

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter XI: Vavigash (Gen. 44:18–47:27)

Essay 11. The impurity of the Jewish people does not prevent G-d's embrace

**פסוק** "אֲנֹכִי אֶרְדָּה עִמָּךְ מִצְרַיִם וְאֲנֹכִי אֶעֱלֶךָ גַּם-עִלָּה". יש לנדקדק מה חידוש יש בהבטחה זו יותר ממה שהבטיח לאברהם לגאולם, כדכתיב "וגם את-הגוי אשר יעבודו דן אנכי ואחר-יכן יצאו" וכו'. ועוד מהו "גם-עלה"? ויש לומר דאיתא בשמות רבה על פסוק "ויהי בְחֻצֵי הַלְיָלָה" וכו', הקב"ה קדוש וטהור ופשוט ידו בטמאים, בשביל שגדול ונורא הוא, ובשביל ישראל הודיע פחו, ובשביל שאמר ליעקב "'אנכי ארד עמך מצרַיִם" וכו'.

There is a verse: **“I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I Myself will surely bring you up”** (Gen. 46:4). We should scrutinize what novelty is present in this promise, beyond that which [G-d] promised Abraham to redeem them, as it is written: **“But I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and in the end, they shall go free with great wealth”** (Gen. 15:14). Furthermore, after G-d said “I will bring you up” (*a'alcha*) (אֶעֱלֶךָ), Scripture adds the words “also up” (*gam aloh*) (גַּם-עִלָּה). This doubling has been considered as giving extra emphasis, and thus the translation has added the word “surely.” **What is this apparently superfluous term *gam aloh* (גַּם-עִלָּה) (“also up”)? It can be said that it is brought in Midrash Ex. Rabbah (18:8) on the verse, “In the middle of the night” (Ex. 12:29): “The Holy One, Blessed be He, was holy and pure, but He extended His hand to the impure, because He is great and awesome, and because Israel acknowledged His power, and because He told Jacob, “I Myself will go down with you to Egypt.”**

וקשה מה חידוש הוא זה שהקב"ה קדוש וטהור ופשוט ידו בטמאים. מי לא ידע בכל אלה, ומה הם הטעמים שנותן, בשביל שגדול ונורא הוא ובשביל ישראל הודיע פחו ובשביל שאמר ליעקב וכו'? ועוד דעיקרא דדינא פירכא, דמה איכפת שיהיה הקב"ה בעצמו המוציאם ממצרים והדן במצרים, הלא משל הדיוט אומר יבא הגס מפל מקום? והכא נמי די להם לישראל לצאת לחירות. ואם תאמר שאם היה גואלם הקב"ה לא היה להם עוד גלות כמו שפירשו המפרשים על "מי אנכי פי אלה אלה-פרעה" וכו', הלא מצינו שאף על פי שקיים הקב"ה הבטחתו של "דן אנכי" עם כל זה חזרו בגלות?

**It is difficult what novelty there is to say that the Holy One, Blessed be He, is holy and pure and that He stretched out His hand to the unclean people. Who didn't know all this, and what are the reasons [the author of the Midrash] gives, “because He is great and awesome,” and “because Israel acknowledged His power,” and “because He told Jacob, ‘I Myself will go down with you to Egypt’ ”? Furthermore, refutation of the *a fortiori* inference is present from the outset, for what difference is there that the Holy One, Blessed be He, is by Himself the**

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**One Who takes them out of Egypt and Who executes judgment on the Egyptians? For isn't there a common parable that says, "let the miracle come from any place."<sup>1</sup> Also, it would have been sufficient for Israel to go forth to freedom even if not directly by G-d's hand? If you will say that if the Holy One, Blessed be He, had been their redeemer, they would have not had any more exile, as the commentators interpreted the verse, "But Moses said to G-d, 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?'" (Ex. 3:11),<sup>2</sup> haven't we found that even though the Holy One, Blessed be He, fulfilled His promise that "I will execute judgment," nevertheless they returned to Exile?**

וְנִשְׁאָר לֵאמֹר דְּאִיתָא בְּיוֹמָא פְּרָקָה אָמַר לִיהּ הֵהוּא מִינָא לְרַבֵּי חֲנִינְיָא הִשְׁתָּא בְּרִי טְמֵאִין אַתּוּן דְּכִתִּיב "טְמֵאֲתָהּ בְּשׂוּלְיָהּ". אָמַר לִיהּ תָּא חֲזִי מַה כְּתִיב בְּהוּ "הִשְׁכַּן אִתְּם בְּתוֹךְ טְמֵאֲתָם" אַף עַל פִּי שְׁהֵם טְמֵאִים שְׂכִינָה עִמָּהֶם. וּפִירֵשׁ רִש"י הִשְׁתָּא בְּרִי טְמֵאִין אַתּוּן, וְאִין שְׂכִינָה שׂוֹרְהָ עִמְכֶם בְּטוֹמְאָה עַכ"ל.

**It can be said that it's brought in tractate Yoma, in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter (56b–57a): A certain infidel<sup>3</sup> said to Rabbi Chanina, "Now you are certainly impure, as it is written [about the Jewish people]: 'Her impurity was in her skirts' " (Lam. 1:9). [Rabbi Chanina] said to him: "Come and see what is written about [the Jewish people]: 'That dwells with them in the midst of their impurity' " (Lev. 16:16). That is, the infidel quoted Scripture as saying that Israel was impure, and Rashi explained the significance of the infidel's words, "Now you are certainly impure," as implying that, "The Shechinah does not dwell with you in impurity." Rabbi Chanina then quoted another piece of Scripture, explaining, "Even when they are impure, the Divine Presence dwells among them."**

וְהִנֵּה בְּמִצְרַיִם יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיוּ טְמֵאִים שְׂהָרִי נִשְׁתַּקְעוּ בְּטוֹמְאָהּ. וְהִנֵּה מְקוֹם לֹא אָמַר שְׂאָף עַל פִּי שְׂהֵקֵב"ה עוֹשֶׂה נְקֻמָּוֹת בְּמִצְרַיִם עִם כָּל זֶה אֵי אֶפְשָׁר שְׂהֵקֵב"ה יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׂכִינְתּוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לְפִי שְׂהֵם טְמֵאִים. וְלִפְיֻקְדָּה הוֹצֵרָה שְׂהוּא בְּעִצְמוֹ יִהְיֶה פּוֹשֵׁט יָדָיו בְּטְמֵאִים, כְּדִי לְהוֹדִיעַ בְּזֶה שְׂהֵטוֹמְאָה אֵינָה עוֹמְדָת לְפָנָיו וְאֵינָה מְעַכְבֶּת בְּיָדוֹ. וּמִמִּילָא נֹדַע שְׂאָף יִשְׂרָאֵל טְמֵאִים שְׂכִינָה עִמָּהֶם כְּדִכְתִּיב "הִשְׁכַּן אִתְּם בְּתוֹךְ טְמֵאֲתָם", וְזֶהוּ דְקַמְשַׁמַּע לֵן הַמְדַרְשׁ.

**Behold, in Egypt, Israel was unclean, for they were immersed in the uncleanness. There's room to say that even though the Holy One, Blessed be He, wreaks vengeance in Egypt, nevertheless it is impossible that the Holy One, Blessed be He, would approve of His Shechinah dwelling with Israel, because of their uncleanness. Therefore, in order to disprove that viewpoint, it was necessary that He would Himself stretch out His hands to the unclean people, in order to announce by this that the impurity does not stand as a barrier before Him and does not restrain His hand. In any case, it is known that even though Israel was unclean, the Shechinah is with them, as it is written, "That dwells with them in the midst of their impurity," and this is the meaning of the Midrash.**

<sup>1</sup> Meilah 17b.

<sup>2</sup> The translator has not identified the commentary noted by the author.

<sup>3</sup> While the Vilna edition of the Talmud reads "Sadducee," <https://bavli.genizah.org> shows that all earlier editions and manuscripts had the broader reading "min," usually meaning a Jewish infidel.

ואחר כך נתן הטעם שגדול ונורא הוא ובשביל זה הטומאה בורחת מפניו. ובשביל [זה] ישראל הודיע פחו, דבפרק קמא דחולין אמר רבי חנינא "אין עוד מלבדו" נאפילו כשפים. והאמר רבי [יוחנן] למה נקרא שמם? כשפים שמכחישין פמליא של מעלה. שאני רבי חנינא, דנפיש זכותיה. ואף כן בשביל פבודם של ישראל שיהיו נראים כאילו יש להם זכות רב, הודיע פחו לבטל הכשופים שעשו במצרים.

**Afterward, He gave the sense that He is great and awesome, and for this reason, the impurity flees from before Him. For this reason, Israel announced His power, as in the first chapter of tractate Chullin:**

**“Rabbi Chanina said, ‘There is none else beside Him’ (Deut. 4:35), and even sorcery [is ineffective against the will of G-d].** The Gemara relates: There was] a certain woman who would try to take dust from beneath the feet of Rabbi Chanina [in order to perform sorcery on him and harm him]. Rabbi Chanina said to her: Take [the dust], but the matter will be ineffective for you, as it is written: “There is none other beside Him.” [The Gemara asks:] **Rabbi Yochanan<sup>4</sup> said: Why is [sorcery] called *keshafim* (כשפים)?** It is an acronym for *mach’chishin pamalya shel mala* (מכחישין פמליא של מעלה) [meaning that sorcerers diminish the heavenly entourage, i.e., they function contrary to the will of G-d, which suggests that there is some efficacy to sorcery]. [The Gemara answers:] **Rabbi Chanina is different, as his merit is great [and therefore sorcery has no effect on him].”**

-Chullin 7b<sup>5</sup>

ונהו שחידש בהבטחתו ליעקב, שאף שישאל יהיו טמאים ישרה עמקם, "אנכי ארד עמה מצרימה" אף על פי שהוא מקום טומאה, ובשביל זה, "אנכי אעלה" אם יהיו ישראל זכאין. ועוד, "גם-עלה" אף אם לא יהיו זכאין. ועיין עוד לעיל פרשת לה-לך על פסוק "ודור רביעי ישובו הנה", ועיין עוד לקמן במגילת קינות על פסוק "טמאתה בשוליה" וכו'.

**This is the novelty He introduced in His promise to Jacob, that even though Israel will be unclean, He will dwell with them, “I Myself will go down with you to Egypt,” despite the fact that it is a place of impurity, and because of this, “I will bring you up,” if Israel will so merit, just as Rabbi Chanina merited to be saved from sorcery. Furthermore, “also up” (*gam aloh*) (גם-עלה), even if they do not merit. See further above in parshat Lech Lecha (essay 20) on the verse, “And they shall return here in the fourth generation” (Gen. 15:16). See also below in the chapter on The Book of Lamentations (essay 5) on the verse, “Her impurity was in her skirts” (Lam. 1:9), which identifies the primary sin as baseless hatred of a Jew for his fellow.**

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<sup>4</sup> The first edition reads “Rabbi Yosi,” but Chullin 7b shows “Rabbi Yochanan” in all printings and manuscripts listed on <https://bavli.genizah.org>.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to Chullin 7b, the teaching appears in Sanhedrin 67b. A shortened version is also at Yoma 56b–57a.