

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter XXXIX: Chukat (Num. 19:1–22:1)

### Essay 8. G-d expressed concern for the property of Israel

"וְהִשְׁקִיתָ אֶת-הָעֵדָה וְאֶת-בְּעִירָם", פִּירֵשׁ רַשִׁ"י מִלְמַד שְׁחַס הַקַּב"ה עַל מְמוֹנָם שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל. מְקַשִּׁים מִנָּא לִיהּ לַרַשִׁ"י לְלַמּוּד שְׁחַס וְכוּ', דִּילְמָא לְכַד נְאָמַר "וְהִשְׁקִיתָ אֶת-הָעֵדָה וְאֶת-בְּעִירָם" כִּי כֶּף הָיְתָה שְׂאֵלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׂאֲמָרוּ לָמָּה נִמּוּת אֲנַחְנוּ וּבְעִירָנוּ. וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לְהַקְשׁוֹת דְּמִילְתָּא דְּפִשְׁיטָא הִיא שְׁהַקַּב"ה נּוֹתֵן לְכָל בְּרִיָּה דִּי מְחַסְרָהּ וְהוּא בְּרַחְמֵיּוּן מְקַרְנֵי רַאמִים עַד בְּיַצֵּי כִּינִים.

There is a verse: “You and your brother Aaron take the rod and assemble the community, and before their very eyes order the rock to yield its water; thus you shall produce water for them from the rock **and provide drink for the congregation and their beasts**” (Num. 20:8). **Rashi explained, “This teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, took pity on the money of Israel,”** i.e., on their valuable property. **People question from where Rashi learned that [G-d] took pity on Israel’s property. Perhaps it is said, “and provide drink for the congregation and their beasts,” because thus was the question of Israel, who said, “Why should we die, us and our beasts?”**<sup>1</sup> I.e., the people were first to mention the animals, indicating a concern not only for their own lives but also for their property, so G-d answered them in kind. **Also, one can question that the matter is obvious, that the Holy One, Blessed be He, gives every creature sufficient sustenance and He in His mercy sustains everything from the horns of wild oxen to the eggs of lice.**<sup>2</sup>

וְיֵשׁ לֹאמַר שֶׁהוֹצִירָהּ רַשִׁ"י לְפִרְשׁ כֶּף מְשׁוּם שֶׁהָיָה מְקוֹם לְטַעוֹת וְלֹאמַר דִּישְׁרָאֵל לֹא הָיוּ זֹכִים וְכֹא לָהֶם מִיָּם בְּנֻכּוֹת הַבְּהֵמוֹת, כְּמוֹ שֶׁמְצִינּוּ בַּעֲבוּרָא דְּאַלְכְּסַנְדְּרוֹס מוֹקְדוֹן חֵיכּוֹן בְּגִינּוּ בְּעִירָא דְּקִיק מְטָרָא נְחִית, "אֲדָם-וּבְהֵמָה" אֲדָם בְּנֻכּוֹת בְּהֵמָה "תּוֹשִׁיעַ ה'".

**One can say that Rashi had to interpret thus, because there was room to err and to say that Israel didn’t merit [water], and it came to them in the merit of the beasts. This is as we find in the incident of Alexander of Macedonia, “By your lives,<sup>3</sup> it was for the sake of the**

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<sup>1</sup> This is a paraphrase of Num. 20:4, “Why have you brought the congregation of the L-rd into this wilderness to die there, us and our beasts?”

<sup>2</sup> Shabbat 107b: “Abaye said to Rav Yosef: . . . Didn’t the Master say: The Holy One, Blessed be He, sits and sustains everything from the horns of wild oxen to the eggs of lice?” Ps. 22:22 is the source for “horns of wild oxen.”

<sup>3</sup> An exclamation.

**city that the rain came down.** This refers to the legend that Alexander the Great visited Africa to learn their laws. As Alexander watched, two men came before the African king. One explained that he had bought what he thought was an empty building. Instead, he found a treasure within it. He wanted to return the treasure to the seller, but the seller said that his intent had been to sell the building and whatever was in it. Each felt he would be stealing from the other if he kept the treasure. The African king instructed the buyer and seller to marry a son and daughter to each other, and allow them to spend the treasure. Alexander the Great expressed astonishment at the ruling. He admitted that he thought the ruling was correct, but explained that in his country, he would have killed both the buyer and seller, and kept the treasure for himself. [Recognizing the wickedness of Alexander's approach,] the African king asked if the sun shone in Alexander's country, and if the rain fell there. Alexander answered yes. The African king then asked if there were sheep and goats in Alexander's country. Alexander answered yes. The African king then said, "[Woe to] that man! It is for the sake of the sheep and the goats that the sun shines for you and that the rain comes down upon you. So it is for the sake of the [flocks] that you are saved." "You deliver **man and beast**, O L-rd" (Ps. 36:7) means "**You deliver man in the merit of the beast, O L-rd.**"<sup>4</sup>

וְהִיִּיתִי אוֹמֵר שְׂאֵף כָּאֵן הַשְּׂמִיעֵנוּ הַפְּתוּב "וְאֶת־בְּעִירָם" לוֹמֵר שְׂבֻזְכוֹת הַבְּהֵמוֹת הָיוּ הַמַּיִם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל. מִשּׁוּם הֵכִי פָתַח רֶש"י מְלַמֵּד וְכוּ'. דְּמִדְּכַתֵּב "וְאֶת־בְּעִירָם" מוֹכַח שֶׁהַבְּהֵמוֹת הָיוּ טְפִלִּים לָהֶם, דְּאֵי לֹא הֵכִי הֵיךְ לוֹ לוֹמֵר וְהַשְּׂקִיתָ אֶת־הַעֲדָה וּבְעִירָם, כְּמוֹ שְׂאֵמְרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל "לְמוֹת שָׁם אֲנַחְנוּ וּבְעִירָנוּ" בְּלֹא "אֶת".

**I could say that here too,** just as in the Midrash regarding Alexander the Great, **Scripture is letting us hear “and their beasts” to say that it was in the merit of the beasts that there was water for Israel. Because of this,** to prevent this incorrect view, **Rashi wrote, “This teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, took pity on the money of Israel.” [Scripture] wrote, *et ha'eda v'et be'iram* [אֶת־הַעֲדָה וְאֶת־בְּעִירָם], i.e., including the preposition *et* [אֶת] that is often used to introduce a direct object before both “the congregation” and “their beasts.” **From that, it proves that the beasts were subsidiary to [Israel], for if not, it would have said, “and provide drink *et ha'eda v'be'iram*” [אֶת־הַעֲדָה וּבְעִירָם], not prefixing “their beasts” with a separate “*et*”, as Israel said, “to die there, us and our beasts” (Num. 20:4), without an “*et*.”****

וְאֵין הֵכִי נִמְי אֶפְשָׁר לוֹמֵר שְׂפִנוּנֵת יִשְׂרָאֵל הִיָּתָה פְּדָה, אִף אִם אֵין לָנוּ זְכוֹת הִיָּה לוֹ לְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ בְּזְכוֹת הַבְּהֵמוֹת. וְהִיָּה דִי שְׂהֵקֵב"ה יִשִּׁיב "וְהַשְּׂקִיתָ אֶת־הַעֲדָה" וְתוֹ לֹא. וּמִמִּילָא יִשְׁתּוּ הַבְּהֵמוֹת נִמְי. וְלָמָּה חֲזַר לוֹמֵר "וְאֶת־בְּעִירָם"? אֶלָּא וְדֹאֵי לְלַמְדָּנוּ שְׂחָס הַקֵּב"ה וְכוּ'!

**It is indeed so that it's possible to say that the intent of Israel** in saying, “Why should we die, us and our beasts,” **was thus: That even if we don't have the merit, [G-d] should save us in the merit of the beasts.** If G-d understood that as their intent, and He felt that Israel had enough merit on their own, then **it would have been enough that the Holy One, Blessed be He, would have answered “You and your brother Aaron . . . shall produce water for them from the**

<sup>4</sup> Lev. Rabbah 27:1; Midrash Tanchuma, Emor 6.

rock and provide drink for the congregation,” and not said anything more. In any event, if the water were to flow for Israel, then the beasts would also drink and be saved. So why [did G-d] choose to respond by saying *v’et be’iram* [וְאֶת־בְּעִירָם], i.e., including the mention of “their beasts,” but also including the separate “*et*”? Rather, certainly it was to teach us that the Holy One, Blessed be He, took pity on the property of Israel, but that Israel merited salvation on its own, and not for the sake of their animals.

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