

# 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 "נאֶתְסַנֶּן אֶל־ה'" " לְמָה " נֶאֱתַסְנֶנּוּ? כִּדִּי לִיכְנֹס לְאֶרֶץ עַכ"ל. וְהוּא תַּמוּזָה.

**There is a midrash Yalkut Shimoni<sup>1</sup> 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?

וַיִּבְנֶן בְּמֵאֵי דְאֶמְרֵינוּן בְּסוּף פְּרָק קַמָּא דְסוּטָה דְרַשׁ ר' שְׁמַלְאֵי מְפַנֵּי מָה נִתְאַוָּה מִשָּׁה לִיכְנֹס לְאֶרֶץ, וְכִי לְאֶכּוּל מִפְרֵיָהּ הוּא צָרִיד, אֶלָּא אָמַר מִשָּׁה יֵשׁ כַּמָּה מְצוֹת תְּלוּיּוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ וְכו', אֶכְנֹס אֲנִי לְאֶרֶץ וְכו', אָמַר לוֹ הַקַּב"ה כְּלוּם אִתָּה מְבַקֵּשׁ אֶלָּא לִישׁוּל שְׂכָר וְכו', מַעֲלָה אֲנִי עֲלִידָה כְּאִילוּ קִימָתִים 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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<sup>1</sup> 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 לְתַמּוּזָה אִיךָ יִתְכַנּוּ שְׁמִשָּׁה רַבֵּינוּ ע"ה יִרְצֶה לְעַבּוֹד עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס, וְאַפִּילוּ הַדְּיוּט שְׁבִישְׁרָאֵל אִם יֵשׁ לוֹ לֵב טוֹב אֵינּוּ עוֹבְדֵי עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס. וְאַף עַל פִּי שְׁתִּירֵץ מִהֲרָשָׁ"א שְׁמַתְחִלָּה קוֹדֵם שְׂיִכְנֹס הִיָּה לוֹ מִחֻשְׁבָּה זֶה לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס אֲבָל אִם הִיָּה נִכְנָס הִיָּה עוֹבֵד שְׁלֵא עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס, בְּמַחִילָה מְכַבּוּדוֹ אֵין אֵלּוֹ אֶלָּא דְבָרֵי נְבִיאוֹת וְעַד יֵינן [אֵין] אָנוּ יוֹדְעִים הַטַּעַם לָמָּה נִתְאַוָּה מִשָּׁה לִיכְנֹס לְאַרְצָיִשׁרָאֵל 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 Maharsha<sup>2</sup> 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 (בְּאֹפֶן ד') תִּירֵץ, דְּבַעֲרֵכִין (דף ל"ב) אֵיתָא, דְּעֻזְרָא בְּעָא רַחֲמֵי עַל יִצְרָא דְעֵבֻדָּה זָרָה וּבְטָלֵי וְכוּ', בְּשִׁלְמָא מִשָּׁה לֹא בְּעָא רַחֲמֵי דְלֹא הִנָּה לִיָּה זְכוּתָא דְאַרְצָיִשׁרָאֵל, אֶלָּא יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֲמָאֵי לֹא בְּעָא רַחֲמֵי, וְהֵינּוּ דְקָא קְפִיד קְרָא עַל[ג] הַ דִּיהוֹשֻׁעַ וְכוּ'. וְאִם כֵּן הִיָּה מִשָּׁה רוּצָה לִיכְנֹס לְאַרְצָיִשׁרָאֵל כְּדֵי לְהַעֲבִיר הַיָּצָר דְעֵבֻדָּה זָרָה, וְלִתְקוֹן הָעוֹלָם כְּמוֹ שְׁעֻשָּׂה עֻזְרָא.

**Indeed, the *Megaleh Amukot*<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.**

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

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

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

וְזָהוּ "וְנִאְתָּחֶנּוּ אֱלֹהֵי בְּעֵת הַהוּא", בְּעֵת הַהִיא שְׁמִינֵן עֲזָרָא אֶת הָעוֹלָם, וְזָהוּ "לֹא־מֵר", לֵאמֹר לְדוֹרוֹת זֶה הַתִּיקוֹן, וְזָהוּ "אֶעֱבְרָה־נָּא", דְּהַרְמֵב"ם בְּהַקְדָּמָתוֹ לְסִפְרֵי הַיָּד שְׁלוֹ מְנָה נ"א אִיסוּרֵינִי בְּעֵינֵי עֲבוּדָה זָרָה, וְכָל אֱלוֹ הֵיךְ רוֹצֵה 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 [נָא] [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.”<sup>5</sup>**

וּבְזֶה יוֹבֵן הַמְדַרְשׁ, שְׂבָא לְאַפּוּקֵי מֵר' שְׁמֵלַי הַנ"ל, לְמָה "וְנִאְתָּחֶנּוּ" כְּלוּמֵר, לְמָה הִרְבָּה וְהַפְצִיר כָּל כָּף בְּתַפְלָה לְמָה נִתְאַנָּה לִיכְנֹס לְאֶרֶץ. וְכִי לְקַבֵּל שְׂכָר הַמִּצְוֹת הוּא צָרִיךְ, זֶה אִי אֶפְשָׁר, וְתִירֵץ כְּדֵי שְׂיִכְנֹס לְאֶרֶץ, לֹא הִיָּתָה מְחֻשְׁבָּתוֹ אֱלָא לִיכְנֹס לְאֶרֶץ, שְׂפָשְׁיָהּ לֹא זְכוּת הָאֶרֶץ וְתַפְלֵל עַל הַיָּצָר הָרַע דְּעֲבוּדָה זָרָה וִיבְטָלְנָו. וְאַף אִם הִיָּה מֵת מִיָּד בְּלִי לִיהְנוֹת מִפְּרֵי הָאֶרֶץ אוֹ בְּלִי לַעֲשׂוֹת שׁוּם מִצְוָה אַחֲרַת הִיָּה דִּי לוֹ בְּכָף לְתִיקוֹן הָעוֹלָם. וְעֵינֵי עוֹד לְקַמֵּן מְנָה בְּפִרְשֵׁת וִיגְלוֹ.

**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,”<sup>6</sup> 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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<sup>5</sup> Zohar III: 111b.

<sup>6</sup> Rashi on Gen. 25:21.