

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXXVII: Shelach (Num. 13:1–15:41)

Essay 6. One reason that Moses had to die in the wilderness

"אָנִי ה' דִּבַּרְתִּי אִם-לֹא זֹאת אֲעֲשֶׂה" נְכוּי, מֵהוּ "אִם-לֹא זֹאת אֲעֲשֶׂה" וְאִיךָ מִתְקַשֵּׁר הַפְּסוּק וְנִחַד, וְאִם בָּא לְהַשְׁמִיעֵנוּ שְׁדָבָר ה' יְקוּם לְעוֹלָם הוּא דָבָר פְּשוּט, וְעוֹד מֵהוּ הַכֶּפֶל "יִתְמוּ וְשָׁם יָמָתוּ" דָּאִם יִתְמוּ פְּשִׁיטָא שְׁיָמוּתוּ.

Following the false report of the spies of the Land of Israel and its inhabitants, we read: **"I the L-rd have spoken, isn't it so that I will do this** unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against Me: in this wilderness they will be finished off, and there they will die."¹

What is meant by "isn't it so that I will do this"? How is the verse connected together? If it comes to teach us that the word of G-d will stand forever, that is an obvious matter.

Also, what is the meaning of the duplication, "they will be finished off, and there they will die," for if they will be finished off, it is obvious that they will die.

וְיִשׁ לְפָרְשׁוֹ עִם מֵה שְׁפָתַי הַכֶּלִי יִקָּרַע עַל פְּסוּק "וְהִמַּתָּה אֶת-הָעָם הַזֶּה כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד" שְׁפָנוּת מִשָּׁה הִיָּתָה לומר שְׁיִשׁ חִילוּל ה' בְּדָבָר לְהַמִּיתָם כֹּל כֹּד תִּקְרָה וּמִיָּד, שְׁנֵה הוּא מַעֲשֶׂה גָבֵר בְּעֵלְמָא הַמְמַהֵר לְנִקּוּם בְּכַעֲסוֹ וְכַדִּי בְּזִיווֹן וְקִצְף לְנַחֵס אֵלָיו יִתְבַּרַךְ מִדָּה זו עכ"ל. וְלִכְּנֹן אָמַר הַפְּתוּב "אָנִי ה' דִּבַּרְתִּי" כְּלוּמַר אֵל אֲנִי וְלֹא אִישׁ וּמֵה שְׁאֲמַרְתִּי לֹא אֲמַרְתִּי בְּכַח הַכַּעֲס בַּק מִצַּד הַדִּין וְהַמְשָׁפֵט, אֲבָל אִם לֹא, כְּלוּמַר "אִם-לֹא" אוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת זו שְׁדִבַּרְתִּי בְּשִׁבִיל חִילוּל הַשֵּׁם, לֹא אֲבַטֵּל הַגְּזִירָה בְּשִׁבִיל זֶה, אֲלֵא "זֹאת אֲעֲשֶׂה" שְׁבִמְדָבָר הַזֶּה יִתְמוּ וְנְכוּי.

This can be explained according to what the *Kli Yakar* wrote on the verse "if You then slay this people to a man,"² that Moses' intention was to say that there would be a desecration of G-d's Name in killing them all at once and immediately. For such an act appears as that of a human who is quick to take revenge in his anger, and such a trait of hastiness and rage is disgraceful to attribute to the Blessed One.³

Therefore, Scripture says "I the L-rd have spoken," meaning I am G-d and not a man, and what I have spoken was not spoken out of anger, but from justice and judgment. But "isn't it so," meaning, if I cannot do what I said because of the desecration of G-d's Name, I will not nullify the decree because of that; rather, "I will do this," that "in this wilderness they will be finished off." However, they did not die immediately, but over a course of 40 years.

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¹ Num. 14:35.

² Num. 14:15.

³ Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz (1550–1619), *Kli Yakar* (Lublin 1602), Num. 14:13.

אָבֵל עֲדִיין יֵשׁ לְדַקְדָּק וְכִי לֹא הָיָה יוֹדֵעַ הַקָּב"ה שֶׁמִּשְׁשָׁה יָשִׁיב לוֹ כָּדָּ, וְעוֹד לְמָה דִּבֶּר אִם לֹא הָיָה עֲתִיד לַעֲשׂוֹת. וַיֵּשׁ לוֹמֵר שֶׁאִם הָיָה הַקָּב"ה מְכַלֵּה אוֹתָם כְּרַגְעֵי אֵז הָיְתָה מִיְתָתָם כְּפָרְתָם, שֶׁהוֹאִיל שֶׁמִּיד שֶׁחָטְאוּ מִתּוֹ וְלֹא נִהְנוּ כְּלוּם מֵעוֹלָם הָיָה אֶחָד חָטְאוּתָם הָיוּ רְאוּיִים לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, לְפִי שֶׁאִין אָדָם לוֹקָה בְּשָׁנֵי דִינָיִם, וְכָל אָדָם יֵשׁ לוֹ שְׁנֵי חֲלָקִים, אֶחָד בְּגוֹן עֲדוֹן וְאֶחָד בְּגִיחָם, אֶחָד בְּעוֹלָם הָיָה וְאֶחָד בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וְיִי שֶׁאֲבָד חֲלָקוֹ בְּעוֹלָם הָיָה וְלֹא נִהְנֶה כְּלוּם אֶחָד שֶׁחָטְאָ, מִן הַדִּין הוּא שֶׁיִּזְכֶּה לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, מֶה שֶׁאִין כֵּן אִם אֶחָד חָטְאָ יְהִי נִהְנֶה מִהָעוֹלָם הָיָה קוֹדָם שֶׁיִּמּוּת אֵז אִף עַל פִּי שֶׁיִּמּוּת קוֹדָם זְמַנּוֹ מִחֲמַת חָטְאוֹ אֲפֹשֶׁר שֶׁאֲבָד הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא בְּשִׁבִיל מֶה שֶׁנִּהְנֶה בְּעוֹלָם הָיָה אֶחָד חָטְאוֹ, וְעַל זֶה נֶאֱמַר "וַיִּשְׁלַח לְשַׁנְאָיו" וְכוּ'.

But still there is a difficulty: did the Holy One, Blessed be He, not know that Moses would respond in this way, to complain that would be like the action of an angry man? Also, why did He speak if He was not going to carry it out?

It can be said that if the Holy One, Blessed be He, had destroyed them immediately, then their death would have been their atonement, for since they died right after they sinned and did not enjoy anything of this world after their sin, they would be worthy of the World-to-Come, since a person is not punished with two punishments. Every person has two portions, one in the Garden of Eden and one in Gehenna; one in this world and one in the next. One who loses his portion in this world and derives no pleasure from it after sinning, by law should merit the World-to-Come. But if after the sin he enjoys this world before dying, then even if he dies before his time, due to his sin, it is possible that he has lost the World-to-Come because of the benefit he had from this world after his sin. About this, it is said, “He repays those that hate Him to their face, to destroy them.”⁴

וְנִהְיוּ רְמֵז לְמָה שֶׁאֲמָרוּ וְ"לִי קָבֵל עוֹלָמוֹ בְּחַיָּיו בְּדַבָּר מוֹעֵט. וְכַוֻּנָת הַקָּב"ה הָיְתָה לְהַמִּיתָם מִיַּד בְּעוֹלָם הָיָה כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּזְכּוּ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וְאִף עַל פִּי שֶׁהָיָה יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁיֵּשׁ חִילּוּל ה' בְּדַבָּר, עִם כָּל זֶה לֹא הָיָה מַקְפִּיד, שֶׁהָרִי בְּעוֹלָם הָיָה גַם עִתָּה שֶׁהִגְלֵנוּ בֵּין הָאוּמוֹת אוֹמְרִים אֵיךְ גְּבוּרָתוֹ, הֵיכֵן הֵם נוֹרְאוּתוֹ, כִּמוֹ שֶׁדִּבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים לֹא רָצוּ לוֹמֵר גְּבוּר וְנוֹרָא, וְהוּא שׁוֹתֵק וְכוּבֵשׁ אֵת כְּעֵסוֹ כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּהְיֶה נִיצוּלִים מִן הַגִּיחָם וְנִזְכֶּה לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

This is an allusion to what our Sages said: “He received his World-to-Come in his lifetime through a small matter,” i.e., an evil person may experience some good things in this world, but then not receive any share of the World-to-Come.⁵ The intention of the Holy One, Blessed be He, was to kill them immediately in this world so that they would merit the World-to-Come. Even though He knew that this would result in a desecration of G-d’s Name, nevertheless He was not concerned, for even now, in this world, as we have been exiled among the nations, they say: “Where is His might? Where are His awesomeness?”—as Daniel and Jeremiah did not want to say “mighty” and “awesome.”⁶ That is, Moses referred to “the great, the mighty, and the awesome G-d.”⁷ Daniel said, “the great and awesome G-d,”⁸ but did not say

⁴ Deut. 7:10.

⁵ Deut. Rabbah 2:14; Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance 6:1.

⁶ Yoma 69b.

⁷ Deut. 10:17.

⁸ Dan. 9:4.

“mighty.” Jeremiah said, “the great, the mighty, L-rd of Hosts,” but didn’t mention “awesome.”⁹
Even so, He is silent and withholds His anger so that we be spared from Gehenna and merit the World-to-Come.

והקב"ה לא היה יכול לעשות זה בלי ידיעת משה רבנו עליו השלום שהיה רוען ומנהיגן של ישראל, כמו שאמר הכתוב "נה' אָמַר הַמְּכַסֶּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם" וכו', ומשום הכי דבר עם משה מה שהיה רוצה לעשות. ומשה לא רצה לקבול זה החילול השם, כמו שגם אברהם אמר "חללה לך מעשתי כדבר הזה להמית צדיק עם-רשע", לפי שהצדיקים שהם יסוד עולם ומוסיפין פח בגבורה של מעלה במעשיהם הטובים, אינם רוצים לקבול שום רפיון חס ושלום וחילול השם, וכבכול שהיה דפוק ח' דבבא קמא החובל בעצמו, פטור. אחרים וכו' חייבים. אָמַנְם כְּנֻגַד זֶה אִם יתְקַיְּמוּ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה אַחַר שִׁחְטָאוֹ וַיְהִי מִמֶּנּוּ אֲפִילוֹ אִם יָמוּתוּ קוֹדֵם זְמַנָּם יֵאָבְדוּ הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

The Holy One, Blessed be He could not do this without the knowledge of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, who was the shepherd and leader of Israel, as Scripture says, “Now, the L-rd had said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do.’”¹⁰

Therefore, He spoke with Moses about what He intended to do. But Moses did not want to tolerate this desecration of God's Name, just as Abraham also said: “Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty.”¹¹ This is because the righteous, who are the foundation of the world and “who add strength to the power on high”¹² through their good deeds, do not want to tolerate any weakening, G-d forbid, or desecration of G-d’s Name. This is, so to speak, like the case in Bava Kamma: “One who injures himself, although it is not permitted for him, is [nevertheless] exempt [from penalty]. Others who injured him are liable [to pay him].”¹³

However, in contrast to this, if they remain in this world after they sin and enjoy it, even if they die before their time, they lose the World-to-Come.

וזהו הטעם שהוכרח משה רבנו עליו השלום למות בחוץ לארץ, כדי שישפכו דורו לתחיית המתים, כדאיתא בילקוט ריש פרשת ואתחננו אם אתה תהיה נקבר אצלם אף הם באים בזכותך וכו'. וקושה טוביה חטא וזיגוד מנגיד, אלא לפי שמשה גרם להם שיאבדו העולם הבא משום הכי הוצרך גם הוא להצטרע למות בחוץ לארץ כדי לנכות אותה ההנאה שנהנו ישראל מהעולם הזה אחר חטאם ולהביאם עמו לעולם הבא.

This is the reason Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, was compelled to die outside the Land, so that his generation, who had died and been buried in the wilderness, would merit resurrection of the dead. This is as it says in the Yalkut at the beginning of Parashat Va’etchanan: “If you will be buried with them, they too will come by your merit,”¹⁴ etc.

⁹ Jer. 32:18.
¹⁰ Gen. 18:17.
¹¹ Gen. 18:25.
¹² Eichah Rabbah 1:33; Yalkut Shimoni on Nach 1012:1.
¹³ Mishna Bava Kamma 8:6; Bava Kamma 90b.
¹⁴ Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 814:5; Deut. Rabbah 2:9.

But there is a difficulty: Is it right that “Tuvia sinned and Zigud is punished?”¹⁵ I.e., isn’t it the case that the generation of Moses sinned, but Moses himself is being punished with them? **Rather, since Moses caused them to lose the World-to-Come, by preventing G-d from killing them immediately after they sinned, therefore he too needed to suffer by dying outside the Land, in order to atone for the enjoyment that Israel had from this world after their sin, and to bring them with him to the World-to-Come.**

ועל זה אמר הפתוב "אני ה' דברתי", כלומר לא דברתי לעשות זה מחמת הפעם ורוגזו כמו שיעשה איש אחד עם חברו, אלא במדת רחמים עשיתי זאת להמיתם בפתע פתאום תכף ומיד, כדי שיזכו לעולם הבא, והוכרחתי לדבר עם משה קודם העשייה לפי שמשה היה רועה שלהם.

Regarding this, Scripture says, “I the L-rd have spoken,” as if to say, I did not speak to do this out of anger and rage, as one person might act toward his fellow. Rather, with the attribute of mercy I did this, to kill them suddenly and immediately, so that they might merit the World-to-Come. I was compelled to speak with Moses before acting, because Moses was their shepherd.

ועתה שמשה לא רצה בזה עם כל זה הגזירה לא תבטל ואדרבא יהיה יותר קשה להם שלא יזכו לעולם הבא, וזהו "אם לא זאת אעשה", כלומר אם לא אעשה כאלו דברתי עם כל זה זאת אעשה ש"במדבר הזה יתמו וישם ימתו", כדתנו בסנהדרין "יתמו" — בעולם הזה, "וישם ימתו" — בעולם הבא, ואף לר' אליעזר דפליגי עם ר' עקיבא וסבירא ליה דעליהם נאמר "אספו לי חסידיו" וכו', מפל מקום מודה הוא שזמן הדיו לא היה להם להחיות, אלא שזכות הצדיקים דהיינו משה אהרן ומרים יאספו אותם, מפלל דאסיפה מיהא בעו.

But now that Moses did not agree to this, nonetheless, the decree will not be annulled. On the contrary, it will be harder for them, for they will not merit the World-to-Come. This is the meaning of, “isn’t it so that I will do this,” as if to say, if I will not do as I said, nevertheless, this I will do, that “in this wilderness they will be finished off, and there they will die.” As it is taught in tractate *Sanhedrin* (108a): “ “They will be finished off” [means] in this world, ‘and there they will die’ [means] in the World-to-Come. These are the words of Rabbi Akiva.” Even according to Rabbi Eliezer, who disagrees with Rabbi Akiva and holds that the verse, “Gather to Me My devout ones,”¹⁶ refers to them, nonetheless he agrees that by strict law they were not worthy to live. However, the merit of the righteous, namely, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, would gather them in. From this we learn that at the very least, they required gathering.

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¹⁵ Makkot 11a; Pesachim 113b.

¹⁶ Ps. 50:5.