

Lengthening Our Breath

Many things dispirit us. Too often, these quicken our breath, causing us to become impatient and shorten our spirits. What can we do to lengthen our breath and strengthen our spirits? Can we discuss these as easily as we enumerate the things that unnerve us? What spiritual practices would we like to add to our lives?

שמות וי:ט'

(ט) וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בֵּן אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מִקְצֵר רוּחַ וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה: {פ}

Exodus 6:9

(9) Moshe spoke thus to the Children of Israel. But they did not hearken to Moshe, out of **shortness of spirit** and out of hard servitude.

Above is Everett Fox's translation. He notes: Michael Walzer suggests "dispiritedness." A parallel Ugaritic phrase probably means "wretchedness."

רש"י על שמות וי:ט'

(א) ולא שמעו אל משה. לא קבלו תנחומין: (ב) מקצר רוח. כל מי שהוא מצר, רוחו ונשימתו קצרה, ואינו יכול להאריך בנשימתו:

Rashi on Exodus 6:9

(1) BUT THEY HEARKENED NOT TO MOSES — they did not accept his words of comfort. (2) מקצר רוח THROUGH ANGUISH (lit. shortness) OF SPIRIT — If one is in anguish his breath comes in short gasps and he cannot draw long breaths.

Ramban on Exodus 6:9

(1) BUT THEY HEARKENED NOT UNTO MOSES FOR IMPATIENCE OF SPIRIT, AND FOR CRUEL BONDAGE. It was not because they did not believe in God and in His prophet [that they hearkened not]. Rather, they paid no attention to his words because of impatience of spirit, as a person whose soul is grieved on account of his misery and who does not want to live another moment in his suffering even though he knows that he will be relieved later. The "impatience of spirit" was their fear that Pharaoh would put them to death, as their

officers said to Moses...

Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Rabbi Steven Moskowitz

וַאֲרָא יוֹדֵבֶר אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְיֹאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי יְהוָה: (ג) וַאֲרָא אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֶל־יִצְחָק וְאֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שַׁדַּי וְשָׁמִי יְהוָה לֹא נֹדַעְתִּי לָהֶם: (ד) וְגַם הִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּם לְתֵת לָהֶם אֶת־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֶת אֶרֶץ מִגְרֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר־גָּרוּ בָּהּ: (ה) וְגַם אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־נְאֻקַּת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם מַעֲבֹדִים אַתֶּם וְאֶזְכֹּר אֶת־בְּרִיתִי: (ו) לָכֵן אָמַר לְבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי יְהוָה וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלַת מִצְרַיִם וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעֲבֹדָתָם וְגֵאלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים: (ז) וְלִקַּחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהֵייתִי לְכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְיָדַעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלוֹת מִצְרַיִם: (ח) וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת־יָדִי לְתֵת אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלַיַּעֲקֹב וְנָתַתִּי אֹתָהּ לְכֶם מִוְרֶשֶׁה אֲנִי יְהוָה: (ט) וְיֹדֵבֶר מֹשֶׁה כֵּן אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מִקְצֵר רוּחַ וּמֵעֲבֹדַת קִשָּׁה: (פ)

שמות ה':כ"ג

(כג) ומֵאָז בָּאתִי אֶל־פַּרְעֹה לְדַבֵּר בְּשִׁמְךָ הִרַע לְעַם הַזֶּה וְהִצִּיל לֹא־הִצַּלְתָּ אֶת־עַמִּי:

Exodus 5:23

(23) Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people; and still You have not delivered Your people."

שמות ו':ב-ט

(ב) וַיִּדְבֹר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי יְהוָה: (ג) וַאֲרָא אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֶל־יִצְחָק וְאֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שַׁדַּי וְשָׁמִי יְהוָה לֹא נֹדַעְתִּי לָהֶם: (ד) וְגַם הִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּם לְתֵת לָהֶם אֶת־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֶת אֶרֶץ מִגְרֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר־גָּרוּ בָּהּ: (ה) וְגַם אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־נְאֻקַּת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם מַעֲבֹדִים אַתֶּם וְאֶזְכֹּר אֶת־בְּרִיתִי: (ו) לָכֵן אָמַר לְבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי יְהוָה וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלַת מִצְרַיִם וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעֲבֹדָתָם וְגֵאלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים: (ז) וְלִקַּחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהֵייתִי לְכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְיָדַעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלוֹת מִצְרַיִם: (ח) וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת־יָדִי לְתֵת אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלַיַּעֲקֹב וְנָתַתִּי אֹתָהּ לְכֶם מִוְרֶשֶׁה אֲנִי יְהוָה: (ט) וְיֹדֵבֶר מֹשֶׁה כֵּן אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מִקְצֵר רוּחַ וּמֵעֲבֹדַת קִשָּׁה: (פ)

Exodus 6:2-9

(2) God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. (3) I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name (יהוה). (4) I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. (5) **I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.** (6) Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am the LORD. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. (7) And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God. **And you shall know that I, the LORD, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians.** (8) I will

bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession, I the LORD.” **(9) But when Moses told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moses, their spirits crushed by cruel bondage.**

קָצָר *kotzer* = shortness. being stunted. despondency. impatience. Related to the word Mitzrayim-- narrowness.

רוּחַ *ruach* = wind. spirit. breath. motivation. As in וַיִּרְוַח אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֵף עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: -- a wind from God sweeping over the water. Genesis 1:2.

אַוֹדָה *avodah* = labor. service. ritual. worship.

קָשָׁה *kashah* = difficult. heavy. stubborn. severe

רש"י על שמות ו':ט'

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(1) BUT THEY HEARKENED NOT TO MOSES — they did not accept his words of comfort. (2) THROUGH ANGUISH (lit. shortness) OF SPIRIT — If one is in anguish his breath comes in short gasps and he cannot draw long breaths.

Rashi is an 11th century French exegete who wrote a commentary on the Torah and much of the Talmud as well.

רמב"ן על שמות ו':ט'

(א) מקוצר רוח ומעבודה קשה לא בעבור שלא יאמינו בה' ובנביאו, רק שלא הטו אוזן לדבריו מקוצר רוח, כאדם שתקצר נפשו בעמלו, ולא ירצה לחיות רגע בצערו, מדעתו שירוח לו אחרי כן וקוצר הרוח הוא פחדם שלא יהרגם פרעה בחרב:

Ramban on Exodus 6:9

Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman – Spain 13th century) It was not because they did not believe in God and God's prophets, but rather they could not listen because they were overburdened, and even though they knew that they might be free afterwards, they feared being killed by Pharaoh's sword.

In Kabbalistic terms, the children of Israel are stunted in the *ruach* level of soul. Like animals, they exist from day to day with only the *nefesh*, the level of soul that animates the body. They have neither time nor energy to access their *ruach* and *neshamah* levels of soul. (The *neshamah* is the soul level where one can hear one's calling and receive inspiration. The *ruach* is the level where one is seized by the drive and motivation to seek that calling, to do something new.)

<https://mtorah.com/2011/04/15/va-eira-shortness-of-ruach/>

"An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity." Martin Luther King

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, in *The Particulars of Rapture*. "To hear is to open oneself up to vulnerability, change, contingency." Pharaoh the hard-hearted cannot consider even the idea of change, so he refuses to hear out Moses. Pharaoh afflicts his Israelite slaves with the same deafness, by making their lives so hard that they cannot stop and listen to any revolutionary ideas. Thus Egypt, which in Hebrew is called *Mitzrayim*, "Narrow Places", is the place of constriction for both master and slave. It is the place where people are stunted, cut short—"kotzer"—from the freedom of thought that make us human.

"The Language of the Unheard" Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, "The Other America," April 1967

"I think America must see that riots do not develop out of thin air. Certain conditions continue to exist in our society which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. **And what is it that America has failed to hear?** It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity. And so in a real sense our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention".

שמות כ"ג:ט'

(ט) וְגֵר לֹא תִלְחָץ וְאַתֶּם יֹדְעֵתֶם אֶת־נַפְשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי־גֵרִים הֵיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

Exodus 23:9

(9) You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.

Love's Bidding
by Reverend Tyrone Holmes

**The rules are simple.
Every single woman
is someone's
daughter.
Every single man
is someone's
son.**

**When they meet trouble,
feel their parents' pain,
the sadness,
the despair,
the raw terror.
Don't flee from this.
Embrace it.
Meditate on it.
Let it surround you
until there is but
a pit of agony
where your stomach
once was;
until you lose sight
of the four directions;
Until your life
is so consumed
by prayers
for their safe return,**

**for compassion,
for light,
and for warmth
that you forget
they are not your kin.
Then, while the
bloodlines are blurred,
get
up
off your comfortable cushions,
your boardroom chairs,
your seats of separation

and go out into the world
and do love's bidding**

Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Dianne Cohler-Esses