

# Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

13 Av, 5770 Vol. 11, No. 38

Parashas Vaeschanan

“AND YOU SHALL REMEMBER THAT YOU WERE A SERVANT IN THE LAND OF EGYPT...” (DEVARIM 5:15)

**Moshe understood that this was an especially difficult restriction**

RASHI explains: Moshe was telling *B'nei Yisrael* that Hashem saved the nation from Egyptian servitude on the condition that they would serve Him and keep His *mitzvos*. The Sifsei Chachamim (ibid.) explains further that this verse is specifically referring to the *mitzva* of refraining from work on Shabbos, because Moshe understood that this was an especially difficult restriction for *B'nei Yisrael* to accept. As an illustration of this problem, the Sifsei Chachamim quotes a Gemara that describes the enactment of the holiday of Purim. Mordechai and Esther had intended that Purim should be a real *yom tov*, with the same restrictions on work as every other *yom tov* (Megilla 5b). The Jews of the time did not accept those restrictions; rather, they only accepted Purim as days of feasting and rejoicing. Aware of this inherent natural resistance to abstaining from work, Moshe reminded *B'nei Yisrael* that, because of the Exodus, Hashem was now their new Master. Since He took them out of slavery, they now owe Him their loyalty and subservience. If their new Master tells them not to work, then they must obey that command.

**Impending death and imminent destruction were replaced with triumph and victory**

Imagine that you have just lived through the amazing turnabout of the Purim miracle. Impending death and imminent destruction were replaced with triumph and victory. Mordechai, the great *gadol hador*, announces that it would be appropriate to celebrate their salvation as a full-fledged *yom tov*. Would you disagree? Why did the Jews of Persia find it so difficult to refrain from work? The Jews had already agreed to spend much of the day involved in the *mitzvos* of hearing the *megilla*; giving *mishloach manos* and *matanos l'evyonim*; and having an elaborate *seudah* – why would they refuse to take the day off from work?

How pervasive and insidious is the human desire for money! Despite all their gratitude for Hashem's saving them from annihilation, and all their respect for the Torah leadership of Mordechai and Esther, the Jews would not accept another day of Yom Tov – another day without attending their job. This craving for wealth did not allow them – even after they had experienced such amazing miracles. The lesson for us is to be constantly vigilant to avoid this temptation and not let it interfere with *mitzvos* that require loosening our purse strings and letting go of some money: to give *tzedaka*, pay our children's tuition in a timely manner and to support Torah and communal institutions.

**Moshe gives us a simple means to combat it**

There is, however, a constructive lesson to be derived from this episode. Even though this desire for material wealth is so strong, Moshe gives us a simple means to combat it: Remember that we are all servants of Hashem and we must follow His command. Furthermore, we must remember that our livelihood comes from our Master, and He alone gives us our *parnassa*, and not our customers, clients or bosses. If He tells us, “Take the day off as paid vacation,” we can be sure that we will not lose anything by abstaining from work.

Let us avoid the pitfalls of chasing money, and may we always bear in mind that we are servants of Hashem and that He alone determines and provides our livelihood. Following the Torah's command will never hurt us financially, because Hashem can always more than compensate us for serving Him. Beyond the financial rewards, the spiritual compensation from fulfilling Hashem's *mitzvos* is the greatest and most eternal wealth we can ever hope to possess.