Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter XXXI: Emor (Lev. 21:1-24:23)

Essay 14. The commandment of the Menorah

לְּדָרָשׁ רַבָּה עַל פָּסוּק "צַו אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְחוּ אֵלֶיְדּ שֶׁמֶן" וְכוּ', "אֱלֹהִים מִי כָמוֹדּ" מִי כָמוֹדְּ בָּעֶלְיוֹנִים, מִי כָמוֹדְ בָּעֶלְיוֹנִים, מִי כָמוֹדְ שָׁאַתָּה כּוֹבֵשׁ עַל מִדְּת הַדִּין, אַתָּה מֵאִיר לָעֶלְיוֹנִים וּלְתַחְתּוֹנִים, אַתָּה מֵאִיר לְכָל בָּאֵי הָעוֹלָם וְאַתָּה בִּקְתָיב, שָׁל מִדְּת הַדִּין", מְתַּאָנָה לָאוֹרָן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל, הָדָא הִיא דַכְתִיב, "צַו אָת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" עכ"ל. קַשֶּׁה דְּמָה עִנְיקַרָא. מַעִּיקַרָא. וְאַהָּה מֵאִיר" וְכוּ', הָיִינוּ "מֵי כָּמוֹדְ" דְּאָמֵר מֵעִיקַרָא.

There is a Midrash Rabbah on the verse, "Command the children of Israel to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling lamps regularly.":

"G-d, who is like You"²—who is like You among the Heavenly beings, who is like You among those on earth, who is like You, that You subdue the attribute of justice, You illuminate for the Heavenly beings and for those on earth, You illuminate for all the inhabitants of the world, and You desire the light of Israel. This is [the meaning of] what is written: "Command the children of Israel."

- Lev. Rabbah 31:1

A difficulty is what the relevance here is of "You subdue the attribute of justice," and why does it use so much repetition, as "You illuminate" is included in "who is like You," which was already stated.

וְגֵשׁ לוֹמֵר דְּאִיתָא בַּמִּדְרָשׁ עַל פָּסוּק "וְעַל־מִי לֹא־יָקוּם אוֹרֵהוּ", מֵי בָּא מִכּּל בָּאֵי עוֹלָם וְאָמֵר לֹא הֵאִיר לִי חַמָּה בְּיוֹם וּלְבֵנָה בַּלַּיְלָה. עכ"ל. עוֹד אָמְרוּ בַּמִּדְרָשׁ עַל פָּסוּק "בַּבֹּקֶר בַּבֹּקֶר מִשְׁפָּטוֹ יִתֵּן לָאוֹר לֹא נֶעְדָּר", שֶׁבְּכָל יוֹם וְיוֹם יוֹשֵׁב הקב"ה בְּדִין עָם שֵׁמֵשׁ וְיַרָחַ שֵׁאֵינַם רוֹצִים לָצֵאת בִּשָׁבִיל אוֹתַם בָּנֵי אָדָם שֵׁמָשׁתַּחַוִים לָהֵם וְכוּ' עכ"ל.

It may be said that it's brought in the Midrash on the verse, "On whom does His light not shine," "who from all the inhabitants of the world ever said: the sun did not shine for me by day, and the moon by night." 4

^{*} English translation: Copyright © 2025 by Charles S. Stein. Additional essays at https://www.zstorah.com

¹ Lev. 24:2.

² Ps. 71:19.

³ Job 25:3.

⁴ Lev. Rabbah 31:6.

They also said in the Midrash on the verse, "He issues judgment every morning, as unfailing as the light," that every single day the Holy One, Blessed be He, sits in judgment of the sun and the moon, who do not want to emerge to illuminate the world because of those people who indict them [as objects of idolatry] because [the people] bow down to them, etc. 6

ּוּבְפָּרָשׁת [תִּצנָה] אָמְרוּ בְּמִדְרָשׁ רַבָּה דְּעִנָיָן הַמְּנוֹרָה מְשָׁל לְפִקֵּח וְסוּמָא שֶׁהָיוּ מְהַלְּכִים בַּדֶּרֶהְ וְהָיוּ פְּקֵּח מְנְהִיג אֶת הַסוּמָא, אָמֵר לוֹ פִּקָּח לַסוּמָא כְּשֶׁבָּאוּ לְבֵיתָם צֵא וְהַדְלֵק לִי אֶת הַנֵּר כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹא מַחֲזִיק לִי טוֹבָה מִמָּה שֶׁעָשִׁה תִּבֶּר לִי טוֹבָה מִמָּה שֶׁעָשָׂה עִמְּהֶם וְהָאִיר לָהֶם הַדֶּרֶךְ. אָמְנָם עַל טַעַם זֶה יֵשׁ לְהַקְשׁוֹת צְנָּה אֶת הַמְּנוֹרָה לְנִשְּׁרָאֵל כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹא יַחֲזִיקוּ לוֹ טוֹבָה מִמָּה שֶׁעָשָׂה עִמְהֶם וְהַאִיר לָהֶם הַבְּּרֶךְ. אָמְנָם עַל לְאוֹרָן שֶׁל יִשְׁרָאֵל. שִׁל זִּבְשְׁלְמָא הָתָם הַפִּקּם צָּרִיךְ לְּבֵּר אָבָל כָּאן הקב"ה אֵינוֹ צָּרִיךְ כְּלֶל לְאוֹרָן שֶׁל יִשְׁרָאֵל.

In the parashat of [Tetzaveh], the Midrash Rabbah says that the matter of the Menorah is a parable to a sighted man and a blind man who were walking along the way, and the sighted one was leading the blind one. When they arrived at their home, the sighted one said to the blind one: go and light the lamp for me, so that you will not feel indebted for what I did for you on the way. So too the Holy One, Blessed be He, commanded the Menorah to Israel so that they would not feel indebted for what He did for them in lighting the way in the wilderness with the pillar of fire.⁷

However, we can question this reason, for the parable of the blind man lighting the lamp for the sighted man is not similar to the moral lesson that the Jewish lit the Menorah for G-d. There, the sighted man needs the lamp, but here, the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not need at all the light of Israel.

וְזוֹ הִיא מַמָּשׁ כּנָונַת מִדְרָשֵׁנוּ שֶׁהֵבִיא עַל פָּסוּק "צַו אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" הַפָּסוּק שֶׁל "מִי כָמוֹךּ" וְכוּ', כְּלוֹמַר בְּנַדִּאי צָרִיךְ טַעַם לְמָה צָנָה הקב"ה מִצְנַת הַדְּלָקת הַנֵּרוֹת, וְאֵין לוֹמֵר כְּטַעַם הַמִּדְרָשׁ שֶׁל פָּרָשַׁת [מְצַנָּה] הַנַּ"ל מָשָׁל לְפָקּח וְסוּמָא, שֶׁהְרֵי הוּא אֵינוֹ צָרִיךְ כָּלֵל לָאוֹרָה. אֶלָּא אַדְרַבָּא הוּא מֵאִיר לְעֶלְיוֹנִים וְתַחְתּוֹנִים, וְהָיִינוּ מִי כָמוֹךְ בְּעֻלְיוֹנִים, מִי כָמוֹךְ שָׁאַתָּה כּוֹבִשׁ מִדְּת הַדִּין וּמוֹצִיא בּוֹ הַמִּדְרָשׁ. וְלֹא דֵּי שֶׁאַתָּה מִאִיר לַצַּדִּיקִים אֶלָּא אַף לְרְשָׁעִים, וּמִשׁוּם הָכִי הוֹסִיף מִי כָמוֹךְ שֶׁאַתָּה כּוֹבֵשׁ מִדְּת הַדִּין וּמוֹצִיא הַשָּׁעָם מִצְנַת הָבּרוֹת הִיא בְּמָשֶׁל הַפְּקָח וְהָסוּמָא כנּ"ל.

This question is precisely the intent of our Midrash, which brings on the verse "Command the children of Israel" the verse "Who is like You," etc. That is to say: indeed, we need a reason why the Holy One, Blessed be He, commanded the mitzvah of lighting the lamps. It cannot be said to be for the reason in the Midrash of parashat [Tetzaveh] above, the parable of the sighted man and the blind man, for He does not need their light at all.

On the contrary, He illuminates the Heavenly and earthly realms, and this is the meaning of "Who is like You among the Heavenly beings, who is like You among the earthly beings," with which the Midrash began.

⁵ Zeph. 3:5.

⁶ Lev. Rabbah 31:9.

⁷ Ex. Rabbah 36:2.

Not only do You illuminate the righteous, but even the wicked; that is why it added: "Who is like You, who subdues the attribute of justice," and causes the sun to shine even for the nations. If so, it is impossible to say that the reason for the commandment of the lamps is like the parable of the sighter man and the blind man mentioned above.

אָבָל עֲדִיִין הָיִינוּ יְכוֹלִים לְתָרֵץ הַמִּדְרָשׁ הַנַּ"ל דְּמִיְירֵי שֶׁהַפָּקַּחַ אוֹמֵר לַסוּמָא לְהַדְלִיק לוֹ הַנֵּר בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁאֵינוֹ צָרִיךְ לוֹ כְּלֶל, כְּגוֹן שֶׁעֲדִיִין הוּא יוֹם וְהַסוּמָא אֵינוֹ יוֹדֵע לְהַבְחִין. אִי נָמֵי שֶׁיַּדְלִיק לוֹ הַנֵּר בְּיוֹם מַמְשׁ שֶׁאוֹמֵר שֶׁצָּרִידְ לוֹ כְּגוֹן לַחָתוֹם אִנֶּרְת וּכִיוֹצֵא וּלְפִי הָאֱמֶת אֵינוֹ צָרִיךְ לוֹ כְּלָל וְגַם הַסוּמָא אֵינוֹ נָהֶנָה כְּלָל.

But we could still resolve that Midrash by saying that it is speaking of a case where the sighted man tells the blind one to light the lamp at a time when he does not need it at all, such as when it is still daytime, but the blind man doesn't know how to distinguish this.

Alternatively, that the sighted man says that [the blind man] should light the lamp specifically during the day, while saying that he needs it, such as for signing a letter or the like, but in truth, he does not need it at all, and the blind man also does not benefit from it.

וּמֵעַתָּה הָנֵי שַׁפִּיר הַמָּשָׁל דּוֹמֶה לְנְמְשָׁל, שֶׁהָרֵי הַנֵּרוֹת שֶׁל הַמְּקְדָּשׁ אֲסוּרִים בַּהְנָאָה לְנוּ וְגַם הקב"ה אֵין לוֹ צוֹרֶךְ מֵאֵלוּ הַנֵּרוֹת. וּמְעַתָּה הָנִי שְׁבָּיר הַמְּשָׁל, שֶׁהָרֵי הָנֶּלְיוֹנִים וְלַתַּחְתוֹנִים, וְאַף לְאוֹתָם שֶׁאֵין לָהֶם זְכוּת כְּלָל וְהַיִינוּ לְכֶל בָּאֵי שׁלְּכִּיךְ שׁ שֶׁלָנוּ הוֹסִיף לוֹמֵר אַתָּה מֵאִיר לָעֶלִיוֹנִים וְלַתַּחְתוֹנִים, וְאֵרְ לְהֹוֹנֶת בְּמְנֵּוּ מְקְפִּיד אַם צְרִיכִים לְהַחְזִיק לְךּ טוֹבָה. וּמָה טָעֵם יֵשׁ לְהַקְפִּיד עַל מַה שֶׁעָשִׁיתְ עִמְּנוּ עְוֹלָם, וְכֶל זָה אַתָּה עוֹשֶׂה בְּחָנָם, וְאֵינְךְ מֻעָּה, וְזֶהוּ וְאַתָּה מִתַּאֲנָה לְאוֹרָן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל. אֶלָּא וַדָּאי שֶׁלֹא צִוִּיתְ בְּבָּאוֹתוֹ פַּעַם יוֹתֵר מִמֵּה שָׁאַתָּה עוֹשֶׂה עִמְנוּ בְּכָל יוֹם וּבְכָל שֶׁעָה, וְזֶהוּ וְאַתָּה מִתַּאֲנָה לְאוֹרָן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל. אֶלָּא וַדָּאי שֶׁלֹא צִוִּיתְ לֵנוּ אֵת הַמְּנוֹרָה אֻלָּא כְּדֵי לִזְכוּתְבוֹה זוֹ.

Now, with that understanding, the parable that the sighted person asked for the lamp even though he didn't need it fits the moral lesson as to why G-d commanded us to light the Menorah, since the Temple lamps are forbidden for our use, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, has no need at all from these lamps.

Therefore, our Midrash added: "You illuminate the Heavenly and earthly realms," and even for those who have no merit at all—that is, for all the inhabitants of the world—and all this You do for free, and You do not insist that we need to repay you with goodness.

So why would You be strict regarding what You did for us that one time when you guided us in the wilderness, more than what You do for us every day and every hour? This is the meaning of "and You desire the light of Israel." Rather, certainly, You commanded us the Menorah only to grant us merit through this mitzvah.

* * *