



THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION OF THE TOWER OF BABEL

The builders of the Tower of Babel invented bricks, revolutionizing construction. The Pharaoh later used the same techniques in building Pithom and Ramses. Are the two great construction projects related?

A study of history, reincarnation, and education.

TEACHER'S MANUAL



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Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India

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The story of the construction of the Tower of Babel (Source 1).

What was so significant about the Tower of Babel? The brick was the symbol of human progress and development at that time, allowing people to build large buildings and develop urban centers. The Dor Haflaga (Generation of Dispersal), led by Nimrod, wanted to establish a large city in the Shinar Valley and build a huge tower in it, to emphasize the power of humanity. The tower builders asked Avraham to join the project, and when he came to check it out, it became clear to him that they valued the brick more than human life. To Avraham this was sufficient information to establish that this project was immoral, and in opposition to the Creator of the world (Source 2).

But what was really behind the project, and what was so bad about it? The Previous Rebbe explains that the Dor Haflaga did not want to be subservient to G-d and built the tower in order to express man's independent power (Source 3).

B. The Reasons for the Construction of Pithom and Ramses.....11

The reason for the construction of Pithom and Ramses resembled the reason for the construction of the Tower of Babel. Pharaoh wanted the Israelites to, instead of building a dwelling for G-d, build cities that would illustrate Pharaoh's power and might. The Rebbe quotes from the Arizal, that the generation of the Israelites in Egypt was a reincarnation of the Dor Haflaga, and making the bricks in Egypt was the correction for their sin in building the Tower of Babel (Sources 4 and 5).

C. Why Bricks?.....16

There are two methods of construction. Stones - made by heaven, and bricks - made by man. In the Land of Israel there are stones - they symbolize the revelation of holiness from heaven, and in Babylonia there are bricks - which symbolize the creation of man.

What is the lesson from this in the service of G-d?

Babylonia is a place of freedom without restrictions, and in order to be a moral person, who observes the instructions of the Torah even in such a place, much effort is required. This is symbolized by the effort and toil necessary for the crafting of bricks.

One must take clay and change it from its natural form, knead it, and burn it in the fire of the furnace, and only then is the brick created. Likewise when educating a child, we must educate the child to overcome and change their natural desires, not to succumb

to the temptations of life and to stand strong on their own (just as we educate them not to be tempted by the desire to eat candy, because it is harmful to their health).

When we educate children in this way, they will grow up to be strong Jews, who will stand strong against all the winds that blow outside.

השיעור לפרשת נח

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לקוטי שיחות חלק ו' עמוד 13 ואילך [מתורגם]
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A. What Happened At The Tower Of Babel?

Student's
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Source 1 Genesis, 11:1-9

The entire earth was of one language and uniform words. And it came to pass when they traveled from the east, that they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and fire them thoroughly; and they used bricks for stone and clay for mortar."

Rashi:

bricks: Because there are no stones in Babylon, which is a valley.

and fire them thoroughly: This is how they make bricks - they are baked in a furnace.

And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make ourselves a name, lest we be scattered upon the face of the entire earth."

And the L-rd descended to see the city and the tower that the sons of man had built. And the L-rd said, "Lo! they are one people, and they all have one language, and this is what they have commenced to do. Now, will it not be withheld from them, all that they have planned to do? Come, let us descend and confuse their language, so that one will not understand the language of his companion."

Student's
pg. 4

And the L-rd scattered them from there upon the face of the entire earth, and they ceased

וַיְהִי כִלְהַאֲרֵץ שְׂפָה אַחַת
וּדְבָרִים אֶחָדִים. וַיְהִי
בְּנוֹסְעֵם מִקֶּדֶם, וַיִּמְצְאוּ
בְּקֶעֶז בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר וַיֵּשְׁבוּ
שָׁם. וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-
רֵעֵהוּ: "הִבֵּה נִלְבְּנָה לְבָנִים
וְנִשְׂרָפָה לְשִׂרְפָה", וַתְּהִי
לָהֶם הַלְבְּנָה לְאֲבָן וְהַחֲמֵר
הָיָה לָהֶם לְחֵמֶר.

רש"י

לְבָנִים. שְׂאִין אֲבָנִים
בְּבָבֶל, שֶׁהִיא בְּקֶעֶז.

וְנִשְׂרָפָה לְשִׂרְפָה. כֶּךָ
עוֹשִׂין הַלְבְּנִים שְׂקוּרִין
טוּוֹל"ש בלע"ז,
שׂוֹרְפִים אוֹתוֹ בְּכַבֻּשׁוֹ.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ: "הִבֵּה נִבְנֶה-לָנוּ
עִיר וּמִגְדָּל וְרֹאשׁוֹ בְּשָׁמַיִם
וְנַעֲשֶׂה-לָנוּ שֵׁם פֶּן-נִפּוּץ
עַל-פְּנֵי כְלֵי-הָאָרֶץ."

וַיֵּרַד ה' לְרַאֲתָא אֶת-הָעִיר
וְאֶת-הַמִּגְדָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְנֵי
הָאָדָם. וַיֹּאמֶר ה': "הֵן עַם
אֶחָד וּשְׂפָה אַחַת לְכֻלָּם
וְזֶה הַחֲלֹם לַעֲשׂוֹת, וְעַתָּה
לֹא-יִבָּצֵר מֵהֶם כָּל אֲשֶׁר
יִזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת. הִבֵּה נִרְדֶּה
וְנִבְלֶה שֵׁם שְׂפָתָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא
יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שְׂפַת רֵעֵהוּ."

וַיִּפֹּץ ה' אֹתָם מִשָּׁם עַל-פְּנֵי
כְלֵי-הָאָרֶץ, וַיִּחְדְּלוּ לְבִנְתָא

building the city. Therefore, He named it Babel, for there the L-rd confused the language of the entire earth, and from there the L-rd scattered them upon the face of the entire earth.

הָעִיר. עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ בָּבֶל,
כִּי־שָׁם בָּלְלָהּ ה' שִׁפְתֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ
וּמִשָּׁם הִפְצִיחַ ה' עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־
הָאָרֶץ.

What happened in this story? What is so bad about the fact that they built themselves a high tower, and why did G-d come down especially to see what they were doing, and go through the trouble of thwarting the project?

We will quote here extensive passages from the Sefer Haparshiyot (by Rabbi Eliyahu Ki-Tov) that shed light on the whole saga of the building of the tower. Among these passages we will quote two sources from the midrashim. (Sefer Haparshiyot, Parshat Noach, 163ff).

Enormous progress of mankind

“A great innovation was introduced at that time. Until that time all the human settlements were in the mountains, and when a person wished to build a house for himself, he would cut stones from the mountain - stones that were three or five cubits wide, or more - smooth them out, and put them one on top of the other until his house was finished. The work of building was a difficult one, but they were strong, and could handle it. Nevertheless, their houses were only as high as a man’s height, they could not build towers that reached great heights.

Then, people’s strength began to decline, and without the help of many other people, working together for many years, no one would be able to build a house for themselves to live in. Even so, there was another problem: the people were spread out in many distant places, and gathering them in one place to do the job took great effort and trouble.

So they invented the brick. All that is needed is soft soil. Knead it with water and make it into a lump the size of a person’s palm, dry it in the sun or burn it with fire, and you have a stone for building. The stones can be placed one on top of the other and connected together with the clay from which it is made. Even women and children can handle this job alone. Now every individual is capable of achieving with his own strength more than the mighty people who came before him. All the more so if many work together - “nothing that they set out to do will be withheld from them.”

People originally lived in the mountains, and could not reach the sky; we will sit in the valley and from there we will reach the heavens! Even if the flood comes to us a second time and floods all the mountains, we will not run to the top of the tower, but walk there in peace and comfort, and there we will find refuge.’

“Innovation begets innovation, until suddenly and all at once, man appears to them as omnipotent. If every great deed is divided and made up of very many tiny parts, and every person, whether great or small, will only do his part, and one wise and mighty person will oversee the actions of all, there are no more weak people in the world, and there is no longer anything that is impossible for man to do. “

The First Industrial Revolution

Basically, at that time, a revolution took place, one that is similar to the industrial revolution of recent times. The brick was the ‘invention of the century’ of their time, which symbolized human progress, and gave mankind the tools to attain enormous achievements, and to live a more comfortable and stable life.

Until then, humans were spread in the mountains and hills, and everyone had to take care of their own food and sustenance. Now urban life began, the common effort of living together.

So the question arises: what’s wrong with this? Seemingly this is a good thing. Indeed, even at the time, most people didn’t think it was a bad thing. Even Avraham, our patriarch, wasn’t sure...

The People Drift

“The entire world, even those who initially did not come to the Land of Shinar, when they saw that Nimrod’s actions were successful, they all went down to Babel to see what was done there. Everything seems amazing to them. They were seeing things there that they would not have imagined possible to be done by human power. There, food is abundant, work is available for everyone, every person is remunerated according to his worth, and everyone actually participates in these wonders. This work is beautiful, so people from all over the world flock to Babel, some to join and others to observe.

Everyone sees everything that is done, but not everyone knows the thoughts in the hearts of the doers, their rebellion and treachery. What can be wrong with this enterprise that is made by the hands of countless people, with one common thought, everyone gets what they deserve, and the enterprise just keeps on growing? So said the nations.

The builders of the tower came to Avraham and said: You are mighty - come and help us, and we’ll build a tower with its top in the sky. He said to them: You left ‘The name of the L-rd is a tower of strength’, and you say we will make a name for ourselves?

Finally Avraham came to see the city and the tower, and left them immediately.

What did he see that caused him to leave? The Midrash relates the story:

Avraham Avinu Formulates An Opinion

The tower had stairs on its east and west. The laborers who took up the bricks went up on the eastern steps, and those who descended went down on the western steps. If a person fell and died they paid no heed to him, but if even one brick fell, they sat down and wept, and said: Woe is to us! When will another one come in its stead?

And Avraham, son of Terach, passed by, and saw them building the city and the tower, and he cursed them in the name of his G-d, and he said, "Destroy, O L-rd, divide their tongue"

ומעלות היו לו ממזרחו וממערבו. אלו שהיו מעליו את הלבנים היו עולים ממזרחו, ואלו שהיו יורדיו, היו יורדיו ממערבו. ואם נפל אדם ומת לא שמים את לבם עליו, ואם נפלה לבנה אחת, היו יושבין ובוכין ואומרין אוי לנו אימתי תעלה אחרת תחתייה.

ועבר אברהם בן תרח, וראה אותם בונים את העיר, וקללם בשם אלקיו ואמר: בלע ה' פלג לשונם.

"Destroy, O L-rd, divide their tongue. It is better for them to be divided, and not be able to do evil either against G-d or against man.

Because what is the purpose of this enterprise, even if it is great and its head is in the sky, and even if its builders do not conspire to do evil, but they conquer man and pamper him, all so that the brick will be properly placed? What is the value of such an enterprise, to which man is considered a mere accessory, and only serves it, when in reality, G-d created his entire world and everything it contains, in order to serve man, every individual person."

Avraham himself was not sure what his opinion was about this great project, and about this amazing human development. He came to visit, and when he saw that the economy was more important than human life, it was a sign for him that this enterprise was fundamentally corrupt. When money is worth more than someone's life, we know we are in a very bad place.

What was really behind this project of the Dor Haflaga? The Previous Rebbe explains:

The Dor Haflaga Did Not Want To Nullify Themselves Before G-D

The Dor Haflaga did not want to observe the commandments. Because the idea of commandments - mitzvot - is relationship and connection, to be nullified to the mitzvah. In holiness the energy is drawn precisely through nullification, for the objective of the mitzvot is to reign in one's desires, and as the Talmud teaches, 'Rav said: The mitzvot were only given to refine the people. For what does it matter to G-d if one slaughters from the neck or from the nape of the neck? Rather, the commandments were given in order to refine the human beings.

But the Dor Haflaga did not want to follow the ways of G-d, but rather to follow the whims of their evil hearts. As the verse states, "And they said to G-d, turn away from us, we do not wish to know your ways (the ways of the Torah and the mitzvot, which are called the ways of G-d). This is because the observance of the mitzvot must be done with self-nullification, in which they had no interest.

The Dor Haflaga lived only about three hundred years after the great flood. At this time, Noah and his sons, who survived the flood in the ark, were still alive. They remembered the great punishment the world received for rebelling against G-d, and, therefore, decided to keep and follow the commandments they received from G-d.

Their descendants, whose leader was Nimrod, did not desire such a life. They did not want a life of mitzvot. Why?

They did not have a problem with a particular mitzvah, but with the entire concept of mitzvot. Because the idea of mitzvot is self-nullification. I'm doing a certain thing, only because G-d commanded me. I am totally submitted and subservient to the creator of the world. And they didn't want that at all.

דְּהִנָּה דּוֹר הַפְּלָגָה לֹא רָצוּ
בְּקִיּוּם הַמִּצְוֹת. דְּמִצְוֹת הֵם
צְוֹתָא וְחִיבוּר' לְהִיּוֹת בְּטַל
אֶל הַמִּצְוָה, וְכָל הַהִמְשָׁכוֹת
בְּקְדוּשָׁה הוּא עַל יְדֵי הַבִּיטוּל
דְּוֹקָא, דְּזָהוּ עֲנִיין הַמִּצְוֹת
לְהִיּוֹת מוּגְדָר בְּהִרְצוּנוֹת שְׁלוֹ,
וְכַמְאָמַר², אָמַר רַב: לֹא נִיתְּנוּ
הַמִּצְוֹת אֶלָּא לְצַרְרָה בְּהֵם אֶת
הַבְּרִיּוֹת. וְכִי מָה אֵיכָפֵת לִיה
לְהַקְב"ה אִם שׁוֹחֵט מִן הַצְּנֹאֵר
אוֹ שׁוֹחֵט מִן הָעוֹרָף? הֲרֵי לֹא
נִיתְּנוּ הַמִּצְוֹת אֶלָּא לְצַרְרָה בְּהֵם
אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת.

אָבַל דּוֹר הַפְּלָגָה לֹא רָצוּ
לְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכֵי הַשָּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, כִּי
אִם לְיַלֵּךְ אַחֲרֵי שְׂרִירוֹת לְבָם
הָרַע, וְכַמוֹ שְׂכַתוֹב³: "וַיֹּאמְרוּ
לְאֵל סוּר מִמֶּנּוּ, וְנָדַעַת דְּרָכֶיךָ"
- שְׁהֵם דְּרָכֵי הַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוֹת
שְׂנֵקְרָאִים "דְּרָכֵי הוִי"⁴ - 'לֹא
חֲפָצוּ, וְהֵינּוּ מִפְּנֵי שְׂקִיּוּם
הַמִּצְוֹת צָרִיךְ לְהִיּוֹת בְּבִיטוּל
וְהֵם לֹא חֲפָצוּ בִיטוּל זָה.

(3) איוב כא, יד.
(4) הושע יד, י.

(1) לקו"ת בחוקותי מה, ג. ספר המאמרים תרח"ץ ע' נב. וש"נ.
(2) ב"ר פמ"ד, א.

They wanted only to rely on themselves and to glorify themselves. And this led them to develop the brick, to develop a humanity that could rely on itself, and to build a tower that would make a name for man's power, completely disconnected from the Creator of the world.

Student's **The Tower Symbolizes Human Strength**
pg. 5

This is the meaning of the words 'And it came to pass when they traveled from the east (Kedem). When they removed themselves from the Predecessor (Kadmono) of the world, and they found a valley in the land of Shinar... and there they built a city and tower of the 'other side', opposite the city and the tower of holiness.

וְזֶה וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעָם מִקֶּדֶם,
דְּכַאֲשֶׁר הִסִּיעוּ עֲצָמָם
מִקַּדְמוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, וַיִּמְצְאוּ
בְּקֻצֵה בְּאַרְץ שִׁנְעָר⁵... וַיִּשֶׂם
בְּנוֹ הָעִיר וְהַמִּגְדָּל דְּלְעוֹמַת
זֶה, לְנִגְדַּת הָעִיר וְהַמִּגְדָּל
דְּקְדוּשָׁה.

B. The Reasons for the Construction of Pithom and Ramses

Jumping several hundred years forward to the Egyptian exile, the hard work of the Jewish people appears to have been focused on building the cities of Pithom and Ramses. Any similarities to tower building?

Student's >> The Rebbe

pg. 6

The Main Work In Egypt Was With Bricks And Mortar

The Talmud expounds on the verse “and they embittered their lives with hard work, with bricks and mortar and all kinds of work in the fields, all of their work,” stating that “it began with bricks and mortar, continued with all kinds of work in the fields, and ended up with all of their work. The commentaries explain that the Talmud is responding to a question: Why does the Torah specify the work with bricks and mortar even though it is included in the general statement regarding “all of their work”? In response to this question the Talmud explains that the forced labor with bricks and mortar came first. Since it preceded the rest of the work, it is specified separately before the general statement.

Everything in Torah is absolutely precise. If the work with bricks and mortar came first in time, it must also have been primary in importance - the most difficult and severe element of the enslavement. The bricks and mortar must have been the primary labor,

על הפסוק “וימרו את חייהם בעבודה קשה בחומר ובלבנים ובכל עבודה בשדה את כל עבודתם וגו’”⁶, אומרת הגמרא⁷: “בתחילה בחומר ובלבנים, ולבסוף ובכל עבודה בשדה, ולבסוף⁸ את כל עבודתם”. מבהירים המפרשים⁹ את משמעות דברי הגמרא: מכיון שאפשר לשאול מדוע הפסוק מפריד את העבודה “בחומר ובלבנים”, למרות שהיא נכללת במילים “כל עבודתם” המופיעות בהמשך הפסוק? את זאת מבהירה הגמרא, שהשעבוד “בחומר ובלבנים” היה “בתחילה”. כלומר, התחלת כל ה“עבודה בשדה” אשר הגיעה “לבסוף”, ולכן היא מוזכרת (לפני כן ו)בנפרד.

כל הענינים בתורה הם בתכלית הדיוק. מכך מובן, שהעבודה ב“חומר ובלבנים” הייתה “בתחילה” (ו“לבסוף” - “כל עבודתם”), לא רק מבחינת הזמן, אלא “תחילה” מבחינת התוכן המשמעות, מבחינת הקושי והחומר של השעבוד.

בגמרא.
(9) חדא”ג שם.

(6) שמות א, יד.
(7) סוטה יא, ב.
(8) שמור”ר פ”א, יא. וראה חדא”ג מהרש”א בסוטה שם שמפרש כן גם

Student's from which all of the other forms of work
pg. 7 later developed.

This is why we see that even after the Jewish people were already working in all forms of work, their primary job was still brickmaking. This is evident from the continuation of the story, that when Pharaoh wished to increase the people's workload he did so specifically through the brickmaking process, by ordering that the Jews no longer be provided with ready straw, yet still be required to produce the same quota of bricks. This event happened at the end of the period of enslavement, after Moses and Aaron had already been sent by G-d to order Pharaoh to let the people go.

כלומר, עיקר השעבוד התבטא ב"חומר ובלבנים", ומכך הסתעפו לאחר מכן (דוגמת פרטים שנובעים מכלל) כל סוגי השעבוד של "כל עבודתם".

לכן רואים, שגם "לבסוף" כאשר בני ישראל כבר עבדו ב"כל עבודתם", הרי עיקר עבודתם עדיין היה בעיבוד הלבנים¹⁰. כפי שמוכח מהמסופר בהמשך¹¹, שכאשר פרעה רצה ליישם את "תכבד העבודה על האנשים" (דבר שהתרחש בסוף תקופת גלות מצרים, לאחר שמשה ואהרן באו בשליחותו של הקב"ה אל פרעה באומרם "שלח את עמי"), הוא עשה זאת דווקא על ידי עבודת הכנת הלבנים (בצוותו שלא לתת להם תבן עבור מלאכה זו, ויחד עם זאת שלא תפחת כמות הלבנים שנקבעה קודם).

Student's Instead of a Home for G-d, Cities for Pharaoh pg. 7

The reason why the primary element of the slavery was with bricks and mortar is as follows:

The meaning of "the Egyptians enslaved the Jewish people and embittered their lives with hard work" is that the Egyptians took the life and strength of the Jewish people, which all comes from their holy Divine soul, and used it towards the construction of storage cities for Pharaoh. Instead of the Jews working on building a dwelling place for G-d, the Egyptians

ההסבר לכך שעיקר השעבוד¹² היה בחומר ובלבנים הוא:

כבר הוסבר באריכות¹³, בנוגע לפירוש של "ויעבדו מצרים את בני ישראל... וימררו את חייהם בעבודה קשה גו", שאת חייהם וכוחותיהם של ישראל, אשר חיותם וכוחם האמיתי נובעים מהקדושה¹⁴ (נפש האלקית¹⁵) ניצלו המצריים לבניית ערי מסכנות - לפרעה. במקום שעבודת היהודי תהיה בבניית דירה לה' יתברך, בבניית "עיר אלקיננו"¹⁶, הכריחו אותם אלו המצריים¹⁷ והמעיקים עליהם,

14 כנאמר על התומ"צ כי הם חיינו. וראה קונטרס ומעין מ"ז. ו"לכן נוגע מאד הענינים שעוסקים בהם, מפני שבכל דבר ודבר שהאדם פועל ועושה מכניס בוה כחות אלקית" (ד"ה בששה"ק תער"ב פ"ב). וראה גם לקו"ש שם הערה 22.
15 ראה תניא פ"ט, יב ועוד.
16 תהלים מו, ב. וראה רשימות הצ"צ שם.
17 דכל המצריים נקראו ע"ש מצרים (ראה ב"ר פט"ז, ד).

10 להעיר מפרשי משפטים (כד. יו"ד): "שהיו משועבדים במעשה לבנים".
11 שמות ה, א ואילך.
12 במצרים כפשוטו, ובמצרים וגלות ויציאת מצרים שבעבודת כא"א מבני, ש"כ"ל יום ויום חייב לראות עצמו כאילו הוא יצא היום ממצרים" (תניא רפמ"ז - ראה שם ביאורו).
13 ראה עדי"ז לקו"ש ח"ג ע' 848 ואילך.

Student's forced them to use their holy powers to build
pg. 8 on behalf of the forces of impurity - storage
cities for Pharaoh.

לנצל את כוחות הקדושה למטרת
בניית דירה לקליפה הטמאה רחמנא
לצלן - "ערי מסכנות לפרעה".

Pharaoh didn't just enslave the Jewish people because he needed cheap manpower. He had a deeper reason. Instead of the Jewish people expending their efforts on constructing a dwelling place for G-d in the lower realm, Pharaoh wanted them to do the opposite: build large cities that express the power and might of humans. Just like the generation of dispersal, who rebelled against Divine service.

The enslavement of the Jewish people in Egypt wasn't just opportunism, it was a concerted effort to construct a symbol of revolt against G-d.

Student's Bricks Represent Actions pg. 8

When we do something positive - a mitzvah, or a mundane act conducted for the sake of Heaven - we add a metaphorical brick to the building of holiness. When we do something negative we add a brick to the building of impurity. The difference is only in the type of building, but the external effect is identical: building. Positive actions contribute to the building of Jerusalem, and negative actions contribute to the building of Tyre.

כאשר עושים דבר טוב, מצווה או
עשיית דברי רשות לשם שמים,
או באופן של (בכל דרכיך) דעהו¹⁸,
מוסיפים בכך אבן לבנין הקדושה.
אך כאשר עושים דבר לא-טוב,
מוסיפים לבנה לבנין הקליפה.
ההבדל בין הפעולות והעבודות
השונות מתבטא בתוכן הבנין, אך
בחיצוניות יש לכל הפעולות אופי
שווה - בנין (פעולות טובות - בנין
ירושלים; פעולות לא טובות - בנין
צור)¹⁹.

משיחת ש"פ שמות, ה'תשכ"ו,
לקוטי שיחות, חלק ו' עמוד 13 ואילך [מתורגם]

Building a dwelling place for G-d or grand cities for Pharaoh represent all of the actions we do over the course of our lives. Every action is another brick in a building. If the action is positive, it is another brick for G-d's dwelling place. If the action is negative it is another brick in the edifice of impurity.

The Builders Of Pithom And Ramses Were Reincarnations Of The Builders Of The Tower Of Babel

It is explained in the writings of the Arizal that the souls of the Jewish people living during the Egyptian exile were reincarnations of the Generation of Dispersion. When they built the tower they said "let us make bricks . . . and they used bricks for stone and clay for mortar." The rectification of this was the work of the Jewish people "with bricks and mortar."

וְלִהְיֶיר גַּם מִהַמְבוֹאֵר בְּכַתְבֵי
הָאֲרִיז'ל²⁰ שֶׁהַנְּשֻׁמוֹת שֶׁל
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁהָיוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם
הָיוּ גִלְגּוּל שֶׁל דּוֹר הַפְּלָגָה,
שֶׁאָמְרוּ "הִבֵּה נִלְבְּנָה לְבָנִים
גו' וְתִהְיֶה לָהֶם הַלְבֵנָה לְאֶבֶן
וְהַחֲמֵר גו' לְחוֹמֵר"²¹, וְהִתְיַקּוֹן
שֶׁלָּהֶם הָיָה עַל יְדֵי עֲבוֹדַת בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל "בְּחוֹמֵר וּבְלִבְנִים".

The Tzemach Tzedek explains this in detail in Or HaTorah.

It is explained in Peri Eitz Chaim (Sha'ar Chag Hamatzot, chapter 1), "the Israelites in that generation of the Egyptian exile were reincarnations of the Dor Haflaga. . . . The entire purpose of the Egyptian exile was to refine those souls. This is why the Jewish people were subjected to this great exile, and had their lives embittered with hard work with mortar and bricks. This corresponds to the mortar and bricks that were made in the Dor Haflaga."

The Dor Haflaga didn't want... to be in a state of self-nullification and fear of G-d. They wanted to go according to their heart's desire. Therefore they conspired to make a city and a tower, which is the precise opposite and reversal of the city of G-d...

וְהָעֲנִינוּ, כִּי הִנֵּה מְבוֹאֵר בְּפָרִי
עֵץ חַיִּים (שֶׁעַר חַג הַמִּצּוֹת פָּרָק
א'), דִּישְׂרָאֵל שֶׁבָּאוּתוֹ הַדּוֹר
בְּגִלְלוֹת מִצְרַיִם הָיוּ גִלְגּוּל שֶׁל
דּוֹר הַפְּלָגָה... וְגִלְלוֹת מִצְרַיִם
כֹּל עֲנִינָה לֹא הָיָה רַק לְצַרְף
נְשֻׁמוֹת הָהֵם, וְלָכֵן בָּאוּ בָּאוּתוֹ
הַגִּלְלוֹת הַגְּדוֹל, וּמָרְרוּ אֶת
חַיֵּיהֶם בְּעֲבוֹדַת קֶשֶׁה בְּחוֹמֵר
וּבְלִבְנִים, כְּנֶגֶד הַחוֹמֵר וּלְבָנִים
שֶׁהָיוּ עוֹשִׂים בְּדוֹר הַפְּלָגָה, עַד
כָּאן לְשׁוֹנוֹ.

הִנֵּה דּוֹר הַפְּלָגָה לֹא רָצוּ...
שֶׁהָיָה בָּהֶם בְּחִינַת בֵּיטוּל
וְיִרְאַת ה' הִיא אוֹצְרָם, וְהֵם
רָצוּ לִילֵךְ בְּשִׁרְיוֹת לְבָם, לָכֵן
נִתְיַעֲצוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת עִיר וּמְגִדָּל,
שֶׁהוּא מִמָּשׁ נֶגֶד וְהִפּוּךְ בְּחִינַת
עִיר אֱלֻקִּינוּ...

(20) ראה הנסמן בלק"ש שבפנים הערות 22; 81.
(21) נח יא, ג.

(19) היפך בנין ירושלים (ראה רש"י תולדות כה, כג - ממגילה ו, א. וראה גם זח"ב רלו, א. רמ, א. עיי"ש).

Student's
pg. 9

Therefore, in a manner of measure for measure, they built storage cities for Pharaoh... who said, "I did not know the L-rd" ... and Pharaoh enslaved them with mortar and bricks. But through this slavery and suffering, they achieved rectification.

וְלָכֵן מִדָּה כְּנִגְדַּד מִדָּה בָּנוּ עָרֵי
מִסְכְּנוֹת לְפָרְעֹה כו'... אֲשֶׁר
אָמַר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֶת ה'... עַל
כֵּן נִשְׁתַּעֲבַד בְּהֵם פָּרְעֹה גַם כֵּן
בְּחֹמֶר וּבְלִבָּנִים, אֲךָ הִנֵּה עַל
יְדֵי זֶה הַשְּׁעָבוֹד וְהִסּוּרִים, עַל
יְדֵי זֶה נִתְקַנְנוּ.

When we look at the story of the slavery of the Jewish People in Egypt, which was mainly focused on building fortified cities for Pharaoh, as well as at the story of the Tower of Babel, we realize that in both instances humanity wanted to prove the greatness and power of man, and not be nullified before G-d.

At the center of these two stories are the bricks, the symbol of technological progress at that time, and which allowed people to demonstrate their own strength and ability to trust themselves.

C. Why Bricks?

In the first parts of the lesson we learned what was behind the construction of the tower of Babel, and the construction of the cities of Pithom and Ramses. These endeavours symbolized a completely alternative way of life, one that is in total opposition to the service of G-d.

In the following talk, the Rebbe emphasizes the fact that in these two large projects, bricks were used, rather than stones, and explains the spiritual significance of this.

>> The Rebbe

Student's Heaven-Made Stones, Man-Made Bricks

pg. 10

The Alter Rebbe explains in a Chassidic discourse that there are two types of stones: actual stones, that are natural divine creations, and man-made bricks, formed from soil which is hardened and strengthened. The man-made bricks are also referred to as stones, as the verse says "let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly, and they used bricks for stone," and bricks can be used to build a building just like stones can, as is well-known. But in order to produce durable bricks, they need to undergo a process of baking in a furnace, and only then does the brick become like a stone. These are man-made stones, unlike natural stones which are created by G-d.

ישנו דרוש של רבינו הזקן²² שבו מבאר²³ החילוק ש"באבנים יש שני מדרגות, הא', אבנים ממש שהם בריאה בידי שמים, והב', האבן הנעשה בידי אדם, והיא הלבנה, שנעשית מן העפר על ידי בני אדם, שנעשית גם כן חזקה וקשה, והיא נקראת גם כן אבן, כמו שכתוב²⁴ הבה נלבנה לבנים ונשרפה לשרפה ותהי להם הלבנה לאבן כו', וכידוע ומפורסם שגם מן הלבנים יבנו בנין בית חומה כמו מן האבנים, אך צריך תחלה הכנה איך לעשות הלבנים שיהיו חזקים ומתקיימים, והוא על ידי שישרפו אותם בכבשן האש. . ואז דייקא ותהי להם הלבנה לאבן, והיא האבן הנעשה בידי אדם, ולא בעצם תולדתם כמו אבנים ממש שהן בריאה בידי שמים".

24 נח יא, ג.

22 ד"ה ויראו את אלקי ישראל גוי לבנת הספיר - בת"א משפטים עז, ד.
23 שם עז, סע"ג ואילך.

Student's The Land of Israel - intrinsic holiness pg. 11

This parallels the difference between the Land of Israel—which contains stones—and Babylonia—which has no stones and needs bricks.

The Land of Israel is intrinsically holy, as “the land G-d is constantly looking after, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.” This is also why it is “a land whose stones are iron,” stones as strong as iron. Israel is a land that is actually beyond nature, but G-d wished for it to be conducted naturally as well, with plowing, sowing, etc. (and also the capacity for brick processing).

Babylonia - An Open Valley

Student's pg. 11 Babylonia, which represents the entire Diaspora, is a valley, about which it is said “he found an open valley and fenced it in.”

A Jew needs to know that he has restrictions, “a fence from both sides,” to the left and to the right. Regarding every matter, what to do and what not to do, he must first clarify what G-d's desire is - what is allowed by the Code of Jewish Law, and what is forbidden.

There can however be a state of an open, unguarded valley, meaning that when one looks at it superficially he doesn't see any restrictions of Torah and mitzvot, and thinks that here every person can do as they wish, without any restrictions.

ובענין זה הוא החילוק בין ארץ ישראל שיש בה אבנים, לבבל שאין בה אבנים, כי אם לבנים:

ארץ ישראל היא ארץ קדושה מצד עצמה, להיותה “ארץ אשר גו' תמיד עיני ה' אלקיך בה מרשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה”, ולכן היא גם “ארץ אשר אבניה ברזל”²⁵, יש בה אבנים, והאבנים שבה הן טובות כמו ברזל של שאר הארצות, והיינו, לפי שארץ ישראל מצד עצמה היא למעלה מן הטבע, אלא, שרצה הקב"ה שתהיה קשורה גם עם הנהגת הטבע, שלכן צריך להיות בה חרישה וזריעה וכו' (ומשום זה ישנה אפשרות שיהיו בה גם “לבנים”).

אבל כאשר באים לבבל, חוץ לארץ, הרי זו “בקעה”, שעליה אמרו²⁶ “בקעה מצא וגדר בה גדר”, ומפרש רש"י “כאדם הגודר בקעה פרוצה לשומרה”:

יהודי צריך לדעת שיש לו הגבלות - גדר מזה וגדר מזה²⁷, הן מצד ימין והן מצד שמאל, שכן, בנוגע לכל דבר, מה לעשות ומה לא לעשות, צריך לברר תחילה מהו רצונו של הקב"ה, מה מותר לעשות על פי שולחן ערוך, ומה אסור לעשות על פי שולחן ערוך.

אבל ישנו מעמד ומצב של “בקעה”, מקום פרוץ, היינו, שכאשר מסתכל בעיני בשר, אינו רואה גדר של תורה ומצוות, ונדמה לו שאין עליו הגבלות; איש בשרירות לבו ילך²⁸.

27 בלק כב, כד.
28 ע"פ נצבים כט, יח.

25 דברים ח, ט.
26 עירובין ו, א. וש"נ.

Proper Conduct In Babylonia Requires Effort

For a Jew to conduct himself in such a place in accordance with G-d's will, "listen to these laws and observe them," hard work and effort is necessary.

In Babylonia there are no "stones" naturally created by G-d. G-d wishes that everything be achieved through human toil and effort. Without toil there can be no success, and when a person does toil he is assured that he will succeed. If a person isn't successful this indicates he hasn't toiled, and when he does toil he will certainly be able to study Torah and observe mitzvot, conducting a proper Jewish life as G-d wishes. It all depends on the effort.

In the Land of Israel, it is easier to be Jewish. The land is holy, it has sites that are holy and historic for the Jewish people, and the atmosphere is more Jewish. But Babylonia, - the land of the Diaspora, is just a valley without any boundaries. It is an open place that does not radiate any holiness. To be a good Jew in such a place requires much more effort.

We see this quite clearly. A Jewish child who grows up in the Land of Israel is familiar with many basic Jewish concepts, even if they don't receive a formal religious education. When children in Israel walk down the street on Yom Kippur, they see empty streets without cars, before Purim, costumes fill the street, before Pesach, an atmosphere of cleaning is in the air, and on Pesach everyone celebrates the Seder night. In the Land of Israel, it is easier to grow up Jewish.

In the Diaspora, however, this supportive atmosphere is lacking, and is replaced by an opposing atmosphere. Jewish children grow up with non-Jewish friends who celebrate Christian holidays, eat non-kosher foods and so on. Instilling Jewish traditions in the child requires hard work. The entire responsibility rests on the parents, and whatever they don't do on their own, no one else will do for them.

וכדי שגם במקום כזה תהיה ההנהגה של יהודי על פי רצונו של הקב"ה, "תשמעו גו' ושמרתם ועשיתם אותם" - יש צורך בעבודה ויגיעה.

בבבל - אין "אבנים" שהן בריאה בידי שמים, אלא, רצונו של הקב"ה שיעשו זאת על ידי עבודה ויגיעה בידי אדם, ואם "לא יגעת", לא יכול להיות "מצאת", ולאידך, יש הבטחה ש"יגעת ומצאת"²⁹, וכל זמן ש"לא מצאת", הרי זה סימן ש"לא יגעת", וכאשר תתייגע כדבעי, בוודאי תוכל ללמוד תורה ולקיים מצוות, ולנהל אורח-חיים יהודי כרצונו של הקב"ה, ואין הדבר תלוי אלא ביגיעתך.

Student's Education Is Like Brickmaking

pg. 12

The process of brickmaking requires taking clay from the ground, kneading it, forming it into shape, and then baking it in the furnace. This produces a strong and durable brick.

The same is true regarding education: "A person is born like a wild donkey" and if left in this state, without any process of "kneading," changing of form, etc., he will not be a strong and durable "brick" that can be used to build a lasting edifice.

Student's
pg. 13

For example: even though a child screams that he wants to eat candies and sweets, he needs to be educated and told that eating candy damages the teeth and is unhealthy. The same is true about other similar matters.

When a child is educated properly and receives the proper form, and is then "baked" in the "furnace" with the holy fire of passion for G-dliness, and becomes permeated with love for G-d and His commandments, he or she will grow to be a strong Jew. Such a Jew will be able to withstand all of the waves and winds that blow outside.

וסדר העבודה הוא - "ותהי להם הלבנה לאבן":

יש לקחת חימר, עפר מן האדמה, ללוש אותו, ולצור בו צורה, ואחר כך לשרפו בכבשן האש (שעל ידי זה נעשית מציאות חדשה³⁰), ואז תהיה לבינה חזקה ומתקיימת.

ודוגמתו בענין החינוך:

"עיר פרא אדם יולד"³¹, ואם ישאירו אותו כפי שנולד, "עפר מן האדמה"³², ללא פעולה של לישה, שינוי הצורה וכו' - אזי לא יהיה בבחינת "לבינה" חזקה ומתקיימת שאפשר לבנות בה "בנין עדי עד".

ולדוגמה: יש לחנך את הילד מבלי להתחשב בכך שצועק שרצונו לאכול סוכריות וממתקים, שכן, "נופת תטופנה שפתי זרה" אבל "אחריתה מרה כלענה"³³; יש להסביר לילד שאכילת סוכריות גורמת קלקול לשיניים, לקיבה, כך, שזהו היפך הבריאות. ועל דרך זה בשאר ענינים כיוצא בזה.

וכאשר מחנכים את הילד כדבעי עד שתקבע בו הצורה ההוגנת הראויה לשמה, ומצרפים אותו בכבשן האש, אש שלמעלה ואש שלמטה, "רשפיה רשפי אש שלהבת י-ה"³⁴, שיהיה חדור באהבה להקב"ה, שמביאה לאהבה לתורה ומצוות - אזי יגדל להיות יהודי חזק, שיוכל לעמוד בתוקף נגד כל הגלים והרוחות שנושבות ברחוב.

(33) משלי ה, ג-ד.
(34) שה"ש ה, ו.

(30) ראה תורה התורה (פסחים ל, ב) וד"ה אלא (זבחים צו, א).
(31) איוב יא, יב.
(32) בראשית ב, ז.

While the lack of stones in Babylonia appears to be a disadvantage in comparison to the Land of Israel, the Sages tell us that "one Babylonian scholar is equal to two scholars in Israel."

We need to learn from the toil required in Babylonia, and form the clay into the right shape and bake it in the furnace, until it becomes a new entity permeated with the fire of passion for G-dliness. Then, even "mighty waters will be unable to extinguish the love," the love of G-d that burns in the heart of every Jew.

On the other hand, we see that children who are educated in the Diaspora, and absorb and learn the Jewish traditions and values at home, with their parents, often have a stronger Jewish identity than that of their peers who grew up in the Land of Israel. This is because the Jewish values were consciously planted deeply within them, with great effort. They therefore constitute an integral and fundamental part of their being.

ונקודת הענין:

אף על פי שהעובדה ש"אין אבנים בבבל" היא חסרון, לכאורה, לגבי המעמד ומצב ב"ארץ גו' אשר תמיד עיני ה' אלקיך בה מרשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה", הרי לאידך גיסא, אמרו חז"ל³⁵ "חד מינון (מבני בבל) כי סליק להתם עדיף כתרי מינייהו". [אחד מחכמי חוץ לארץ, כשהוא עולה לארץ ישראל - נעשה שקול בחכמה כשניים מחכמי ארץ ישראל].

יש ללמוד מהגייעה הנדרשת בבבל - לפעול בחימר צורה הוגנת, ולצרפה בכבשן, עד שנעשית בריאה חדשה שחדורה ב"רשפי אש שלהבת י-ה", כך, ש"מים רבים לא יוכלו לכבות את האהבה"³⁶ - אש האהבה להשם יתברך שבוערת בלבו של כל אחד מישראל.

משיחת כ' אב ה'תשכ"ד, בלתי מוגה

תורת מנחם, כרך מ' עמוד 326