

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter XLIV: Devarim (Deut. 1:1–3:22)

Essay 6. Why Isaiah reversed Moses' language

"שמעו שמים והאזיני ארץ כי ה' דבר בנים גדלתי ורוממתי" וכו'. צריך ביאור איך מתקשר הפסוק רישיה לסיפיה, והמפרשים דקדקו למה שינה ממה שאמר משה "האזינו השמים . . . ותשמע הארץ".

This week's Haftorah includes the verse: **"Hear, O Heavens, and listen, O earth, for the L-rd has spoken: 'I reared children and brought them up, and they have rebelled against Me.'"**¹ **This requires explanation how to connect the beginning of the verse to the end. The commentators were precise to note what changed from what Moses had said, "Listen, O Heavens, let me speak; let the earth hear the words I utter!"**²

ותירצו לפי שהאזנה היא מקרוב ושמיעה מרחוק, ולכן משה שהיה קרוב לשמים ובפרט ביום מותו אמר לשון האזנה בשמים, אבל ישעיה שהיה קרוב לארץ אמר לשון האזנה בארץ, וכן משמע מדברי הזהר ריש פרשת האזינו, אלא דבמתר הכי קאמר התם, תאנא, בההוא זמנא דאמר ישעיהו "שמעו שמים והאזיני ארץ". כמה גרדיני טהירין אנדמנו לתברא רישיה, נפקא קלא ואמר, מהו דין דבעי לארעשא עלמין. עד דפתח ואמר, "כי ה' דבר" לאו אנא, ולא מן דידי עכ"ל.

They explained this according to the fact that "listening" is a close action, but "hearing" is a distant action. Therefore Moses, who was close to Heaven—especially on the day of his death—spoke in the language of "listening" concerning the Heavens.

But Isaiah, who was close to the Land of Israel, spoke in the language of "listening" concerning the Land. Thus is the meaning from the words of the Zohar, at the beginning of parashat Ha'azinu, as it says there:

"Listen, O Heavens, let me speak." Rabbi Chiya said, Moses' portion is blessed above that of any prophet in the world. Come and see, it is written [in Isaiah], "Hear, O Heavens, and listen, O earth, for the L-rd has spoken." "Hear, O Heavens," it is written in Isaiah, who was further away from the King, "Hear, O Heavens." As for Moses, who was nearer to the King, it is written [in Deuteronomy], "Listen, O heavens."

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¹ Isaiah 1:2.

² Deut. 32:1.

We learned that when Isaiah said, **“Hear, O Heavens, and listen, O earth,”** many prosecuting angels came to break his head. A voice resounded, saying, **“Who is that wishes to shake worlds?”** Then [Isaiah] opened with the words, **“It is not I nor is it mine, but, ‘the L-rd has spoken’ and not I.”**

- Zohar 286b (Ha'azinu 2:6–7)

וְצָרִיךְ עֵינֵינוּ מִהַ חֲטָא יִשְׁעֵיהוּ בְּזוּהָ, דְּאֵי מְשׁוּם שְׁשׂוּנָה הִסְדֵּר מְמָה שְׁאָמַר מֹשֶׁה, הֲלֹא פָתַח הַזּוֹהַר עֲצָמוֹ שֶׁם דְּמִשָּׁה הָיָה יִתִּיר קָרוֹב לְמַלְכָא וַיִּשְׁעֵיהּ הָיָה יִתִּיר רַחֲמִיקָה מִמְּלָכָא. וְאֵין סְבִירָא לִזְמַר שְׁבִשְׁבִיל שְׁקִירָא לְשָׁמַיִם וְלְאַרְצָא נְעֻנְשׁ וְלֹא מְשׁוּם שְׁשׂוּנָה הַלְשׁוֹן, שְׁהָרִי דְבָר פְּשוּט הוּא, שְׁפָבָר שְׁמַיִם וְאַרְצָא עֲדִים הֵם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּשׁ פָּתַח בְּיַד נְבִיא לְקִרְוֵא הָעֲדִים שְׁפָבָר הוֹכְנֵנוּ לְעֲדִים שְׁיִבְאוּ וְיַעֲדוּ. וְאַף אֲלֵיהּ גִּזַּר שְׁלֹא יִהְיֶה טַל וּמִטָּר מִפְּנֵי שְׁהִפְתּוּב אֹמַר "וְעֲצַר אֶת־הַשְּׁמַיִם" וְכוּ'. אֲלֵא וְדֵאֵי שְׁהָיוּ רוֹצִים לְעֻנְשׁוֹ מִפְּנֵי שְׁשׂוּנָה הַלְשׁוֹן וְגַם בְּזוּהָ אֵין לְהֵם טַעַם, וְעוֹד דְּמָה אֵיכְפַת לְהוּ לְשָׁמַיִם מְלִשׁוֹן זֶה אוֹ לְשׁוֹן אַחֵר.

It is necessary to study what sin Isaiah committed by this utterance such that the prosecuting angels wanted to harm him. **If it was because he changed the order from what Moses said, isn't it written in the Zohar itself that Moses was closer to the King, i.e., to G-d, and Isaiah was farther from the King?** I.e., as we said above, “listen” implies a close action, while “hear” implies a more distant action. So we can understand that Moses would use “listen” with regard to the Heavens, as he was closer to the King, and that Isaiah would use “listen” with regard to the earth. So why would that be the reason that the prosecuting angels would want to harm Isaiah?

On the other hand, **there's no reason to say that he was punished for calling out to Heaven and earth, instead of being punished because he changed the language. For this is a simple matter, that Heaven and earth were already established as witnesses for Israel, and a prophet has the power to call the witnesses—who were already prepared as witnesses—that they should come and testify.**

Even Elijah decreed that there should be no dew or rain,³ because the Scripture says, **“and He will stop up the Heavens,”** etc.⁴ I.e., this reinforces our understanding that a prophet has the power to call established witnesses.

Rather, it is certain that [the prosecuting angels] wanted to punish [Isaiah] because the language has changed, and there's no reason for that, according to our defense of Isaiah presented above. **Also, what do they care in Heaven for this language or some other language?**

וַיּוֹבֵן בְּמָה שְׁפָתַב הַש"ךְ, שְׁלִשׁוֹן הָאֲזִנָּה שְׁרִיף לְשָׁמַיִם שְׁהֵם נִגְדַּד הַנְּשָׁמָה, דְּהַשְּׁמַיִם"ם גִּימְטְרִיאָא נְשָׁמָה"ה, וְהַנְּשָׁמָה וְהַשְּׁמַיִם בְּקָל הֵם שׁוֹמְעִים. וְהָכִי מוֹכַח לְשׁוֹן הָאֲזִנָּה, אֲבָל פְּנִינָה הָאֲרָצָא אָמַר "וְתִשְׁמַע", שְׁהִיא פְּנִינָה הַגּוֹרָף שְׁפָתוֹב בּוֹ "נְאֻנִי כְּחֵרֶשׁ לֹא אֲשָׁמַע", שְׁאֵינּוּ שׁוֹמְעֵי אֲלֵא בְּקוֹלֵי קוֹלוֹת עַב"ל.

This will be understood by what the Shach wrote, that the language of “listening” belongs to the Heavens [הַשְּׁמַיִם] [ha'shamayim], which correspond to the soul [נְשָׁמָה] [neshama],

³ I Kings 17:1: “Elijah the Tishbite, an inhabitant of Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the L-rd lives, the G-d of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain except at my bidding.’”

⁴ Deut. 11:17: “For the L-rd’s anger will flare up against you, shutting up the skies so that there will be no rain . . .”

as the word **הַשָּׁמַיִם** has the same Gematria, 395, as the word **נֶשְׁמָה** [neshama] [soul].⁵ The soul and the Heavens easily hear, and thus is proven the language of “listening,” as Moses said.

But corresponding to the earth, [Moses] said, “let the earth hear,” which corresponds to the body, about which is written, “But I am like a deaf man, unhearing,”⁶ that they only hear a thunderous sound.

Thus, we see that “listening” corresponds to the soul, and “hearing” corresponds to the body.

ומעתה משה אָמר "הַאֲזִינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם", וַיִּשַׁבַּח בְּנֵה שְׁתֵּי טַעְמִים, הָאֶחָד לְפִי שֶׁהִיא מִשָּׁה קְרוֹב לַשָּׁמַיִם, וְהַשֵּׁנִי מִשּׁוּם שֶׁהוּא יוֹתֵר כְּבוֹד לַשָּׁמַיִם, שֶׁהֵם נִגְדַּת הַנְּשָׁמָה וְאִין צוֹרֵף לָהֶם לְשׁוֹן הַשְּׁמִיעָה כְּמוֹ הַגּוֹף, וְהַנֶּה לְשַׁעֲרָה תַּפְס טַעַם הָרֵאשׁוֹן וְאָמַר "שְׁמַעוּ שָׁמַיִם" לְפִי שֶׁהִיא יוֹתֵר רְחוּק מִמֶּה מִמִּשָּׁה. וּמִשּׁוּם הַכִּי הָיוּ רוֹצִים לְהַעֲנִישׁוּ מִטַּעַם שֶׁזֶלַל בְּכָבוֹד הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהִיא לוֹ לַחַוִּישׁ דְּדִלְמָא טַעַם שְׁנֵי עֵיקָר וְלֹא שֵׁיף כָּלֵל לומר לְשׁוֹן שְׁמִיעָה בַּשָּׁמַיִם וְהוּא זְלוּל לַשָּׁמַיִם.

From now on, we understand that **Moses had said, “Listen, O Heavens,”** and that there are two reasons for this. One reason is because Moses was close to the Heavens. The other reason is because it is more respectful to the Heavens, as [the Heavens] correspond to the soul, and for them, there is no need for the language of “hearing” as there is for the body.

Here, Isaiah grasped the first reason and said, “Hear, O Heavens,” because he was further away from them than was Moses. Because of this, [the prosecuting angels] wanted to punish him on the grounds that he disrespected the honor of the Heavens. He should have felt that perhaps the second reason was the main point, that the Heavens correspond to the soul, and that it wasn’t relevant at all to speak in the language of “hearing” for the Heavens, and that it was disrespectful to the Heavens.

וּמִשּׁוּם הַכִּי תִירַץ "כִּי ה' דִּבֶּר", אֲבָל קִשָּׁה מֵאֵן מוֹכַח שֶׁה' אָמַר כֵּן, וְלִמָּה אָמַר כֵּן, וְתִירַץ "בְּנִים גְּדַלְתִּי וְרוּמְמַתִּי", וּמֵהוּ זֶה הַגְּדֻלוֹת וְהָרוּמָמוֹת שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ לָהֶם. צָרִיף לומר דְּזָהוּ מֵה שֶׁהַשָּׁרָה שְׁכִינָתוֹ בַּתְּחִתּוֹנִים וְהַנִּים אֶת הָעֲלִיוֹנִים, כְּדֵאִיתָא בְּמִדְרַשׁ פְּרָשַׁת תְּרוּמָה, "לֵךְ ה' הַגְּדֻלָּה" וְכוּ' "כִּי־כָל בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבְאָרְצָךְ". אֵתָה מוֹצֵא כָּל מֵה שֶׁבְּרָא הַקַּב"ה לַמַּעֲלָה בְּרָא לַמַּטָּה וְכוּ', וְלֹא עוֹד אֵלָא שֶׁתְּבִיבִין כָּל מֵה שֶׁלְּמַטָּה מִשָּׁל מַעֲלָה, תִּדַּע לֵךְ שֶׁהַנִּים מֵה שֶׁלְּמַעֲלָה וַיִּרְדַּ בְּשָׁל מַטָּה, הַדָּא הוּא דְכְּתִיב "וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ" וְכוּ' וְעֵי"ש. וְכֵן שְׁלֵמָה אָמַר "ה' אָמַר לְשֹׁכֵן בְּעִרְפָּל", וּבְחִוּרְבֵן בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ מִצִּינוּ דְכְּתִיב "אֵלֶיךָ אֲשׁוּבָה אֶל־מְקוֹמִי", וְזֶהוּ הַגְּדוּלָּה וְהָרוּמָמוֹת שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ הַקַּב"ה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל.

Because of this criticism, [Isaiah] explained, “‘the L-rd has spoken’ and not I.” But a difficulty is who has proven that G-d said this, and why did He say this? [Isaiah] explained that G-d said, “I reared children and brought them up.” What is this rearing and upbringing that He gave to them? It’s necessary to say that this is the spreading out of His Shechinah in the lower world and abandoning the upper world, as is brought in Midrash Ex. Rabbah on parashat Teruma:

⁵ Rabbi Mordechai Ha’Cohen of Safed (1523–98), *Sifte Cohen on Torah* (Venice 1605), parashat Ha’azinu.

⁶ Ps. 38:14.

“Yours, L-rd, are greatness, might, splendor, triumph, and majesty—yes, all that is in Heaven and on earth.”⁷ You find that everything that the Holy One, Blessed be He, created above, He created below. Not only that, but more beloved to Him is everything below than what is above. You should know that He abandoned what is above and descended to what is below, as it is written, “And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.”⁸

- Ex. Rabbah 33:4

Thus, Solomon said, “The L-rd has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud,”⁹ and regarding the destruction of the Temple, we find that it is written, “And I will return to My abode.”¹⁰ This is the rearing and upbringing that the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave to Israel.

וְזֶה יְהִי קֶשֶׁר הַפְּסוּקִים, דְּהֵנָּה יִשְׁעֶיהּ אָמַר "שָׁמְעוּ שָׁמַיִם" לְפִי שֶׁהִנֵּה רְחוּק מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְהַשָּׁמַיִם הָיוּ רוֹצִים לְהַעֲנִישׁוּ לְפִי שֶׁלֹּא נָתַן לָהֶם הָאֲזָנָה שֶׁהוּא יוֹתֵר חָשׁוּב מִשְׁמִיעָה, וְהוּא תִּירֵץ לָהֶם "כִּי ה' דִּבֶּר", שֶׁאֵינּוּ רוֹצִים לְתַת כְּבוֹד לְשָׁמַיִם יוֹתֵר מִהָאָרֶץ אֲלָא אֲדַרְבָּא הַנִּים הַשָּׁמַיִם וְיָרַד בְּאָרְץ, וְהֵיכָן מְצִינּוּ שֶׁעָשָׂה זֶה, "בְּנִים גְּדַלְתִּי וְרוֹמַמְתִּי" כּו"ל.

This is the connection of the verses, that here Isaiah said, “Hear, O Heavens,” because he was far from the Heavens, and the Heavens wanted to punish him because he didn’t give them language of “listening,” which was more important than “hearing.” He answered them, “ ‘the L-rd has spoken’ and not I.” That is, he didn’t want to give more honor to the Heavens than the earth, rather to the contrary, [G-d] had left the Heavens and descended to the earth, where we found that He was doing this, “I reared children and brought them up.”

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⁷ I Chron. 29:11.

⁸ Ex. 25:8.

⁹ I Kings 8:12.

¹⁰ Hosea 5:15. The first edition reads “אלכה ואשובה אל מקומי הראשון”, which mistakenly conflates Hosea 2:9 with 5:15. The translator has corrected the text to Hosea 5:15.