

Zera Shimshon

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Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter XVI: Beshalach (Ex. 13:17–17:16)

Essay 1. The end of Exile and the role of Pharaoh

"וַיְהִי בְשַׁלַּח פָּרְעֹה אֶת הָעָם" וכו'. קנשה למה לא אמר "וַיְהִי" כְּאֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיא אֱלֹהִים מִמִּצְרַיִם, כְּמוֹ שְׁאָמַר הַפְּתוּב "אֵל מוֹצִיאֵם מִמִּצְרַיִם", וּמָהוּ "כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא", וְלָמָּה הֵם שָׁנִי טְעָמִים, "כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא" "כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹהִים", וְעוֹד דְּקָדוּקִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם.

“And it came to pass when Pharaoh sent the people, G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was near; for G-d said, ‘The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt.’”¹

Question 1: **It is difficult to understand why it does not say “and it came to pass” when G-d brought them out of Egypt, as it says in the scripture “G-d took them out from Egypt”?**²

Question 2: **Also, what is meant by “although it was near”?**

Question 3: **Also, why there are two reasons, “although it was near” and “for G-d said”?**

Question 4: **Also, there are other grammatical points.**

וְנִשְׁ לֹמַר לְפִי שִׁישְׁרָאֵל צָעְקוּ אֵל ה' שִׁיוֹצִיאֵם מִמִּצְרַיִם, כְּדַכְתִּיב "וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן־הָעֶבֶדָה וַיִּזְעֲקוּ", וְעַקֵּר וְעַקֵּה זֶה הִיא לְפִי שִׁהִיוּ סוֹבְרִים שְׁנִשְׁלֵם הַקֶּץ בְּקוֹשֵׁי הַשְּׁעָבֹד, צָעְקוּ אֵל ה' שִׁיגְבִיר מִדַּת חֶסֶדוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם, וּכְשִׁשְׁמַע צָעְקֵתָם כְּדַכְתִּיב "הִנֵּה צָעַקְתָּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֵה אֵלַי", גִּרְאָה שֶׁהַסְּפִים לְסִבְרָתָם, וְאִם נִשְׁלֵם הַקֶּץ אֵין צוֹרֵךְ שֶׁפֶרְעֹה יַעֲשֶׂם בְּנֵי חוֹרִין, שֶׁהָרִי כִּינּוּן שֶׁהַגִּיעָה הַשְּׁעָה מֵעֲצָמָם הֵם בְּנֵי חוֹרִין, אֲלָא שֶׁמִּפְנֵי קִטְרוּג מִדַּת הַדִּין שֶׁהִיָּתָה טוֹעֲנָת שֶׁעֲדִיין לֹא נִשְׁלֵם הַקֶּץ, רִצְחָה הַקַּב"ה שֶׁפֶרְעֹה יַעֲשֶׂם בְּנֵי חוֹרִין וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם "הֲרִי אֲתֵם בְּנֵי חוֹרִין", וְעִיין בְּפֶרֶשׁה הַקוֹדֶמֶת.

It can be said that Israel cried out to the L-rd to bring them out of Egypt, as it is written, “And the children of Israel groaned under the burden of work and cried out.”³ The essence of this cry is because they thought that the end of the Exile would be completed with the hardship of bondage, and they cried to the L-rd to increase the measure of His kindness upon them. When He heard their cry, as it is written, “Behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me,”⁴ it seems that He agreed with their understanding. If the end of the Exile was completed, there would be no need for Pharaoh to make them free men, for since

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¹ Ex. 13:17.

² Num. 23:22.

³ Ex. 2:23.

⁴ Ex. 3:9.

the time had arrived they would themselves be free men. But because of the accusation of the Attribute of Justice, which claimed that the end of the Exile was not yet complete, the Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted Pharaoh to make them free men and say to them: “Behold, you are free men.”⁵ See in the previous parsha (parashat Bo, essay 18).

ומעתה אם הנה אומר הכתוב "וַיְהִי כִּהְיוּצֵי־אֵלֶּיךָ ה' אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל" וכו', הנה משמע שהוציאם בזמנם, כמו שהם צעקו אליו, ואם כן אף אם ילכו דרך פלשתים, לא הנה עולה על דעתם לתזור למצרים, אמנם לאחר שהקב"ה הכריח פרעה לעשותם בני חורין, שמנה מוכח שעדיין לא נשלם הקץ לגמרי וצריכים הם ללכת בגלות אחרות, מעתה אפשר שאם יוליכם דרך ארץ פלשתים שירצו לתזור, ומשום הכי אמר הכתוב דוקא "וַיְהִי בְשִׁלַּח פְּרַעֲהוֹ" וכו' "ולא-נחם" וכו', שהרי משליחות זה משמע "כי קרוב הוא", כי זמן גאולתם נקרב קודם זמנו. ומטעם זה "כי אמר אלהים פוֹרֵי-נַחֲמֵם הָעַם", ופירש רש"י יחשבו מחשבה על שיצאו ויתנו לב לשוב, יחשבו מחשבה על שיצאו קודם תשלום מנין הקץ, וירצו לשוב להשלים שם מנין הגלות, שמא יתיראו לתזור בגלות אחרת.

From now, if Scripture had said, “And it came to pass, when the Lord brought Israel out,” etc., it would have implied that He brought them out at their proper time, just as they cried out to Him. If so, even if they were to go by way of the land of the Philistines, it would not have occurred to them to return to Egypt. However, the Holy One, Blessed be He, compelled Pharaoh to make them free men, from which it appeared that the end of the Exile had not yet been fully completed and that they still needed to go into other exiles. From that point, it became possible that if He were to lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, they would want to return. Therefore, Scripture specifically said, “And it came to pass when Pharaoh sent the people,” and “G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistine, although it was near.”

Thus, to answer Question 1, why it does not say “and it came to pass” when discussing that G-d brought them out of Egypt, is that this phrasing would imply that Israel’s redemption occurred at its fully appointed time, as a natural completion of the Exile. Instead, the redemption happened in response to Israel’s crying out and Pharaoh’s compulsion, not merely according to the scheduled timing, because the full measure of the exile had not yet been completed.

To answer Question 2, from this sending away of the children of Israel by Pharaoh, it is implied “although it was near,” namely that the time of their redemption had drawn near before its proper time. For this reason, for G-d said, “The people may have a change of heart,” and Rashi explained: they would think—when they went out, they would set their heart to return. They would think that they went out before the completion of the reckoning of the end of the Exile, and they would wish to return to complete there the reckoning of the exile, lest they fear having to go into another exile.

Question 3 asked why two reasons were given, “although it was near” and “for G-d said.” The first indicated that the appointed time for the redemption was approaching. The second suggested that Israel could have a change of heart and return to Egypt, and thus G-d had to actively ensure that Pharaoh freed them.

⁵ Midrash Tehillim [Midrash Shocher Tov] 113:2.

Question 4 said that there were additional grammatical points, though the Zera Shimshon wasn't specific. The following paragraphs address additional subtle grammatical points, explaining nuances in phrasing, repetition, and word choice that are not explicit questions, but are essential for understanding the text's meaning.

וְזֶהוּ שֶׁאָמַר הַפְּתוּב "וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה", וְאֶדְרְבָּא הִיָּה לְהֵם לְהַתְנַחֵם בְּשִׁמְעֵם בְּשׁוֹרָה טוֹבָה, כִּי "שָׁמוּעָה טוֹבָה תִּדְשָׁן־עָצָם", אֶל־אִשְׂרָאֵל הָיוּ מִתְיַרְאִים פֶּן יִתְחַיְיְבוּ לְלָכֶת תַּחַת מַלְכוּת אַחֲרֵת לְהַשְׁתַּעֲבֹד, וְהִינּוּ "מִקְצָר רוּחַ וּמַעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה" הַעֲתִידָה, שֶׁהָרִי קוֹדֵם זֶה כְּתִיבִי אַרְבַּע לְשׁוֹנוֹת שֶׁל גְּאוּלָּה, "וְהוֹצֵאתִי" "וְהַצֵּלְתִּי" "וְגִאֲלֹתִי" וְכוּ', וְהֵם רוֹמְזִים לְגַלּוּיּוֹת אַחֲרוֹת, וְכִתִּיב "וְיִדְבַר מֹשֶׁה פֶּן אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל", שֶׁאָמַר לְהֵם כֵּן מִמֶּשׁ שֶׁרָמַז לְהֵם הַגְּלִיּוֹת, אֶל־אִשְׂרָאֵל יִתְקַיְיֶמוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁלֹּא יִחְטְאוּ לֹא יִלְכוּ עוֹד בְּגָלוּת, כִּמוֹ שֶׁפִּירְשְׁנוּ לְעִיל בְּפִרְשֵׁת שְׁמוֹת עַל "דִּיָּה לְצָרָה בְּשַׁעֲתָה" וְעִי"ש. וְזֶהוּ שֶׁאָמַר הַקַּב"ה "וַיִּצְוֶם אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶל־פְּרַעֲזֵה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם", שֶׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל לֹא הָיוּ כָּל כָּךְ רוֹצִים לְצֵאת מִיִּרְאָה זוֹ.

This is why Scripture said, “And Moses told this to the children of Israel, and they did not listen to Moses because of crushed spirits and hard labor.”⁶ On the contrary, they ought to have been comforted upon hearing good news, for “good news puts fat on the bones.”⁷ Rather, Israel was afraid lest they become obligated to go under another kingdom to be enslaved. This is the meaning of “crushed spirits and hard labor,” thinking of the next exile, that lay ahead. For earlier it states four expressions of redemption: “I will take you out,” “and save,” “and I will redeem,” “and I will take you”—and they allude to other exiles.⁸

Also, it is written, “But when Moses told this to the children of Israel,” meaning that he indeed spoke to them in this way, hinting to them about the exiles. However, if the children of Israel would endure and not sin, they would not go again into exile, as we explained above in parashat Shemot on “it is enough [for now]! [Let] the [future] suffering [come] at its [appointed] time”⁹—see there, Essay 11. This is what the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: “And He commanded them concerning the children of Israel and concerning Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt,”¹⁰ for Israel was not so eager to leave because of this fear.

⁶ Ex. 6:9.

⁷ Prov. 15:30.

⁸ Ex. 6:6–7: “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.”

⁹ Berachot 9b.

¹⁰ Ex. 6:13.

וזהו שאמר פרעה "מה־זאת עשינו כִּי־שלחנו את־ישראל מעבדנו", בנדאי שישראל יהיו עבדים פעם אחרת לאיזו אומה, כדי תשלוּם ארבע מאות ושלשים שנה, ו"מה־זאת עשינו כִּי־שלחנו את־ישראל" מעבוד אותנו, דבשלמא אם יהיו בגוי חורין לא הייתי אומר כלום. וכן אמר להם "ראו כי רעה נגד פניכם", שהנה אברהם בירר המלכות במקום גהינם, ואם לא ישלימו זמן הגלות אם פן חייבים גהינם, ואתם רוצים לצאת קודם זמניכם ראו כי תפלו בגהינם.

This is what Pharaoh said: “What is this that we have done, that we have sent Israel away from serving us?”¹¹—for certainly Israel would be servants once again to some nation, in order to complete the four hundred and thirty years. Also, “What is this that we have done, that we have sent Israel away” from serving us—since if they were destined to be free men at this time, I would not have said anything. So he said to them, “See that evil lies before you,”¹² for behold Abraham chose the kingdoms in place of Gehinnom; and if they do not complete the time of exile, then they are liable to Gehinnom. You wish to go out before your time—see that you will fall into Gehinnom.

ויקראו ישראל שמצרים רודפים אחריהם מחמת הטענה שעדיין לא נשלם הקץ, אמרו "הלא־נה הדבר אשר דברנו אליך במצרים לאמר" וכו', והיכן דברו זה במצרים, אלא ודאי שאמרו כד פשלא "שמעו אל־משה מקצר רוח" וכו', ועכשיו אמרו הלא טוב היה לעבוד¹³ וכו' מלמות וליפול לגהינם. ומשה אמר להם "התנצבו וראו", כלומר הישועה והגאולה היא גאולת עולם, שאם לא היו חוטאים בעגל היה להם חירות משעבוד מלכות, כמו שאמרו רז"ל.

When Israel saw that the Egyptians were pursuing after them because of the claim that the end of the Exile was not yet completed, they said, “Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness’?”¹⁴ Where did they speak this in Egypt? Surely they said it when they did not “listen to Moses because of crushed spirits and hard labor,” and now they said, “Would it not have been better to serve,”¹⁵ than to die and fall into Gehinnom. Moses said to them, “Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance that the L-rd will work for you today,”¹⁶ meaning that salvation and redemption is an eternal redemption. For if they had not sinned with the calf, they would have had freedom from the bondage of kingdoms, as our sages said.¹⁷

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¹¹ Ex. 14:5.

¹² Ex. 10:10.

¹³ This is a paraphrase. The Torah reads: “כי טוב לנו עבד”.

¹⁴ Ex. 14:12.

¹⁵ The first edition’s paraphrase of the Torah has been retained.

¹⁶ Ex. 14:13.

¹⁷ Ex. Rabbah 32:1.