

Parsha Ponders

Va'eira | January 15, 2021 | 2 Shevat 5781

*The brighter side of things*¹

וידבר משה כן אל בני ישראל ולא שמעו אל משה מקוצר רוח ומעבודה קשה

And Moshe told the Jewish people so, but they didn't listen to him due to a lack of spirit and the difficult labor²

Moshe saw some major setbacks at the beginning of his mission to redeem the Jewish people. First, his first encounter with Pharaoh, demanding the immediate release of the Jews, backfired. Rather than complying, Pharaoh magnified the suffering of the Jews by intensifying his immoral demands. They were expected to produce the same number of bricks as before, but this time being required to gather their own materials. This was the exact opposite of redemption. Subsequently, Hashem reassured Moshe that the Jews will indeed be redeemed. There will be a miraculous salvation, and the Egyptians will be punished appropriately for their heinous crimes. When Moshe told this great news to the people, they unfortunately didn't. They were too overwhelmed from their labor, and had essentially given up hope of redemption.

We read the first *Aliyah* from the *parsha* the Shabbos before it at *Mincha*, as well as the subsequent Monday and Thursday in the morning. We divide the *Aliyah* into three *Aliyos*, for the Kohen, Levi, and Yisrael. The above verse is the conclusion of the Torah reading for the Levi. This practice is seemingly problematic, as it appears to go against the accepted law. It's codified³ that we are to finish the Torah reading on a positive note. Saying that the Jewish people didn't listen to Moshe, when he was promising them salvation, doesn't sound very positive. It shows that things were so bleak, that the Jews had no hope for relief. Why then do we finish the *Aliyah* with this verse?

There are many sources⁴ which teach that the intensity of the subjugation in Egypt actually hastened the Exodus⁵. Originally the Jews were sentenced to four-hundred years of enslavement⁶. That means there was four-hundred years worth of suffering that was meant to be experienced. What really happened is

¹ Based on MiShulchan Rabbi Eliyahu Baruch to Exodus 6:9, by Rav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel

² Exodus loc. cit.

³ Rema to Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 138:1, quoting Ohr Zaruah (brought in Darkei Moshe ad. loc.) and Mishneh Torah Hilchos Tefillah 13:5

⁴ Many sources cite this from *Chazal*, including Rav Eliyahu Baruch, the Vilna Gaon in the next note, and Rav Meir Shapiro in Yavneh 2:10 (Nissan 5690). Some, like Nechmad LaMar'eh to Shemos Rabbah 15:1, cite it from "Our Rabbis of blessed memory" (רז"ל). Others, like the Brisker Rav in the next note, and the Tzlach to Pesachim 119b, cite it from a *Midrash*. However, we don't seem to have this idea in any work of *Chazal*. See Eitz Chaim (Bobov) Nissan 5770 p. 321 (מקור להא דקושי השעבוד). The earliest known source seems to be the Ralbag to Genesis 15:13, although he uses this idea to explain that the Jews were in Egypt only 400 years, instead of 430 years (see Exodus 12:40,41). The Parshas Derachim BaDerech Mitzraim § 5 cites this idea from Rav Shmuel Yafeh Ashkenazi, in his Yefeh Toar to Shemos Rabbah loc. cit. and Yafeh Kol to Shir HaShirim Rabbah 2:24. The Malbim to Exodus 5:22 on the other hand simply cites it from "a few *Mefarshim*". For more early sources, see Eitz Chaim, as well as <http://forum.otzar.org/viewtopic.php?t=17> for many more sources

⁵ See Kol Eliyahu to Exodus 1:14, who says the cantillation marks there known as קדמא ואזלא (lit: preceded and went away) allude to this as well. Rav Eliyahu Baruch points out that the numerical value of קדמא ואזלא is קץ, 190, the number of years that were shaved off the original decree of four hundred. See also Chiddushei HaGriz Al HaTorah to ibid 14:40

⁶ Genesis 15:13

the Jews were only enslaved two-hundred and ten years⁷. In order to make the enslavement shorter for the Jews, Hashem ensured that Pharaoh's decrees would intensify. Pharaoh made the Jews do meaningless work⁸. He drowned all the Jewish babies. Now, right before the redemption was to begin, he made their work quota impossible to fulfill. These extra levels of intensity allowed the redemption to be earlier than planned. This means that the back-breaking labor that the Jews were now experiencing had a positive side. It was making the overall enslavement shorter.

Even the Jews' inability to accept Moshe's promise of salvation had a positive side. If the Jews at that time had accepted Moshe's ray of shining light, his comfort that the redemption was soon at hand, this relief would have made their burden lighter. There's no comparison between working on a tough project knowing it's almost done, and working on something difficult with no end in sight. Their hope and renewed optimism would've countered the harsh decrees of Pharaoh. The enslavement wouldn't have been shortened. The verse tells us that they didn't, and in fact couldn't, accept Moshe's comfort. They were so overworked, and had lost all hope. This intensity of suffering was the catalyst which brought about their redemption. It turns out then that we do end the Torah reading on a positive note.

Good Shabbos

⁷ See Rashi to *ibid* 42:2, quoting Bereishis Rabbah 91:2, and Rashi to Exodus 12:40, citing Megillah 9a (see Rashi *ad. loc.*)

⁸ See Sotah 11a