

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XLVIII: Shoftim (Deut. 16:18–21:9)

Essay 6. The horse of Pharaoh

"כִּי-תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל-אֹיְבֶיךָ וְרָאִיתָ סוּס וְרֶכֶב עִם רַב מִמֶּךָ" וְכוּ', וּפָרַשׁ רַשִׁ"י "סוּס וְרֶכֶב", בְּעֵינֵי כָלֵם כְּסוּס אֶחָד, וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר "וְהָפִיתָ אֶת-מִדְּבַר כָּאִישׁ אֶחָד" וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר "כִּי בָּא סוּס פָּרְעֹה" עכ"ל.

A verse reads: **“When you take the field against your enemies, and see a horse and chariot—a people greater than you, have no fear of them”** (Deut. 20:1). Why is it written as “horse and chariot” in singular form, instead of “horses and chariots,” in plural form.

Rashi explains: “ ‘A horse and chariot’: In the eyes of everyone, it’s like one horse. Likewise, [Scripture] says, ‘you shall defeat Midian as one man’ (Judges 6:16), **and likewise it says, ‘For the horse of Pharaoh went** with his chariot and horsemen into the sea’ (Ex. 15:19).” In other words, despite greater numbers, they are powerless against Israel, as though they are only one horse or one man.

וְהַשְׁפֵּתִי חֲכָמִים הַקֹּשָׁה, לָמָּה רַשִׁ"י הֵבִיא הַפְּסוּק "כִּי בָּא סוּס פָּרְעֹה", וְלֹא הֵבִיא הַפְּסוּק שֶׁל "כָּל סוּס פָּרְעֹה" הַקְּדוּם לוֹ, וְתִירֵץ מִשּׁוּם דָּשֵׁם כְּתִיב "כָּל סוּס" דְּמִשְׁמַע כָּלֵם. אָבֵל עֲדִינן קֹשָׁה לָמָּה לֹא הֵבִיא הַפְּסוּק שֶׁל "סוּס וְרֶכֶבו" הַקְּדוּם לְ"כִי בָּא סוּס פָּרְעֹה".

The Siftei Chachamim¹ questions: “Why does Rashi bring the verse, ‘For the horse of Pharaoh went with his chariot and horsemen into the sea,” **and he doesn’t bring the earlier verse, ‘The Egyptians came in pursuit after them into the sea, all of the horse of Pharaoh, his chariot, and his horsemen.’** (Ex. 14:23)?” That is, if one interprets “For the horse of Pharaoh” to be talking about Pharaoh as an individual, then he only needs one horse and chariot, and the sentence appears grammatically correct. In contrast, “all of the horse of Pharaoh” seems grammatically incorrect, which would seem better suited for an explanation that there is a teaching there, that it says “all of the horse” instead of “all of the horses” because they are considered as weak as only one horse.

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¹ Shabbetai ben Joseph Bass (1641–1718), Polish printer, publisher, bibliographer and author. Siftei Chakhamim (Amsterdam 1680) is a supercommentary on Rashi’s commentary on Chumash.

[The Siftei Chachamim] solves that it is because there, “all of the horse” has the meaning of all of them. That is, even though “horse” is singular, the addition of the word “all” implies more than one.

But there’s still the question why [Rashi] didn’t also bring the verse of “Horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea” (Ex. 15:1), the first verse of the Song at the Sea, which precedes the final verse of the Song of the Sea, “For the horse of Pharaoh went with his chariot and horsemen into the sea.”

עוד יש מקשים על רש"י ז"ל, שבפירשת וישלח פירש, "ניהיילי שור ותמור" דרף ארץ לומר על שורים הרבה שור, כמו קרא התרנגול ואינו אומר קראו התרנגולים עכ"ל. וכאן מנא ליה דתשובים פסוס אהד, דילמא לכה נאמר "סוס ורכב", או "כי בא סוס פרעה" לשון יחיד, דדרף בגי אדם לומר כן על סוסים הרבה כמו קרא התרנגול.

Other people also question Rashi, of blessed memory, for in parshat Vayishlach, on verse Gen. 32:6, he interpreted, “I have acquired an ox and a donkey”: it is customary to speak of many oxen as ‘an ox,’ as a man says to his fellow, ‘At night the rooster crowed’ and he does not say, ‘the roosters crowed.’”

Here, at Deut. 20:1, how does [Rashi] derive that it is really considered as one horse? Perhaps [Scripture] said, “a horse and chariot,” or “for the horse of Pharaoh went,” in singular form, for the reason that it’s customary to speak thus of many horses, just as someone will say “the rooster crowed” instead of “the roosters crowed.” If Rashi says at Gen. 32:6 that it’s a feature of the Hebrew language for people to sometimes use the singular form when referring to a plurality, why doesn’t he say the same for Deut. 20:1? Why there does he give a different interpretation, that it means “equivalent to one, i.e., being essentially powerless”?

ותדא מתורצת, בגי דחברתה, שאם היה מביא רש"י הפסוק "סוס ורכבו", לא היה בו ראיה כלל שלפניו תשובים כלם פסוס אהד, שהייתי יכול לומר שהפסוק דיבר בדרף בגי אדם שאומרים על סוסים הרבה סוס, ומשום הכי הביא הראיה דנקא מ"כי בא סוס פרעה", דעל פסוק זה קשה, למה פרט דנקא סוס פרעה ולא אמר סתם "כי בא סוס ורכבו ופרשיו בים", כמו שאמר בתחילת השירה "סוס ורכבו רמה בים".

One possible reason is that “a woman is jealous only of the thigh of another [woman].”² I.e., Rashi considered each verse in light of other verses. For if Rashi had brought the verse, “Horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea” (Ex. 15:1), it wouldn’t have the proof at all that before [G-d], all were considered as one horse. For I’d be able to say that the verse speaks in the custom of people who speak of many horses as “a horse.” Because of this, perhaps [Rashi] specifically brought the proof from the verse, “For the horse of Pharaoh went with his chariot and horsemen into the sea” (Ex. 15:19). For on this verse is a question: why does it specifically detail “the horse of Pharaoh” and not simply say, “for the horse went with

² Megillah 13a.

his chariot and horsemen into the sea,” as it says at the beginning of the Song at the Sea, **“Horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea”**? We know that there are no superfluous words in the Torah, so “of Pharaoh” must be telling us something. Perhaps it is not talking about Pharaoh as an individual, who would only need one horse and chariot, but it’s speaking about Pharaoh as absolute leader who “owns” his soldiers and their horses and chariots. So the verse should use the plural form for horses and chariots.

אֵלֶּא וַדַּאי צָרִיךְ לומר דְּחִידוּשָׁא קַמְשַׁמְעָא לִן קַרְא, דְּאִיתָא בְּמִדְרָשׁ שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים "לְסִסְתִּי בְּרִכְבֵּי פָרְעֹה", רִכְבַּ פָּרְעֹה עַל סוּס זָכָר וְכַבִּיכּוֹל נִגְלָה הַקַּב"ה עַל סוּס זָכָר שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְכוּ', אָמַר פָּרְעֹה הַסּוּס זָכָר הוֹרֵג בְּעַלְיוֹ בְּמִלְחָמָה, אֵלֶּא הָרִינִי רוֹכֵב עַל סוּסָה נְקֵבָה, הִדָּא הוּא דְּכַתִּיב וְכוּ', חִזַּר וְרִכַּב פָּרְעֹה עַל סוּס אָדוּם עַל סוּס לְבָן עַל סוּס שְׁחוּר, כְּבִיכּוֹל נִגְלָה הַקַּב"ה עַל סוּס אָדוּם לְבָן שְׁחוּר, הִדָּא הוּא דְּכַתִּיב "דְּרִכְתָּ בְּיָם סוּסִיד", סוּסוֹן פְּגִיין עכ"ל. וְהוֹאִיל שֶׁבְּכָאן פְּרַט הַכְּתוּב "סוּס פָּרְעֹה", לְפִי שֶׁנֶּשְׁתַּנָּה לְכַמָּה סוּסִים, הִיָּה לוֹ לומר כִּי בָּאוּ "סוּסֵי פָּרְעֹה", אֵלֶּא וַדַּאי לְאִשְׁמוּעֵינָן שֶׁלְפָנֵי הַקַּב"ה הָיוּ חֲשׂוּבִים כּוֹלָם כּוֹסוֹ אֶחָד.

Rather, we certainly need to say that Scripture has made known a novel interpretation for us, as brought in the midrash of Song of Songs, telling how G-d showed Pharaoh He could match him action for action:

“I have likened you, my darling, to a mare in Pharaoh’s chariots” (Song of Songs 1:9). **Pharaoh rode on a male horse, and, as though it were possible, the Holy One, Blessed be He, revealed Himself on a male horse, as it is said, “He mounted a cherub and flew” (Ps. 18:11). Pharaoh said, “A male horse will kill its rider in a war, rather here I am riding on a female horse, this is as it’s written, ‘to a mare in Pharaoh’s chariots.’ Pharaoh changed to riding on a red horse, on a white horse, on a black horse, and, as though it were possible, the Holy One, Blessed be He, revealed Himself on a red horse, a white [horse], [and] a black [horse], as it’s written, “You will lead your horses in the sea” (Hab. 3:15), i.e., a number of horses.**

- Song of Songs Rabbah 1:45

Since here in Ex. 15:19, Scripture detailed **“the horse of Pharaoh,”** and we know from the midrash that **[Pharaoh] changed to a few different horses, [Scripture] should have said, “the horses of Pharaoh.”** In other words, even if we view Pharaoh as one individual, as we speculated above, he still had multiple horses, according to the midrash. So whether he is viewed as one individual or master of his soldiers and their cavalry, there were multiple horses. So why did the verse use the singular form for horse? **Rather, certainly** the singular form was used in Ex. 15:19 because **it’s to inform us that before the Holy One, Blessed be He, they are all considered as one horse.** However, isn’t there still the possibility that this is simply a case of it being customary usage at times to “speak of many oxen as ‘an ox’ ”?

ועוד דמעיקרא קושניא ליתא, דבשילמא ביצקב לא הנה מן הראוי שישתבח עצמו לפני עשיו לומר שיש לו שונורים ונמורים דמשמע רבים. ודי הנה לו לומר שיש לו כל אלו המינים, כמו שפירש בזהר שפוננתו היתה לומר שהוא יכול להכניע כל מין קליפה שבעולם שרמוזים באלו התמשת מינים ועיי"ש. איברא שאם לא הנה לשון הדיוט מסייעו שהעולם לא יהיו קוראים לשונורים הרבה שור, לא הנה יכול לומר לשון "שור ונמור" נגד האמת, שהרי היו לו הרבה מפל מין ומין, אבל הואיל שדרך העולם כן, תפס דרך העולם דרך הפשוט. ועוד דרך רמז הודיע לעשו שאינו מתירא מן הקליפות ומרוחות הטומאה.

In the beginning, for Rashi's interpretation of Gen. 32:6, "I have acquired an ox and a donkey," **there was no difficulty, as granted, for Jacob it would not have been proper for him to praise himself before Esau, to say that he had oxen and donkeys, meaning many.** For Jacob was speaking both out of modesty, and also out of fear of Esau, and wanted to minimize his accomplishments.

It was enough for him to say that he had these five types, i.e., "an ox, and a donkey, a sheep, and a male servant, and a female servant," without specifying a quantity. Also, **as it's explained in the Zohar** (volume I, page 166b), **his intent was to say that he was able to subdue every type of klipah** [spiritual impurity] **in the world, that were hinted at by these five types, and see there.**³

In truth, if not for the popular language supporting [Jacob], i.e., if everyone was not calling many oxen "an ox," he would not have been able to say "an ox, and a donkey," as it would have been untrue, for he had many of each and every of the listed five types. But since the custom was thus, he seized the universal custom according to the simple understanding. Also, as explain by the Zohar, it was by way of a hint to inform Esau that [Jacob] was not afraid of the klipot and the spirits of impurity.

אבל פאן דכתיב "אשירה לה" פיגאה גאה סוס ורכבו רמה בים", הסברא היא להפך, שהנה לו לומר סוסים ורכביהם רמה בים כדי להגדיל הגאות שלו, והכי נמי בפסוק "כי בא סוס פרעה" וכו' שהוא סיום השירה ותוקף הגם, שפאשר באו סוסי פרעה בים השיב עליהם את מי הים, אף על גב שהיו ישראל בתוך הים ביבשה, כמו שסיים "ובני ישראל הלכו ביבשה", אלא ודאי צריך לומר שאמר "סוס" לשון יחיד, כדי להורות שכלפניו חשויבים כלם כסוס אחד.

But here, it is written, "I will sing to the L-rd, for He has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider He has hurled into the sea" (Ex. 15:1). The explanation is the opposite, instead of using the singular form to be modest, as in Jacob's case, here [Scripture] should have said "the horses and their riders He has hurled into the sea," in order to magnify [G-d's] majesty. This is how we know that the Torah was not simply "speaking of many oxen as 'an ox.' "

³ The Zohar explains that the ox and donkey refer to demons that do not typically inflict damage, except when they join together, in which case they cooperate to harm the world. The sheep, male servant, and female servant refer to lower crowns of the *klipot*, which the Holy One, Blessed be He, slew in Egypt. They are called "the firstborn of cattle" (Ex. 12:29), "the firstborn of the captive" (ibid.), and "the firstborn of the maidservant" (Ex. 11:5).

Thus, too in the verse, “For the horse of Pharaoh went with his chariot and horsemen into the sea,” which is the conclusion of the Song at the Sea. It’s also displaying the force of the miracle, for when the horses of Pharaoh went into the sea, the waters of the sea turned unto them, despite the fact that Israel was within the sea on dry land. As [the Song at the Sea] concludes, “but the Children of Israel marched on dry land through the sea” (Ex. 14:29). Rather, it’s certainly necessary to say that [Scripture] says “horse” in the singular form, in order to instruct that before Him, they were all considered as one horse.

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