

# מעבדות לעבדות או מעבדות לחירות

On the ideas of slavery and freedom  
(Parashat Beshalach, by Nir Boms )

Why the longer way may be the shorter way?  
Why do we need to travel far just to get near?  
What is slavery and why is it dangerous to the Jewish Soul?  
Can we enslave ourselves to God?  
what is Jewish Freedom and can we really consider ourselves free?

## 1. The road not taken:

וַיְהִי בְּשַׁלַּח פְּרַעֲהַ אֶת-הָעָם וְלֹא-נָחַם אֱלֹהִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא כִּי | אָמַר אֱלֹהִים  
פֹּר-יִנְחָם הָעָם בְּרֵאתָם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרַיִמָּה: יח | וַיִּסַּב אֱלֹהִים | אֶת-הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם-סוּף

Now, when Pharaoh let the people go  
God did not lead them by way of the land of the philistines, although it was near,  
for God said  
The people may change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt. So God  
round by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea..." ( Exodos, 13: 17 – 18)

דרך ארץ פלשתים כי קרוב הוא קרוב הדבר שאמר הקב"ה לאברהם ועוד קרוב הדרך לחזור  
למצרים,

"by way of the land of the philistines, although it was near since near was God's  
promise to Abraham and near was the way to Egypt" (Midrash Tanchoma for  
Beshalah)

## 2. The shepherd and its flock

וַיְהִי הַלֶּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן לְנַחֲתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ וְלַיְלָה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לְהַאִיר לָהֶם לְלַכֵּת יוֹמָם  
:וְלַיְלָה: כב | לֹא-וַיִּמַּשׁ עַמּוּד הָעָנָן יוֹמָם וְעַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ לַיְלָה לִפְנֵי הָעָם

And the lord traveled in front of them by day as a towering cloud to direct them and a  
pillar of fire by night to light their way day and night. And the cloud did not stray in the  
day and the pillar appears every night, not to leave the people of Israel. (Exodus  
13:21)

## 3. Two roads that were taken:

### The Journey of Abraham – The first Jew

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ-לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבְּיַת אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹרְאָךְ

And God said to Abraham: Leave your land, and your country, and the house of your  
father and go to the land that I will show you (Genesis, 12)

## The Journey of Moshe – The First Leader of the Jewish Nation

וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וָאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיְהִי בַעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יֵצְאוּ כָל-צְבָאוֹת יְהוָה מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: מִבַּיִת לַיְהוָה לְהוֹצִיאָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

“...and after four hundred and thirty years, in this very day, the armies of God departed the land of Egypt. It was a night of watch for the lord though he had brought them out of the land of Egypt”

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָעָם זְכוֹר אֶת-הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יֵצְאתֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבַּיִת עֲבָדִים כִּי בְחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיא יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם

“

And Moses spoke to the people of Israel: Remember the day that you left Egypt and the house of bondage because with a strong arm God took you out of the land of Egypt” (Exodus, 12)

Moshe – כי מן המים משיתהו (Because he was lifted from the water)

Avraham – אב המון גויים (a father of many nations)

## 4. The road to freedom: Between Freedom, Heart and God

וַיֹּאמֶר אִם-שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִיָּשֵׁר בְּעֵינָיו תַּעֲשֶׂה וְהֶאֱזַנְתָּ לְמִצְוֹתָיו וְשָׁמַרְתָּ כָּל-חֻקָּיו כָּל-הַמְחֻלָּה אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַתִּי בְּמִצְרַיִם לֹא-אֲשִׁים עֲלֶיךָ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה רַפְּאֵךְ:

It he said (God to Moses): if you will listen to the voice of Adonai, your God and you will do as he pleases and you will listen to his commandments and you will keep his laws – then all the disease that I have installed in the land of Egypt will not be installed upon you as I am the lord your healer” (Exodus 16: 26)

\* \* \*

בְּנֵי אִם-חֹכֵם לְבָבְךָ יִשְׁמַח לְבִי גַם-אֲנִי: טז וְתַעֲלֶזְנָה כְּלִיּוֹתַי בְּדַבְרֵךְ שִׁפְתֶיךָ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל: יז אֶל-יִקְנֵא:

My son, if your heart will be wise, my heart will also be wise. And my body will be filled with happiness when I will hear the wisdom upon your lips. Your heart should not envy the sinners but rather fear God all day. Now hear this, my son, and become wise and acknowledge what lies in your heart” (Mishlai 23)

## 5. Choosing Freedom, choosing life

כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם לֹא-נִפְלְאָת הִוא מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא-רְחֹקָה הִוא: יב לֹא בְּשָׁמַיִם הִוא לֵאמֹר מִי יַעֲלֶה-לָנוּ הַשָּׁמַיִמָה וַיִּקְחֶהָ לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁמַעְנוּ אֶתְהָ וְנַעֲשֶׂנָה: יג וְלֹא-מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם הִוא לֵאמֹר מִי יַעֲבֹר-לָנוּ אֶל-עֵבֶר הַיָּם וַיִּקְחֶהָ לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁמַעְנוּ אֶתְהָ וְנַעֲשֶׂנָה: יד כִּי-קְרוֹב אֶלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ .... הַעֲדַתִּי בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַחַיִּים וְהַמּוֹת נִתְּתִי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה וּבַחֲרֹת בְּחַיִּים לְמַעַן תַּחֲיֶה אֶתְהָ וְזָרַעְךָ: כ

“For this commandment which I command you this day, it is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it? But the word is very near to you, in

your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it. ... I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse: therefore choose life, that you may live, you and your seed”

(Deuteronomy 30: 11-20)

## **6. Are we really free?**

*No human being is free who is not master of himself.*

--Epictetus (Ancient Greek Philosopher)

*“The real important things are those that are hidden from the eye”*

--Antouan De Saint, Ackzopery, the Little Prince

*“When is a man free? Not when he is driftwood on the stream of life...free of all cares or worries or ambitions....He is not free at all—not drugged, like the lotus eaters in the Odyssey... To be free in actions, in struggle, in undiverted and purposeful achievement, to move forward towards a worthy objective across a fierce terrain of resistance, to be vital and aglow in the exercise of a great enterprise— that is to be free, and to know the joy and exhilaration of true freedom. A man is free only when he as an errand on earth”*

--Abba Hillel Silver (20th c. Reform Rabbi and Zionist Leader)

*“What then is the meaning of freedom for modern man? He has become free from the external bonds that would prevent him from doing and thinking as he sees fit. He would be free to act according to his will, if he knew what he wanted, thought, and felt. But he does not know. He conforms to anonymous authorities and adopts a self which is not his. The more he does this, the more powerless he feels, the more is he forced to conform. In spite of a veneer of optimism and initiative, modern man is overcome by a profound feeling of powerlessness and enslavement.*

--Erich Fromm, (20th c. German Jewish Psychologist)

Notes (not for photocopy)

### **Epictetus (60-117A.D.)**

**E**pictetus was a stoic philosopher who lived in the first century A.D. He was born in Asia Minor.

He was a slave that gained his freedom and lived and taught in the city of Rome until A.D. 89 when the emperor Domitian expelled all the philosophers. He spent the remainder of his life teaching in the city of Nicopolis in Greece.

He believed and taught that we should be happy with the way events occur in our life. He felt that a divine providence governs our life and events occur for a reason that our beyond our understanding. Everything that occurs in our life he said occurs for a reason even if it does not appear so at the time. In fact, even if the worst occurs it occurs for the best even if we do not feel like this at the time.

He believed that we should not try to control events but rather that we should accept them, and then go on with our lives. To him only the ignorant and foolish could not accept events which were clearly beyond their control. He was a true Stoic, and believed that all should face misfortunes no matter how bad they possibly could be with calmness.