

# Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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## Chapter XXII: Vayakhel (Ex. 35:1–38:20)

### Essay 2. The purpose of public gatherings

**מִדְרָשׁ** ילקוט על פסוק "וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה", מתחלת התורה ועד סופה אין בה פְּרִשָּׁה שְׁנֵאמַר בְּרֵאשִׁי "וַיִּקְהַל" אֵלָּא זו בלבד. אָמַר הַקַּב"ה עֲשֵׂה לָּךְ קִהְלוֹת גְּדוּלוֹת וְדְרוֹשׁ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּרַבִּים הַלְכוֹת שַׁבָּת, כְּדֵי שְׂיִלְמְדוּ מִמֶּךָ דוֹרוֹת הַבָּאִים לְהִקְהִיל קִהְלוֹת בְּכָל שַׁבָּת וְשַׁבָּת וְלִיכְנֹס לְבֵתִי מִדְרָשׁוֹת לְלַמֵּד וְלְהוֹרוֹת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה אִיסוּר וְהִיתָר, כְּדֵי שְׂיִהְיֶה שְׁמִי הַגָּדוֹל מְתַקְלָם בְּיָנֵיהֶם. וּמִכָּאֵן אָמְרוּ, מֹשֶׁה תִּקְוָה לָהֶם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל שְׂיִהְיוּ דוֹרְשִׁים בְּעֵינָיו שֶׁל יוֹם, הַלְכוֹת פְּסַח בְּפֶסַח, הַלְכוֹת עֲצָרֶת בְּעֲצָרֶת, הַלְכוֹת חַג בְּחַג. אָמַר מֹשֶׁה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אִם אַתֶּם עוֹשִׂים כְּסֹדֵר הַזֶּה הַקַּב"ה מַעֲלֶה עֲלֵיכֶם כְּאִילוֹ הַמְּלַכְתֶּם אוֹתוֹ בְּעוֹלְמוֹ, שְׁנֵאמַר "וְאַתֶּם עֲדֵי נְאֻם־ה' נֶאֱנִי־אֵל" עכ"ל.

**There is a Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (parashat Vaichal Remez 18) on the verse, “Moses then gathered** the whole Israelite community and said to them: These are the things that the L-rd has commanded you to do”<sup>1</sup>:

**From the beginning of the Torah to its end, there is no section in which it is said in the beginning “and he gathered” except for this one alone. The intent is that the Holy One, Blessed be He, said, “Make great gatherings and explain before their great numbers the laws of the Sabbath. [This is] in order that the future generations will learn from you to assemble gatherings for each and every Sabbath and to bring them into study halls to teach and to instruct Israel the words of Torah [regarding what is] forbidden and [what is] allowed, in order that My great Name will be praised in their eyes.”**

**From here, they said that Moses established for them, for Israel, that they should explain the matters of the day: the laws of Passover for Passover, the laws of Shavuot for Shavuot, the laws of [each] holiday for [that] holiday.**

**Moses said to Israel: “If you act according to this arrangement, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will credit you as if you had enthroned Him in His world. [This is] as it is said, “So you are My witnesses, declares the L-rd, and I am G-d.”<sup>2</sup>**

- Yalkut Shimoni on Torah, 408:2

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<sup>1</sup> Ex. 35:1.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 43:12.

צריך עיון מה ענין קהלות אלו, ולמה נוקא הוצרך זה לדורות הבאים ולא לדורו של משה, כדמשמע מלשון המדרש כדי שילמדו ממך הדורות הבאים, ועוד מה ראיה מייתי מפסוק "ואתם עדי".

**Investigation is required what the relevance of these gatherings is.**

**Also, why is this especially necessary for the future generations and not for the generation of Moses, as it sounds from the language of the Midrash, “In order that the future generations will learn from you”?**

**Also, what proof comes from the verse, “So you are My witnesses”?**

ונש לומר דאיתא בטור ארח חיים (סימן רס"ח) שחזרין לומר "ונכלו" אחר ערבית של שבת להעיד כלם ביחד על מעשה בראשית, וכתב הט"ז דניחיד המתפלל אינו חוזר לומר "ונכלו" דאין עדות ליחיד, ועדה שלימה בעינן להעיד להקב"ה דהיינו עשרה, ואם ירצה יחיד לאומרה לא יתפגין לשם עדות עכ"ל. נראה מכאן שאינו דומה השבח הניתן להקב"ה ברוב עם, להשבח הניתן לו מהיחיד, שהרי כל אחד ואחד כבר אמר "ונכלו" בעמידה ואף על פי כן חזרין לומר אותו בקול רם ובניחוד.

**It can be said that it's brought in the Tur, Orach Chaim (siman 268, se'if 7) that [people] return to say, “The Heavens and the Earth were finished [va'yechulu] [va'yechulu],”<sup>3</sup> following the Ma'ariv prayer of the Sabbath so that everyone testifies together about the act of Creation. I.e., the verses are recited first during the Amidah (Shemoneh Esrei) prayer of Ma'ariv, but this is recited silently, each person at his own pace. Following the silent Amidah, it is then recited out loud and in unison. The Taz writes that a person praying independently, i.e., without a minyan, does not return to say, “The Heavens and the Earth were finished” after his silent Shemoneh Esrei prayer, for there is no testimony with a single individual. A complete testimony is required to testify for the Holy One, Blessed be He, which is ten men, but if an individual should desire to recite it, he should not intend to do so for the sake of testimony.<sup>4,5</sup>**

**It appears from here that the praise given to the Holy One, Blessed be He by a majority of the people cannot compare to the praise given to Him from an individual, for each and every person has already said, “The Heavens and the Earth were finished” in the Amidah prayer, and nevertheless they return to recite it out loud and in unison.**

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<sup>3</sup> Gen. 2:1–3.

<sup>4</sup> David ha-Levi Segal (c. 1586–1667), Polish rabbi and author of the *Turei Zahav* (“Taz”), a commentary on the Shulchan Aruch. See *Turei Zahav*, Orach Chaim, siman 268, se'if katan 5.

<sup>5</sup> While the Taz rules that in order for a recitation of *va'yechulu* to serve as testimony, a minyan of 10 men saying it aloud and in unison is required, other poskim, such as the Mishneh Berura 268:19, hold that two men saying it aloud and in unison would suffice, as two men can serve as witnesses in court cases..

ובפרק ו' ד'שבת איתא דסנדל המסומר אסרוהו בשבת משום מעשה שהיה בשבת, וגם ביום טוב מפני שהוא יום כנופייא כמו שבת. אבל לא בתענית צבור אף על פי שהוא יום כנופייא שנתקבצין לבתי כנסיות ואינם עושים מלאכה, לפי שהוא כנופייא דהיתירא, ואינו אסור בעשיית מלאכה כמו בשבת, (ועיי"ש דף ס' ע"ב). וכן הוא הדין שמתירין חרמי צבור בשבת לפי שהוא יום כנופייא לרבים.

**In the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of tractate Shabbat, it is brought that a spiked sandal is forbidden to wear on the Sabbath<sup>6</sup> because of an incident that happened on the Sabbath,<sup>7</sup> and it is also forbidden on a holiday, because this is a day of gathering similar to the Sabbath. But it is not forbidden on a communal fast day even though this is also a day of gathering when people join together in synagogues and don't engage in work, because it is a gathering of permission, when performing labor is permitted, and it is not forbidden to do labor, such as on the Sabbath, and see there, page 60b. Similarly, it's the law that it's permitted to release forbidden communal items on the Sabbath, even though one does not need those items for Shabbat, because it is a day of gathering for the community, and it's permissible to discuss such matters during such a public gathering.<sup>8</sup>**

ובפרק ד' דפסחים ההולך ממקום שאין עושין למקום שעושין נותנין עליו חומרי מקום שיצא משם . . . ואין בזה משום אל ישנה אדם מפני המתלוקת, משום שהרואה אותו בטל אומר אין לו מלאכה לעשות, דהא כמה בטלני איכא בשוקא עכ"ל.

**Also, in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of tractate Pesachim:**

In a place where [the people were] accustomed to perform labor on Passover eve until midday, one [may] do [so on that day]. In a place where [the people were] accustomed not to perform [labor], one [may] not do [so]. [I.e., labor isn't prohibited then by Torah law, but depends on local custom.] **If one travels** from a place where [people] perform [labor on Passover eve] to a place where [people] do not perform [labor], or **from a place where [people] do not perform [labor on Passover eve] to a place where [people] perform [labor, the Sages] impose upon him the stringencies of [both] the place from which he left** and the stringencies of the place to which he went. [In both cases, he may not perform labor]. The Sages stated a principle]: **A person [may] not deviate [from the local custom], due to [potential] dispute.**

- Mishnah Pesachim 4:1, Pesachim 50a–b

**This is because one who sees him deviate [from the local custom allowing work, by abstaining from work] will say that he had no labor to perform, and not because he was observing a**

<sup>6</sup> Mishnah Shabbat 6:2.

<sup>7</sup> Shabbat 60a–b: The Gemara gives a number of possible reasons. Basically, either the sound of a spiked sandal on stone, or the impression left by a spiked sandal, led Jews to panic that their enemies were upon them. This led to panic and a stampede, which killed many.

<sup>8</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 306:12; Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim, se'if 341.

prohibition.<sup>9</sup> **“Go out and see how many idle people there are in the marketplace [even on days when it is permitted to perform labor].”**<sup>10</sup>

ואם כן אף על פי שכל אדם מונע עצמו מעשיית מלאכה בשבת, אין בזה היכר שעושין זה מפני ציוויו של מקום, דהא כמה בטלגי איכא בשוקא, אבל אם יתאספו כלם במקום אחד ללמוד או לשמוע הדירוש של החכם בשבת, אז יתפרסם הדבר שעושים זה ונקא ביום זה לפי שהוא אסור בעשיית מלאכה, שכך צנה הבורא שמים נאריך זכר למעשה בראשית. וגדול קילוסו של הקב"ה העולה מקהלה גדולה כמה שעולה מפל יחיד ויחיד לבדו.

**If so, even though each person prevents himself from doing work on the Sabbath, there's no recognition that he is doing so because of the commandment of a place, for “go out and see how many idle people there are in the marketplace.” But if all gather together in one place to learn or to hear the explanation of the Torah scholar on the Sabbath, then the matter will be publicized that they are specifically doing so on this day because he is forbidden to engage in labor, for thus commanded the Creator of Heaven and Earth as a remembrance of the act of Creation. The praise of the Holy One, Blessed be He, that rises from a great congregation is greater than that rising from each and every individual acting independently.**

וכל זה הוא בדורות הבאים שהם מפוזרים מעט פאן ומעט פאן וטרודים בכל יום ויום מימי החול בעסקיהם ובמלאכתם, אבל דורו של משה היו כלם מקובצים תוך מחנה ישראל ואינה ניכרת כל כך אסיפתם בשבת. ועוד שלא היה להם מלאכה לעשות, שהרי היו ניוונים מן המן ולא היה להם עבודת הקרקע, וגם לא תיקון המלבושים דכתיב "שמלתך לא בלתה מעליך". והגם שהיה להם טחינה ובישול כדכתיב "נטחננו" וכו' "דכו במדכה ובשלו בפרור" וכו', עם כל זה אף אם יתאספו לדרשה של משה אין ראיה שלא יעשו מלאכה זו, שאפשר שהקדימו לעשותה קודם הדרש או יעשוה אחר הדרשה, ומשום הכי דורו של משה לא היה צריך לכך אלא ללמד לדורות הבאים.

**All of this is in the future generations, for they are scattered a little here and a little here and are busy every day of the week with their business and their work. But Moses' generation were all grouped together within the camp of Israel and the reason for their meeting on Shabbat is not so evident. Moreover, they had no work to do, since they were fed on manna and they did not have agricultural work, nor work mending the clothing, as it is written, “the clothes upon you did not wear out.”**<sup>11</sup>

**It is true that they had the work of grinding and cooking, as it is written, “The people would go about and gather it, grind it between millstones or pound it in a mortar, boil it in a pot, and make it into cakes.”**<sup>12</sup> **Nevertheless, just because they gathered together for Moses' sermon, that wasn't proof they had not done this work of grinding, pounding, and boiling. For it is possible that they did the work before the sermon, or that they would do it after the sermon. Because of this, we understand that the generation of Moses needed this gathering only**

<sup>9</sup> Bartenura on Mishnah Pesachim 4:5.

<sup>10</sup> Berachot 17b; Pesachim 55a.

<sup>11</sup> Deut. 8:4.

<sup>12</sup> Num. 11:8.

**in order to teach the future generations** to assemble on the Sabbaths and holidays. When future generations, who would have so much more to do, such as agricultural work, mending clothing, etc., would nonetheless cease their work on the Sabbath and festivals to assemble in gatherings, it would be more obvious to others that it was being done in order to testify to G-d's unity and His creation of the universe.

אי נמי דורו של משה לא הנה צריך לכוף שהואיל שהמן הנה יורד בכל יום וביום שבת לא הנה יורד הנה בנה פרסום גדול ואין צורך שיתאספו יחד לדרישה. אבל אחר דורו של משה אם יתאספו כנזכר למעלה בימים האלו דוקא, הם מעידים כלם יחד שהקב"ה ברא העולם, ומתקלס שמו של הקב"ה שגזר עליהם איסור מלאכה והם שוכתים לשניים דבריו פעבדים העושים גזרת מלכם.

**Alternatively, the generation of Moses didn't need this gathering for themselves, because the manna fell on every day, but on the Sabbath day it did not fall. This was a great announcement of the Sabbath as the day of rest, and there was no need that they would gather together for a sermon to attest to their own generation of G-d's unity and creation of the universe.**

**But after the generation of Moses, when there was no longer the miracle of manna, if they were to gather together, as mentioned above on these days, they would all testify together that the Holy One, Blessed be He, created the world. Then the Name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, would be praised, that He had decreed upon them the prohibition of work on the Sabbath. It would be clear to all that they were resting to fulfill His words, as servants who fulfill the decree of their King.**

ומביא ראיה מפסוק "ואתם עדי" על פי המדרש שהביא טור ארח חיים (סימן רצ"ב) שלושה מעידין זה על זה, הקב"ה ישראל ושבת. ישראל ושבת מעידין על הקב"ה שהוא אחד וכו' ועיי"ש.

**[Our Midrash of Yalkut Shimoni] brings proof from the verse, "So you are My witnesses, declares the L-rd, and I am G-d." Consider another Midrash, which the Tur, Orach Chaim (siman 292) brings: Three testify about each other, [and these three are] the Holy One, Blessed be He, and Israel, and the Sabbath. Israel and the Sabbath testify about the Holy One, Blessed be He, that He is one, and see there.** The Tur focuses on the unity of G-d, as included in the Amidah of mincha on the Sabbath.

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