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# How To Work and Persist Despite Not Seeing Results

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## Spiritual Torment

In *Parshas Shemos*, the Torah describes the suffering of Bnei Yisrael as they were forced to build the cities of Pisom and Raamses. Chazal explain that their suffering was not only from the backbreaking physical labor. The Egyptians chose those projects as a form of spiritual-psychological torture. The land upon which the Jews were commanded to build these storehouse cities was not stable enough to support the huge structures. Everything they built was doomed to collapse soon after it was completed.

This was the greatest torture of all, for when a person toils in a purposeless task, his *nefesh* suffers greatly.

## Labor That Destroys

Rav Shimon Sofer (a son of the Chasam Sofer) writes in his *sefer*, *Michtav Sofer*,

וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרֶךְ. – *And the Egyptians enslaved Bnei Yisrael in labor designed to break them.*

They understood that a person who invests effort into his work, whether by choice or because he is forced by his master, finds it burdensome, but he knows that each minute brings him closer to completing the task, and this somewhat calms his soul. He sees the benefit that results from his labors.

This is human nature. The further a person is from reaching his goal, the more burdensome is the labor. This is why a person who is about to complete an assigned project feels renewed strength and the joy of seeing the results of his labor.

This is why Chazal said (*Mechilta Yisro*), כל התחלות קשות - all beginnings are difficult. The source of that difficulty is the sense that you are far from your goal. The item you are working on does not yet resemble the finished product.

(This is a novel explanation of כל התחלות קשות. The more common explanation is that the difficulty results from having to break old habits. *Michtav Sofer* explains that the difficulty results from the sense of being so far from reaching your goal.)

### Purpose Gives Strength

This principle influences many aspects of our lives. For example, when someone speaks with his friend, he needs to see and understand his friend's reactions.

Reuven tells Shimon, "I'd like to tell you something. You may disagree, or you may want to think it over. At least hear me out."

Reuven begins to speak and carefully watches Shimon's reaction. If Shimon nods and says, "I hear what you are saying. I'm not saying that I agree with you, but you have a point," Reuven will continue to speak freely. He senses that he has managed to open a window in Shimon's heart, and that his words are having an effect. This response gives Reuven renewed strength to continue presenting his opinion. On the other hand, if Shimon reacts by saying, "All right, say what you have to and get it over with," Reuven will feel that Shimon is not interested in what he has to say. Even if he tries to make his case, he will soon run out of strength and give up. Why? Because it's hard to put effort into an attempt that seems doomed to fail.

We can see the same reality in the world of business. If someone opens a new business, people may advise him to expect a long and difficult process. "You should know that at the beginning, you won't make a profit. Eventually, after the first year, you'll start to make some money." Their advice is true. Nevertheless, in order to get up each morning and work hard for the success of his business, he has to feel that he is progressing.

It doesn't have to take the form of quick profits. It might be enough to feel that with each passing day, he is gaining a better understanding of the business world. He may even appreciate that he is learning from his mistakes. He may be encouraged by seeing that he is gradually expanding his customer base and selling more merchandise. All of these markers provide a sense of progress.

But if he has no sense of progress, after several months, he won't be able to continue. The feeling that he is endlessly treading water will drain the energy and enthusiasm that power his progress.

### Swinging vs. Chopping

The *Michtav Sofer* continues,

It is easier to work hard all day on a project that is purposeful than to spend one hour on an easier task that is purposeless.

If someone tries to swing an axe as if he is chopping wood, but without actually chopping anything, or swinging a scythe as if he is cutting grain – he will tire quickly and give up. This happens even to a man who is capable of chopping actual wood, or cutting real grain, for hours on end without tiring.

The Egyptians understood this aspect of human nature. They realized that if someone begins a task without finishing it, he will find the labor much more difficult. Therefore, before one worker could finish a project, they replaced him with another slave, and made him finish something that was started by someone else. No one ever experienced the satisfaction of completing a project from start to finish.

(The one who “finished” also felt no satisfaction, because he had no real connection to the project. It is like someone who joins a *shiur* on the day that they are learning the last *daf* of a *masechta*.)

The term עבודת פרך hints to this tactic. The root פרך means to interrupt or separate. For example, the *paroches* separated two areas of the Mishkan from each other.

## Galus That Leads to Geulah

By teaching us the method utilized by the Egyptians to break the spirit of Bnei Yisrael, the Torah is teaching us a vital principle of *avodas Hashem*.

**Every galus has a distinct purpose.** For example, we know that *galus Yavan* was rooted in the Greeks' desire to contaminate the mind of Am Yisrael by eroding our *emunah* in the sanctity of *chochmas haTorah*. They tried to convince Jews that the Torah is just one more book of human wisdom, similar to those written by other nations. When the Chashmonaim risked their lives to defeat the *klipah* of Yavan, a great light of Torah was revealed, enabling every Jew to connect to the *kedushah* of the Torah. This is the light of Chanukah that returns to illuminate our world each year.

So too, every *galus* is meant to illuminate the world with a unique light. However, the *galus* begins as a *klipah*, a spiritual shell that suppresses Am Yisrael. Only by breaking through that particular *klipah* can we reveal the unique light that was hidden within the *galus*.

The Torah describes Bnei Yisrael's slavery in Egypt as forced labor in mud and bricks. The Torah additionally states that it was עבודת פרך, work that was designed to break their spirit, by making it painfully clear that all their work was purposeless. The Torah is teaching us that **the light that Bnei Yisrael were able to reveal after Yetzias Mitzrayim was only attainable after enduring that specific form of galus.**

## Precondition for Receiving the Torah

Rishonim explain that *galus Mitzrayim* was meant to teach Bnei Yisrael what it means to be *avadim*, slaves. This would enable them to commit themselves as *avdei Hashem* when they arrived at Har Sinai.

**One key aspect of this preparation was learning to work without seeing immediate results.** This is a mandatory precondition to *avodas Hashem*. Someone who expects to see immediate results will assume that if he learns, davens and keeps mitzvos as he should, the heavens



will open and he'll be showered with *yeshuos* that resolve all his difficulties. Until he understands that Torah, *tefillah*, and mitzvos always create positive results whether or not he sees them, he cannot become a true *eved Hashem*.

Sometimes, Hashem may reveal a fraction of what someone's mitzvos have accomplished. Nevertheless, He wants our *avodah* to be based on *emunah* rather than on things we can see and experience.

### Don't Despair

In order to become a steadfast *eved Hashem* whose purpose doesn't depend on visible results, a Jew has to go through a difficult training process. From a young age, anything that prevents us from seeing the results of our labor makes us feel angry. If a child builds a tower of Lego and his brother knocks it down, he will throw himself on the floor and cry bitterly. He won't even want to build a new tower. Why? Because our human nature can't bear working purposelessly.

We don't grow out of this easily. A young *avreich* is told, "If you do such-and-such, you will succeed." When he follows the recommendation and fails to succeed, he suffers the additional humiliation of having wasted his time and energy on something that didn't work. If someone tries to convince him to try again, he will have no interest.

What are the roots of that deep despair? Why do so many young *bachurim* despair and give up? It is because they tried and didn't see immediate results. "Do you think I didn't try to get up on time? I tried and tried! I went to sleep on time. I set an alarm. And then despite all that effort, I woke up even later than I usually did, and the *mashgiach* yelled at me. Leave me alone. I'm not going back to yeshiva."

### Human Nature

**This response is not a learned behavior, but a natural reaction.** Our *nefesh* can't bear the disappointment of working without seeing results. If you tell someone that his Torah learning will build worlds, and that

his *gemilus chasadim* will bring *shefa* to the world, he will be upset when he sees no evidence of these benefits. He may even tell a close friend, "I started bentching with *kavanah* and... I hate to say it, but things just got worse. I don't know what you experienced but that was my experience. I kept losing more and more money.

"You keep suggesting *segulos*. Before every Yom Tov you tell me that on this day I can open the heavens and receive *shefa*. For some reason, none of these things work for me."

And then, eventually: "Enough; leave me alone. What can I do? I was also young once, and I tried *emunah* and *tzaddikim*. I haven't experienced any of the things you describe."

Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants us to overcome this natural response, and learn to serve Him without seeing immediate results. **If we always saw the immediate results of our *avodah*, we wouldn't be serving Hashem, but ourselves.** A person who needed something would sit down and learn Torah for an hour in order to get it, just as he's willing to pay fifty dollars to buy something. He'd daven to get something he needs and do *gemilus chasadim* to get something he needs. He'd be directly addressing his own needs and wants, which cannot be called *avodas Hashem*.

### To Act, Not to Accomplish

There is a Yiddish saying, מ'דארף טאהן, נישט אויפטאהן - *one must act, not accomplish*. We are certainly supposed to do all that we can in life, but we must remember that we are not in charge of the results. We have to perform our tasks and leave the results to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

This holds true for our Torah, our *tefillah*, and our attempts to help a friend find a *shidduch*.

A *shadchan* invested ten hours of work until he was ready to propose a certain *shidduch*. He made all the phone calls, asked all the questions and thought carefully before making the suggestion.

He did this work selflessly, knowing that both families were poor and unable to pay him. He just wanted to do *chesed*.

He approached the father of the boy, and as soon as he mentioned the name of the girl, the father said, "Absolutely not!" He refused to hear any more of the information, and he castigated the *shadchan* for daring to suggest someone like that for his son. The *shadchan* retreated, bruised and beaten, thinking to himself, "I just wanted to help, and this is what I got..."

A Jew has to get used to this type of *avodah*. You do what you have to, whether or not you see results.

Think of a businessman who places a "help wanted" ad, hoping to hire a new employee. When he interviews the applicants, he presents his expectations and the responsibilities of the position: "The employee will have to be on a ship at sea for six months a year. Are you ready to commit to that?"

"You will have to be meticulous about confidentiality; you can't reveal many aspects of your work even to your wife, your brother, or your closest friend. They must have no hint of what you are doing. Are you willing and able to do that? If so, we can continue; if not, this job is not for you."

Similarly, before giving the Torah, Hashem taught us that the precondition for receiving the Torah is the ability to work without feeling that you are bringing about results. If you keep working that way, you will achieve great success as an *oveid Hashem*, because you will keep telling yourself, **"I don't need to see what I am accomplishing with my actions. I just have to do my part."**

### With Great Wealth

After Bnei Yisrael worked for years without seeing what their labor accomplished, Hakadosh Baruch Hu suddenly transformed their entire world. Fire and water joined together to strike the Egyptians, water turned to blood, and the firstborn died while everyone else in the same house survived.

Many Rishonim ask why all these *nissim* were necessary. Why was it necessary for Hakadosh Baruch Hu to override and transform the systems of nature? The Ramban (*Parshas Bo*) explains that by displaying *nissim geluyim*, revealed miracles, Hakadosh Baruch Hu taught us to believe in the hidden miracles that take place in each person's life.

From the sudden transformation that characterized *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, we learn that if someone serves Hashem faithfully without seeing results, his reward will be the ability to see more than he ever imagined.

When the *Navi* describes Bnei Yisrael following Hashem into ארץ לא זרועה - *a land which is not planted* - the image contains a lesson for every Jew. It represents not only the struggle of a Jew who endures hard times and must believe that these challenges have a reason. It also represents the life of a Jew who feels stuck, and can't understand why Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants his learning or davening.

When a teenager struggles with *nisayon* after *nisayon* in *ruchniyus*, and drifts further and further away, parents may look back with bitterness at the sacrifices they made for their child. "Why did we invest so much in his education when he was young? Why did we pay all that money for a private *rebbe* to learn with him?" There are many aspects to their unbearable pain, but one part is the painful feeling that all their work accomplished nothing.

As we learn to serve Hashem without needing to see results, we will cease to be tormented by painful thoughts of bitterness. Just as Bnei Yisrael in *Mitzrayim* went from darkness to light, we will experience light in the future. This is the way of Hashem's world. People have to work in the darkness, and only later does Hashem illuminate their world and enable them to see what they accomplished.

When a person reaches the *Olam Ha'emes*, he may be told, "You built an entire world! You gave this person life, and saving one Jew is like saving an entire world."

He may be confused. "I have no idea what you are talking about. I don't even know that person." And then he'll be shown that one mitzvah he did actually brought life to a certain Jew.

All of that will be revealed in the world of truth. However, in *Olam Hazeih*, Hashem tells each of us, "I don't want you to see what your actions have accomplished. I want you to serve Me without seeing results."

Chazal teach us that every Jewish *neshamah* was in Mitzrayim. Therefore, the ability to persevere when we don't see results is part of every Jew's spiritual DNA. We need to cultivate that hidden strength by telling ourselves again and again, "I do my part; Hakadosh Baruch Hu brings the results."

### Retroactive Wages

Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim carrying vast fortunes of Egyptian gold and silver, fulfilling Hashem's promise to Avraham that after their slavery, his descendants would leave with great wealth.

Think about it. Someone who observed Jews in *galus Mitzrayim* would see unpaid slave laborers. In reality, they were earning gold and silver with every minute of labor! That information certainly could have raised their spirits. But the purpose of *galus* was for them to work without seeing any results.

When it came time to build the Mishkan, **the gold they had earned by their seemingly meaningless labor was the only gold worthy of adorning the place of the *Shechinah* in this world.**

Each of us goes through periods of personal *galus*. If we learn to say, "I don't care about anything; I just want to do what Hashem wants me to do," that thought will fuel our learning, davening, and acts of *chesed*. Like the Mishkan, a Yid who develops this mindset will also be worthy of *hashraas haShechinah*.

In the Torah, Hashem promises us rewards in this world, such as prosperity and security, if we follow His mitzvos. Each day after *birchos*

*haTorah*, we learn a *mishnah* from *Maseches Pe'ah* that lists the mitzvos for which a person receives reward both in this world and the next.

A person may think, "I don't see any of that reward. Why haven't I received my salary?"

Hakadosh Baruch Hu answers, "If you insist on seeing your reward, you won't be able to receive the reward that I want to give you.

**"I want to pay you with gold that can be used to build a Mishkan.** I want to reward you not only with *gashmiyus* but with *ruchmiyus*. You will have a Mishkan of your own. Your sins will be forgiven. The *Shechinah* will dwell with you; you will live with *simchah*, and you will have all that you need. However, there is one condition. You can only receive this reward if you serve Me without being able to see the Mishkan that you are building with your *avodah*."

### Never for Naught

This is an amazing lesson. If we look back at Jewish history, we see how it has played out time and time again. How many times did a person think that he wasn't accomplishing anything, only to discover much later how significant his actions were? For example, after World War II, a few survivors established yeshivos that attracted only a handful of students. It was a pitiful sight. Today some of those same yeshivos are great bastions of Torah.

Hashem wants us to believe *b'emunah sheleimah* that every word of Torah we learn accomplishes great things. Hashem wants us to draw the strength needed to serve Him, not from results we can see, but by learning from the Torah to appreciate the significance of our *avodah*. The Torah teaches us both principles: that our efforts accomplish a lot that we can't see, and that we are meant to serve Hashem without seeing those accomplishments. We know that our *avodah* will eventually lead to personal *geulah*, and to the *geulah* of Klal Yisrael *bimheira biyameinu amen*.





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