

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter XIII: Shemot (Ex. 1:1–6:1)

### Essay 7. Why Moses was placed in a basket of bulrushes

**סוטה** פֶּרֶק קמ"א "וּתְקַח-לוֹ תֵבֶת גְּמָא" מֵאֵי שְׁנָא גּוּמָא אָמַר ר' אֶלְעָזָר מִפְּאֵן לְצַדִּיקִים שְׁמֻמוֹנִם תְּבִיב לֵהֶם יוֹתֵר מִגּוּפָם. וְשָׁם בְּתוֹסְפוֹת חֶמֶר מִבְּחוּץ וְנֹזֶת מִבְּפָנִים פֶּרֶשׁ [רַבִּי] בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בְּרַ קוֹלוּנִימוּס זֶה וְזֶה בְּתוֹךְ הַתֵּיבָה וְהַחֲ[ ]מֶר הָיָה מִכֶּסֶה אֶת הַנֹּזֶת אֲבָל בְּחוּץ לֹא זִיפְפָה וְשֵׁלֵא יִרְגִישׁוּ פִי הַגּוּמָא דֹּמָה לְקִנְיָה הַיְאֹר וְלֹא יִבְחִינוּ הַתֵּיבָה בְּתוֹךְ קִנְיָה הַיְאֹר עַכ"ל. מִקְשִׁים לְפִי זֶה מְנַלֵּן דְּמֻמוֹנִם תְּבִיב מִדְּלִקְתָּה תֵּיבֵת גּוּמָא, דְּלִמָּא לְכַד לְקַחְתָּה תֵּיבֵת גּוּמָא מִפְּנֵי שְׁדוּמָה לְקִנְיָה הַיְאֹר כְּמוֹ שְׁפָתָיו הַתּוֹסְפוֹת.

### Tractate **Sotah**, 1<sup>st</sup> chapter:

“When she could hide him no longer, **she took a basket of bulrushes for him** and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile.”<sup>1</sup> **What is different** [about] **bulrushes** [that she decided to use them]? **Rabbi Elazar said: From here we learn that to the righteous their money is more precious to them than their bodies** [as she took an inexpensive material to build the basket].

- Sotah 12a

Note that money being precious does not imply stinginess; rather, the righteous value money because it represents honest labor and is therefore treated with care.

**There in Tosafot**, at the text beginning, “**bitumen on the outside and pitch on the inside**”), **Rabbi<sup>2</sup> explained in the name of Rabbi Shmuel bar Kalonymus<sup>3</sup>: both the bitumen and the pitch were inside the basket; the bitumen covered the pitch, but on the outside she did not apply pitch, so that [the Egyptians] would not sense it, for bulrush resembles the reeds of the Nile, and they would not notice the basket among the reeds of the Nile.**

**They ask, according to this Tosafot, from where do we derive that their money is precious to them, from the fact that she took a basket of bulrushes? Perhaps she took a basket of bulrushes because it resembles the reeds of the Nile, as Tosafot wrote, and not to save money.**

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<sup>1</sup> Ex. 2:3.

<sup>2</sup> The first edition read R”I, i.e., Rabbi Isaac ben Samuel of Dampierre, but the translator has corrected to “Rabbi,” i.e., Rabbi Shimshon of Falaise, 12<sup>th</sup> century, to match our edition of the Tosafot.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Shmuel ben Kalonymus, late 10<sup>th</sup>–early 11<sup>th</sup> century.

וְיִשׁ לְתַרְצֵן דְּאִיתָא בְּשִׁמּוֹת רַבָּה "וְעַתָּה לְכָה וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה" אָמַר ר' אֶלְעָזָר הַה"א שְׁבִסּוּף תִּיבָה לֹמַר אִם אֵין אַתָּה גּוֹאֲלִים אֵין אַחַר גּוֹאֲלִים. וּפִירָשׁ שָׁם הִיפָה תֵּאָר שְׂאִין הַטַּעַם מִפְּנֵי הַזְכוּת בְּלִבְד, שְׁהָרִי אֶפְשֵׁר שְׂיִגְאָלוּ בְּדוֹר אַחַר עַל יְדֵי זַכָּאֵי כְּמִשָּׁה, שְׂאָף עַל פִּי שְׂלָא קָם כְּמוֹהוּ הֵיִינוּ בְּנִבּוּאָה אֶבֶל בְּזָכוֹת קָם, וְכִדְאֶמְרֵינוּ אֵין דוֹר שְׂאִין בּוֹ כְּמִשָּׁה, וְעוֹד שְׂמוּאֵל הִיָּה שְׂקוּל כְּמִשָּׁה וְאֶהְרֵן וְכו'. אֶלָּא הַטַּעַם הוּא לְפִי שְׁהַמְזָלוֹת הֵיִו עוֹזְרוֹת לְמַצְרַיִם לְשַׁעֲבֵד הָעֶבְדִּים וְכו' וְהִיָּה צְרִיךְ שְׂתַהֲיָה הַגְּאֻלָּה עַל יַד מִשָּׁה, שְׂמִלְבַּד זְכוּתוֹ נוֹלַד בְּמִזְל טוֹב לְהַכְנִיעַ הַמְזָלוֹת שֶׁל הַמַּצְרַיִים, וְזֶהוּ "וַתֵּרָא אֹתוֹ כִּי־טוֹב הוּא". וְלִכֵּן אִם לֹא הֵיִו נְגָאֲלִים עַל יַד מִשָּׁה שְׂנוֹלַד בְּמִזְל תְּקִיף וּמְצוּרָף לְזֶה זְכוּת הַגְּדוּל לְהַכְנִיעַ הַמַּעֲרָכָה שֶׁל הַמְזָלוֹת שׁוֹב לֹא הִיָּה נִמְצָא כְּמוֹהוּ שְׂיַחְוִבְרוּ שְׂתֵי עֲנֻגִים יַסַּד, וְהַקַּב"ה לֹא יִשְׁדַּד הַמַּעֲרָכָה אֶלָּא בְּזָכוֹת גְּדוּל יִתֵּר מְאוֹד עַכ"ל, וְעֵי"ש בְּאוּרְךָ.

**It can be answered by what is brought in Ex. Rabbah 3:4: “ ‘Now, go [לכה] [*lecha*] and I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt.’<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Elazar said: the letter *heh* at the end of the word *lecha* indicates: if you do not redeem them, no one else will redeem them.”** I.e., one would have expected to see the verb לָךְ, *lech*, with no *heh* at the end of the word.

**The *Yefeh To'ar* explained there that the reason is not merely merit, for it would be possible for them to be redeemed in another generation by someone like Moses. For although none arose like him, that refers to prophecy, but in merit one did arise, as we say, “There is no generation without one like Moses,”<sup>5</sup> and furthermore Samuel was equivalent to Moses and Aaron, etc.<sup>6</sup> Rather, the reason is that the constellations were assisting the Egyptians in subjugating the slaves, and it was necessary that the redemption be through Moses, who, in addition to his merit, was born under a favorable constellation to subdue the constellations of the Egyptians, and this is the meaning of “The woman conceived and bore a son; and she saw he was good.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, if they had not been redeemed through Moses, who was born under a powerful constellation combined with great merit to subdue the astrological order, there would no longer be found one in whom these two matters were joined together. Then, the Holy One, Blessed be He, would not overturn the astrological order except through exceedingly great merit. See there at length.**

וְעַל כְּרַחֲמֵי לֹמַר שְׂמִזְלוֹ שֶׁל מִשָּׁה אָף עַל פִּי שְׁהִיָּה טוֹב וְתְקִיף לְהַכְנִיעַ כָּל הַמְזָלוֹת, מִכָּל מְקוֹם בְּמֵים לֹא הִיָּה מִזְלוֹ יָכוֹל לְשַׁלּוֹט, וְזֶהוּ שְׂאֶמְרוּ הָאֲצַטְגִּינִי[נִי]ם לְפַרְעֹה רוֹאִין שְׂמוֹשִׁיעֵן לוֹקָה בְּמֵים, וְגִזְרוּ "כָּל־הַבֵּן הַיְּלוּד" וְכו' כְּמוֹ שְׁהִיָּה סוֹפוֹ שְׂמַת עַל יְדֵי הַמֵּים.

**One must therefore say that Moses’ constellation, although it was good and powerful to subdue all the constellations, nevertheless could not prevail over the water. This is what the astrologers said to Pharaoh, that they saw their savior would be stricken by the water, and they decreed “every male child that is born, you shall throw into the river,”<sup>8</sup> just as in the end he died because of water, i.e., referring to the Waters of Meribah, where Moses was commanded to speak to the rock to bring forth water, but he instead struck the rock.<sup>9</sup>**

<sup>4</sup> Ex. 3:10.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. Rabbah 56:7.

<sup>6</sup> Tanchuma, Parashat Korach, §5.

<sup>7</sup> Ex. 2:2.

<sup>8</sup> Ex. 1:22.

<sup>9</sup> Num. 20:8–12.

ומעתה יש לדקדק למה עשתה יוכבד למשה הטיבה להניחו בתוכה ולא השליכתו ליאור כמו שהיו עושים האחרים, ולקטום בהקב"ה שניצלהו כמו שהיה מציל האחרים, כדאיתא בפרקי [ד] רבי אליעזר (פרק מ"ב) ר' שילא אומר כל הילדים שהשליכו ליאור לא מתו אלא היאור הפליט אותם למדבר מצרים וכו' ועיי"ש. אלא נדאי צריך לומר שהואיל שהיתה יוכבד יודעת שמזלו של משה אינו טוב במים כמו שפרסמו אצטגניני פרעה, אף על פי שהיתה יודעת שהיה מזלו טוב על כל המזלות כדכתיב "נתרא אתו כייטוב הוא" כגנזר לעיל, וחסשה להשליכו ליאור דהיכא דשכיח היזקא לא סמכינן אנפסא, ומשום הכי עשתה לו תיבה כדי להצילו מן המים.

**Now one must analyze why Jochebed made a basket for Moses and placed him inside it, and did not cast him into the Nile as the others were doing, and trust in the Holy One, Blessed be He, to save him, as He was saving the others. As it was stated in Pirkei de'Rabbi Eliezer (chapter 42): Rabbi Shayla says, all the children who were cast into the Nile did not die, but rather the Nile expelled them into the wilderness of Egypt, etc.; see there.**

**Rather, one must certainly say that Jochebed knew that Moses' constellation was not good with respect to the water, as the astrologers of Pharaoh publicized. Thus, even though she knew that his constellation was good with respect to all the constellations, as it is written "and she saw he was good," as above, she feared to cast him into the Nile. For where danger is common, we do not rely on a miracle.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, she made for him a basket in order to save him from the water.**

ומעתה קשה על יוכבד למה לקחה גומא שהיא דבר קל שהמים יכולים להכנס שם אף על פי שהיה שם ה[ח]מר והזפת. ויש לומר שלקחה גומא מפני שדומה לקנה היאור, כדי שהמקריים לא ירגישו ולא יתרגוהו. אבל צדיין קשה שהיה משה היה מזלו טוב נגד כל המקריים שבעולם ובנדאי שלא היה ניזוק משום אדם, והחשש אינו אלא מפני המים לפי שמזלו רע במים, והיה לה ליקח עץ יותר טוב וקשה שיעמוד נגד המים ולא לחוש לשאר המקריים, אלא נדאי צריך לומר שהטעם הוא מפני שהצדיקים חביב עליהם ממונם יותר מגופם, ופרש רש"י ע"ה שהביב עליהם ממונם שדמיו מועטין ואף על פי שהיה משתמר גופו יותר בשל עצים קשים ונקיים.

**Now it is difficult: why did Jochebed take bulrushes, which are a light material through which water can enter, even though there was bitumen and pitch there? One can say that she took bulrushes because they resemble the reeds of the Nile, so that the Egyptians would not sense it and kill him.**

**But there's still a question, for Moses' constellation was good against all contingencies in the world, and certainly he would not have been harmed by any person. The concern was only with respect to water, since his constellation was bad with respect to the water. She should therefore have taken better and harder wood that would withstand the water and not be concerned with other contingencies. Rather, one must certainly say that the reason is that to the righteous their money is more precious than their bodies. Rashi explained that their money is precious to them because [the bulrushes'] value is small, even though their bodies would be better protected by hard and strong woods.<sup>11</sup>**

<sup>10</sup> Kiddushin 39b.

<sup>11</sup> Rashi on Sotah 12a.

וְזָהוּ הַטַּעַם שֶׁהֵימָּן לֹא הִיָּה רוֹצֵה לְהִיּוֹת נִקְרָע מִפְּנֵי מֹשֶׁה, שֶׁהִשִּׁיב לוֹ מִפְּנֵי אִין אֲנִי נִקְרָע, עַד שֶׁנִּמְתַּן הַקַּב"ה מִיָּמֵינוּ עַל מִיָּנוּ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ ז"ל. וְקִשָּׁה וְהָא מִפְּנֵי אֶהְרֹן נִהְפְּכוּ הַמַּיִם לְדָם וּמִפְּנֵי מֹשֶׁה בָּאוּ כַּמָּה מַכּוֹת נֶגֶד הַטַּבֵּעַ, וְכֵּן הָיָה טַעֲמָה זֶה שֶׁל הַיָּם, וְכֵּן מִפְּנֵי שֶׁנִּקְרָא בְּדִקְוֵא מִפְּנֵי, אֲלֵא מִפְּנֵי שֶׁמִּזְלוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה לֹא הִיָּה טוֹב בְּמַיִם מִשּׁוֹם הִכִּי הִיָּה סוֹבֵר הַשָּׂר שֶׁל יָם שֶׁאִין לוֹ כַּח לְצוּוֹת עָלָיו.

**This is the reason that the sea did not want to split before Moses, for it replied to him, "Before you I will not split," until the Holy One, Blessed be He, placed His right hand upon Moses' right hand, as our [rabbis] of blessed memory said.<sup>12</sup>**

**This is difficult to understand. After all, because of Aaron, the waters were turned to blood, and because of Moses, many plagues contrary to nature came about. What, then, is this claim of the sea, and what is meant by "before you," which seems to indicate specifically "before you"? Rather, because Moses' constellation was not good with respect to the water, therefore the ministering angel of the sea thought that he had no power to command it.**

**וְאֶפְשָׁר שֶׁזֶהוּ הַטַּעַם שֶׁמִּשְׁבַּע שְׁמוֹת שֶׁהָיוּ לְמֹשֶׁה רַבְּנוּ ע"ה לֹא נִקְרָא אֲלֵא בְּשֵׁם מֹשֶׁה, לְפִי שֶׁשֵׁם זֶה מוֹרָה שֶׁיֵּשׁ לוֹ מִזְל טוֹב אֲף בְּמַיִם, שֶׁכְּשֶׁנִּיצוּל אֲזַעַל יַד בְּתִיָּה בַת פֶּרַעַה גָּבַר מִזְלוֹ אֲף נֶגֶד הַמַּיִם, וְלָכֵן קִרְאָתוֹ מֹשֶׁה כִּי מִן הַמַּיִם מִשִּׁיתָהוּ, כְּלוֹמַר מִן מִזְל הַמַּיִם מִשִּׁיתָהוּ שֶׁהִיָּה יָפָה מִזְלוֹ אֲף נֶגֶד הַמַּיִם.**

**Perhaps this is also the reason that of the seven names of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him,<sup>13</sup> he was called only by the name Moses, because this name indicates that he has a good constellation even with respect to water. For when he was saved then through Batya daughter of Pharaoh, his constellation prevailed even over the water. Therefore, she called him Moses, "for I drew him from the water," that is, from the constellation of water I drew him, so that his constellation would be favorable even with respect to water.**

**וּבְדִרְוֹ זֶה יוֹבֵן מֵה שֶׁפֶּרֶשׁ רַש"י עַל פְּסוּק "אָמַר אֶל־אֶהְרֹן קַח מַטֵּה וְנִטְהֵ־יָדָד" שֶׁמֹּשֶׁה לֹא הִפָּה אֶת הַיָּאוֹר בְּמַכַּת הַדָּם לְפִי שֶׁהָיוּ עָלָיו כְּשֶׁהוֹשְׁלָה לְתוֹכּוֹ. וְקִשָּׁה שֶׁהַיָּאוֹר לֹא הָיוּ עָלָיו כְּלוֹם שֶׁהָיוּ הַתִּיבָה וְהַיָּם וְהַיָּם הֵם הָיוּ עָלָיו, אֲלֵא וְדַאי צָרִיף לוֹמַר כְּנִזְכָּר לְעֵיל שֶׁזֶּאת הַתִּיבָה לֹא הִיָּתָה כְּדַאִית לְהַצִּילוֹ מִן הַמַּיִם, וּמִכַּל שֶׁכֵּן שֶׁלֹּא הִיָּה מִזְלוֹ טוֹב בְּמַיִם וְהַיָּאוֹר הִיָּה יָכוֹל לְהַזִּיקוֹ וְלֹא הַזִּיקוֹ, וְיוֹכְבֵּד עֲשָׂתָה זֹאת הַתִּיבָה לְפִי שֶׁחֲסָה עַל מְמוֹנָהּ, כְּנִזְכָּר לְעֵיל.**

**In this way, one can understand what Rashi explained on the verse "Say to Aaron: Take your staff and stretch out your hand,"<sup>14</sup> that Moses did not strike the Nile with the plague of blood because it had protected him when he was cast into it.**

**This is difficult, for the Nile did not actively protect him at all; rather, the basket and the bitumen and the pitch protected him. Rather, one must certainly say as mentioned above that this basket was not sufficient to save him from the water. That is all the more so since his constellation was not good with respect to water. and the Nile could have harmed him but did not. Jochebed made this basket because she had pity on her property, as mentioned above.**

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<sup>12</sup> Ex. Rabbah 21:6.

<sup>13</sup> Ex. Rabbah 40:4.

<sup>14</sup> Ex. 7:19.