

Zera Shimshon

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

Essay 9. The nations seek to destroy the love between G-d and Israel

מדרש רבה "ויַעֲשׂוּ כָל־חַכְמֵי־לֵב" וְכו', הָדָא הוּא דְקָתִיב "מִיָּמִים רַבִּים לֹא יוֹכְלוּ לְכַבּוֹת אֶת־הָאֱהָבָה". "מִיָּמִים רַבִּים" אֵלּוּ אוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם פְּדַקְתִּיב "כַּהְמוֹת יָמִים יְהִיּוּ", אִם מִתְפַּנְסִים כָּל הָאוֹמוֹת לְבַטֵּל אֶת הָאֱהָבָה שֶׁיֵּשׁ בֵּין הַקָּב"ה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, אֵינָם יְכוּלִים, דְּקָתִיב "מִיָּמִים רַבִּים" וְכו', וְקָתִיב "וְנֹאֲהַב אֶת־יַעֲקֹב", "וְנִהְרֹת לֹא יִשְׁטְפוּהָ" אֵלּוּ הַמְלָכוֹת, וְכֵן הַפְּתוּב אוֹמַר "אֶת־מִי הַנֶּהָר . . . אֶת־מְלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר" עכ"ל.

There is a **Midrash Ex. Rabbah**:

“**Then all the wise-hearted** among those engaged in the work **made** the tabernacle of ten strips of cloth, which they made of fine twisted linen, blue, purple, and crimson yarns; into these they worked a design of cherubim” (Ex. 36:8). **This is what is written: “Vast floods cannot quench love**, nor rivers drown it; if a man offered all his wealth for love, he would be laughed to scorn” (Song of Songs 8:7). **“Vast floods,”** these are the nations of the world, as it is written, “Ah, the roar of many peoples, **that roar as roars the sea**” (Isaiah 17:12), **if all the nations gather together to nullify the love that exists between the Holy One, Blessed be He, and Israel, they would not be able to do so, as it is written, “Vast floods cannot quench love,”** and it is written, “I have shown you love, said the L-rd. But you ask, ‘How have You shown us love?’ After all—declares the L-rd—Esau is Jacob’s brother; **yet I have loved Jacob**” (Malachi 1:2). **“Nor rivers drown it,”** these are the [foreign] monarchies, and similarly Scripture says, “Assuredly, My L-rd will bring up against them **the mighty, massive waters of the Euphrates, the king of Assyria** and all his multitude” (Isaiah 8:7).

- Midrash Ex. Rabbah 49:1

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צריך עיון איך סלקא דעתך שהאומות יהיו יכולים לבטל את האהבה, והיא אהבה אינו דבר גופני אלא דבר רוחני, ובשלמא אם הנה אומר אם מתכנסין כל האומות לאבד את ישראל תס ושלום, ניהא שפיר, שנה הוא דבר שהנה יכולת בידם אם לא מחמת שהקב"ה לא שבק ולא ישבוק, אמנם באהבה אין מקום לסברא זו. ועוד קשה מה שאמר "ונהרות לא ישטפה" אלו המלכות, וכי המלכות אינם האומות עצמם, ומה הוסיף לנו בנה.

Question 1: **This requires investigation how it would enter one's mind that the nations would be able to nullify the love, for love is not something physical but rather spiritual. Granted, if it had said that if all the nations had gathered together to physically destroy Israel, G-d forbid, it would make more sense, for this is something physical, and that is something within the ability of [the nations'] power, if not for the fact that the Holy One, Blessed be He, did not abandon us and would not abandon us.¹ However, regarding the love between G-d and Israel, which is not physical but spiritual, there is no room for such reasoning.**

Question 2: **Further, it's difficult to understand what was said, "nor rivers drown it, these are the monarchies," for aren't the monarchies the nations themselves? What is added for us by this?**

ויש לומר שאהבה זו תלויה במאי דאמרינן בפירק קמא דברכות "אהב ה' שערי ציון" אוהב ה' שערים המצויינים בהלכה. ועוד אמרינן בגילקוט "הקל קול יעקב", כל זמן שקולו של יעקב נשמע בבתי בנסיות ובבתי מדרשות, אין "הגידים ידי עשו" שולטות בו, דשמע מינה שעקר האהבה תלויה בעסק התורה.

It can be said that this love depends upon what is said in the first chapter of tractate Berachot (8a): "[Rafraim bar Pappa said to Rava:] What is [the meaning of] 'The L-rd loves the gates of Zion [Tziyon] [ציון], His foundation on the holy mountains, more than all the dwellings of Jacob' (Ps. 87:2)? [This means that] the L-rd loves the gates distinguished [metzuyananim] [המצויינים] through [the study of] halacha more than the synagogues and study halls."² Also, it is said in the Yalkut Shimoni, on the verse, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, yet the hands are the hands of Esau" (Gen. 27:22): "The voice is the voice of Jacob," as long as the voice of Jacob is heard in synagogues and study halls, "the hands [that] are the hands of Esau" won't rule him.³

Answer to Question 1: **We hear from this that the principal of the love between G-d and Israel depends upon engagement in Torah study. I.e., the love between G-d and Israel is something spiritual, rather than something physical, but it is based upon Israel's involvement in Torah study, which is something physical. Thus, perhaps the nations could nullify the love by preventing Israel from learning Torah?**

¹ Yalkut Shimoni on Nach 816:3.

² I.e., relying on the similarity between the words *Tzion* ("Zion") and *metzuyananim* ("distinguished").

³ Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 115:4.

והשָׁמַר קְאָמַר אִם מִתְפַּנְסִין כָּל הָאוּמוֹת לְבַטֵּל עֶסֶק הַתּוֹרָה כְּדֵי לְבַטֵּל הָאֵהָבָה, אֵינָם יְכוּלִים, לְפִי שָׂאֵם יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יוּכְלוּ לְלַמּוֹד בְּפִרְהֶסְיָא יְלַמְדוּ בְּצִנְעָא, וְאִם לֹא יוּכְלוּ לְלַמּוֹד תּוֹרָה שְׁבִכְתָּב יְלַמְדוּ תּוֹרָה שְׁבִעַל פֶּה בְּלִבָּד, וְהָאוּמוֹת לֹא יִרְגִישׁוּ אִם הֵם מְדַבְּרִים דְּבַרֵי תּוֹרָה אוֹ מִיֵּלֵי דְעֵלְמָא. וְכִמּוֹ שְׁמַצִּינוּ בְּפֶרֶק בְּתַרְא דְּפִסְחִים שְׁרַבֵי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאִי לְמַד תְּמַשֶּׁה דְּבַרֵים מִר' עֲקִיבָא כְּשֶׁהָיָה חֲבוּשׁ בְּבֵית הָאֲסוּרִים, וְעוֹד מְצִינוּ בְּפֶרֶק קִמָּא דְּסַנְהֶדְרִין (דָּף י"ב) שְׁרַבֵי עֲקִיבָא עֲצִמוּ כְּשֶׁהָיָה חֲבוּשׁ בְּבֵית הָאֲסוּרִים וְהָיָה יוֹצֵא לִיהֶרֶג עֵיבַר שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים וְכוּ' וְעֵי"ש. וְלֹא נִתְפָּס מִתְחַלְקָה אֶלָּא לְפִי שֶׁהָיָה מְקַהֵל קְהָלוֹת בְּרַבֵּי, וְכִמּוֹ שֶׁהוֹכִיחַ עַל זֶה ר' יוֹסִי בֶן קִסְמָא לִר' חֲנִינָא בֶן תְּרַדְיוֹן בְּפֶרֶק קִמָּא דְּעֵבֻדָּה זָרָה, וְעֵינִן בְּחִידוּשָׁנוּ לְמַסַּכְתָּא אַבּוּת.

But now as it says, if all the nations were to gather together to nullify the engagement in Torah study, they would not be able to do so, for if Israel wouldn't be able to learn publicly, they would learn privately, and if they wouldn't be able to learn the Written Torah, they would learn the Oral Torah only, and the nations wouldn't sense if they were speaking words of Torah or about mundane matters.

As we find in the last chapter of tractate Pesachim (112a), that Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai learned five things from Rabbi Akiva when he was imprisoned. I.e., despite being entirely in the control of the Romans, he was able to speak elliptically and learn Torah. We also find in the first chapter of Sanhedrin (page 12a)⁴ that Rabbi Akiva himself, when he was imprisoned and stood to be executed, intercalated three years, and see there. Nor were they only learning Torah in private or by speaking elliptically; rather, they were even learning publicly, despite the threat of death. [Rabbi Akiva himself] was only apprehended initially because he was convening assemblies in public and engaging in Torah study.⁵ Also, as Rabbi Yosei ben Kisma rebuked to Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon, in the first chapter of tractate Avodah Zarah (18a), that he was endangering his life, for "I heard about you that you sit and engage in Torah [study], and convene assemblies in public, and have a [Torah] scroll placed in your lap." Also, see our novelties developed for tractate Pirkei Avot, i.e., in Toldot Shimshon.

וְאִם תֹּאמַר הֲלֹא לְאַחַר שִׁיגְלוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבֵין הָאוּמוֹת יְהִיָּה לָהֶם טִירוּף דַּעַת וּבְלִבּוּלִים וְכָל יְמֵיהֶם מְכֹאֲבִים וְלֹא יוּכְלוּ עוֹד לְלַמּוֹד, עַל זֶה אָמַר "וְנִהְרֹת לֹא יִשְׁטַפּוּהָ" אֵלּוּ הַמַּלְכִּיּוֹת, דְּאִמְרִינוּ בְּעִירוּבֵינוּ "לְכֶה דוֹדֵי נְצִיא הַשְּׂדֵה", בֵּא וְאַרְצָהּ תִּלְמִידֵי חֻכְמִים, עוֹסְקִים בְּתוֹרָה מִתוֹךְ דוּחַק וְצַעַר הַגְּלוּת. וְעֵינִן לְקַמּוֹן פְּרֻשֶׁת בְּמִדְבַר פִּירוּשׁ מְדַרְשׁ זֶה יוֹמֵר בְּאוּרְךָ.

Answer to question 2: **In case you'll say, after Israel is exiled among the nations, won't [Israel] be unsettled and confused and suffering all their days, and they won't be able to learn Torah? For this reason, it says, "Nor rivers drown it," these are the [foreign] monarchies." As it says in tractate Eiruvin (21b), "Come, my beloved, let us go into the field" (Song of Songs 7:12), come and I will show You Torah scholars who [work the land but nonetheless] engage in Torah [study], within the pressure and the anguish of the Exile.** That is, the reference to nations of the world means when we are attacked in our own Land, whereas the reference to monarchies means when we are challenged in Exile. See below, parshat Bamidbar, essay 4, the explanation of the Midrash at greater length.

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⁴ The first edition incorrectly cited Pesachim page 12, whereas it is actually Sanhedrin 12a.

⁵ Berachot 61b.