

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778*

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

Essay 23. The altar at Rephidim

The Israelites quarreled at Massah and Meribah, and “they tried the L-rd, saying, ‘Is the L-rd present among us or not?’ ” (Ex. 17:7). Scripture then immediately follows this unworthy behavior by recounting Israel’s victory over Amalek at Rephidim, which included the miracle that, “Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.” (Ex. 17:11) In appreciation for the miraculous victory, Moses built an altar. (Ex. 17:15).

עוד שם בַּיַּלְקוּט, "וַיִּבֶן מֹשֶׁה מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ ה' נְסִי" ר' אֶלְעָזָר הַמִּוֹדְעִי אֹמֵר, אָמַר מֹשֶׁה הֲנִס הַנֶּה שְׁעֵשָׂה, בְּגִינּוֹ עֲשָׂאוֹ לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ עֲשָׂאוֹ, שְׁלֹא הָיוּ רְאוּיִים בְּאוֹתָהּ שְׁעָה לְאוֹתוֹ הֲנִס, וְכֵן אִתָּהּ מוֹצֵא שְׁפָל זְמַן שִׁישְׂרָאֵל בְּנִס פְּבַיְכוֹל הֲנִס לְפָנָיו שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר ה' נְסִי, צָרָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְכוּ' שֶׁמִּתָּה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְכוּ' עכ"ל. קִשָּׁה דְּמִתְחַלְלָה קָא יְלִיף מֵה' נְסִי שְׁלֹא הָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל רְאוּיִים וְשֶׁהִקְב"ה עֲשָׂאוֹ בְּגִינּוֹ, וְאַחֲרַי כְּדָ יְלִיף מֵה' נְסִי שֶׁשִּׁישְׂרָאֵל בְּנִס פְּבַיְכוֹל הֲנִס לְפָנָיו. אִם כֵּן אֵין עוֹד רְאָיָה שִׁישְׂרָאֵל לֹא הָיוּ רְאוּיִים. וְעוֹד מֵהוּ הַלְשׁוֹן וְכֵן אִתָּהּ מוֹצֵא, דְּמָה עֲנִין זֶה לְזֶה?

We also find there in Yalkut Shimoni:

Regarding the verse, “**And Moses built an altar and named it ‘The L-rd is my miracle’**” (Ex. 17:15), **R. Eliezer of Modi’in says, Moses said [regarding] this miracle that He did, He did it for His own sake, He did it for His name. For [the children of Israel] were not worthy at that time for that miracle, and thus you find that whenever a miracle is performed for Israel, that miracle, as it were, is before Him—“The L-rd is my miracle.” “In all of their afflictions, He was afflicted” (Isaiah 63:9). In all of their joys, the joy was to Him, as it says, “I rejoice in Your salvation” (I Sam. 2:1).**

- Yalkut Shimoni, remez 267

It is difficult that at the beginning, [R. Eliezer] derives from “the L-rd is my miracle” that [the children of] Israel were not worthy of the miracle and that the Holy One, Blessed be He, therefore performed [the miracle] for His own sake, but afterward [R. Eliezer] derives from the very same words, “the L-rd is my miracle,” that when a miracle is performed for Israel, that miracle, as it were, is before Him. That is, as the Israelites had quarreled amongst

* English translation: Copyright © 2021 by Charles S. Stein.

themselves and questioned whether G-d was with them, one could say that they weren't worthy of the miraculous victory over Amalek. But if that's the case, why then say, "when a miracle is performed *for Israel*," indicating that the miracle actually was performed for Israel rather than for G-d's own sake? **If so, that a miracle is performed for Israel, then there is no longer any evidence that Israel was unworthy. Also, what is the meaning of the language "and thus you will find that whenever a miracle is performed for Israel, that miracle, as it were, is before Him," how is this related to this matter?**

וְנִרְאָה שֶׁהַמִּדְרָשׁ הִרְגִישׁ בְּפֶסוּקַיִם זֶה לְמָה יֵשׁ פֶּסֶק בֵּין ה' לְנֶסִי, וְעַל זֶה פִּירֵשׁ כְּדִי לְרַמּוֹז שֶׁה' עָשָׂא לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ, שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה יִשְׂרָאֵל רָאוּיִים. אֲלֵא דְקֻשְׁיָה לְמָה קָרָא שְׁמוֹ "ה' נְסִי", הִנֵּה לוֹ לֹא מֵר ה' גַּם כְּמוֹ שֶׁמִּצִּינוּ בְּגִדְעוֹן ה' שְׁלוֹם.

It seems that the Midrash considered for this verse why there is a Masoretic cantillation mark called a *pasek* by the Sephardim (and called a *munach legarmeh* by the Ashkenazim) between the words "L-rd" and "my miracle." [R. Eliezer] interpreted this to imply that G-d performed [the miracle] of defeating Amalek for His own name, and that Israel was not worthy of the miracle. But it is difficult why [Moses] called [the altar] "the L-rd is my miracle," he could have said, "the L-rd is a miracle," as we find with Gideon, who built an article and called it, "the L-rd is peace" (Judges 6:24), and not "the L-rd is my peace."¹

אֲלֵא וְדַאי שְׂאֵר עַל פִּי שְׂאִינָם רָאוּיִים נִקְרָא הַגֵּם אֶף שְׁלֵהֶם. וְזֶהוּ "נְסִי" הוֹאִיל שֶׁנֶּעֱשָׂה הַגֵּם לְפָנֶיהֶם. וְעַל זֶה אָמַר הַמִּדְרָשׁ וְכֵן אֵתָּה מוֹצֵא וְכו', כְּשֵׁם שֶׁמִּצִּינוּ שֶׁהַגֵּם שֶׁעָשָׂה הַקַּב"ה בְּגִינוֹ נִקְרָא גַם אֶף שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּדִכְתִּיב "ה' נְסִי". אֶף כְּשִׁיחִיו רָאוּיִים יִקְרָא הַגֵּם "ה' נְסִי", לְפִי שֶׁכְּבִיכּוֹל הַגֵּם לְפָנָיו.

Rather, it's certain that even though [the children of Israel] were not worthy, the miracle was also referred to as theirs. This is the meaning of "my miracle": since the miracle was performed before them. I.e., they not only saw Joshua and his men defeat the more powerful Amalek, but they saw that the battle waxed and waned depending on whether Moses held up his hand or lowered it. Because of this, the Midrash says, "thus you find that whenever a miracle is performed for Israel, that miracle, as it were, is before Him," just as we find that the miracle that G-d performed for His own sake is called a miracle also for Israel, as it is written, "the L-rd is my miracle." That is, G-d performed the miracle for His own sake, but it also benefitted Israel, and so it can be referred to either way, as a miracle for Israel, or as a miracle that G-d performed for His own sake. Even when they will be worthy, the miracle will be called "the L-rd is my miracle," as it were, for not only would the destruction of Amalek benefit Israel, but it would also be for G-d's own sake, and thus it can also be said that the miracle is before Him.

* * *

¹ The translator notes that there is no *pasek/munach legarmeh* present in Judges 6:24 between the words "L-rd" and "peace."