

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XIV: Va'era (Ex. 6:2–9:35)

Essay 4. Why Israel wouldn't listen

פסוק "הן בני-ישראל לא שמעו אלי ואיך ישמעני פרעה ואני ערל שפתים". פירוש רש"י: זה אחד מעשרה קל וחומר שבתורה. מקשים העולם שהפרכא מבוארת, מה לבני ישראל שפן היה להם הקוצר רוח, כדכתיב "ולא שמעו אל-משה מקצר רוח ומעבדה קשה". ועוד קשה "ואני ערל שפתים", דמה צורך לזה הטעם הנוסף על הקל וחומר, ובקל וחומר עצמו אינו נכנס, שמה שלא שמעו ישראל לא היה מחמת שהיה ערל שפתים. ועוד מקשים על פסוק "הן לא-יאמינו לי", דמהיכא בא הסלקא דעתך למשה שלא יאמינו ישראל.

There is a verse: **“Behold, the children of Israel did not listen to me; how then will Pharaoh listen to me, when I am of uncircumcised lips.”**¹ Rashi explained: **This is one of the ten *a fortiori* arguments that is in the Torah.**

Question 1: **People raise the difficulty that the refutation of Moses’ *a fortiori* argument is obvious: what comparison can be made between Pharaoh and the children of Israel as far as not listening to Moses? For [the Israelites] had crushed spirits, as it is written, “And they did not listen to Moses because of crushed spirits and hard labor.”**² I.e., according to this argument, Pharaoh did not have crushed spirits, so maybe he would listen? But this argument seems counterintuitive, as why would a strong Pharaoh listen to an argument to free his slaves? Indeed, *Zera Shimshon* will explain that the crushed spirits are mentioned for a different reason, and that this was not why the Israelites rejected Moses’ message.

Question 2: **Another difficulty is the phrase “when I am of uncircumcised lips.” What need is there for this additional reason beyond the *a fortiori* argument, especially since it does not enter into the *a fortiori* itself, for Israel’s failure to listen was not due to Moses’ being of uncircumcised lips?**

Question 3: **They also ask about the verse “What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me, but say, ‘the L-rd did not appear to you.’”**³ **From where did Moses arrive at the assumption that Israel would not believe him?**

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¹ Ex. 6:12.

² Ex. 6:9.

³ Ex. 4:1.

וְנִקְדִים מֵהַ שְׁאֲמָרוּ וְ"לִ בְּפֶרֶק קָמָא דְבִרְכוֹת "דְּבִרְנָא בְּאֲזִנֵי הָעָם וַיִּשְׁאַלוּ" וְכוּ' לֵךְ אָמַר לָהֶם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּבִקְשָׁה מִכֶּם, שְׁאַלוּ "אִישׁ מֵאַת רַעְהוּ" וְכוּ' כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יֵאמַר אוֹתוֹ צְדִיק "וַעֲבָדוּם וַעֲנוּ אִתְּם" קַיִים בְּהֶם, "וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יֵצְאוּ בְּרִכְשׁ גְּדוֹל" לֹא קַיִים בְּהֶם. וְאַף כָּאֵן מְקֻשִׁים אִם כְּבָר הַבְּטִים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שְׁאַחַר שְׁנִתְקַיִים "וַעֲבָדוּם" וְכוּ' יֵצְאוּ בְּרִכְוֹשׁ גְּדוֹל, לְמַה הוּצְרָךְ לְתַחְבּוּלָה זֹו שְׁנִרְאִית כְּמוֹ עֲרָמָה וּמְרָמָה. הִנֵּה לוֹ לִיתֵן לָהֶם רְכוּשׁ גְּדוֹל בְּפִירוּשׁ. וְעוֹד מֵהוּ שֶׁלֹּא יֵאמַר אוֹתוֹ צְדִיק, שְׁנִרְאֵה שְׁעוֹשֶׂה כֵן כְּדֵי שְׁאַבְרָהֶם לֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ תַרְעוּמָת, וְהָא בְּלָאוּ הִכִּי נִמְי הִנֵּה מְחַוֵּיב הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא כֹּל יָכוֹל לְקַיִים דְּבָרוֹ שֶׁהַבְּטִים נִגְם "אַת־הַגּוֹי" וְכוּ' וְאַחַר כֵּךְ "יֵצְאוּ" וְכוּ'.

We must first introduce what [the rabbis] of blessed memory said in the first chapter of Berakhot (9a):

“Speak, please, in the ears of the people, and let them ask each man from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor, objects of silver and gold.”⁴ . . . The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: I beseech you, **go and tell Israel: I beseech you; let them ask “each man from his neighbor** and each woman from her neighbor” to borrow vessels of silver and vessels of gold from the Egyptians, **so that that righteous person, [Abraham,] will not say: [G-d] fulfilled [His pronouncement]: “[Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs,] and they will be enslaved and oppressed [four hundred years],”⁵ [but G-d] did not fulfill [His pronouncement]: “but I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and afterward, they will leave with great wealth.”⁶**

- Berakhot 9a-9b

Here too they ask: if the Holy One, Blessed be He, already promised that after “they enslaved them” etc., they would go out with great wealth, why was there need for this stratagem, to “borrow” silver and gold vessels without planning to return them, which appears to involve cunning and deceit? He could have given them great wealth explicitly.

Furthermore, what is meant by “so that that righteous one should not say,” which seems to imply that He does this so that Abraham should not have a complaint? Yet in any case, the Holy One, Blessed be He, who is omnipotent, was obligated to fulfill His word that He promised, “but I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve and afterward, they will leave with great wealth.”

⁴ Ex. 11:2.

⁵ Gen. 15:13.

⁶ Gen. 15:14.

ולתרוץ הפל יש לדקדק שבכל פעם שמזכיר בפרשה שרוצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לגאול את ישראל ממצרים, מזכיר נמי הלחץ והשעבוד [ה]קשה שהכבידו עליהם המצרים. וכן הנה בתחלת דבורו של הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה: "ראה ראיתי את-עני עמי" וכו', "ואת-צעקתם" וכו', "כי ידעתי את-מכאביו". וקשה, מה צריך לתלות טעם הגאולה בצרת ישראל בגלות? תיפוק לי שבכר הגיעה השעה שיגאלו. ואם לא הגיעה השעה לגאלם, מה הוא זה שאמר "פקוד פקדתי", והא עדיין אינו זמן הפקידה? אלא ודאי צריך לומר שלפי שהיה להם קושי השעבוד יש סברא לומר שהשלים המגן, כמו שכתבו המפרשים.

To resolve all of this, one must be precise that every time the parasha mentions that the Holy One, Blessed be He, wishes to redeem Israel from Egypt, it also mentions the pressure and the harsh bondage that the Egyptians imposed upon them. So it was at the beginning of the Holy One, Blessed be He, words to Moses: "I have surely seen the affliction of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of their sufferings."⁷

It is difficult to understand this: what need is there to base the reason for redemption on Israel's suffering in exile? Is it not enough that the time for their redemption had arrived? If the time had not arrived to redeem them, what is meant by what He said, "I have surely remembered you and of what is being done to you in Egypt,"⁸ when it is still not the time of remembrance, as four hundred years had not passed? Rather, it must certainly be said that since the bondage was so harsh, there is reason to say that the term of Exile was completed, as the commentators have written.

אמנם זה נחא כנגד מדת הרחמים, שבשעה צדק ופקוד וקול "ורב-חסד" משה כלפי חסד. אבל מדת הדין יש לה לעולם פתחון פה לומר שעדיין לא נשלם המגן. ומשום הכי כל פעם שמזכיר גאולתם של ישראל מזכיר נמי קושי השעבוד, כלומר שנה גרם להוציאם ממצרים, שאפילו נימא שהקושי אינו משלים, עם כל זה צריכים הם לצאת מתחת יד מצרים לפי שרדה בהם בפרך שלא כדיו. וכמו שהארבנו בזה לעיל על הפסוק "למה הרעתה לעם" וכו', "ובגד חזקה וגרשם מארצו", ועיין שם.

Actually, this is fine according to the Attribute of Mercy, *rachamim*, i.e., compassion operating within judgment, for when a matter is doubtful and balanced, "[He who is] 'and abundant in kindness'⁹ tilts [the scales] in favor of kindness [so that people who are borderline won't have to pass through Gehenna]."¹⁰

But on the other hand, the Attribute of Strict Justice always has an opening to argue that the term of Exile has not yet been completed.

⁷ Ex. 3:7.

⁸ Ex. 3:16.

⁹ Ex. 34:6.

¹⁰ Rosh Hashana 17a.

Therefore, every time Israel's redemption is mentioned, the harshness of the bondage is also mentioned, as if to say that this caused their departure from Egypt. For even if we say that the harshness does not complete the term, nevertheless they must leave from under Egypt's hand, since Egypt ruled over them unlawfully with crushing labor. As we have explained at length earlier on the verse "Why have You done evil to this people,"¹¹ "and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land."¹² See there, parashat Shemot, Essay 15.

That is, the crushed spirit of Israel was not stated by the Torah as the reason Israel refused to listen to Moses. Rather, the crushed spirit, together with the unprecedented harshness of the bondage, is what allowed the exile to be shortened. Since Egypt went beyond what was decreed, the remaining years of exile were, as it were, consumed by the intensity of the suffering.

וְלִכְּנֹן מִתְחַלְּלָה אֲמַר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמִשְׁהָ: "רְאֵה רְאִיתִי אֶת־עַנְי עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־צַעֲקָתָם" וְכוּ', "וְנֹאֲרַד לְהַצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וְלְהַצִּילוֹ מִן הָאֲרֶץ הַהִוא" וְכוּ'. כְּלוּמַר, שְׁלֹפֵי שְׂרָדָה בְּהֵם בְּפָרָךְ אֲנִי רוֹצֵה לְהַצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם, וְלִפְחוֹת לְהַצִּילוֹתוֹ מִן הָאֲרֶץ הַהִוא דְּנֹקָא, דְּהֵינּוּ שְׁלֵא יִשְׁלִימוּ הַגְּלוּת שָׁם אֲלָא שְׁיִלְכוּ בְּגְלוּיּוֹת אַחֲרוֹת. וְכֵן נִמְי בְּסֻמוּף אָמַר: "הִנֵּה צַעֲקַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל" וְכוּ', "וְגַם־רְאִיתִי אֶת־הַלַּחֲסִי" וְכוּ', "וְאֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי לֹא־יִתֵּן אֶתְכֶם מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְהַלִּיף וְלֹא בְּיַד חֲזָקָה". וּפְרַשׁ רַש"י: כֹּל עוֹד שְׂאִין אֲנִי מֵרְאֶה לוֹ יְדֵי חֲזָקָה וְכוּ'. כְּלוּמַר, פְּרַעַה יִהְיֶה לוֹ פְּתַחוֹן פֶּה לוֹמַר שְׁקוּשֵׁי הַשְּׁעֵבוּד לֹא הַשְּׁלִים וְלֹא יִתֵּן אוֹתָם לְהַלּוֹף. וְאֲנִי אָבֵא עֲלֵיו בְּיַד חֲזָקָה בְּדַרְךְ מִמֶּה נִפְשָׁד, שְׁאֲפִילוּ תִּימָא שְׁלֵא הַשְּׁלִים, עִם כֹּל זֶה רָדָה בְּהֵם בְּפָרָךְ וְשְׁלֵא כַּדִּין וְצָרִיף שְׁיִשְׁלַח אוֹתָם וְיִשְׁלִימוּ בְּמִקוֹמוֹת אַחֲרִים.

Therefore, at the outset, the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: "I have surely seen the affliction of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry," "and I will come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land."¹³ That is as if to say, that since Egypt ruled over them with crushing labor, I wish to rescue them from the hand of Egypt, and at least to bring them up from that land specifically. That is, that they should not complete the exile there but should go to other exiles. Likewise, shortly thereafter, He said: "Now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me; and I have seen the oppression by which the Egyptians oppress them,"¹⁴ "Yet I know that the king of Egypt will let you go only because of a strong hand."¹⁵ Rashi explains: as long as I do not show him My strong hand, etc., meaning that Pharaoh would have an opening to claim that the harshness of the bondage did not complete the term and thus he would not let them go. But I will come upon him with a strong hand in a way that covers all possibilities: even if you say that it did not complete the term, nevertheless he ruled over them unlawfully with crushing labor, and therefore he must send them out, and they will complete the Exile in other places.

¹¹ Ex. 5:22.

¹² Ex. 6:1.

¹³ Ex. 3:8.

¹⁴ Ex. 3:9.

¹⁵ Ex. 3:19.

וְזֶהוּ "פְּקֹד פְּקֹדֹתַי אֲתֶכֶם וְאֶת־הַעֲשׂוּי לְכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם". "פְּקֹד פְּקֹדֹתַי" מִצַּד אֶחָד, דְּהֵינּוּ שְׁלֹפֵי מִדַּת הַחֶסֶד קוֹשֵׁי הַשְּׁעָבוֹד הַשְּׁלִים הַמְּגֻנָּן. וְאִם מִדַּת הַדִּין תִּקְטָרְג שְׁלֹא הַשְּׁלִים, הָא אֵיכָא "וְאֶת־הַעֲשׂוּי לְכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם", שְׁרָדָה בְּהֶם בְּפָרָד. וְלִפִּי שְׂאִינָה טַעֲנָה בְּרוּרָה אִם קוֹשֵׁי הַשְּׁעָבוֹד הַשְּׁלִים אוֹ לֹא, אִין מְקוּם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְטַעוֹן מִהַמְצָרִיִּים בְּטַעֲנַת וְדַאי הַרְכוּשׁ הַגְּדוֹל שֶׁהִבְטִיחַ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְאַבְרָהָם, שְׁנֵה לֹא מִשְׁמַע אֲלֵא לְאַחַר הַשְּׁלֵמַת יְמֵי הַשְּׁעָבוֹד. וְהַמּוֹצִיא מִחֶבְרוֹ עָלָיו הַרְאָה. וּמִשׁוּם הַכִּי צָנָה עָלֵיהֶם הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שְׂיַעֲשׂוּ זֹאת הַתְּחֻבּוּלָה שְׂיִשְׁאַלּוּ מִמְצָרַיִם, וְאַחַר שְׂיִהְיֶה זֶה הַרְכוּשׁ בְּיַד יִשְׂרָאֵל יִהְיֶה נִקְרָאִים הַמְצָרִיִּים מוֹצִיאִים מִיָּדָם, וְעָלֵיהֶם הַרְאָה לֹאמֹר שְׁבֻדַּי קוֹשֵׁי הַשְּׁעָבוֹד לֹא הַשְּׁלִים.

This is the meaning of “I have surely remembered you and of what is being done to you in Egypt.” “I have surely remembered” from one side, namely, according to the Attribute of Kindness, *chesed*, i.e., unbounded beneficence, the harshness of the bondage completed the term of Exile.¹⁶ If the Attribute of Strict Justice denounces that it did not complete the term of Exile, there still remains “what is being done to you in Egypt,” that they ruled over them with crushing labor. It is not a clear claim whether the harshness of the bondage completed the term or not. Thus, Israel has no grounds to claim from the Egyptians, with a claim of certainty, the great wealth that the Holy One, Blessed be He, promised to Abraham. For that only applies after the completion of the days of bondage, and the burden of proof lies on the claimant.

Therefore, the Holy One, Blessed be He, commanded them to employ this stratagem, that they should ask from Egypt to borrow the vessels of silver and gold. Then, once this wealth would be in Israel’s possession, the Egyptians would be considered those who seek to take it from them, and the burden of proof would shift, and would lie upon them to show with certainty that the harshness of the bondage did not complete the term.

וּכְשֶׁשָּׁמַע מֹשֶׁה כֵּן אָמַר: "וְהֵן לֹא־יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי" וְכוּ'. דִּילְמָא לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי לֹאמֹר שְׁקוֹשֵׁי הַשְּׁעָבוֹד לֹא הַשְּׁלִים לְגַמְרִי, וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי לְשֹׂאֵל מִהַמְצָרִיִּים בְּזֹאת הַתְּחֻבּוּלָה, כִּי יֹאמְרוּ: "לֹא־נִרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ ה'", דְּהֵינּוּ מִדַּת הַרְחֻמִּים, שְׁבִמְדַת הַרְחֻמִּים בְּוֹדַי קוֹשֵׁי הַשְּׁעָבוֹד הַשְּׁלִים וְנִשׁ לְהֶם לְזַכּוֹת לְרְכוּשׁ גְּדוֹל בְּלִי שׁוּם עֲרָמָה. וְזֶהוּ שְׂאִמְרוּ "לֹא אֲשַׁמְרֶה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא כְּדֵי שְׁלֹא יֹאמֶר אוֹתוֹ צְדִיק "וְעַבְדוּם וְעָנּוּ אֲתֶם" קַיִים בְּהֶם. שְׁלֹפֵי מִדַּת הַחֶסֶד שֶׁהִיא מִיָּדָתוֹ שְׁלֵ אַבְרָהָם, קוֹשֵׁי הַשְּׁעָבוֹד הַשְּׁלִים, "וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יִצְאוּ בְּרַכְשׁ גְּדוֹל" לֹא קַיִים בְּהֶם.

When Moses heard this, he said, “What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me, but say, ‘the L-rd did not appear to you.’ ”

Question 3 asked from where Moses arrived at the assumption that Israel would not believe him. The answer is that he was thinking, **perhaps they will not believe me when I say that the harshness of the bondage did not fully complete the term, and they will not listen to my voice to ask from the Egyptians through this stratagem. For they will say, “The L-rd did not appear**

¹⁶ I.e., the *Zera Shimshon* refers in this essay to both the Attribute of Kindness (*chesed*), meaning giving beyond what is deserved, and the Attribute of Mercy (*rachamim*), meaning softening judgment rather than canceling it.

to you,” meaning the Attribute of Mercy represented by the Tetragrammaton. That is, it is according to the Attribute of Mercy that the harshness of the bondage certainly completed the term, and they deserve to receive great wealth without any stratagem.

This is what the [rabbis] of blessed memory said, that the Holy One, Blessed be He, said, “so that that righteous person, [Abraham,] will not say: [G-d] fulfilled [His pronouncement]: “[Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs,] and they will be enslaved and oppressed [four hundred years],” [but G-d] did not fulfill [His pronouncement]: “but I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and afterward, they will leave with great wealth.” For according to the Attribute of Kindness, which is the Attribute of Abraham, the harshness of the bondage completed the term, but “and afterward, they will go out with great wealth,” He did not fulfill for them.

This answers Question 1, as to whether the crushed spirits had led the Israelites to disregard Moses, whereas perhaps Pharaoh would listen to him. It was not the crushed spirits that led the Israelites to disregard Moses, but the theological concern that the term of four hundred years of Exile promised to Abraham had not yet been fulfilled. Furthermore, if it were to be cut short, they were uncertain whether the great wealth promised would be delivered.

וכן נמי אמר הכתוב: "וגם אני שמעתי את־נאקת בני ישראל אשר מצרים מעבדים אתם ואזכר" וכו'. "לכן אמר לבני־ישראל" וכו', "והוצאתי" וכו'. וקאמר הכא ארבע לשונות לשונות של גאולה: "והצלתני", "והוצאתי" וכו', פנגד ארבע גלויות אחרות, כדי לרמוז שזאת הגאולה אינה שלימה, שהרי קושי השעבוד לא השלים לגמרי, רק שרופצה להוציאם ממצרים ואחר כך ישלימו בגלויות אחרות. וכן שלח נמי לומר לפרעה: "בא דבר אל־פרעה" וכו', "וישלח את־בני־ישראל מארצו", שישלחם מארצו אפילו שיש להם להשתעבד אחר כך.

Similarly, Scripture says: “I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.”¹⁷ “Say therefore to the children of Israel, I am the L-rd, **I will take you out** from the labors of the Egyptians **and save you** from their bondage; **I will redeem you** with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. And **I will take you** to be My people, and I will be your G-d.”¹⁸ Here it states four expressions of redemption: “I will take you out,” “and save,” “and I will redeem,” “and I will take you.” These correspond to four other exiles, viz, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, to hint that this redemption is not complete, since the harshness of the bondage did not fully complete the term, but rather He wishes to take them out of Egypt, and afterward they will complete the exile in other exiles. Likewise, he was sent to say to Pharaoh: “Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites depart from his land,”¹⁹ that he should send them out of his land, even though they would later be subjected to bondage again.

¹⁷ Ex. 6:5.

¹⁸ Ex. 6:6–7.

¹⁹ Ex. 6:11.

וּכְשֶׁדִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה כֵּן אֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁמְעוּ לְמֹשֶׁה, שֶׁהִטְעַם שֶׁל גְּאוּלָּתָם יִהְיֶה מִחֲמַת קוֹצֵר הָרוּחַ וְהַעֲבֹדָה הַקָּשָׁה שֶׁל הַמִּצְרָיִים, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּרְאָה מֵאַרְבַּע לְשׁוֹנוֹת שֶׁל גְּאוּלָּה שֶׁיֵּשׁ לָהֶם לְהַשְׁלִים. וְלָכֵן אָמַר מֹשֶׁה לְפָנָיו הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: "הֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא־שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי" לְהַגְאֵל מִחֲמַת הַטְּעַם דְּקוֹשֵׁי הַשְּׁעִבּוּד לֹא הַשְׁלִים, וְאִיךָ יִשְׁמְעֵנִי פִּרְעֹה? וְהִשְׁתָּא אֲתֵי שְׁפִיר הַקַּל וְחָמָר וְלִיכָא תוּ לְמִפְרָךְ מִיָּדִי.

Question 1 asked what comparison could be made between Pharaoh and the children of Israel as far as ignoring Moses, for the Israelites had crushed spirits, whereas Pharaoh did not.

When Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel, they did not listen to Moses, since the reason for their redemption would be on account of the crushed spirits and the hard labor imposed by the Egyptians. This is implied by the four expressions of redemption that they would still need to complete the exile. Therefore, Moses said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: “Behold, the children of Israel did not listen to me”²⁰ to be redeemed, on the grounds that the harshness of the bondage did not complete the term; “how then will Pharaoh listen to me?” Now the *a fortiori* argument between Pharaoh and the children of Israel works well, with no further refutation.

ומה שהוסיף הכתוב: "ונאני ערל שפתיים", פנונתו לומר נאין אני יכול לומר לפרעה שקושי השעבוד השלים, או נימא שהגיע זמן הגאולה, דאם כן לא הייתי ערל שפתיים. אלא ודאי מדאני ערל שפתיים מוכח שעדיין לא נתקנו ישראל ואינם ראויים לגאולה. והיינו שבמתן תורה נתרפא משה, לפי שאז בטלה הזיהומא מאבותינו, ואם לא היו חוטאים בעגל הייתה להם חירות משעבוד מלכות.

Question 2 asked why Moses added to the *a fortiori* argument between Pharaoh and the children of Israel by adding, “when I am of uncircumcised lips.”

As for what Scripture adds, “when I am of uncircumcised lips,” its intent is to say: I cannot tell Pharaoh that the harshness of the bondage completed the term, nor that the time of redemption has arrived, for if so, I would not be of uncircumcised lips. Rather, certainly from the fact that I am of uncircumcised lips, it is evident that Israel has not yet been rectified and they are not worthy of redemption. This is because at the giving of the Torah, Moses was healed,²¹ for then the impurity was removed from our ancestors. If they had not sinned with the Golden Calf, they would have attained freedom from subjugation to foreign kingdoms.

With this understanding, the mention of uncircumcised lips is not an expression of personal inadequacy, but a theological proof.

²⁰ Ex. 6:11.

²¹ Ex. 6:7.

ונודע שישקראל במצרים תיקנו הפגם של ארבעה דורות: אנוש, מבול, סדום, הפלגה, והוא ראשי תבות של "המוציא אתכם מתחת סבלות" וכו'. וכנגד זה גם משה רבנו עליו השלום תימן אף הוא, לפי שהיה שקול כנגד כל ישראל, וכמו שכתבו המקובלים. כי כנגד ים אוקיינוס שהציף שלישו של עולם בדור אנוש, כאן נגזר "כל־הבן הילוד היארה תשליכהו". כנגד דור המבול שאמר לגם "עשה לה תבת עצי־גפר" וכו', בכאן "נתקח־לו תבת גמא" וכו'. וכנגד אנשי סדום אשר הכו בסגורים, היתה תיבתו של משה כלה סגורה וישב שם בחשך, מה שלא היה כן תיבתו של נח. וכנגד דור הפלגה שנתבלבלה לשונם, היה משה ערל שפתיים.

It is known that Israel in Egypt rectified the blemish of four generations, Enosh [אנוש], the Flood [מבול], Sodom [סדום], and the Dispersion [הפלגה]. These are the initial letters of the phrase “Who freed you from the labors [מתחת סבלות] of the Egyptians.”²² Corresponding to this, Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, also rectified them, for he was equal to all of Israel, as the Kabbalists have written.²³ For corresponding to the Ocean Sea that flooded a third of the world in the generation of Enosh, here it was decreed, “Every boy that is born you shall cast into the river.”²⁴ Corresponding to the generation of the Flood, for which it was said to Noah, “Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood,”²⁵ here it says, “And she took for him an ark of reeds.”²⁶ Corresponding to the people of Sodom who were struck with blindness,²⁷ Moses’ ark was completely closed and he sat there in darkness,²⁸ which was not the case with Noah’s ark, which had a window.²⁹ Corresponding to the generation of the Dispersion, whose language was confused, Moses was of uncircumcised lips.

ושפיר קאמר פרעה: אם האמת שפכר נתקנו כל הפגמים והגיע זמן הגאולה, לא היתה ערל שפתיים. שפתיים הם המנין, היו נתקנים לגמרי כל הפגמים, וכל הזיהומא היתה מתבטלת אף קודם מתן תורה.

Thus Pharaoh argued well: if it were true that all the blemishes had already been rectified and the time of redemption had arrived, you would not be of uncircumcised lips. For had they completed the term of Exile there, all the blemishes would have been fully rectified, and all impurity would have been nullified even before the giving of the Torah.

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²² Deut. Rabbah 1:1.

²³ Rabbi Menachem Azaria da Fano (“Rema M’Pano”) (1548–1620), Italian Kabbalist and commentator on the Talmud. *Asara Ma’amarot, Heker Din* 3:22 (Venice 1597).

²⁴ Ex. 1:22.

²⁵ Gen. 6:14.

²⁶ Ex. 2:3.

²⁷ Gen. 19:11.

²⁸ The translator has not identified a source for this. In fact, pointing in the opposite direction, Sotah 12a and Ex. Rabbah 1:20 say that when Moses was born, the house became filled with light, and Rashi interprets Ex. 2:6 (based on Sotah 12b) that when Pharaoh’s daughter opened the ark, she saw that the Shechinah was with Moses.

²⁹ Gen. 6:16.