

Toldot Shimshon

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Chapter II – Mishnah 17

רבי טרפון אומר, היום קצר והמלאכה מרובה, והפועלים עצלים, והשוכר הרבה, ובעל הבית דוחק.

Rabbi Tarfon said: The day is short, and the work is plentiful, and the laborers are lazy, and the reward is great, and the Master of the House is insistent.

אַמַּת מאַך"ש תצמח בסגנון פרוש משנה זו, דבשלמא אם לא היתה היום קצר, לא היתה המלאכה מרובה. אבל עתה לשהיום קצר, בעוונותינו הרבים המלאכה מרובה. ועתה שאמרנו המלאכה מרובה, צריך לומר הפועלים עצלים, דבלא זה לא הייתי אומר הפועלים עצלים, וכן כולם.

Truth springs up from an utterance of our lips,¹ by an expression of explanation of this Mishnah, that granted, if the day were not short, the work would not be plentiful. But now that the day is short—because of our many sins, as will be explained below—the work is plentiful. I.e., “the work” refers to the learning of Torah. If there were more hours in the day, the workload per day would be reduced. Now that we say that the work is plentiful, it’s necessary to say that the workers are lazy, for if not so that the work is plentiful, I would not say that the workers are lazy. I.e., many people engage in *bitul Torah*, wasting time in trivial pursuits instead of learning Torah. That is considered laziness. If they wouldn’t be lazy, i.e., if they would spend more time learning Torah, they would accomplish more of “the work.” So forth for all of [the clauses of this Mishnah]. I.e., the reward for learning Torah is great, and if the laborers would be more diligent, lessening their *bitul Torah*, they would receive a greater reward. The Master of the House refers to G-d, Who has instructed us to learn His holy Torah.

והיינו שפכר נודע שפושקבלו ישראל את התורה, קבלוה על מנת שלא תהיה עוד מיתה בעולם, "חרות על-הלכות", חירות ממלאכה המנות. אך לאחר שחטאו, חזר יצר הרע ומלאכה המנות למקומו. ובפרק ג' דגדרים אמרינו, אלא לא לא חטאו ישראל, לא ניתן להם אלא חמשה חומשי תורה וספר יהושע בלבד וכו'. ואם כן נראה, שקודם שיחטאו ישראל היו הימים ארוכים, לפי שלא היתה מיתה בעולם. והמלאכה מועטת, לפי שלא היו אלא חמשה חומשי תורה. אבל לאחר שחטאו, שנעשה היום קצר, שיש מיתה בעולם, אז נעשית נמי המלאכה מרובה, שהוצרך לתת להם פל התורה, "ארכה מארץ מדה".

It so happens that it was already known that when Israel accepted the Torah, they accepted it on condition that there would be no more death in the world, “engraved [חרות]

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¹ Cf. Ps. 85:12, “Truth springs up from the earth . . .” The author has poetically replaced מארץ [“from the earth”] with אַמַּת [“an utterance of our lips”].

[*charut*] on the Tablets,”² and the Midrash interprets this as freedom [חרות] [*cherut*] from the Angel of Death.³ But after they sinned, the evil inclination and the Angel of Death returned to its place. In the third chapter of tractate Nedarim (22b), it is said that if Israel had not sinned, only the Five Books of the Torah and the Book of Joshua alone would have been given to them. Joshua was needed because it explains the division of the Land of Israel among the tribes, but the other books of the prophets primarily discuss how Israel angered G-d, so that He sent prophets to admonish them. If so, it appears that before Israel sinned, the days were long, because there was no death in the world. The work was less, because there were only the Five Books of the Torah. But after they sinned, such that the day was made short, for there was death in the world, the work also was made plentiful, for it was necessary to give them the entire Torah, “it’s measure is longer than the Earth.”⁴

וּכְשֶׁהִתּוֹרָה הִיא אַרוּכָה, אִזּוּ הַפּוֹעֲלִים עֲצָלִים. בְּדִאֲמָרֵינוּ בְּמִדְרַשׁ שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים רָבָה עַל פְּסוּקַי "קוֹצוֹתַי תִּלְתְּלִים", "רֵאמוֹת לְאֹיִל תְּכַמוֹת" הַיָּאֵד אֲנִי לוֹמֵד תּוֹרָה, שְׁבֵת עֲשָׂרִים וְאַרְבָּעָה פְּרָקִים, נִזְקִינן שְׁלוֹשִׁים פְּרָקִים, כְּלִים שְׁלוֹשִׁים פְּרָקִים וְכוּ'. עכ"ל.

When the Torah is long, then the workers are lazy. As it is said in Midrash Song of Songs Rabbah (5:2) on the verse, “His head is finest gold, His locks are curled and black as a raven,”⁵ “Wisdom is too lofty for a fool,”⁶ how do I learn Torah? Tractate Shabbat has twenty-four chapters, tractate Nezikim has thirty chapters, tractate Kelim has thirty chapters, etc. With so much to learn, it can seem overwhelming, and one can become discouraged and lazy.

וּלְפִי שֶׁהַפּוֹעֲלִים עֲצָלִים, הַשְּׂכָר הַרְבֵּה. שְׁהֵרִי כְּשֵׁשׁ מִתָּה בְּעוֹלָם, יֵשׁ נִמְי יֵצֵר הָרַע בְּעוֹלָם, וְהוּא הוּא הַגּוֹרֵם שֶׁ"רֵאמוֹת לְאֹיִל תְּכַמוֹת", וְשִׁיחֵיו הַפּוֹעֲלִים עֲצָלִים. וּכְשֵׁשׁ יֵצֵר הָרַע, צָרִיף שֶׁהָאָדָם יַעֲשֶׂה טוֹרַח הַרְבֵּה לְהַנְצִל מִמֶּנּוּ, וּמִשּׁוֹם הַכִּי, צָרִיף שְׂכָר הַרְבֵּה, דְּלִפּוֹם צְעָרָא אֲגָרָא.

Because the workers are lazy, the reward is great. For when there is death in the world, there is also the evil inclination in the world, and this is the cause that “wisdom is too lofty for a fool,” and that the workers will be lazy. When there is an evil inclination, it is necessary that the man will make great efforts to save himself from it. Because of this, he needs a great reward, as “According to the labor is the reward.”⁷

² Ex. 32:16.

³ Ex. Rabbah 32:1. Also Tractate Kallah Rabbati 8:2: “R. Joshua b. Levi said: Every day a *Bat Kol* [Heavenly Voice] goes forth from Mount Horeb and proclaims, ‘Woe to mankind for the contempt which they display towards the Torah! For whoever is not constant in his study of the Torah is termed ‘censured’ . . . and it states, ‘And the Tablets were the work of G-d, and the writing was the writing of G-d, engraven upon the Tablets.’ Do not read *charut* [engraven] but *cherut* [freedom], for no man is free but he who occupies himself with the Torah; and whoever studies the lore of the Torah is exalted . . .”

⁴ Job 11:9.

⁵ Song of Songs 5:11.

⁶ Prov. 24:7.

⁷ Pirkei Avot 5:22, quoting Ben He He.

אי נמי, משום דתנן בפרק ז' דמציעא, השוכר את הפועלים, ואמר להם להשכים ולהעריב, מקום שנהגו שלא להשכים ושלל להעריב, אינו רשאי לכופן. ובגמרא, פשיטא. לא צריכא, דטפא להו אאגרייהו. מהו דתימא, אמר להו, הא דטפאי לכו אאגריכו, אדעתא דמקדמיתו ומחשכיתו בהדאי. קא משמע לן, דאמרי ליה, האי דטפת לן, אדעתא דעבידנא לך עבידתא שפירתא. וכתבו התוספות, פרש ר"י, כששכרן סתמא, ואמר להם לאחר ששכרן, להשכים ולהעריב. אבל אם התנה מעיקרא, הכל לפי תנאו. עכ"ל.

Alternatively, because of that which we learned in a Mishnah in the seventh chapter of Bava Metzia, “[Regarding] one who hires laborers and tells them to rise [to work] early and to continue [until] late, [in] a place where [laborers] are not accustomed to rising early or to continuing late, [the employer] is not permitted to compel them [to do so].⁸ In the Gemara: [Isn’t this] obvious? No, [the Mishnah] is necessary where [the employer] increased their wages [beyond the standard in that place]. Lest you say [that the employer could] say to [the laborers]: [The fact] that I increased your wages was with the understanding that you would rise early and continue [working] late for me, [the Mishnah] teaches us that [the laborers can] say [in response] to [the employer]: [The fact] that you increased our [wages was] with the understanding that we perform quality work for you [not that we would work longer hours].⁹

The Tosafists say: The Ri¹⁰ explained that he hired them without condition, but then afterwards he told them to start early and end late. However, if he stipulated from the beginning, everything is according to his condition.

ולנה אמר התנא, והשכר הרבה, דטפא להו אאגרייהו כדי שיהיו זריזים, שהזריזות הוא כמו להשכים ולהעריב, כדתנן במציעא, שהרי זריזים מקדימין למצות, ילפינן בריש פסחים, מ"ו ושכם אברהם בבקר". דלא מצו למימר, הא דטפת לן, אדעתא דעבידתא שפירתא, כההיא מתניתין. דההיא מיירי בסתם, אבל במפרש, הכל לפי התנאי, כמו שכתבו התוספות ו"ל. וזהו "ובעל הבית דוחק", כלומר, כשמתנה ליתן להם השכר הרבה, הוא דוחקם למלאכתו בזריזות ובהשכמה.

To this, the Tanna says, “and the reward is great,” where [the Employer] increased their wages [beyond the standard in that place] so that they would be quick, for being quick is like what we learned in the Mishnah 7:1 in Bava Metzia of starting early and ending late. After all, the quick start early to do mitzvot, as we derive from the beginning of tractate Pesachim (4a), from “Abraham started early in the morning.”¹¹ They cannot say, that you increased [our wages] with the understanding that we perform quality work, as this Mishnah of Bava Metzia 83a has it, for this Mishnah of Bava Metzia 83a is speaking of employment without specifying conditions. But where he specifies conditions, everything is according to the condition, as the Tosafists of blessed memory said.

This is the meaning of our Mishnah saying “and the Master of the House is insistent, as if to say, He may stipulate to give to them a great reward, as He is pressing them to His work quickly and early.

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⁸ Mishnah Bava Metzia 7:1; Bava Metzia 83a.

⁹ Bava Metzia 83a.

¹⁰ Rabbi Isaac ben Samuel the Elder (c. 1115–c. 1184).

¹¹ Gen. 22:3.