

Zera Shimshon

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

Essay 8. Do not oppress a stranger

פסוק "וגר לא תלחץ ואתם ידעתם את־נפש הגר כִּי־גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים". קשה שהיה לו לומר וגר לא תלחץ כִּי־גרים הייתם וכו', שהוא הטעם של "וגר לא תלחץ", ולמה הפסיק ביניהם ב"ואתם ידעתם" וכו'?

A verse reads: **“You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the soul of the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt”** (Ex. 23:9). A difficulty is that [G-d] could have said, **“You shall not oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt,”** which is the reason that **“you shall not oppress a stranger.”** Why did [G-d] interrupt between [the prohibition and the reason] with **“for you know the soul of the stranger”**?

ואיתא בשבת כ"ב ישראל שעמדו על הר סיני פסקה זיהמתו. גויים שלא עמדו וכו'. גרים מאי, אלא אף על גב דאינהו לא הנו מזליהו הנה. ופליגא דרבי אבא בר כהנא, שאמר שאחר יעקב פסקה זיהמא מישראל עכ"ל. זה שאמר הכתוב איני רוצה שתלחצו הגרים, שהרי היו שנים עמכם, שבהר סיני פסקה זיהמתו עם זיהמתכם, דאף על גב דאינהו לא הנו מזליהו הנה. ולזה אמר "ואתם ידעתם את־נפש הגר", דוקא נפש שרומזו על המזל. ואם תאמרו שפסקה זיהמתכם מעת יעקב, ואם כן, אתם גדולים מהם, שמהם לא פסקה עד סיני, לכן אמר טעם אחר "כִּי־גרים הייתם."

It's brought in tractate **Shabbat**, chapter 23 (page 146a), “[When the] **Jewish people stood at Mount Sinai, their contamination ceased. Gentiles did not stand** at Mount Sinai, and their contamination never ceased. Rav Acha, the son of Rava, said to Rav Ashi: **What** [about] **converts?** [How do you explain the cessation of their moral contamination?] Rav Ashi said to him: **Even though they were not** at Mount Sinai, **their guardian angels were** [present].” **This disagrees with Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, who said that after Jacob, the contamination ceased from Israel.**¹ **This is why Scripture said, “I don’t want you to oppress a stranger,” for you were equal to them, for at Mount Sinai, their contamination ceased with your contamination, for even though they weren’t there, their guardian angels were. For this reason, [G-d] said, “for you know the soul of the stranger”—literally the soul, which hints at the guardian angel of each convert, who was present at Sinai. If you’ll say that your contamination ceased from**

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¹ Shabbat 146a: “Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: Until three generations [passed], [the moral] contamination did not cease from our forefathers: Abraham fathered Ishmael [who was of lowly moral stature]; Isaac fathered Esau; [but] Jacob fathered twelve tribes in whom there was no flaw.” Thus, he holds that the moral contamination ceased with Jacob, which was long before the Revelation at Sinai.

the time of Jacob, and if so, you are greater than [the converts], for theirs did not stop until Sinai, therefore [G-d] said another reason, “for you were strangers in the land of Egypt,” to remind Jews not to oppress a stranger, whether a “*ger tzedek*” (righteous stranger) [a full convert to Judaism], or a “*ger toshav*” (resident exile) [a non-Jew living in the Land of Israel who observes the Noachide laws].

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