

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XVII: Yitro (Ex. 18:1–20:23)

Essay 5. Delivery from the hand of Egypt

"**וַיֹּאמֶר** יְתֵרוֹ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם" וכו'. קוּשָׁה דְּכָל הַפְּסוּק נִרְאָה מְיוֹתֵר, דְּב"ה הִצִּיל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם" סְגִי, וּמֵהוּ שֶׁחֲזַר לֹאמַר "וּמִיַּד פְּרַעֲזָה", וְעוֹד "אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל" וכו'. וְהַמְּפָרְשִׁים פְּתָבוּ ד' מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם" פִּירוּשׁוֹ שֶׁר שֶׁל מִצְרַיִם, וּמְכַל מְקוֹם קוּשָׁה סוּף הַפְּסוּק, וְעוֹד שֶׁ"מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם" נִמְי סְגִי, דְּכִיּוֹן שֶׁנִּיצוּלוּ מֵהַשָּׂר מִיַּד הָעַם, וְעוֹד דְּתִיבַת "מִצְרַיִם" כּוּלְלֵת בֵּין הַשָּׂר וּבֵין הַמְּצַרִּים.

Jethro¹ said, “Blessed be the L-rd, Who delivered you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh, and Who delivered the people from under the hand of Egypt” (Ex. 18:10). A difficulty is that the entire verse appears to have redundant elements, for “Who delivered you from the hand of Egypt” is enough, and why did it return to say “and from the hand of Pharaoh,” and also “Who delivered the people from under the hand of Egypt”? The commentators wrote that the explanation of “from the hand of Egypt” is the ministering angel of Egypt.

Nevertheless, even if we accept that, the end of the verse is still difficult. Again, “from the hand of Egypt” is also enough, as if they were rescued from the Egyptian ministering angel, then they were rescued also from the hand of the Egyptian people. Also, one can say that the word “Egypt” includes both the ministering angel and also the Egyptians.

וְנִשְׁ לֹאמַר דְּכּוֹנֵנַת יְתֵרוֹ הִיְתָה כָּךְ, "בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם", הַשָּׂר שֶׁל מִצְרַיִם שֶׁהִיָּה לוֹ טַעֲנָה נֶגְדַּיִשְׂרָאֵל, "וּמִיַּד פְּרַעֲזָה" שֶׁהִיָּה לוֹ נְמִי טַעֲנָה אַחֲרָת, וְכִיּוֹד הִצִּילֵם, "אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶת־הָעַם", זֶהוּ תִירוּץ נֶגְדַּי טַעֲנַת הַשָּׂר שֶׁל מִצְרַיִם, ו"מִתַּחַת יַד־מִצְרַיִם" זֶהוּ תִירוּץ לְטַעֲנַת פְּרַעֲזָה. וְהִיָּנוּ דְּהַשָּׂר שֶׁל מִצְרַיִם הִיְתָה לוֹ טַעֲנָה נֶגְדַּיִשְׂרָאֵל מֵה נִשְׁתַּנּוּ אֵלָיו מֵאֵלָיו, שֶׁאֵינָם רְאוּיִים יִשְׂרָאֵל לִיעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם נֶס, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁעֲבָדוּ עֲבוּדָה זָרָה בְּמִצְרַיִם, כְּדֹאִתָּא בְּמִדְרַשׁ רַבָּה. וּפְרַעֲזָה הִיְתָה לוֹ טַעֲנָה שֶׁעֲדִיין לֹא שָׁלְמוּ הָאֲרָבַע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה. וּמִשּׁוֹם הַכִּי לֹא הָיָה רוּצָה לְשַׁלֵּם אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְלָכֵן אָמַר "מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּמִיַּד פְּרַעֲזָה".

It can be said that the intention of Jethro was thus: “Blessed be the L-rd, Who delivered you from the hand of Egypt,” means from the ministering angel of Egypt, who had a claim against Israel, “and from the hand of Pharaoh,” who had a different claim. How did He rescue them? “He delivered the people” is the solution against the claim of the ministering angel of Egypt, and “from under the hand of Egypt,” is the solution to the claim of Pharaoh.

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¹ The first edition failed to indicate the beginning of this essay with the large bold text that it normally used.

The ministering angel of Egypt had a claim against Israel: What is the difference between these, the Israelites, and these, the Egyptians? Israel did not deserve to have a miracle performed for them, because they engaged in idolatry in Egypt, as is brought in Midrash Ex. Rabbah (6:5), just like the Egyptians.

Pharaoh had a separate claim against Israel: Because they had not completed the 400 years of slavery about which G-d had told Abram (Gen. 15:13). Because of this, [Pharaoh] did not want to send Israel away, and therefore [the verse] says, “from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh.”

וכנגד טענת השׁר אָמר "אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶת־הָעַם", שָׂאם תִּיסק אֲדַעְתִּין לומר שֶׁהַקֹּב"ה מַעֲבִיר הַדִּין עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאִם עַל פִּי שְׁעָבְדוּ עֲבוּדָה זָרָה נוֹשָׂא לָהֶם פְּנִים בְּשִׁבִיל שְׂאָהֵב אוֹתָם, לֹא הָיָה לוֹ לְהִצִּיל אֶת הָעָרֶב רַב, דִּהְיִינוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם שְׂבָאוּ עִמָּהֶם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁפִּירְשׁוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים ד' "אֶת־הָעַם" רָצָה לומר עָרֶב רַב, שְׂאִין לְהַקֵּב"ה אֶהְבָּה כָּלֵל עִם אֱלוֹ מִצְרַיִם, אֲלֵא וְדַאי מִדֵּהֲצִיל אִם הָעָרֶב רַב מוֹכַח מִכָּאן שֶׁהַדִּין דִּין אֶמֶת וְיִשְׂרָאֵל פִּירְשׁוּ מִן הָעֲבוּדָה זָרָה, וְאִם הָעָרֶב רַב פִּירְשׁוּ מִן הָעֲבוּדָה זָרָה וְרַאוּיִים לִיעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם גַּם, מֵה שְׂאִין כֹּן הַמִּצְרַיִם שֶׁלֹּא פִירְשׁוּ מִהָעֲבוּדָה זָרָה.

Against the claim of the ministering angel [Scripture] said, “Who delivered the people,” for maybe it would enter the mind to say that the Holy One, Blessed be He, bypassed judgment on Israel—that even though they had engaged in idolatry, He showed favor to them, because He loved them. But the answer to that possibility is that He didn’t have to rescue the mixed multitude, who were the Egyptians who came out of Egypt with [the Israelites], as the commentators explained that “the people” intended to say “the mixed multitude.”² For the Holy One, Blessed be He, had no love at all for these Egyptians of the mixed multitude. Rather, certainly from the fact that He saved even the mixed multitude, it’s proof from here that the [His] judgment in saving people was a true judgment, not influenced by favoritism, and it’s because Israel had separated themselves from the idolatry. Even the mixed multitude separated themselves from the idolatry (at this point) and deserved to have a miracle performed for them, something that is not the case for the other Egyptians, who did not separate themselves from the idolatry.

וְמֵה שְׂאָמַר "מִתַּחַת יַד־מִצְרַיִם", הוּא כְּנֶגֶד טֵעֵנָה פְּרֵעָה, כְּלוֹמַר אֶמֶת הוּא שֶׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל רַאוּיִים לְהִשְׁתַּעֲבֹד אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה, אֲבָל הַקֹּב"ה לֹא גָזַר שֶׁיְהִיוּ תַּחַת יַד מִצְרַיִם דּוֹקָא, וְאִין הָכִי נִמְי שֶׁיֵּשׁ לָהֶם לְשֵׁלֵם תַּחַת אִמָּה אֶחָרָת.

Regarding what was said, “from under the hand of Egypt,” this corresponds to the claim of Pharaoh, as if to say, it is true that Israel deserved to be enslaved four hundred years. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, didn’t decree that they would specifically under the hand of Egypt, and it is indeed so that they will need to complete the decree of 400 years under another nation, but it won’t all be in Egypt.

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² Rabbi Mordechai Ha’Cohen of Safed (1523–98), *Sifte Cohen on Torah* (Venice 1605), beginning of the chapter on Beshalach.