

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXI: Ki Tisa (Ex. 30:11–34:35)

Essay 12. The shame of the Golden Calf

עוד שם על פסוק הנאמר לעיל, "לך ה' הצדקה" במו, "ולנו בַּשֵּׁת הַפְּנִים" בַּמַּעֲשֵׂה הַעֲגֹל עכ"ל. כִּמְה טָרְחוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים בְּדָבָר זֶה, וְעַל הַפְּסוּק עֲצָמוּ קוֹשֶׁה דְּמֵאֵי קָא מְשַׁמְעֵ לֵן "וְלָנוּ בַּשֵּׁת הַפְּנִים". פְּשִׁיטָא דְּכִשְׁמַקְבְּלִים צְדָקָה יְהִיָּה לָהֶם בּוֹשֵׁת פְּנִים כְּמוֹ הַעֲנִי שְׂיִישׁ לוֹ בּוֹשֵׁת פְּנִים לְקַבֵּל צְדָקָה, אֲלָא וְדֵאֵי דְּמִיִּירֵי קָרָא בְּבוֹשֵׁת פְּנִים הַבָּא מִחֻמַּת דְּבָר אַחֵר.

Also there on the verse mentioned above, “With You, O Lord, is the righteousness”¹—this refers to the manna, “and the shame is upon us”²—this refers to the Golden Calf.³ How much trouble the commentators have had on this matter, and the verse itself is difficult, for what is it teaching us by saying “and the shame is upon us”? It is obvious that when they receive charity that they will have shame, just as the poor person will have shame to receive charity. Rather, certainly the verse is speaking of the shame that comes from another matter.

וְדוּעַ שְׂיִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹפֵן קִנּוּי לְהַקֵּב"ה פְּעֻבָּדִים פְּנֵעֵנִים, וּמִשּׁוּם הֵכִי צָנָה לָנוּ "פִּיִּלִי בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִים", וְקִיָּמָא לֵן דִּיכּוֹל הֵרֵב לוֹמַר לְעֶבֶד "עֲשֵׂה עִמִּי וְאִינִי זָנָד" אֲלָא יִתְפַּרְגֵּס מִן הַצְּדָקָה. וְכֵן פֶּסֶק הַרְמַב"ם (בְּפָרֶק ט' מֵהַלְכוֹת עֲבָדִים), וְאִם כֵּן הַקֵּב"ה לֹא הִיָּה סְתִיב מִן הַדִּין לְזוֹן אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל, שְׁהָרִי הָיָו עֲבָדִים לוֹ, וְכִשְׁנֵן אוֹתָם נִקְרְאוּת צְדָקָה, כְּמוֹ שְׂיִהְיֶה נִחְשָׁב לְצְדָקָה לְאֲדוֹן שְׁנֵן אֶת עֲבָדוֹ.

It is known that Israel itself is acquired by the Holy One, Blessed be He, as Canaanite slaves, and because of this, He commanded us, “For it is to Me that the Israelites are servants,”⁴ and we hold that “a master can say to [his] slave: Work for me, but I will not sustain you,”⁵ rather you will be sustained from charity. For a Jewish master, this rule “applies [only to] a Canaanite slave, about whom it is not written: ‘With you.’ But [with regard to] a Hebrew slave about whom it is written: ‘[It is good for him] with you’ (Deut. 15:16), [this does] not [apply, and the master must sustain him just as he sustains the members of his own household.]”⁶ The Rambam also ruled thus (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Slaves, chapter 9, halacha 7).⁷ If so, the

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¹ Dan. 9:7.

² Ibid.

³ Ex. Rabbah 41:1.

⁴ Lev. 25:55.

⁵ Ketubot 43a, 58b; Bava Kamma 87b; Bava Metzia 93a; Gittin 12a, 12b.

⁶ Ketubot 43a, 58b; Bava Kamma 87b.

⁷ Mishneh Torah, Laws of Slaves, chapter 9, halacha 7: “A master may tell his Canaanite slave: ‘Work for me, but I will not provide you with sustenance,’ and the slave must instead, go and beg from door to door and derive his sustenance from charity. For the Jews are obligated to support the slaves that live among them.”

Holy One, Blessed be He, was not obligated according to the law to sustain Israel, as they were considered to be his slaves. I.e., if we work for a flesh-and-blood Jewish master, we are legally considered as Hebrew slaves. But in the context of being the property of G-d, we are considered as Canaanite slaves. Then, when He sustained them, this is called “charity,” as it would be considered charity for a master who sustained his Canaanite slaves.

אָמַנְם יֵשׁ פּוֹסְקִים שְׂפוֹבְרִים דְּבִשְׁנֵי בְצוּרַת אֵין הָרַב יָכוֹל לֹאמַר לְעֶבֶד “עֲשֵׂה עִמִּי וְאֵינִי זָנָד”, כִּסְבֶּרֶת רַבֵּן שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל בְּגִישׁוֹ (דף י"ב) דָּאֵמַר יָכוֹל הָעֶבֶד לֹאמַר לְרַבּוֹ בְּשְׁנֵי בְצוּרַת אוֹ פְרָנְסֵנִי אוֹ הוֹצִיאֵנִי לְחֵירוֹת, וְכֵן פֶּסֶק בְּהַגְהָה יוֹרֵה דְעָה (סימן רמ"ז סעיף כ').

Indeed, there are decisors who are of the opinion that in drought years, a master is not able to say to his slave, “work for me, but I will not sustain you,” according to the opinion of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel in tractate Gittin (page 12a), who said, “A slave can say to his master in drought years: ‘Either sustain me or send me out to freedom,’ ” and so it is ruled in the gloss of Moses Isserles to the Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De’ah (siman 246, se’if 20).

וְנִהוּ פְשֻׁט הַמְדַרְשׁ "לֵךְ ה' הַצְדָּקָה" בְּמִן, שְׁהָרִי אֲנַחְנוּ לֵךְ לְעֶבְדִים וְלֹא הֵייתְ סָיִב מִן הַדִּין לְזוֹן אוֹתָנוּ, וְהוֹרְדֶת לָנוּ הַמֶּן בְּתוֹרַת צְדָקָה. וְאִם תֹּאמַר שְׁהֵייתְ סָיִב מִן הַדִּין לְזוֹן אוֹתָנוּ וְאֵינִי נִקְרָא צְדָקָה, לְפִי שְׁהֵי בְּמַדְבָּר מְקוֹם תֵּהוּ כִּי אֵין לָחֶם וְאֵין מַיִם וְהֵי דוֹמֵא דְבִשְׁנֵי בְצוּרַת, וְכִסְבֶּרֶת רַבֵּן שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל דְּיָכוֹל הָעֶבֶד לֹאמַר לְרַבּוֹ אוֹ פְרָנְסֵנִי אוֹ הוֹצִיאֵנִי לְחֵירוֹת, עִם כָּל זֶה לָנוּ בּוֹשֶׁת הַפָּנִים, שְׁאֵחַר שְׁהוֹרְדֶת לָנוּ אֵת הַמֶּן וּפְרָנְסָתָנוּ אָנוּ מְרַדְנֵנוּ בָּהּ וּבִקְשָׁנוּ לְצִאת לְחֵירוֹת בְּמַעֲשֵׂה הָעֶגְלָה.

This is the plain meaning of the Midrash: “With You, O Lord, is the righteousness”—this refers to the manna. For we are as slaves to you, and you are not obliged according to the law to sustain us, and you brought down the manna to us according to the law of righteousness. Maybe You will say that You were obliged according to the law to sustain us and that it is not called charity, because they were in the wilderness, a place that is a wasteland with no food and no water. This was similar to the drought years, and the law is according to the opinion of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, who said, “A slave can say to his master: ‘Either sustain me or send me out to freedom.’ ” Nevertheless, we should be ashamed, that after You brought down the manna for us, we rebelled against You and asked to go to freedom in the incident of the Golden Calf.

וְעוֹד מִמָּה נִפְשָׁד לָנוּ בּוֹשֶׁת הַפָּנִים, אִם קִבְּלָנוּ הַמֶּן בְּתוֹרַת צְדָקָה לָנוּ הַבּוֹשֶׁת, וְאִם אִם נֹאמַר שְׁאֵינִי צְדָקָה, דְּהִלְכָה כְּרַבֵּן שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל וְהַמְדַרְשׁ נִקְרָא בְּשְׁנֵי בְצוּרַת, מְכַל מְקוֹם יֵשׁ לָנוּ יוֹתֵר בּוֹשֶׁת הַפָּנִים בְּמַעֲשֵׂה הָעֶגְלָה.

Also, whichever way you look at it, we are ashamed. If we received the manna according to the law of charity, we are ashamed. Even if it is said that it was not charity, according to the law of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, and with the consideration that the wilderness is considered like drought years, nevertheless, we have a greater shame through the incident of the Golden Calf.

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