



Adapted from the sefer **חמין במוצאי שבת** a collection of maamarim on  
תנא דבי אליהו given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Melave Malka

### Melave Malka Parshas VaEira 5763

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Rosh Hashona 3/5), interprets one of the pesukim in our parsha.

"אמר רב שמואל בר רב יצחק, וידבר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן ויצום אל בני ישראל, על מה ציום? על פרשת שילוח עבדים, הדא הוא דכתיב (ירמיהו ל"ד י"ג – י"ד) כה אמר ה' אלקי ישראל אנכי כרתי ברית את אבותיכם ביום הוציא אותם מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים לאמר. מקץ שבע שנים תשלחו איש את אחיו העברי אשר ימכר לך ועבדך שש שנים ושלחתו חפשי מעמך ולא שמעו אבותיכם אלי ולא הטו אזנם."

R. Shmuel bar Yitzchok asked, what does the pasuk refer to, when it says that Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon about Bnei Yisroel? It refers to the mitzva of freeing a Jewish slave. As Yirmiyahu said "So says Hashem Elokai Yisroel, I made a covenant with your fathers on the day that I took them out of the land of Mitzrayim, from the house of slavery, saying. At the end of Seven Years each man must send out his Jewish brother who has been sold to him for to work for six years, and then to set free, and your fathers did not listen to me or pay attention."

The Mitzva of sending out the slave includes the Torah's commandment, "הענק תעניק לו מצאנך, ומגרנך, ומיקבך וגו'" "You shall give him gifts from your sheep, your grain, and your wine.... And you should remember that you were a slave in Mitzrayim".

The Sifrei elaborates on this mitzva. "Just as I gave to you repeatedly, you should give to him repeatedly. Just as I gave to you generously, you too should give to him generously, ....". The Sifrei views the wealth which Hashem gave to Am Yisroel both when they left Mitzrayim, and after the splitting of Yam Suf, as gifts that parallel הענקה, the gifts which the owner must give to his Jewish slave at the end of his servitude.

It is difficult to identify the words in the pasuk **ויצום אל בני ישראל**, that indicate to the Yerushalmi that Hashem is teaching Moshe and Aharon the mitzva of freeing a Jewish slave and providing him with gifts.

I believe that we can solve the mystery with the help of a story told about the Rav of Lodz, Hagaon R. Eliyahu Chaim Meisel zt"l.



[1]

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The city of Lodz was experiencing a particularly difficult winter, with snowstorms, strong winds and freezing temperatures. The Rav heard that many of the poor people in the community did not have firewood to warm their homes.

The Rav hurried out to raise funds that would enable each Jewish home to have sufficient firewood. He went to the home of Mr. Poznansky, one of the wealthiest Jews in Lodz. When a servant answered the door, the Rav asked him to please inform his master that he would like to speak with him. When Mr. Poznansky heard that the Rav of the city was at the door, he hurried down in his light clothing, greeted the Rav, and invited him in. The Rav returned his greeting, but did not enter the house. While continuing to stand at the open door, he chatted with Mr. Poznansky about this and that, asking him about his business, his family, and about issues facing the community.

As the conversation went on, Mr. Poznansky began to shiver from the cold. Rav Meisel paid no attention and calmly continued the discussion. Eventually, Mr. Poznansky felt that he could no longer withstand the cold. He said "Please Rabbi, forgive me, but can't we move inside, I'm freezing!" The Rav responded, "That is exactly what brought me to your house. We desperately need funds to help the poor people of Lodz heat their homes". Mr. Poznansky immediately gave the Rav a large sum of money. The Rav then entered the house, sat down with Mr. Poznansky and spoke with him about some other matters.

When the Rav got up to leave, Mr. Poznansky said, "Rabbi, please enlighten me. Why did you insist on standing in the doorway for so long, instead of coming into the house so that we could speak comfortably by the fireplace?" The Rav answered, "People say that a satiated person cannot understand one who is hungry. If I would have sat in your living room, in the warmth of the blazing fire, and told you about the plight of Jews in Lodz who are freezing, you wouldn't have related to them. You wouldn't have understood their suffering. When we stood in the doorway until you were shaking from cold, you experienced a fraction of the cold they suffer from in their homes, all day, every day. Those moments of cold, motivated you to donate so generously.

This story provides us with the key to understanding the Yerushalmi's drasha that ויצום אל בני ישראל, refers to the mitzva of freeing, and giving gifts to an עבד עברי. The word ויצום, or צווי, also refers to the concept צוותא, which means unity and emotional closeness. Hashem transmitted the mitzva of freeing the עבד עברי, specifically while Bnei Yisrael experienced the suffering of slavery. Giving the mitzva while they themselves were slaves, created the relationship of צוותא with the future עבד עברי, enabling them to perform the mitzva with proper empathy.

In Devarim (ט"ו:י"ג), when the Torah extends the mitzva of freeing the עבד עברי, to העניקה, providing gifts to the newly freed עבד, it reminds us זכרת כי עבד היית בארץ מצרים ויפדך ה' אלקיך – "And you should remember that you were an eved in Mitzrayim, and Hashem Elokecha redeemed you, therefore I command you to do this today".



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The Torah requires us to apply our memory of slavery in Mitzrayim to our fulfillment of Hashem's command to free the עבד עברי, and share our grain, wine, and sheep with him.

This lesson applies to us even if we don't own עבדים. Boruch Hashem, our generation is blessed with many people who perform chesed in myriad ways. However, we often forget the empathy which is integral to performing acts of chesed. Too often we perform even mitzvos of chesed robotically, without the aspect of צוותא, truly connecting with the recipient and feeling what he is experiencing.

Developing this sensitivity should be a central goal in the chinuch of our children. We should train them to open their hearts and feel the pain and trouble of each person around them. When our children internalize true אהבת ישראל, their words and actions will always take into account the feelings of those around them.

I will mention one painful example that has unfortunately become commonplace in all of our schools. Teachers in schools that are supposed to be חרדים לדבר ה', will take a child who misbehaved, or was impudent and humiliate him terribly. As a punishment for his behavior, they bring him to the classroom of a lower grade, and force him to stand there as a laughingstock while the younger children are encouraged to taunt him.

This demeaning punishment is utilized in our schools on a daily basis. How many children have been destroyed by this terrible approach? Instead of the רחמנות and חסד desired by Torah, this process habituates our children to arrogance and cruelty. A punishment must not be given without empathy for the child who is being punished. Even punishments must be given within the framework of חסד גמילות חסד for the students.

The Torah readings of these weeks should awaken us, and strengthen our request for סייעתא מן שמיא, to remember, before each action or each word, the feelings of those around us. We must hope that Hashem will help us to reach the level of perfection that the Rambam describes with the brief instruction (הלכות דעות ה"ג), not to cause any pain, to anyone ever our lives. "ולא יצר לאדם עולם בחייו".

If we strengthen each other in this area, we will merit a speedy redemption להחיש גאולתנו בעזה"י, and ופדות נפשנו בב"א.

Once we have mentioned Hagaon R. Eliyahu Chaim Meisel זצ"ל, the Rav of Lodz, I would like to share a story about Rav Meisel's visit to the Sfz Emes zy"l. I heard this story first hand, from a very old man named R' Chaim Gordon, whom I met at a seudas mitzva in my grandfather's shul in Bayit Vegan. My grandfather told me that this man had actually met the Sfz Emes! I immediately sat next to him and asked him about his life, especially about his meeting with the Sfz Emes. He told me that he didn't simply see the Sfz Emes, but actually met with him to ask his advice.

R' Chaim lived in Lodz. After he got married, he wanted to invest the "wedding money" in a dry cleaning shop. The investment would require him to form a partnership with another young man



[3]

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who was a Gerrer chossid. R' Chaim wanted reassurance that he could trust this potential partner. Friends recommended that he travel to Gur and ask the advice of the Gerrer Rebbe, the Sfas Emes. R' Chaim wasn't a Gerrer chossid. He was a chossid of Radomsk. Nonetheless, the Gerrer Rebbe was known to be a pillar of truth, who would not alter the truth for anything in the world. R' Chaim took the train to Gur to ask the Rebbe's opinion.

When he reached the waiting room of the Sfas Emes, he discovered that the Rav of his city, Rav Meizel zt"l, was also waiting. The Sfas Emes arrived and Rav Meizel went in. After a few moments, Rav Meizel strode out of the room with a very troubled look on his face.

R' Chaim went in next, and the Sfas Emes reassured him that he could trust the partner and gave him a brocha for success in the business. As R' Chaim got up to leave, the Sfas Emes told him, "You live in Lodz, and the Rav of your city is taking the train back. You should honor him by accompanying him."

R' Chaim ran after the Rav, and caught up with him at the train station. He informed the Rav that the Sfas Emes had told him to accompany the Rav back home. The Rav silently nodded his assent, and they boarded the train. When they sat down, R' Chaim decided to boldly ask the Rav about his meeting with the Sfas Emes.

"It seems to me", said R' Chaim, "that the Rav was unhappy with what he heard from the Sfas Emes". The Rav answered that R' Chaim's perception was accurate. He then shared with R' Chaim, the background of his visit to Gur.

"Late last night, people approached me about a case of Pidyon Shvuyim that had reached the level of Pikuach Nefesh. Some Jews had been arrested and a large sum of money was needed to free them. The only available money was a significant sum that someone had deposited with me. The stipulation was that I could borrow the money for mitzvos at my discretion, with the understanding that when the donor needed his money, I would return the loan. I immediately gave the money for Pidyon Shvuyim, planning to replace the funds by raising money from the people of Lodz. Unfortunately, just as I started collecting, the donor informed me that he needed the money. I was still missing a large part of the funds."

"I knew that some of the wealthiest Jews in Lodz were Gerrer Chasidim. I was sure that if I explained the situation to the Sfas Emes, he would instruct his chassidim to provide me with the money I needed so badly. However, to my surprise, when I described my urgent need of funds to the Rebbe, he responded, 'When you don't know where you will get funds to repay a debt, you shouldn't borrow money!' This is why I looked so disappointed when I left the meeting."

When we arrived in Lodz, through the window of the train, we saw a delegation of the wealthiest Gerrer chassidim in Lodz standing on the platform. As soon as the Rav stepped out of the train, they told him that they had received an urgent telegram from the Sfas Emes, instructing them to



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wait for the Rav in the train station, and to give him the sum of money that he needed. They handed the very large amount of money to the Rav and went on their way.

The Rav was clearly moved by what happened. He turned to me and declared, "You see! This is what the Gemara in Nedarim (כ"א:) teaches – Tzadikim say little, but do a lot. The Sfas Emes said nothing and did so much!"

After hearing this story, I had the opportunity to share it with the Pnei Menachem, zy"va who enjoyed it very much, and explained the behavior of his grandfather, the Sfas Emes, from an additional perspective.

Aside from the Torah's guidance to say a little but do a lot, the Sfas Emes may have been following the teaching of R. Eliezer ben R. Tzadok in Nedarim (ס"ב), "עשה דברים לשם פעלים", (Rashi – for the sake of Hakadosh Boruch Hu who made them and commanded us to do them). Many people do a lot to help others, but they also want to publicize what they do, building their reputation as one who performs mitzvos. As the Rebbe said, 'אין מיטען דעם חסד ריקט זעך אריין דעם איך', (The ego pushes its way into the middle of the chessed).

Sometimes, when someone asks a "Baal Chessed" for help in a certain matter, and mentions that another "askan" is also helping, the "Baal Chessed" may get angry and say "if you went to him, don't come to me!" He wants the mitzva to be known as "his", exclusively.

True tzadikim work in the opposite way. They do all they can to separate their personal interest from the mitzva, and to focus on performing mitzvos for the sake of the one who commanded them.

When the Rav of Lodz approached the Sfas Emes for help, the Rebbe shared the very true lesson that it is not a good idea to borrow if you don't know how you will repay the loan. He could have told the Rav that he would immediately ask his chassidim to provide the funds. However, if he did that, the Rav would probably thank him and praise him, or declare that he is forever in debt to the Sfas Emes. In order to avoid the danger of pride, he took care of the Rav's needs without letting him know, even though it meant that the Rav was upset until he reached Lodz.

This is the way of tzadikim. They say little, do a lot, and perform mitzvos לשם פעלים.



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