

Zera Shimshon

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Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter XLV: Va'etchanan (Deut. 3:23–7:11)

Essay 3. Why Moses pleaded to enter the Land of Israel

“I pleaded with the L-rd at that time, saying, ‘O L-rd G-d, You who let Your servant see the first works of Your greatness and Your mighty hand, You whose powerful deeds no god in heaven or on earth can equal! Let me cross over, please, and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan, that good hill country, and the Lebanon.’ But the L-rd was wrathful with me on your account and would not listen to me; the L-rd said to me, ‘Enough! Never speak to Me of this matter again! Go up to the summit of Pisgah and gaze about, to the west, the north, the south, and the east; look at it well, for you shall not go across yonder Jordan. Command Joshua, and imbue him with strength and courage, for he shall go across at the head of this people, and he shall allot to them the land that you may only see.’ ”

- Deut. 3:23–28

מדרש ילקוט "נאִתְּסַנֶּן אֶל־ה'" " לְמָה " נִאֲתַסְנֶנּוּ? כִּדִּי לִיכְנֹס לְאֶרֶץ עַכ"ל. וְהוּא תַּמוּזָה.

There is a midrash Yalkut Shimoni¹ on the Scripture in which Moses said: “I pleaded with the L-rd”: The midrash asks, **“Why did he say, ‘I pleaded’? In order to enter the Land of Israel.” This is strange**, because Moses explicitly said that he wanted to enter the Land, so what is the midrash explaining?

וַיִּכְּנֹס בְּמַאֵי דְאֶמְרֵינָן בְּסוּף פְּרָק קַמָּא דְסוּטָה דְרַשׁ ר' שְׁמַלְאֵי מְפַנֵּי מָה נִתְּאֵנָה מִשָּׁה לִיכְנֹס לְאֶרֶץ, וְכִי לְאֶכּוּל מִפְּרִיָהּ הוּא צָרִיךְ, אֶלָּא אָמַר מִשָּׁה יֵשׁ כַּמָּה מְצוֹת תְּלוּיּוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ וְכו', אֶכְנֹס אֲנִי לְאֶרֶץ וְכו', אָמַר לוֹ הַקַּב"ה כְּלוּם אַתָּה מְבַקֵּשׁ אֶלָּא לִישׁוּל שְׂכָר וְכו', מַעֲלָה אֲנִי עָלֶיךָ כְּאִילוּ קִימְתִים עַכ"ל.

This will be understood by what is said at the end of the first chapter of tractate Sotah:

Rabbi Simlai taught: Why did Moses desire to enter the Land of Israel? Did he need to eat of its produce . . . ? Rather, Moses said: Many mitzvot depend upon [being present in] the Land of Israel, so I will enter the Land in

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¹ Yalkut Shimoni 812:2.

order that they can all be fulfilled by me. **The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: You only request this to receive a reward. I will ascribe you [credit] as if you had fulfilled them.**

- Sotah 14a

וְהָיָה נָמִי יֵשׁ לְתַמּוּהָ אִיךָ יִתְכַנּוּ שְׂמֻשָּׁה רַבִּינוּ ע"ה יִרְצָה לְעַבּוֹד עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פָּרֶס, וְאַפִּילוּ הַדְּיוּט שְׁבִישְׁרָאֵל אִם יֵשׁ לוֹ לֵב טוֹב אֵינּוּ עוֹבְדֵי עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פָּרֶס. וְאַף עַל פִּי שְׁתִּירֵץ מִהֲרָשָׁ"א שְׂמַתְחִלָּה קוֹדֵם שְׂיִכְנֹס הִיָּה לוֹ מִחֻשְׁבָּה זֶה לְקַבֵּל פָּרֶס אֲבָל אִם הִיָּה נִכְנָס הִיָּה עוֹבֵד שְׂלֵא עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פָּרֶס, בְּמַחֲלָה מְכַבּוּדוֹ אֵין אֵלּוּ אֶלָּא דְבָרֵי נְבִיאוֹת וְעַד יֵינן [אֵין] אֲנִי יוֹדְעִים הַטַּעַם לָמָּה נִתְאַוָּה מִשָּׁה לִיכְנֹס לְאַרְצָ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלָמָּה הִרְבָּה כָּל כָּךְ בַּתְּפִלָּה.

Here too, one has to wonder how it is possible that our teacher, Moses, of blessed memory, would want to serve in order to receive a reward! Even an ordinary man of Israel, if he has a good heart, would not serve G-d just to receive a reward.

Even though the Maharsha² argued that initially, before [Moses] entered, he had the thought to receive a reward, but if he had entered, he would have served G-d without the reason of receiving a reward.

Requesting forgiveness for [the Maharsha's] honor, these are only prophetic words, i.e., this is what he predicts would have happened. But yet we still don't know the reason that Moses strongly desired to enter the Land of Israel and why he made such an emphatic prayer.

אָמְנָם הַמְגַלָּה עֲמוּקוֹת (פְּאוּפֵן ד') תִּירֵץ, דְּבַעֲרֵכִין (דף ל"ב) אֵיתָא, דְּעֻזְרָא בְּעָא רַחֲמֵי עַל יִצְרָא דְעֵבֻדָּה זָרָה וּבְטָלֵי וְכוּ', בְּשִׁלְמָא מִשָּׁה לֹא בְּעָא רַחֲמֵי דְלֹא הִנָּה לִיה זְכוּתָא דְאַרְצָ יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶלָּא יְהוּשָׁע אֲמַאי לֹא בְּעָא רַחֲמֵי, וְהֵינּוּ דְקָא קְפִיד קְרָא עַל[ג] הַ דִּיהוּשָׁע וְכוּ'. וְאִם כֵּן הִיָּה מִשָּׁה רוּצָה לִיכְנֹס לְאַרְצָ יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּדֵי לְהַעֲבִיר הַיָּצָר דְעֵבֻדָּה זָרָה, וְלְתַקּוֹן הָעוֹלָם כְּמוֹ שְׂעֻשָׁה עֻזְרָא.

Indeed, the *Megaleh Amukot*³ argued, that in tractate Arachin (page 32) it is brought that Ezra prayed for mercy with regard to [the evil] inclination of idol worship and nullified it.⁴ Granted, Moses, did not pray for mercy [that this inclination should be removed], as [at the time] there was no merit of living in the Land of Israel; but regarding Joshua, who had the merit of living in the Land of Israel, why didn't he pray for mercy [that this inclination should be nullified]? And this is why the verse criticizes Joshua [referring to Nehemiah 8:17, which is the only place in the Torah that spells Joshua differently, absent the letter *he*]. If so, Moses wanted to enter the Land of Israel in order to remove the inclination for idol worship, and to repair the world, as Ezra did later.

² Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (1555–1631), Polish rabbi famous for his Talmud commentaries, Chiddushei Halachot and Chiddushei Agadot.

³ Nathan Nata Spira (1585–1633), Polish rabbi and kabbalist; Chief Rabbi of Kraków, author of *Megaleh Amukot* ["Revelation of Deep [Secrets]"] (1637), *ofen* 4.

⁴ Arachin 32b. Yoma 69b also indicates that the evil inclination toward idolatry ended in Ezra's time.

וְזָהוּ "וְנִאְתָּחֶנּוּ אֱלֹהֵי בְּעֵת הַהוּא", בְּעֵת הַהִיא שְׁמִינּוּ עֲזָרָא אֶת הָעוֹלָם, וְזָהוּ "לֹאמֵר", לֵאמֹר לְדוֹרוֹת זֶה הַתִּיקוֹן, וְזָהוּ "אֶעֱבְרָה־נָּא", דְּהַרְמַב"ם בְּהַקְדָּמָתוֹ לְסֵפֶר הַיָּד שְׁלוֹ מְנַה נ"א אִיסוּרֵינּוּ בְּעֵינֵי עֲבוּדָה זָרָה, וְכֹל אֱלוֹ הִיָּה רּוֹצֵה מִשָּׁה לְהַעֲבִירָו, וְעוֹד מִלֵּת אֶעֱבֹר"ה גִּימַטְרִיא עֲזָר"א, וְהַקֵּב"ה אָמַר לוֹ "רַב־לֵךְ" וְכוּ', "וְצֹ אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ" דָּאִין צֹ אֱלָא עֲבוּדָה זָרָה וְכוּ' וְעֵי"ש.

This is the meaning of, “I pleaded with the L-rd at that time”: “At that time that Ezra repaired the world.” I.e., Moses pleaded with the L-rd to accomplish what Ezra would do in his time.

And this is the meaning of the word, “saying”: “Saying to the generations, ‘this is the correction.’” I.e., the main correction needed for the world is to take away the desire for idolatry.

And this is the meaning of, “Let me cross over, please [נָּא] [na]”: “That the Rambam, in his introduction to his book ‘The Strong Hand’ [more commonly known as the Mishneh Torah], listed 51 [נ"א] prohibitions regarding idolatry, and [Moses] wanted to remove all of these. I.e., when Moses added the word “na,” meaning, “please,” he wasn’t just being polite, but was hinting at the fact that the Gematria of na is 51, and that idolatry includes 51 prohibitions that he wanted to uproot.

Also, the word “I will cross over” [אֶעֱבְרָה] [ehbera] has the same Gematria as Ezra, i.e., 278, for Moses knew through prophecy that Ezra would uproot the inclination for idolatry, if Moses were not allowed to do so himself. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, said, “Enough! Never speak to Me of this matter again!” and “Command Joshua,” for “[the word] ‘command’ refers to idolatry.”⁵

וּבְזֶה יוֹבֵן הַמְדַרְשׁ, שְׁבָא לְאַפּוֹקֵי מֵר' שְׁמֵלַי הַנ"ל, לְמַה "וְנִאְתָּחֶנּוּ" כְּלוּמֵר, לְמַה הִרְבָּה וְהַפְצִיר כֹּל כָּף בַּתְּפִלָּה לְמַה נִתְאַנָּה לִיכְנֹס לְאֶרֶץ. וְכִי לְקַבֵּל שְׂכָר הַמִּצְוֹת הוּא צָרִיד, זֶה אִי אֶפְשֶׁר, וְתִירֵץ כְּדֵי שְׁיִכְנֹס לְאֶרֶץ, לֹא הִיָּתָה מְחֻשְׁבָּתוֹ אֱלָא לִיכְנֹס לְאֶרֶץ, שְׁפָשְׁיָהּ לֹא זְכוּת הָאֶרֶץ וְתַפְלִל עַל הַיָּצָר הָרַע דְּעֲבוּדָה זָרָה וִיבְטָלָנּוּ. וְאִם אֵם הִיָּה מֵת מִיָּד בְּלִי לִיהְנוֹת מִפְּרֵי הָאֶרֶץ אוֹ בְּלִי לַעֲשׂוֹת שׁוּם מִצְוָה אַחֲרֵת הִיָּה דִּי לוֹ בְּכָף לְתִיקוֹן הָעוֹלָם. וְעֵינֵי עוֹד לְקַמֵּן מְנַה בְּפִרְשֵׁת וִיגְלוּ.

In this way, the midrash will be understood, that it came to exclude the explanation of Rabbi Simlai mentioned above, that Moses wanted to receive the reward for mitzvot. Why did he say “I pleaded,” as if to say, why did he “pray much and urgently,”⁶ why did he desire to enter the Land of Israel? Did he need to receive the reward of the mitzvot? This is impossible, and the solution of the midrash is in order to enter into the Land, for his thinking was only to enter the Land, that when he would have the merit of the Land, he would pray regarding the evil inclination toward idolatry and would abolish it. Even if [Moses] would have died immediately, without having enjoyed the fruits of the Land, or without having done any other mitzvah, it would have been enough for him to repair the world. See further below, Chapter LII, Vayeilech, essay 2.

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⁵ Zohar III: 111b.

⁶ Rashi on Gen. 25:21.