behold! two Hebrew men [Datan and Aviram] were fighting. He said to the wicked one, ‘Why would you strike your fellow?’” (2:13)

“The shepherds came and drove [Yitro’s daughters] away. Moshe got up and saved them, and he watered their sheep.” (2:17)

Midrash Rabbah comments on the verse (*Shir Ha’shirim* 1:6), “They made me a keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I did not keep,” as follows: Before Moshe Rabbeinu sought justice on behalf of the daughters of Yitro, should he not have made peace among his own brethren? Thus it says, “My own vineyard I did not keep!” In a similar vein, the *Midrash* applies this verse to the activities of several other figures in *Tanach*. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Raphael Breuer *z”l* (1881-1932; Rabbi of Aschaffenburg, Bavaria) writes: “Israel could have been great among the nations of the world and would not have ceased being great, had it not split the vast array of its energies among thousands of foreign fields to the benefit of other nations. It should have allowed its abilities to develop to their utmost and realize their full potential in its own field, in accordance with its own will and the Will of its Creator.

“It has always been the case, said Israel--and it could say this in our own time as well--that I have wandered in all sorts of vineyards instead of guarding and cultivating my own vineyard.

“A quick look at Jewish history shows how many Jewish talents were exploited for the benefit of others, how Israel has always been the keeper in foreign vineyards, while its own vineyard it neglected and left desolate. . . The disgrace in such concern was revealed only in the time of exile and in the lands of exile. So long as Israel worshiped other gods and false idols on its own land, its inclination for foreign values did not stand out so blatantly, thanks to its political independence. Only in exile and as a result of exile did this inclination develop to the point of complete subordination of the inner life. The service given to foreign vineyards in exile threatened to erase the very awareness of the authentic vineyard and its true meaning.” (*Commentary on Shir Ha’shirim* p.17-19)

R’ Ze’ev Wolf Einhorn *z”l* (Grodno, Belarus; died 1862) writes that the correct text of the *Midrash* is in the first person: “Before I sought justice on behalf of the daughters of Yitro, should I not have made peace among my own brethren?”--*i.e.*, the *Midrash* is recording that Moshe Rabbeinu berated himself for not trying harder to make peace between his warring brethren. Though there is no hint in the Torah that Moshe Rabbeinu had such regrets, it is the way of the *Midrash* to fill in gaps in one place based on verses in another place, writes R’ Einhorn.

(*Peirush Mahazav*)

R’ Yissachar Berman Ashkenazi Katz *z”l* (Poland and *Eretz Yisrael*; 16th century) interprets the *Midrash* differently--*i.e.*, that Datan and Aviram are bemoaning the fact that they did not allow Moshe to mediate their dispute.

(*Matnot Kehunah*)

“And these are the names of the children of Yisrael who were coming to Egypt . . .” (1:1)

R’ Sa’adiah Gaon *z”l* (882-942; Egypt, *Eretz Yisrael* and present-day Iraq; author of the earliest known work on Jewish Thought) comments: The Torah says, “Coming to Egypt,” and not, “Going down to Egypt.” In contrast, we read (*Yeshayah* 31:1), “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help.” The reason for the difference is that the verse in *Yeshayah* refers to a rebellion against *Hashem*--seeking help from the Egyptians instead of from Him. In contrast, those who were coming to Egypt in our verse were doing so in accordance with *Hashem*’s command. (Quoted in *Perushei Rav Sa’adiah Gaon L’seder Shmot*)

From the same work:

“It may be that if a war will occur, it, too, may join our enemies.” (1:10)

Why did the Egyptians fear that *Bnei Yisrael* would join the Egyptians’ enemies?

R’ Sa’adiah Gaon writes: The Egyptians saw that *Bnei Yisrael* were beginning to assimilate into their new land, so they reasoned, “If this nation adapts so easily to its surroundings, perhaps it will readily assimilate into an invading nation as well.”

“It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and he went out to his brethren and observed their burdens . . .” (2:11)

Midrash Rabbah asks: Did only Moshe grow up? Doesn’t everyone grow up? The *Midrash* answers: He was grown up in a different sense. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Nosson Lewin *z”l* (1857-1926; rabbi of Rzeszów, Poland) explains: When most people grow up, they focus on achieving success and amassing wealth, and they forget their less fortunate brethren. In many cases, they even become ashamed to associate with their less successful former friends. Not so Moshe: Despite having grown up in the royal palace, “He went out to his brethren and observed their burdens.” Moreover, says the *Midrash*, he even helped individual slaves carry their loads.

(*Petach Ha’bayit to Shu”t Bet Yitzchak: Choshen Mishpat*)

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The 50th and lowest level of impurity is reached when a person gives up the fight against the *Yetzer Ha’ra*, the *Ohr Ha’Chaim* writes further. Had *Bnei Yisrael* fallen to that level, there would have been no return, because they would not have been trying any longer.

He concludes: Our Sages say that there is a 50th Gate of Understanding which we will attain only in the future. How will we merit that? Because, before the end of days, we will have to contend with the 50th level of impurity. Although *Bnei Yisrael* in Egypt could not emerge victorious from such a battle, that is because they had not yet received the Torah. We, who have the Torah, can return even from the 50th level of impurity. (*Ohr Ha’Chaim*)