

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XVIII: Mishpatim (Ex. 21:1–24:18)

Essay 11. Isaiah's apparent contradiction of Torah

יְבָמוֹת פָּרָק ד' מִשְׁנֵה רַבֵּה אָמַר "כִּי לֹא-יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחַי" וְאֵת אֲמַרְתָּ "וְנֹאֲרָא אֶת" וְכוּ' "יֵשֵׁב עַל-כִּסֵּא" וְכוּ', אָמַר וְשִׁעָה יִדְעָנָא בֵּיה דְלָא מְקַבֵּל מַה דְאִימָא לִיה וְאִי אִימָא לִיה לִישׁוּנִיה מְזִיד וְכוּ', מְקַל מְקוֹם קָשׁוּ קְרָאִי אֶהְדְּדִי, כְּדַתְנִינָא כָּל הַנְּבִיאִים נִסְתַּמְּלוּ בְּאֶסְפֵּקְלָרְיָא וְשִׁאִינָה מְאִירָה מִשְׁנֵה רַבִּינוּ עֲלֵיו הַשְּׁלוֹם נִסְתַּמְּל בְּאֶסְפֵּקְלָרְיָא הַמְאִירָה עַכ"ל.

Yevamot chapter 4:

[The Gemara discusses the events surrounding Isaiah's death]: Rava said: [Manasseh] judged him [as a false witness for issuing statements contradicting the Torah] and then killed him. [Manasseh] said to [Isaiah:] **Moses your master said:** “[And He said: You cannot see My face,] **for man cannot see Me and live**” (Ex. 33:20), **and yet you said: “I saw the L-rd sitting upon a high and lofty throne”** (Isaiah 6:1). . . .

Isaiah said [to himself]: **I know him**, [i.e., Manasseh,] **that he will not accept whatever explanation that I will say to him** [to resolve my prophecies with the words of the Torah]. **And if I say it to him, I will make him into an intentional transgressor** [since he will kill me anyway]. . . .

In any case, [these] verses contradict each other.

[The Gemara resolves the contradiction]: “I saw the L-rd” [is to be understood] as it is taught [in a *Baraita*]: **All of the prophets** [except for Moses] **observed** [their prophecies] **through an unclear looking glass** [i.e., their prophecies were given as metaphoric visions]. But **Moses our master observed** [his prophecies] **through a clear looking glass** [i.e., he gained a direct and accurate perception of the matter].

- Yevamot 49b

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וּכְתָבוּ הַתּוֹסֵפוֹת לִישׁוּנֵיהֶּ מְזִיד, פְּרִישׁ רַבֵּינוּ חֲנַנְאֵל שְׂרָצָה לְהַשִּׁיבוֹ דְּבַמְשָׁה נְמִי כְּתִיב "וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" עכ"ל.
וְהַעוֹלָם מְקוּשִׁים דְּמָנָא לִיהּ לְרַבֵּינוּ חֲנַנְאֵל לֹאמַר שְׂרָצָה רָצָה לְתַתּוּ תִירוּץ חֲדָשׁ לְמַנְשָׁה, דִּילְמָא הִנֵּה רוּצָה לֹאמַר לֹא מַה
שְׂתִירֵץ הַש"ס לְחַלְקֵי בֵּין מְשָׁה לְנִבְיָאִים בֵּין אֶסְפִּקְלָרְיָא לְאֶסְפִּקְלָרְיָא.

The Tosafot write on the words, “to make him an intentional transgressor”: **“Rabbeinu Chananel explains, he wanted to answer him that regarding Moses [and those with him, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders], it says ‘and they saw the G-d of Israel’ (Ex. 24:10).”** **Everyone asks how Rabbeinu Chananel thought to say that Isaiah wanted to give such a novel answer to Manasseh. Perhaps he had wanted to give him the solution of the Gemara of how to distinguish between Moses and the other prophets, i.e., to distinguish between one looking glass and another looking glass, i.e., between the quality of prophecy of Moses and that of the other prophets.**

וְעוֹד דְּלִפִּי תִירוּצוֹ מְשַׁמֵּעַ שְׂרָצָה לֹאמַר לֹא שָׁגַם בְּמִשְׁה כְּתִיב "וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל", וְאִם כֵּן לִיכָא תוּ לְהַקְשׁוֹת לִישְׁעָה
שְׂאֵמַר הַפֶּד דְּבָרֵי מְשָׁה, שְׂהָרִי גַם מְשָׁה אָמַר כֵּן. וּמַעֲתָה רַבֵּינוּ חֲנַנְאֵל סְתִיר דִּידֵיהּ אֲדִידֵיהּ, שְׂהָרִי בְּקִידוּשִׁין פֶּרַק ב' פִּירֵשׁ
רַבֵּינוּ חֲנַנְאֵל וְז"ל, הַמְתַּרְגֵּם פְּסוּק כְּצוּרְתוֹ כְּגוֹן "וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" וְחִזּוּ יַת אֱלֹהֵי דִישְׂרָאֵל, הָרִי זֶה בְּדַאי, דְּשָׁכִינָה
מִמֶּשׁ לֹא רָאוּ דְכִתִּיב "כִּי לֹא-יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחִי", אֲלֵא הֵי מְתַרְגְּמִינוּ וְחִזּוּ יַת יְקָרָא דְאֱלֹהֵי דִישְׂרָאֵל עכ"ל. וְאִם כֵּן פְּשׁוּטִיה
דְּקָרָא דִ"וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" אֵינּוּ רוּצָה לֹאמַר שְׂרָאוּ אֶת ה', וְהִדְרָא קוּשְׁיִית מְנַשָּׁה לְדוּכְתָהּ, שְׂמִשְׁה אָמַר "כִּי לֹא-יִרְאֵנִי
הָאָדָם וְחִי" וִישְׁעָה אָמַר "וְאֶרְאֶה" וְכו'.

Further, according to his explanation, the meaning that he wanted tell him, was that also for Moses it was written, “and they saw the G-d of Israel.” **If so, there was nothing else to question about Isaiah, i.e., to criticize the fact that he said he saw the L-rd, the opposite of the words of Moses in Ex. 33:20, for even Moses said this in Ex. 24:10.**

But now, Rabbeinu Chananel has destroyed this answer of the Gemara, by offering an alternate answer, and has destroyed that, his own just-offered alternate answer, for in tractate Kiddushin, chapter 2 (49a), [The Gemara teaches]: But isn't it taught [in a *Baraita* that] Rabbi Yehuda says: One who translates a verse literally is a liar. In the Tosafot, **Rabbeinu Chananel explained, and these are his words:** **“One who translates the verse literally, such as translating the Hebrew text ‘and they saw the G-d of Israel’ as the equivalent Aramaic text ‘and they saw the G-d of Israel’ is a liar. For they did not see the Shechinah itself, as it says, ‘for man cannot see Me and live.’** **Rather, thus is it translated in Onkelos, ‘and they saw the glory of the G-d of Israel.’ ”**

If so, the plain meaning of the verse that “and they saw the G-d of Israel” does not mean to say that they saw G-d, but only that they had a sense of G-d’s grandeur, and Manasseh’s question then returns to its place, that Moses said, “for man cannot see Me and live,” and yet Isaiah contradicted him and said, “I saw the L-rd.”

וגיש לומר דנדאי לא נעלם ממנשה התירוץ והחילוק בין משה לשאר נביאים באספקלריא, שמנשה הנה חכם גדול כמו שאמרו ו"ל בסנהדרין. ועוד שבלא ישעיה אף שאר החכמים היו יכולים לתרץ לו כך, אלא נדאי צריך לומר שמנשה הנה מקשה לישעיה קושיא אחרת דלא שייקא על הפסוק אלא דוקא לישעיה לבדו. והכי דייק לישנא דתלמודא דקאמר מפל מקום קשו קראי אהדדי ולא קאמר מאי הני ליה לישעיה למימר ליה, דמוכח דתירוץ של החילוק בין משה לשאר הנביאים אינו אלא לפי האמת אבל קושית מנשה אין הכי נמי דבלאו הכי נמי איתה.

It can be said that certainly Manasseh didn't overlook the solution and distinction between Moses and the other prophets, for Manasseh was very wise, as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said in tractate Sanhedrin (page 103b). Also, even without Isaiah defending himself, even the other sages of the time would have been able to answer [Manasseh] thus.

Rather, certainly, it needs to be said that Manasseh was asking Isaiah another question that didn't pertain specifically to the verse, "I saw the L-rd sitting upon a high and lofty throne," but especially to Isaiah alone, as we will see in the next paragraph. Thus, the Talmud is exact in saying, "In any case, [these] verses contradict each other." It did not say, "What else could Isaiah have answered him?" For this [contradiction] proves that the solution of the distinction offered by the Gemara between Moses and the other prophets is the truth. But regarding the question of Manasseh to Isaiah, pointing out the contradiction, it seems that regardless of this true solution of the Gemara, a question against Isaiah that still exists, as will be explained in the next paragraph.

ועוד דמנא ליה לישעיה דאי לימא ליה לישעיה מזיד? דאם האמת שמנשה לא הנה יודע עדיין חילוק זה של משה לשאר הנביאים ועכשיו הנה ישעיה אומר לו, הלא אף אם לא הנה מנשה שומע לו ולא הנה מאמין לא הנה נקרא מזיד, שהרי אנוס הוא לפי סברתו שסובר שאין חילוק זה בעולם, ואינו חייב להאמין לישעיה, מפני שתלמיד חכם שאומר דבר הלכה אם קודם מעשה בא שומעין ואם לאחר מעשה אין שומעין.

Also, where did Isaiah derive that Manasseh would not accept whatever [explanation] he would say to him [to resolve his prophecies with the words of the Torah]? Also, why did Isaiah think that if he would say it to him anyway, he would make [Manasseh] into an intentional transgressor [since he would kill Isaiah anyway]?

For if the truth is that Manasseh still didn't know the distinction between Moses and the other prophets, and now Isaiah were to tell it to him, so what? For even if Manasseh didn't listen to him and didn't believe him, should he be called an intentional transgressor? For [Manasseh] was compelled to disbelieve Isaiah because his own opinion was that there was no such distinction in the world between Moses and the other prophets.

We can understand halachically that **he was not obliged to believe Isaiah, for [regarding] a Torah scholar who issues a halachic ruling on a matter for which he could have a personal benefit, if he stated the ruling before the incident, [people] listen to him, but if he only stated the ruling after the incident, people don't listen to him.**¹ That is, they might think that his ruling

¹ Yevamot 77a, where the teaching is given in the name of Rabbi Abba quoting Rav.

was given only so that he could benefit. Thus, if Isaiah had stated such a defense after having been challenged, there would no need to believe him.

ועל פְּרָחָה צָרִיף לומר שְׁמַנְשָׁה אין הָכִי נָמִי שֶׁהִנֵּה יוֹדֵעַ חִילּוֹק זֶה וְעַם כָּל זֶה הִנֵּה מִקְשָׁה לִישְׁעָנָה, וְיִשְׁעָנָה הִנֵּה לוֹ תִירוֹץ אַחַר וְלֹא נָתַן לוֹ כִּי הִכִּי דְלֹא לִישְׁנִייה מְזִיד. וְקִשְׁיָא לֵן מֵהוּ זֶה הַתִּירוֹץ וְהַקּוּשְׁיָא, וּמִשּׁוּם הָכִי תִירוֹץ רַבִּינוּ חֲנִנְאֵל שְׁרָצָה לְהַשִּׁיב לוֹ דְגַם בְּמִשְׁה פְּתִיב "וַיִּרְאוּ" וְכוּ', כְּלוּמַר דְּקוּשְׁיֵית מְנַשֶּׁה הִתְהַ מִשּׁוּם שְׁאַף אִם נֶאֱמַר שְׁיֵישׁ חִילּוֹק בֵּין מִשְׁה לְשֹׂאֵר הַגְּבִיאיִם וְאַסְפַּקְלָרְיָא וְכוּ'. עַם כָּל זֶה לֹא הִנֵּה לוֹ לומר לְשׁוֹן "וְאַרְאֶה" שֶׁהוּא הַפֶּךְ הַלְשׁוֹן שְׁאַמַר מִשְׁה רַבָּד, שְׁלִשׁוֹן זֶה גּוֹתֵן מְקוּם לְטַעוֹת לְמִי שְׁאַיִנו יוֹדֵעַ חִילּוֹק זֶה, וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁאַתָּה גְּדוֹל מִמִּשְׁה וְשַׁחַס וְשְׁלוֹם אֵין מִשְׁה אֶמְתָּ, וְעַל דְּבָר זֶה דְּנוּהוּ לְמִיתָה.

You necessarily must say that Manasseh indeed knew this distinction between Moses and the other prophets, and nevertheless questioned Isaiah, and Isaiah had a different solution but didn't give it to him because he didn't want to make him into an intentional transgressor. A difficulty for us is what is this other solution of Isaiah's and the argument, and because of this, Rabbeinu Chananel solved that [Isaiah] wanted to answer him that for Moses, it was also written, "and they saw the G-d of Israel."

That's as if to say that the difficulty for Manasseh was because even if it was written that there was a distinction between Moses and the other prophets, and it was on account of a difference in the looking glass through which each experienced prophecy, nevertheless, [Isaiah] shouldn't have used the language, "I saw the L-rd sitting upon a high and lofty throne." He shouldn't have said this, because it was the opposite of the language that "your master, Moses," said, for this language provides room for error for one who does not know the distinction between Moses and the other prophets. As a result, they would say that you are greater than Moses, and that G-d forbid the teaching of Moses was not true. Because of this, [Isaiah] was judged for death by Manasseh.

וּישְׁעָנָה הִנֵּה יְכוֹל לְתַרְץ לוֹ שְׁגַם לְשׁוֹן זֶה אָמַר מִשְׁה "וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל", אַף עַל גַּב שְׁאַיִנָּה רְאִיָּה מִמֶּשׁ דְּהָא מְתַרְגְּמִינָן וְחִזּוּ יַת יְקָרָא דְאַלְהָא דִּישְׂרָאֵל. וּבְהָכִי לֹא קִשְׁיָא עִם קָרָא דְ"כִי לֹא־יִרְאֵנִי" וְכוּ', וְאִם כֵּן אַף אֲנָא נָמִי אֶמְיָנָא "וְאַרְאֶה אֹת" וְכוּ' דְהִינּוּ יְקָרָא דְאַלְהָא. וְהִינּוּ אֶסְפַּקְלָרְיָא שְׁאַיִנָּה מְאִירָה עִם כָּל זֶה שְׁיִיד לְמִימַר בָּהּ "וְאַרְאֶה". וּבְזֶה דְבָרֵי רַבִּינוּ חֲנִנְאֵל עוֹלִים הָכָא וְהֵתָם בְּסַגְנוֹן אַחַד, וּמְנַשֶּׁה בְּנֻדְאֵי לֹא הִנֵּה מְתַרְצָה בְּזֶה שְׁיִהְיֶה רְשׁוּת לִישְׁעָנָה לְכַתּוּב הַלְשׁוֹן שְׁפָתַב מִשְׁה הִיכָא דִּישׁ מְקוּם לְטַעוֹת, וּמִשּׁוּם הָכִי לֹא תִירוֹץ לוֹ כְּלוּם דְלֹא לִישְׁנִייה מְזִיד.

Isaiah could have given an excuse to [Manasseh] that this language was even said by Moses in Ex. 24:10, "and they saw the G-d of Israel," even though it's not really a proof, for it is translated into Aramaic by Onkelos as "and they saw the glory of the G-d of Israel." Thus, there's no difficulty with the verse, "for man cannot see Me and live." If so, even I can say "I saw the L-rd sitting upon a high and lofty throne," which is using the same terminology as Moses, and has the same meaning, that I was referring to the glory of G-d. Also, there is the answer of an unclear looking glass, and with all this, it's appropriate to say, "I saw the L-rd."

In this way, the words of Rabbeinu Chananel come here and there in one style. That is, it says in the Gemara that two prophets do not prophesy in the same style.² By saying that Isaiah had wanted to give as an excuse the fact that Moses had used the same terminology, Rabbeinu Chananel was suggesting that they were prophesying in the same style, which would not be typical. **Manasseh would certainly not have been willing to allow Isaiah to write the language written by Moses, where there is room for one to err.** That is, one might have not understood the distinction between Moses and Isaiah, that Moses had a clear looking glass while Isaiah had an unclear looking glass. Upon reading that Isaiah said that he “saw the L-rd sitting upon a high and lofty throne,” whereas, at least in one place, Moses said, “man cannot see Me and live,” a person may have erred and thought that Isaiah was a greater prophet, and that Moses was incorrect. **Because of this** possibility, Manasseh would not have listed to Isaiah, even if he had given this excuse. Thus, **[Isaiah] didn’t give such an excuse to [Manasseh], so that he not make him into an intentional transgressor.**

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² Sanhedrin 89a: “Rabbi Yitzchak says: [A prophetic vision relating to] one [and the same] subject matter may appear to several prophets, but two prophets do not prophesy with one style [of speech].”