

# Zera Shimshon

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Published Mantua 1778\*

## Chapter X: Mikeitz (Gen. 41:1–44:17)

### Essay 16. Five insults and defenses

**שַׁבָּת פָּרַק י"ב** רב נחמן בר יצחק אָמַר: "מֵה־נִדְבָר וּמֵה־נִצְטַדֵּק": נְכוּנִים אֲנַחְנוּ, צַדִּיקִים אֲנַחְנוּ, טְהוּרִים אֲנַחְנוּ, דַּכִּים אֲנַחְנוּ, קְדוּשִׁים אֲנַחְנוּ ע"כ. הֵקֵרְסָם שְׁהִיָּה לְרַב נַחְמָן לְדְרוֹשׁ הַנוֹטְרִיקוֹן, הוּא מְפַנֵּי שְׁהִיָּה לוֹ לומר "מֵה־נִצְטַדֵּק" וְכַתֵּב "נִצְטַדֵּק" וְדַאי דְאֵתִי לְדְרָשָׁא. אֲבָל עֲדִינוּ צְרִיךְ טַעַם מָה רָאוּ אֵז הַשְּׂבָטִים לְרַמּוֹז עַל חֲמִשָּׁה דְבָרִים אֵלּוּ.

It says in tractate **Shabbat, chapter 12:**

**Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said:** “And Judah said: What can we say to my master, **what can we speak, and how can we justify ourselves** [*nitztadak*]” (Gen. 44:16). [This is an abbreviation for]: **We are honest** [*nechonim*], **we are righteous** [*tzaddikim*], **we are pure** [*tehorim*], **we are innocent** [*dakim*], **we are holy** [*kedoshim*].

- Shabbat 105a

**The compulsion felt by Rav Nachman to expound this abbreviation was because [Judah] could have said “how can we be justified”** [*nitzdak*] in the *niphal* [passive] verb form, **but instead wrote “justify ourselves”** [*nitztadak*] in the *hitpa’el* [reflexive] verb form, **which is certainly coming for the purpose of a different exposition.** Thus, he interpreted the word *nitztadak* as representing an acronym.

**But we still need a reason what the tribes saw at this time to hint about these five things,** viz, honest, righteous, pure, innocent, and holy.

וְאֶפְשָׁר שֶׁרָצוּ לְרַמּוֹז עַל הַעֲלֵבוֹנוֹת שֶׁסָּבְלוּ, שֶׁהִנֵּה יוֹסֵף סָפַר לְאָבִיו עֲלֵיהֶם שְׁהִיוּ אוֹכְלִים אֶבֶר מִן הַחֵי, וְהָיוּ מְזוּלְזָלִים בְּבָנֵי הַשְּׂפָחוֹת לְקִרְוָתָם עֲבָדִים, וְחֲשׂוּדִים עַל הַעֲרִיּוֹת. וְעַתָּה בִּרְדֵּתָם לְמַצְרַיִם נִחְשָׁדוּ עַל שְׂמֵי דְבָרִים אֲחֵרִים שֶׁקָּרָאָם דְּנִקְא מְרַגְלִים לְמַדּוּד לָהֶם מִדָּה כְּנִגְדַּת מִדָּה, כִּי הַמְרַגֵּל מוֹסֵר מִמּוֹן חֲבִירוֹ בְּנֵד גּוֹי וְאִף הֵם מְסַרּוּ יוֹסֵף בְּנֵד יִשְׁמַעֲאֵלִים, וְלִפִּי זֶה נִחְשָׁדוּ שֶׁבָּאוּ לְרַגֵּל אֶת הָאָרֶץ. וְהִכִּי דִיִּיק הַכְּתוּב לומר "וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מְרַגְלִים אַתֶּם" מְפַנֵּי שֶׁמְכַרְתֶּם אֶחְיֶיכֶם וּבְנֵדֵי "לְרֵאוֹת אֶת־עֲרוֹת הָאָרֶץ בְּאֵתָם".

**It’s possible that they wanted to hint at the insults that they suffered, for Joseph had told their father: (1) that they had eaten flesh [cut off] from a living animal, and (2) that they had insulted the sons of the handmaids, their half-brothers, calling them “slaves,” and (3) that they were suspected of sexual immorality.<sup>1</sup> Now when they went to Egypt, they were suspected of two other things: (4) that they were called spies to punish them measure-for-**

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<sup>1</sup> Rashi on Gen. 37:2, based on Gen. Rabbah 84:7. See *Zera Shimshon*, Chapter IX, Vayeishev, essay 3.

measure, because the spy keeps track of his fellow's property and then betrays by delivering his fellow's money into the hand of a gentile<sup>2</sup> and they had handed Joseph over to the Ishmaelites, and (5) that according to this they were suspected of coming to spy on the land. Scripture was precise to say, "and he said to them, you are spies,"<sup>3</sup> because "you sold your brother," and certainly "you have come to see the land in its nakedness."<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the last two points, there is a connection between spying and betrayal, though they are counted as two separate sins. As will be discussed later in this essay, the brothers entered Egypt through ten separate gates.<sup>5</sup> While their primary purpose for coming to Egypt was to purchase food, they were also searching for Joseph. The viceroy had learned of their entry via separate gates, so accusing them of spying was a logical way of putting them on edge. Also, he didn't want them to continue searching, for they might learn of the Hebrew slave who had become the viceroy. By putting them on notice that they were suspected of espionage and were being watched, they would be less likely to continue asking about a Hebrew slave.<sup>6</sup>

ולכן אמרו הם נכונים אֲנַחְנוּ וְלֹא מְרַגְלִים אֶת הָאָרֶץ, צְדִיקִים אֲנַחְנוּ וְלֹא מוֹסְרִים, טְהוֹרִים אֲנַחְנוּ וְלֹא אָכַלְנוּ אֶבֶר מִן הַחַי שְׂאֵבֶר מִן הַחַי מִטְמֵא, דְּפִים אֲנַחְנוּ וְשִׁפְלִים בְּעֵינֵינוּ וְלֹא גָאָה לְבַבְנוּ עַל בְּנֵי הַשְּׁפָחוֹת לְקְרוֹתָם עֲבָדִים, קְדוּשִׁים אֲנַחְנוּ וְאִין אֲנִי חַשׂוּדִים עַל הָעֲרִיּוֹת שֶׁבְּכָל מְקוֹם שְׂאֵתָה מוֹצֵא גֹדֵר עֲרֻה שֶׁם אֵתָה מוֹצֵא אִיסוּר קְדוּשָׁה.

**Therefore, they said: we are honest, and not spying on the land, we are righteous and not betrayers, we are pure and don't eat flesh [torn from] a living animal, for flesh from a living animal is defiling, we are innocent and lowly in our eyes and not haughty in our hearts toward our half-brothers, the sons of the handmaids, to call them "slaves," we are holy and we are not suspected of sexual immorality, for in every place that you find a fence against such relations you find a prohibition stemming from holiness.<sup>7</sup>**

וְהַקֶּשֶׁר הוּא כִּי שִׁבְגֵי יַעֲקֹב נִכְנְסוּ בְּעֵשְׂרָה שְׁעָרֵי הָעִיר כְּדֵי לְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת יוֹסֵף וְלְפָדוֹתוֹ בְּכָל מְמוֹן שֶׁבְּעוֹלָם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁפָּרַשׁ רַשִׁ"י עַל פְּסוּק "כִּי־עָרַנְתָּ הָאָרֶץ בְּאֵתָם לְרֵאוֹת" וְכוּ'. וְעַל פְּסוּק "וַיִּגְדְּדוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף" וְכוּ', וְזֶה נִתֵּן מְקוֹם לְיוֹסֵף לְקְרוֹתָם מְרַגְלִים, וְעֵתָה כְּנֻנְתָּם לֹא מֵר נְכוּנִים אֲנַחְנוּ שְׂאִין אֲנִי מְרַגְלִים וּמִזֶּה מוֹכַח שֶׁצְדִיקִים אֲנַחְנוּ וְלֹא מוֹסְרִים, שְׂהָרֵי אֲדָרְבָּא כְּנֻנְתָּנוּ הִיָּתָה לְגֵאוֹל אֶת אֲחֵינוּ וּמַעֲתָה שְׁלֹא מִצִּינֵנוּ אוֹתוֹ אֲנִי אוֹמְרִים שְׁלֹא זָכָה לְהִגָּאֵל, וְאִם כֵּן אִיגְלָאֵי מִיִּלְתָּא לְמַפְרַע שְׁמָה שְׁסִיפֵר לְאַבְיָנוּ הִיָּה לְשׁוֹן הָרַע וְשִׁפְת־שִׁקֵּר וְאֲדָרְבָּא אֲנַחְנוּ טְהוֹרִים דְּפִים וְקְדוּשִׁים כּו"ל.

**The connection is that the sons of Jacob entered the ten gates of the city to ask for Joseph and to redeem him with all the wealth in the world, as Rashi interpreted on the verse,**

<sup>2</sup> Bava Kamma 117b, 119a discusses the informer, who informs gentiles of the whereabouts of another's property, facilitating its theft or misuse.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 42:9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Rashi on Gen. 42:12, based on Gen. Rabbah 91:6.

<sup>6</sup> Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz, *Kli Yakar* (1602) on Gen. 42:9.

<sup>7</sup> Rashi on Lev. 19:2, based on Lev. Rabbah 24:4–6, discusses a prohibition against marrying a harlot. Yevamot 20a explains the term "a prohibition stemming from holiness" as referring to rabbinic prohibitions.

“you have come to see the land in its nakedness!”<sup>8</sup> On the verse, “So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to get grain rations in Egypt,”<sup>9</sup> that gave room for Joseph to call them spies. Now their intent was to say, “We are honest, that we are not spies, and from this it’s proven that we are righteous and not betrayers, for rather our intention was to redeem our brother, and now that we can’t find him, we say that he did not deserve to be redeemed. If so, it is clear retrospectively that what he told our father was slander and lying words,<sup>10</sup> and to the contrary, we are pure, innocent, and holy, as above.”

**וַיִּבְּרַח** יְתֹרֵם וְאִיִּם יִתְּרָה עַל פְּסוּקֵי "וַיַּעֲבְדוּךָ בְּאֵרֶץ מִצְרַיִם" , דְּהִיָּה לֹא לֹמַר "לֹא אֲדֹנָי וַעֲבָדְיָךְ בְּאֵרֶץ מִצְרַיִם" , אֲלָא וַדַּאי שְׁהֵם הִשִּׁיבוּ לֹא שְׁמֵי דְבָרִים: "לֹא אֲדֹנָי" שְׁאִין אֲנַחְנוּ מוֹסְרִים וְעוֹד "וַעֲבָדְיָךְ בְּאֵרֶץ מִצְרַיִם" וְלֹא לְתוֹר אֶת הָאָרֶץ. וְעוֹד "לֹא־הָיוּ עֲבָדְיָךְ מִצְרַיִם" שְׁהִיָּה לֹא לֹמַר "אִין אֲנַחְנוּ מִצְרַיִם." אֲלָא וַדַּאי "לֹא־הָיוּ" לְשַׁעֲבֵר, שְׁמָה שְׁמָכְרוּ אַחֵיהֶם יוֹסֵף בְּדִין מְכָרוּהוּ מִהֲטָעֲמִים שְׁפָתֵינוּ לְעִיל בְּפִרְשָׁה הַקּוֹדֶמֶת, אוּ מִמָּה שְׁנִכְתּוּב לְקַמּוֹן בְּסִמּוּד.

In this way will be understood the extra prefixed *vav* ["and"] in the verse, “No, my lord! **And** your servants [וַעֲבָדְיָךְ] [*va'avadecha*] have come to procure food,”<sup>11</sup> for he should have said, “No, my lord! Your servants [עֲבָדְיָךְ] [*avadecha*] have come to procure food.” Rather, it’s certain that they were answering him two things: “No, my lord! We are not betrayers,” and also “we have come to procure food, and not to scout the land.”

Also, what is this language, “Your servants were not spies,”<sup>12</sup> for he could have said, “your servants are not spies.” Rather, it’s certain this term “were not” [referred] to the past, i.e., that they were not spies, who keep track of their fellow’s property and then betray by delivering their fellow’s money into the hand of a gentile. For Joseph’s brothers sold him according to the law, for the reasons that we wrote above in the preceding parasha,<sup>13</sup> or for the reasons we will write in the next essay.

וְאֵתִי שְׁפִיר שְׁמִיד שְׁאֲמָרוּ הֵם "וְהֶאֱחָד אֵינָנוּ" אָמַר לָהֶם יוֹסֵף "הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרַתִּי אֲלֵכֶם לֵאמֹר מִצְרַיִם אַתֶּם", דְּלִפִּי פְּשׁוּטוֹ קִשְׁיָה מִלֵּת "הוּא" וְכוּ'. אֲלָא שְׁפִינֵן שְׁאֲמָרוּ הֵם "וְהֶאֱחָד אֵינָנוּ" אָמַר לָהֶם "הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרַתִּי" שְׁאֲתֶם מוֹסְרִים שְׁמָסְרֶתֶם דָּם אַחֵיכֶם "בְּיַד הָעַרְלִים". וְאֵף יוֹסֵף פְּשָׁאֲמַר לָהֶם "וְאֶת־אֲחֵיכֶם הִקְטַן תְּבִיאוּ אֵלַי וְיִאָּמְנוּ דְּבָרֵיכֶם" וְכוּ', כְּלוּמַר אִם תְּבִיאוּ אַחֵיכֶם יִהְיֶה וַדַּאי שְׁאֲתֶם אֵינְכֶם מוֹסְרִים, וְאִם לֹא שְׁתַּנִּיחוּ שְׁמַעוֹן בְּיַדִּי לְעוֹלָם, שְׁמַע מִינָה שְׁאֲתֶם מוֹסְרִים.

**It’s fine that immediately after they said, “We your servants were twelve brothers, sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is**

<sup>8</sup> Gen. 42:12. Rashi comments, based on Gen. Rabbah 91:6: “I still insist that you are spies, for what you have just said bears this out for you have entered by ten different gates of the city. Why didn’t you all enter by the same gate if you are really brothers and travelled together?”

<sup>9</sup> Gen. 42:3.

<sup>10</sup> Prov. 17:7.

<sup>11</sup> Gen. 42:10.

<sup>12</sup> Gen. 42:11.

<sup>13</sup> See *Zera Shimshon*, Chapter IX, Vayeishev, essay 3.

no more,”<sup>14</sup> that Joseph said to them, “**This is as** [אִתִּי] **I told you: You are spies,**”<sup>15</sup> for according to the plain meaning, it is difficult [to understand] the need for the word, “**This is as**” [אִתִּי]. But since they said, “and one is no more,” he said to them, “**This is as I told you,**” i.e., “**that you are betrayers, that you delivered the blood of your brother ‘into the hands of the uncircumcised.’**”<sup>16</sup> While they didn’t spill his blood, his sale into slavery had endangered his life, and this was “delivery of his blood.”

Even Joseph, when he said to them, “**But you must bring me your youngest brother, that your words may be verified etc.**”<sup>17</sup> That is, if you bring your brother Benjamin, it will be certain that you are not betrayers, i.e., that you haven’t sold or killed him. But if not, i.e., if they didn’t prove that Benjamin was safe, and you leave Shimon in my hands for ever, we’ll learn that you are betrayers, i.e., betrayers who harmed Benjamin, and for that matter betrayers who would abandon Shimon.

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<sup>14</sup> Gen. 42:13.

<sup>15</sup> Gen. 42:14.

<sup>16</sup> Judges 15:18.

<sup>17</sup> Gen. 42:20.