

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXXVI: Beha'alotecha (Num. 8:1–12:16)

Essay 5. All were saved on account of Moses

סוטה פֶּרֶק קמ"א "שֵׁשׁ-מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף רַגְלֵי הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי בְקִרְבּוֹ", אָמַר לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשִׁבְלֵי נִצְלָתָם כְּלַכְּם.

In tractate **Sotah, the first chapter**, it says:

[Pharaoh's astrologers] saw that the savior of the Jewish people would be stricken by water. [They thought that their vision indicated that Moses would be killed in the water.] They arose and decreed: "Every son that is born you shall cast into the river" (Ex. 1:22). Once [Jochebed] cast Moses [into the water, although he was protected in a box, the astrologers] said: We no longer see [in the stars anything] like that sign [we saw as to the downfall of the leader of the Jews by water, and therefore at that moment] they canceled their decree. But they did not know that [what they saw foretold that Moses] would be stricken on account of the waters of Meribah.¹ [They envisioned a downfall for Moses by water but didn't fully comprehend their vision.]

And this is what Rabbi Chama, son of Rabbi Chanina, says: What is [the meaning of] that which is written: "These are the waters of Meribah, where [the children of Israel] strove [with the L-rd, and He was sanctified in them]" (Num. 20:13)? [The verse indicates that] these are [the waters] that the astrologers of Pharaoh saw and [on account of which they] erred. And this is what Moses said: "[**The people**], **among whom I am, are six hundred thousand men on foot** [*ragli*] [רַגְלֵי] [and yet You have said: 'I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month']" (Num. 11:21). **Moses said to them, to Israel: "Because of me,** [which is an alternative meaning of the word *ragli*], **all of you were saved,** [as the decree to throw all males into the river was canceled on my account].

- Sotah 12b

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¹ Num. 20:2–13.

והקשו בתוספות תימא דאדרבא בשבילו נגזרה גזירה שראוי איצטגניני פרעה, ויש לומר הוא הנה הראשון המושלך ליאור עכ"ל. נעדיין הקושני במקומה עומדת, דאפילו תימא שהיא הנה הראשון שהושלך ליאור אין לו להשפיעם ולומר להם בשבילי נצלתם כלכם, דאדרבא בשבילו נגזרה גזירה, ועקשיו שלא מת שום אדם אין לו לא שבח ולא גנאי.

It is asked in the Tosafot, “You can say to the contrary, that it was because of him that a decree was issued, because of what the astrologers of Pharaoh saw? It can be said [in answer], he was the first [infant] to be cast into the river, and the initial decree, ‘If it is a boy, then kill him’ (Ex. 1:16), was not on account of [Moses], but because [Pharaoh said,] ‘They will fight with us’ (Ex. 1:10), and it is generally men who fight.” Yet the question still stands, that even though he was the first to be thrown into the river, he has no right to praise and to tell them, “Because of me, all of you were saved,” rather, because of him, a decree was issued, and now, when we see that no man has died, he should have neither praise for having saved everyone, nor derision for having endangered everyone to start with.

וניש לומר דפוננת משה היתה קד, שאם לא הנה הוא, לא היו המצריים גוזרים הגזירה של "כל-הבן היולד הנארה משליכהו". ואם לא היתה גזירה זו, לא הנה הקב"ה טובע המצריים בים מדה כנגד מדה כמו שפירש רש"י ו"ל במים דימו לאבדם והם נאבדו במים.

It can be said that Moses’ intent was thus: that if not for him, the Egyptians would not have issued the decree of, “Every boy that is born you shall throw into the river” (Ex. 1:22). Also, if not for this decree, the Holy One, Blessed be He, would not have drowned the Egyptians in the river, measure for measure as punishment for what they wanted to do to the Jewish infants, as Rashi of blessed memory explained on Ex. 18:11, where he wrote: “by water they thought to destroy them, and they [themselves] were destroyed by water.”

ואם לא היו המצריים נטבעים בים לעולם לא היו נקראים ישראל ניצולים מן המצריים כמו שפירש התוספת יום טוב בסוף פסחים על מתניתין עד היכן הוא אומר בית שמאי אומרים וכו' ובית הלל אומרים עד "הלמיש למענינומים". דבית הלל סברי כיון דבמזמור הראשון לא נזכר קריעת ים-סוף, צריף שיאמר גם השני שיש בו הזכרת קריעת ים-סוף, כיון שאמר אחר כך ברפת הגאולה. פי לא נושעו ישראל מיד מצרים עד שקרע להם את הים ונטבעו המצריים, כדכתיב "ויושע ה' ביום ההוא את-ישראל מיד מצרים", ביום ההוא דנקא.

If the Egyptians had not been drowned in the sea, Israel never would have been called “saved from the Egyptians,” as the Tosefet Yom Tov² explained at the end of Pesachim (chapter 10, Mishna 6) regarding the teaching: “Until where [in the Passover Hagadah] does one recite [the first half of Hallel (with the second half coming after the meal)]? Beit Shammai say: Until ‘[Who makes the barren woman dwell in her house as] a joyful mother of children, hallelujah’ (Ps. 113:9). And Beit Hillel say: Until ‘[Who turned the rock into a pool of water], the flint into a fountain of waters’ (Ps. 114:8).” [The law here follows Beit Hillel.] For as the

² Rabbi Gershon Shaul Yom-Tov Lipmann ben Nathan ha-Levi Heller (c. 1579 – 19 August 1654), Bohemian rabbi and Talmudist. His commentary on the Mishnah, called the Tosefet Yom-Tov, was published 1614–1617.

Tosefet Yom Tov explains, **Beit Hillel think that since in the first psalm, i.e., Ps. 113, the splitting of the Sea of Reeds is not mentioned, that one should also say the second psalm, i.e., Ps. 114, for within it the splitting of the Sea of Reeds is mentioned.** Beit Hillel believe this is necessary, according to the Tosefet Yom Tov, **since after** this reading of the first half of Hallel at the Passover seder, **one says *Birkat haGeula* [the Blessing of the Redemption].³ For Israel was only delivered from the hand of Egypt when the sea was split for them and the Egyptians were drowned, as it is written, “Thus the L-rd delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians” (Ex. 14:30), precisely on that day.**

וְזֶהוּ שֶׁאָמַר מֹשֶׁה בְּשִׁבְלֵי נִגְזְרָה גְזִירָה וְהִיא הַיְתָה סִבָּה שֶׁכּוֹלְכֶם נִיצַלְתֶּם מִיַּד הַמִּצְרִיִּים. וְעַל זֶה הִקְשׁוּ הַתּוֹסְפוֹת וְהָרִי אִם בְּשִׁבְלֵי נִגְזְרָה גְזִירָה זֶה אִם כֵּן הוֹשְׁלַכּוּ אֵינָה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְיָאֹר וּכְבָר מֵתוֹ, וּמָה שֶׁבַח הוּא זֶה שֶׁיִּצְוּלוּ מִיַּד הַמִּצְרִיִּים בְּשִׁבְלֵי, אִם אֲדָרְבָּא גְתַמְיִיבוּ קִצָּת מֵהֶם לְמִיתָה בְּשִׁבְלֵי. וְתִרְצוּ שֶׁהוּא הִזָּה הִרְאִשׁוֹן וְכוּ' וּבִגְזִירָה זֶה לֹא מֵת שׁוֹם אֶחָד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, וְאֲדָרְבָּא הוּא שֶׁבַח לְמֹשֶׁה שֶׁבְּשִׁבְלֵי נִגְזְרָה גְזִירָה וּבְשִׁבְלֵי גְזִירָה זֶה נִיצְוּלוּ כּוֹלֶם בְּקִרְיַעַת יַם־סוּף.

This is what Moses effectively said, “Because of me, the decree was imposed, and that was the reason that all of you were saved from the hand of the Egyptians. Regarding this, the Tosafot asked, if because of him this decree was issued, if so, some sons of Israel have already been sent to the river and have already died, and what praise is this that they have been saved from the hand of the Egyptians because of him, if to the contrary a few of them have been obliged to die because of him! [The Tosafot] resolved this, that he was the first [infant] to be cast into the river, and in this decree not a single one died from the Children of Israel, and to the contrary, this is praise to Moses, for because of him the decree was issued, and because of this decree, they were all saved in the splitting of the Sea of Reeds.

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³ “Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, Who redeemed us and redeemed our ancestors from Egypt, and brought us on this night to eat *matzo* and *maror*; so too, L-rd our G-d, and G-d of our ancestors, bring us to other appointed times and holidays that will come to greet us in peace, joyful in the building of Your city and happy in Your worship; that we shall eat there from the offerings and from the Passover sacrifices, the blood of which shall reach the wall of Your altar for favor, and we shall thank You with a new song upon our redemption and upon the restoration of our souls. Blessed are you, L-rd, Who redeemed Israel.”