

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter XV: Bo (Ex. 10:1–13:16)

Essay 24. Haggadah: Jacob's descent to Egypt was not voluntary

"**וַיֵּרֶד** מִצְרַיִם" — אָנוּס עַל פִּי הַדְּבַיִר. "וַיֵּרֶד" שֵׁם — מְלַמֵּד שֶׁלֹּא יָרַד יַעֲקֹב אֲבֵינוּ לְהִשְׁתַּקֵּעַ בְּמִצְרַיִם אֲלָא לְגוּר שָׁם, שְׁנֵאמַר: "וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִם" — אָנוּס עַל פִּי הַדְּבַיִר, כְּמוֹ שֶׁעָשָׂה בְּשָׂרָה חֲלוּקוֹת וּבְשָׂרָה הַתִּיבּוֹת שֶׁל הַפְּסוּקָה, וְאִם תֹּאמַר שֶׁלֹּא יָשׁ רָאִיהָ מִהַפְּסוּקָה, אִם כֵּן מִנֵּין לוֹ?

**“And [Jacob] went down to Egypt”<sup>1</sup>—[he was] helpless on account of the word [of G-d, for He had told Abraham that his descendants would have to go into exile]. “And he sojourned there”<sup>2</sup>—[this] teaches that Jacob, our father, didn’t go down to settle in Egypt, but rather [only] to reside there, as it is stated: “And they said to Pharaoh, ‘To sojourn in the land have we come, since there is not enough pasture for the flocks of your servant, since the famine is severe in the land of Canaan, and now please let your servants stay in the Land of Goshen’ ” (Gen. 47:4).**

“With meager numbers”—as it is stated, ‘With seventy souls did your ancestors come down to Egypt, and now the L-rd your G-d has made you as numerous as the stars of the sky’ ” (Deut. 10:22).

“And he became there a nation”—[this] teaches that Israel [became] distinguishable there. “Great, powerful”—as it is stated, ‘And the Children of Israel multiplied and swarmed and grew numerous and strong, most exceedingly and the land became full of them.’ ” (Ex. 1:7).

“And numerous”—as it is stated, ‘I have given you to be numerous as the vegetation of the field, and you increased and grew and became highly ornamented, your breasts were set and your hair grew, but you were naked and barren’ ” (Ezek. 16:7).

- Haggadah, Magid section, First Fruits Declaration

**It is difficult to see why [the author of the Haggadah] didn’t bring a proof from Scripture on the fragment, “ ‘And [Jacob] went down to Egypt’—he was helpless on account**

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. 26:5: “You shall then recite as follows before the L-rd your G-d: ‘My father was a fugitive Aramean. *He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and he sojourned there*; but there he became a great, powerful, and populous nation.’ ”

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

of the word,” as he did with the remaining parts and in the remaining words of the verse. That is, for the fragment, “with meager numbers,” the author cites Deut. 10:22 as proof. For the fragment, “and he sojourned there,” he cites Gen. 47:4 as proof. For the fragment, “but he became there a nation, great and powerful,” the author cites Ex. 1:7 as proof. For the fragment, “and numerous,” the author cites Ezek. 16:7 as proof. Yet for the fragment, “And he went down to Egypt,” the author makes a statement, “[he was] helpless on account of the word,” but does not cite any Scripture. **If you say that there is no evidence from the verse, then from where does he [know it]?**

ונראה לתרץ דלא איצטריך פסוק וראיה על זה, דכוננת המגיד היא לומר שוירד מצרימה אגוס על פי הדבור נפקא לן מוירד שם מלמד שלא ירד וכו' שגאמר ויאמרו אל פרעה וכו', משום דאמרינו במדרש רבה על פסוק "וירד הוירד מצרימה", משל לפרה שמושכין אותה למקולין ולא היתה נמשכת, מה עשו הוליכו בנה לפניה והיא הולכת אחריו בעל פרהה שלא בטובתה. כך אמר הקב"ה הריני מושך בנו לפניי ואביו יעקב ילך אחריי בעל פרהו שלא בטובתו עכ"ל.

**It seems that to solve this it is not necessary to have a verse and a proof, for the intent of the [author of the Haggadah] is to say that “ ‘And [Jacob] went down to Egypt’—[he was] helpless on account of the word” is different from “ ‘And he sojourned there’—[this] teaches that he didn’t go down to settle etc.” For it says in Midrash (Gen.) Rabbah (86:2) on the verse, “and Joseph went down to Egypt,”<sup>3</sup> this is a parable, like a cow that [people] were pulling toward a butcher shop but she refused to be pulled [into it], what they did was lead her calf before her, and she walked after it involuntarily, and not for her own good. This is what the Holy One, Blessed be He, said, “Here I’m pulling his son [i.e., Joseph] before him, and [Joseph’s] father Jacob will come after him involuntarily, and not for his own good.”**

והקשה הנה תואר ודילמא מעשה שהיה כך היה, שבשביל שאחיו מכרו ליוסף בחטא ועון שלא מדעת ורצון הקב"ה, משום הכי נולד דרך מקרה שילך יעקב למצרים עכ"ל.

**The Yafeh To’ar<sup>4</sup> commentary on Gen. Rabbah rhetorically asks, “Perhaps this action happened because the brothers sold Joseph in sin and iniquity, without any knowledge or will of G-d; because of this the path was created that Jacob would go down to Egypt?”** But that is certainly impossible, as G-d is all-knowing, and while man has free will, G-d can also frustrate man’s plan if it is not in accordance with G-d’s will.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 39:1.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Samuel ben Isaac Ashkenazi Jaffe (d. late 16th century), rabbi of the Ashkenazi community of Constantinople. Yafeh To’ar was his commentary to the Midrash Rabbah: Genesis (Venice, 1597–1606); Exodus (Venice, 1597); and Leviticus (Constantinople, 1648).

ולכן אמר המגיד "נירד מצרימה"—אנוס על פי הדיבור, ואם תאמר הכל הנה דרך מקרה ומנין לנו שהנה אנוס על פי הדיבור, לכן סמיו ליה "ניגר שם"—מלמד שלא ירד יעקב אבינו להשתקע וכו'. ואם הכל הנה דרך מקרה הנה לו לחזור, ולמה נשתקע שם, אלא נדאי שהכל הנה מרצון הקב"ה שיבא למצרים בדרך זו, כדאיתא במדרש פרשת וישב, "לכו וראו מפעלות אלהים" וכו' "הפך ים ליבשה" וכו' למה "וישנאו אתו"? כפי שיקרע הים לפניהם עכ"ל. ומכאן מוכח ששנאת אחיו ליוסף היתה ברצון הקב"ה ובשביל זה ירד יעקב אבינו למצרים, ולא הנה בדרך מקרה אלא הכל הנה מן הקב"ה.

**Therefore the [author of the Haggadah] said “ ‘And he went down to Egypt’—[he was] helpless on account of the word,” and if you’ll say everything was by chance and how do we [know] that “he was helpless on account of the word,” therefore juxtaposed to this is, “ ‘And he sojourned there’—[this] teaches that he didn’t go down to settle etc.” If everything was a coincidence, he would have returned, and why would he settle there? Rather, surely everything was the will of the Holy One, Blessed be He, that he would come to Egypt in this way, as is brought in the Midrash [Gen. Rabbah 84:8] on the parsha of Vayeishev. “Come and see the works of G-d”<sup>5</sup> etc. “He turned the sea into dry land”<sup>6</sup> etc. Why is it that “they hated him”<sup>7</sup>? So that the sea would be torn before them.<sup>8</sup> From this, it is proved that the brothers’ hatred of Joseph was by the will of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and because of this, our father Jacob descended to Egypt. It was not by chance, but rather everything was from the Holy One, Blessed be He.**

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<sup>5</sup> Ps. 66:5.

<sup>6</sup> Ps. 66:6.

<sup>7</sup> Gen. 37:4.

<sup>8</sup> I.e., G-d parted the Red Sea, and Israel walked through on dry ground. Gen. Rabbah 84:8 draws a parallel between the brothers’ tearing of Joseph’s coat of many colors into strips, as though torn by a wild beast, and G-d’s tearing the Red Sea into “strips,” providing a dry strip through which Israel could pass.