

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XIII: Shemot (Ex. 1:1–6:1)

Essay 16. A challenge and a punishment

At the end of Exodus, chapter 5, Moses complained to G-d, “O my L-rd, why did You bring harm upon this people? Why did You send me? 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.” G-d then responded, in the first verse of chapter 6 (the last verse of parashat Shemot), “You shall soon see what I will do to Pharaoh: he shall let them go because of a greater might; indeed, because of a greater might he shall drive them from his land.”

מִדְרָשׁ רַבָּה עַל פְּסוּק "עַתָּה תֵּרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶעֱשֶׂה לְפָרְעֹה", בְּמִלְחָמַת פְּרַעֲה אֶתָּה רוֹאֶה וְאִין אֶתָּה רוֹאֶה בְּמִלְחָמַת ל"א מְלָכִים. וְהוּא תִימָא מָה עֲנִין זֶה לְזֶה, וְעוֹד מֵהוּ הִלְשׁוֹן שֶׁל מִלְחָמָה דְנִקֵּט מִלְחָמַת פְּרַעֲה וְכוּ', וְלָמָּה דְנִקֵּט אֶתָּה רוֹאֶה.

There is a **Midrash Rabbah on the verse:**

“The Lord said to Moses: **Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh.**”¹
The war with Pharaoh you will see, but you will not see the war with the 31 kings [of Canaan], against whom Joshua your disciple will take revenge. From here you learn that it was now that Moses was sentenced that he would not enter the Land [of Israel].

- Ex. Rabbah 5:23

Question 1: **This is strange, for what is the relationship between this and that.** Why was Moses to be prevented from entering the Land of Israel because of his complaint?

Question 2: **Also, what is the language of “war” that was taken** by the Midrash, viz, **“the war of Pharaoh”** and **“the war of the 31 kings”**? The Jews didn’t have an army that fought Pharaoh, so why is this compared to the war of the 31 kings, where the Jews did fight?

Question 3: **Also, why does [G-d] specifically say “You will see”?**

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¹ Ex. 6:1.

וגיש לומר דבמדבר הַנְּאָמַר לְעִיֵּל עַל פְּסוּק הַקּוֹדֵם "לְמָה הִרְעַתָּה לְעַם הַזֶּה", מְצִינּוּ שְׁתַּרְעוּמַת מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה מֵה גִּשְׁתַּנָּה הָעַם הַזֶּה מִשָּׂאֵר אוֹמוֹת שֶׁנִּשְׁתַּעַבְדוּ בְּגִלּוֹת מִצְרַיִם, וְאֵי מִשׁוּם "כִּי־גַר יִהְיֶה וְרָעָה" וְכוּ', הִנֵּה לוֹ לְהִשְׁתַּעַבְדוֹ לְעַשׂוֹ וְלִישְׁמַעֲאֵל וְעֵי"ש. וְיָדוּעַ שֶׁמִּתְּנַת אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא בָּאָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲלָא עַל יַד שְׁסָבְלוּ עוֹל הַגִּלּוֹת בְּמִצְרַיִם, וְכֵן פִּירַשׁ רַשִׁ"י עַל פְּסוּק "וַיִּגְלוּ אֶל־אֶרֶץ מִפְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב אֲחִיו", מִפְּנֵי שֶׁטָר חוֹב שָׁל גְּזִירַת "כִּי־גַר יִהְיֶה וְרָעָה" הַמּוֹטֵל עַל וְרָעוּ שָׁל יַצְחָק, אָמַר אֵלֶּךָ לִי מִכָּאן, אֵין לִי חֵלֶק בְּמִתְּנָה שְׁנִיתָנָה לוֹ הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת, וְלֹא בְּפִירְעוֹן הַשְּׁטָר עַכ"ל. וְאַחַר כֵּן אֵין מְקוֹם כָּלֵל לְשַׁעַבְדוֹ בְּנֵי עַשׂוֹ וְיִשְׁמַעֲאֵל, שֶׁאֵין לָהֶם חֵלֶק בְּאֶרֶץ.

It can be said that in the aforementioned Midrash, on the preceding verse, “Why did You bring harm upon this people, Why did You send me?”² we find that Moses’ grievance was why was this people different from the rest of the nations, in that they were enslaved in the Egyptian exile. If it was because G-d had decreed to Abraham, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed,”³ then He should have also enslaved Esau and Ishmael, who were also descendants of Abraham.⁴ Why were only Isaac’s descendants treated this way? See there in the Midrash, where this question is raised.

As for the answer, **it is known that the gift of the Land of Israel only came to Israel because they suffered the yoke of the Egyptian exile. Thus Rashi explained on the verse, “Esau took his wives, his sons and daughters, and all the members of his household, his cattle and all his livestock, and all the property that he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to another land because of his brother Jacob. For their possessions were too many for them to dwell together, and the land where they sojourned could not support them because of their livestock.”⁵ Rashi writes: On account of the bond of indebtedness involved in the decree, “your offspring shall be strangers” that was imposed upon Isaac’s descendants, [Esau] said, “I shall go from here, I don’t want a portion in the gift [to my father] of this Land that was given to him, nor in paying this debt.”⁶ Afterward, there was no reason at all to enslave the offspring of Esau and Ishmael, for they have no share of the Land.**

וְקִשָּׁה עַל מֹשֶׁה לְמָה נִתְרַעַם בְּחַנְּנִים, וּמִכַּל שְׁכֵן שְׁקוֹדֵם לְכֹן גִּלְהָ לּוֹ הַקַּב"ה דְּבָר זֶה, וְאוֹמַר "אֲעֲלֶה אֶתְכֶם מִעֲנֵי מִצְרַיִם . . . אֶל־אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וְדָבָשׁ", כְּלוֹמַר מֵה שְׁעֵינֵינִי אוֹתָם בְּגִלּוֹת מִצְרַיִם לֹא הִנֵּה פִי אִם לְטוֹבָתָם כְּדֵי שִׁירְשׁוּ אֶת הָאֶרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה. וְאִם מֹשֶׁה נִתְרַעַם צְרִיךְ לוֹמַר שֶׁדַּעַתוֹ הִנֵּתָה שֶׁאֵין הָאֶרֶץ כָּל כֵּן רְאוּיָה וְחִשׁוּבָה לְסַבּוֹל עָלֶיהָ טוֹרֵם שְׁעַבּוּד כְּזֶה, אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁהִיא אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה, וְאִם כֵּן מֹשֶׁה פָּגַם בְּחִשְׁבֵיבוֹת הָאֶרֶץ, חָס וְשָׁלוֹם.

It is difficult to understand why Moses was angry for no reason, especially since prior to this, the Holy One, Blessed be He, revealed this matter to him, saying: “I will take you out of the misery of Egypt to the Land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites,

² Ex. 5:22.

³ Gen. 15:13.

⁴ Ex. Rabbah 5:22.

⁵ Gen. 36:6–7.

⁶ Rashi on Gen. 36:7.

the Hivites, and the Jebusites, to a Land flowing with milk and honey.”⁷ This is as if to say, the suffering that I am imposing in the Egyptian exile is only for their good, in order that they shall inherit this good Land.

If this is the case, then if Moses was angry, it needs to be said that his opinion was that the Land was not so worthy and important to suffer such a burden of slavery, even though it is a good Land, and if so, then Moses defamed the importance of the Land, G-d forbid.

ומשום הכי אמר לו "עתה תראה" וכו' מלחמת פרעה אתה רואה ואין אתה רואה וכו', כלומר הלא מנהג העולם הוא שאם עם אחד או מלך אחד ירצה לכבוש מדינה אחת צריך שיעשה עמה מלחמה בצער גדול. וכאן ישראל לפי שסבלו עול הגלות במצרים נפטרו מצער המלחמה, שהרי עשו מלחמה עם הכנענים בדרך גס בלא שום צער. וכן עשו כשיצאו ממצרים "כי ה' נלחם להם במצרים", ולכן אמר במלחמת פרעה אתה רואה ואי אתה רואה וכו'.

Because of this, He said to him, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh.” The wars with Pharaoh you will see, but you will not see the wars with the thirty-one kings [of Canaan], against whom Joshua your disciple will take revenge. This is as if to say, isn’t it the way of the world that if one people or one king want to conquer one nation, it is necessary to wage war against it with great misery. But here, because Israel suffered the yoke of the Egyptian exile, they were exempted from the misery of the war. Thus, they conducted war with the Canaanites in a miraculous manner, without any misery. Also, thus it was done when they went out from Egypt, “for the L-rd is waging war for them against Egypt.”⁸ Therefore, [the Midrash] said, “The war with Pharaoh you will see, but you will not see the war with the thirty-one kings [of Canaan].” I.e., Question 2 was why the language of “war” was used both for the redemption from Egypt as well as the action against the Canaanite kings. We now understand that the action against Egypt was still considered a war, but it was waged by G-d instead of by the Israelites.

Question 1 asked why Moses was prevented from entering the Land of Israel because of his complaint to G-d. Zera Shimson explains that his sin was slandering the Land of Israel, saying that the reward of the Land of Israel wasn’t worth all the suffering undergone by the Israelites. Thus, his punishment, being prevented from entering Israel, directly correlated to his sin.

אבל עדיין חובה עלינו להבין הטעם והסבבה של משה, וכי לא היה יודע כמה גדולה קדושת הארץ וכמה היא חשובה. ונראה לומר לפי שמשה היה משבט לוי, ושבט לוי לא סבלו עול הגלות במצרים, כמו שפרש רש"י על פסוק "לכו לסבלתיכם" ועיי"ש. וכנגד זה לא נטלו חלק בארץ, ושבט לוי היה יותר חשוב מכל השבטים, שלגיונו של מלך הוא. והיה משה סובר שאם זכות ירושת הארץ הוא כל כך חשוב לסבול עליה צער הגלות, למה נגרעו שבט לוי מדבר חשוב כזה, וכי בשביל שאני זכר הפסדותי. אלא ודאי צריך לומר שאין זה זכות לישראל, ומשום הכי אמר "למה הרעתה" וכו'.

But it is still imposed upon us to understand Moses’ thinking, and that he did not know how great was the holiness of the Land and how important he is. It appears to be

⁷ Ex. 3:17.
⁸ Ex. 14:25.

because Moses was from the Tribe of Levi, and the Tribe of Levi didn't suffer the yoke of the Egyptian exile, as Rashi explained on the verse, "Get to your labors,"⁹ and see there. As a consequence of this, they were not given a portion in the Land, and the Tribe of Levi was more important than all of the tribes, for they were of the legions of the King,¹⁰ i.e., the Levites and Kohanim were instrumental to the Temple service in G-d's honor. Moses was thinking that if the merit of the inheritance of the Land was so important to suffer the exile for it, why did the Tribe of Levi flee from such an important thing, and "did I lose out because I am male?"¹¹ That is, if someone left a small estate not sufficient to provide for both sons and daughters, then the daughters are provided with sustenance. There is a debate whether the sons are left out entirely or if they will also be provided with sustenance from the small estate. Some argue that because sons are more prominent, they should not receive less than their sisters. Similarly, Moses could be thinking that if receiving an inheritance in the Land of Israel is a great reward for the other tribes, then the most prominent tribe of all, the Levites, should have received a share. If they did not, perhaps that meant the Land of Israel was not such a great prize. **Rather, certainly it needs to be said that this inheritance of Land is not such a merit for the Israelites, and because of this, [Moses] said, "Why did You bring harm upon this people, Why did You send me?"**

ואחר כך פשבא למות נתחבט הרבה כדי לעבור בה בלבד ולראותה אפילו בלא גטילת חלק בה, פדכתיב "אעברה נא ואראה את-הארץ הטובה" וכו', ולכן אמר לו הקב"ה מלחמה זו אתה רואה אבל אי אתה רואה וכו', שלא תעבור בה פדכתיב "הראיתיה בעיניך ושמה לא תעבר", וכל ההפצרות שעשה משה כדי ליפנס לארץ הן "לאות ולמופת" על שבה הארץ, פדאיתא בילקוט ראובני על פסוק "עתה תראה" וכו'. אמר לו הקב"ה פתבתי עליך שאתה חכם ואתה אומר כן, סתיה גש לה לידע ולהודיע טוב אחריתן של ישראל מראשיתן שנתתי להם במצרים. וזה המדרש תמוה.

Afterward, when [his time] came to die, he prostrated himself just in order to cross over to [the Land] and to see it, even if he would not receive a portion of it, as it is written, "Let me, I pray, cross over and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan, that good hill country, and the Lebanon."¹² Question 3 asked why G-d specifically said, "Now you will see." G-d was pointing out to Moses that he had failed to "see" the value of the Land of Israel. At the end of Moses' life, he asked to see the Land; he recognized his earlier error.

Therefore, the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, "This war with Pharaoh you will see, but you won't see the war with the thirty-one kings." That is, "You won't cross over to it, as it is written, 'I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross there.'¹³" All the urgings of Mose in order to enter the Land were as "a sign and proof"¹⁴ of praise of the

⁹ Ex. 5:4. Rashi wrote: " 'Get to your labors,' i.e., which you have to do at home; but it cannot signify 'get to your labors as slaves,' for he was speaking to Moses and Aaron who were of the tribe of Levi. The work of Egyptian slavery had not been imposed on the tribe of Levi. You may know that this was so, because Moses and Aaron went and came just as they pleased." See also Ex. Rabbah 5:16.

¹⁰ Rashi on Num. 1:49.

¹¹ Mishnah Bava Batra 9:1.

¹² Deut. 3:25.

¹³ Deut. 34:4.

¹⁴ Deut. 28:46.

Land, as is brought in the Yalkut Reuveni at the end of parashat Shemot on the verse, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh.” The Midrash there reads: “The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, ‘I wrote about you that you are wise, but you say this? By your life, you should know and inform others that the eventual good of the Jewish people in inheriting the Land of Israel is better than the initial suffering that I gave them in Egypt.’ ”

This Midrash is puzzling. Did Moses eventually know this and make it known, that the suffering would be rewarded by the inheritance of the Land?

אָבֵל הָעֵנָן הוּא דְבִפְרָק ט"ו דְּבִשְׁבַת אָמְרִינָן שְׁהַתְּלִמִּיד חָכָם מְצֻוּיִן בְּנֵי הָעִיר לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלֹאכְתּוֹ, וּמִזֶּה נִסְתַּרְהָ סְבָרַת מִשָּׁה, שְׂאֵדְרֵבָא לְפִי שְׂשֻׁבְט לֹוִי לְגִיּוֹנֵי שְׁל מְלָךְ, וּכְתִיב "יִוְרוּ מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ לְיַעֲקֹב וְתוֹרָתְךָ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל". וְעוֹד כְּתִיב "וְעַל־פִּיָּהֶם יִהְיֶה כְּלִי־רִיב וְכִלְי־נִגְע", כֹּל יִשְׂרָאֵל מְצֻוּיִן לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלֹאכְתָם, וְלָכֵן חִלַּק הַשָּׁדָה שְׁהִיָּה רְאוּי לָהֶם גְּמוּוֹהוּ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, לְפִי שְׁהֶם לֹא הָיוּ יְכוּלִים לַעֲבֹד אֶת הָאֲדָמָה, וְאַחַר כֵּן יִשְׂרָאֵל נוֹתְנִים לָהֶם הַמַּעֲשֵׂר. וְאִין הָכִי נָמִי שְׂאֵרְץ יִשְׂרָאֵל הִיא חֲשׂוּבָה עַד מְאֹד, וּמִשָּׁה קוֹדֵם מוֹתוֹ הוֹדִיעַ חֲשִׁיבוּתָם שְׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֵרְץ יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּנֶאֱמַר לְעֵיל, וְזֶהוּ שְׂאֵמְרוּ כְּתִבְתִּי עֲלֶיךָ שְׂאֵתָה חָכָם דְּכְתִיב "עִיר גְּבִרִים עָלָה חָכָם" זֶה מִשָּׁה "וַיֵּרֶד עִז מִבְּטָחָה".

But the concept is that given in the 15th chapter of tractate Shabbat. It is said that there is a Torah scholar for whom the inhabitants of his city are commanded to perform his labor for him, which is one who sets his own matters aside and engages in matters of Heaven.¹⁵ For to the contrary, the Tribe of Levi was a legion of the king, and it is written, “They shall teach Your laws to Jacob and Your instructions to Israel.”¹⁶ Also, it is written, “The priests, sons of Levi, shall come forward; for the L-rd, your G-d has chosen them for divine service and to pronounce blessing in the name of the L-rd, and every lawsuit and case of skin affliction is subject to their ruling.”¹⁷ All of Israel is commanded to do their work, and therefore a portion of the field that was suitable for them is given to Israel, because they are not able to work the soil, and afterward Israel gives them tithes. Thus, the Levites didn’t receive a share because of their own exalted status, not because the Land was unworthy.

It is indeed so that the Land of Israel is of the utmost importance. Prior to Moses’ death, he informed the importance of Israel being in the Land of Israel, as above. This is the meaning of what they said, “I wrote about you that you are wise,” as it is written, “One wise man prevailed over a city of warriors,”¹⁸ this is Moses, “and he brought down its mighty stronghold.”¹⁹ See the Yalkut Shimoni, remez 959.

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¹⁵ Shabbat 115a.

¹⁶ Deut. 33:10.

¹⁷ Deut. 21:5.

¹⁸ Prov. 21:22.

¹⁹ Ibid.