

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter IX: Vaveishev (Gen. 37:1–40:23)

Essay 9. The sin of the tribes will be remembered forever, as a hope for the end of the Exile

מדרש רבה על הפסוק "וישבו לאכל-לחם" ר' אהנה [בר] זעירא אמר עבירתן של שבטים זכורה הוא לעולם, תקנה היא לעולם עכ"ל. צריך עיון שלכאורה הם תרתי דסתרון אהדדי.

There is a **Midrash Gen. Rabbah 84:17 on the verse, “Then they sat down to a meal.** Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels bearing gum, balm, and ladanum to be taken to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers, “What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites.” (Gen. 37:25–37:27). The Midrash reports that, **“Rabbi Achva bar¹ Ze’ira said that the sin of the tribes, i.e., the sin that Joseph’s brothers committed by selling him, will be remembered forever, as a hope for the world.” This requires investigation, for apparently they are two things that are mutually opposing, as the sin for selling Joseph is a negative, whereas “a hope for the world” is a positive.**

ויש לומר שקתב הש"ך וז"ל, שמעתי שמכירת יוסף הועילה לגליות, שאלמלא כן היתה שופך חמתו בבית ראשון או בבית שני על ישראל והיו חס ושלום כלים. אבל כשגלה יוסף וגלתה השכינה, כנסת ישראל עמו, שנאמר "ויוסף הורד מצרים"ה" גימטריא שכינה הורגלה השכינה לגלות. וכשחטאו בבית ראשון ושני פלה חמתו בגלות שנאמר "שלח מעל-פני" וכו' כן שמעתי עכ"ל.

It can be said that the Shach² wrote:

I heard that the sale of Joseph benefitted the Jews of the Diaspora, as otherwise He would have poured out His wrath in the First Temple or in the Second Temple on Israel and they would have been finished, G-d forbid. But when Joseph was exiled and the Shechinah was exiled,³ the Congregation of

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¹ The first edition had *de min* (דמין) (“of”) instead of *bar* (בר) (“son of”).

² Rabbi Mordechai Ha’Cohen of Safed (1523–98), *Siftei Cohen on Torah* (Venice 1605).

³ The text will soon quote Gen. 39:1, “And Joseph was taken down to Egypt,” and the following verse says, “the L-rd was with Joseph,” suggesting that the Shechinah was also exiled.

Israel was with him,⁴ as it is said, “**And Joseph was taken down to Egypt**” (Gen. 39:1). In addition to Gen. 39:2 saying, “the L-rd was with Joseph,” there is also the fact that the word מִצְרַיִם (Mitzraim) (“to Egypt”) has the same **Gematria**, 385, as the word “**Shechinah**,” showing that the Shechinah was effectively exiled with Joseph. This **accustomed the Shechinah to Exile. When [the Jews] sinned in the First Temple and the Second [Temple], [G-d] chose not to destroy the people, but instead vented his anger on the Exile, as it is said, ‘Dismiss them from My presence’ (Jer. 15:1), thus I have heard.**

- *Siftei Cohen on Torah*, parsahat Vayeishev

וְנָהוּ שְׁאֵמֵר הַמִּדְרָשׁ עֲבִירָתוֹ שֶׁל שְׁבָטִים זְכוּרָה הִיא לְעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַשְּׂכִינָה מְחַמַּת עוֹן זֶה צָרִיכָה לִילֵךְ בְּגָלוּת בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה כְּדִכְתִּיב "וְאָנֹכִי בְּתוֹדֵי-הַגּוֹלָה" וְכוּ'. אֲמָנָם מֵצַד אַחֵר הִיא תִקְנָה לְעוֹלָם שֶׁשָּׁמַם שֶׁהַשְּׂכִינָה חוֹזְרֶת כִּד יִסְזָרוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הַגָּלוּת, וְלָכֵן לִישׁוּעָתָךְ קוִינֵנו כָּל הַיּוֹם.

This is what the Midrash meant when it said, “the sin of the tribes will be remembered forever,” that because of this sin, the Shechinah needs to go out in exile in this world, as it is written, “I was among the exiles” (Ezek. 1:1). But from another angle, this is a hope for the world, for when the Shechinah returns from Exile, similarly the Children of Israel will return from the Exile, and therefore, “for Your salvation we hope all day.”⁵

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⁴ The exile of Joseph was the beginning of the fulfillment of the decree of exile and slavery that G-d had revealed to Abraham, in Gen. 15:13–14: “And He said to Abram, ‘Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years; but I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and in the end they shall go free with great wealth.’”

⁵ From the weekday Shemoneh Esreh prayer, “Speedily cause the sprout of David, Your servant, to flourish and exalt his power with Your deliverance. For Your salvation, we hope all day.”