

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XIV: Va'era (Ex. 6:2–9:35)

Essay 14. G-d doesn't want praise from the wicked

פְּסוּק "בַּעֲבוּר הַרְאָתָה אֶת־כַּחַי וְלַמַּעַן סֵפֶר שְׁמִי". קִשָּׁה לְמַה לֹּא אָמַר "תְּסַפֵּר" כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר "הַרְאָתָה". וַיֵּשׁ לֹאמֵר דְּבִשְׁלָמָא הַגְּבוּרָה הִיָּה רוֹצֵה שְׁיַפְיִיר בָּהּ פְּרַעֲהַ הַרְשָׁע, אָבֵל הַשְּׁבַח לֹא הִיָּה רוֹצֵה שְׁיַתְּנֶהוּ לוֹ פְּרַעֲהַ, כִּי "תִּהְיֶינָהּ בְּקִהְל חֲסִידִים" כְּתִיב. וַאֲיֵנוּ תְּפִיץ הַקֶּב"ה בְּקִיּוּסוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם רָשָׁע, כִּי "וְלִרְשָׁע אָמַר אֱלֹהִים מִה־לֵּךְ לְסַפֵּר חֲקָיו" וְכוּ', וְלָכֵן אָמַר "וְלַמַּעַן סֵפֶר שְׁמִי" כְּלוּמַר שְׁיִשְׁרָאֵל יִסְפְּרוּ תִּהְיֶינָהּ.

After the sixth plague, Moses is ordered to return to Pharaoh and to tell him that G-d said: "I could have stretched forth My hand and stricken you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been removed from the earth" (Ex. 9:15). The next **verse** continues: "Nevertheless, I have spared you for this reason: **in order to show you My power, and in order that My name may be declared** throughout the world" (Ex. 9:16). **It is difficult** to understand **why [Scripture] didn't say "you will declare"** and instead uses the passive form "may be declared." The active form, "**you will declare**" would seem to be more appropriate as a follow up, **as [the verse] says "to show you."** **One can say that is fine, that the fifth Sefira (attribute or emanation) of *Gevurah* wanted the wicked Pharaoh to recognize it, as emblematic of G-d's strength,¹ but "the praise" did not want to be delivered to G-d by Pharaoh, for it is written, "Hallelujah, sing to the L-rd a new song: His praises in the congregation of the faithful" (Ps. 149:1). But a wicked man such as Pharaoh, an idolator, is hardly one of G-d's faithful. Indeed, **the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not desire the praise of an evil man, because it says, "And to the wicked, G-d said: 'Who are you to recite My laws?' "** (Ps. 50:16). **Therefore, [Scripture] says "and in order that My name may be declared," as if to say that Israel will tell His praise.****

Thus, the verse now makes sense. The Egyptians were spared (for the moment) so that G-d could demonstrate His power to them (and to the world). G-d wanted His name to be praised throughout the world, but not by the wicked Egyptians. Therefore, the verse shifts to the passive form "may be declared," to clarify that "My name may be declared throughout the world [by Israel]" instead of saying "you [wicked Pharaoh] will declare My name throughout the world."

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¹ *Gevurah* (גְּבוּרָה) (strength), is typically understood as representing strict justice.