

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter XLIX: Ki Teitzei (Deut. 21:10–25:19)

Essay 3. How is a child's bad upbringing worse than the war of Gog and Magog?

בְּרִכּוֹת פָּרָק קָמָא אָמַר ר' יוֹחָנָן מְשׁוּם ר' שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאֵי קָשָׁה תְּרַבּוֹת רַעְיָה בְּתוֹךְ בֵּיתוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם יוֹתֵר מִמְּלַחְמַת גּוֹג וּמָגוֹג, שְׁנֵאָמַר "מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד בְּבְרָחוֹ" וְכוּ' וְכַתִּיב בְּתַרְיָה "ה' מְה־רַבּוֹ צָרָי" וְכוּ'. וְאֵילּוּ לְגַבֵּי מְלַחְמַת גּוֹג וּמָגוֹג, כְּתִיב: "לִמָּה רָגַשׁוּ גוֹיִם", וְאֵילּוּ "מְה־רַבּוֹ צָרָי" לֹא כְּתִיב. וּפִירֵשׁ רַשִׁ"י "לִמָּה רָגַשׁוּ גוֹיִם" מֵה תוֹעֵלֶת לָהֶם אֶלְמָא דְּבָר קַל הוּא בְּעֵינֵינוּ ע"כ.

Tractate Berachot, the first chapter:

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: “It’s more difficult having a bad upbringing [of a child] in a person’s home than the war of Gog and Magog. As it is said, ‘A Psalm of David, when he fled from his son, Absalom.’¹ And it is written afterward, ‘L-rd, how great are my troubles, many rise up against me.’² While concerning the war of Gog and Magog, it is written: ‘Why are the nations in an uproar? And why do the peoples speak for naught?’³ Yet ‘how great are my troubles’ is not written [as the war of Gog and Magog is not as difficult as raising a wayward son like Absalom.]”

-Berachot 7b

Rashi explained: “Why are the nations in an uproar? What does it matter to them? This is a small matter in [David’s] eye.” In other words, in discussing the prophecy of Gog and Magog, David doesn’t seem very concerned, whereas he is much more troubled when discussing his son.

מְקַשִּׁים עַל פֶּרֶשׁ רַשִׁ"י מֵה בָּא לְלַמְדֵנוּ וּמִי הִזְקִיקוּ לְפָרֵשׁ כֹּה, דִּילְמָא פְּוֹנֵת הַגְּמָרָא כְּפִשׁוּטָה מְשׁוּם דְּכָאן כְּתִיב "מְה־רַבּוֹ צָרָי" וְכָאן לֹא כְּתִיב, וְאִם הִפְשֵׁט שֶׁל "לִמָּה רָגַשׁוּ" מוֹרָה שֶׁדְּבָר קַל הוּא כְּפִרֵשׁ רַשִׁ"י, לִמָּה הוּצָרָה הַש"ס לְהַבִּיא רְאִיָּה מְשׁוּם דְּלֹא כְּתִיב שֶׁם "מְה־רַבּוֹ צָרָי". וְעוֹד צָרִיךְ לְהַבִּין פֶּשֶׁט הַכְּתוּב, כְּמוֹ שֶׁהַקְּשָׁה מֵהַרְשָׁ"א, דְּ"מְה־רַבּוֹ צָרָי" וְ"רַבִּים קָמִים עָלָיו" הוּא לְשׁוֹן כְּפֹל.

Question 1: People ask about the explanation of Rashi, what it is coming to teach us, and who forced him to interpret thus. Perhaps the intent of the Gemara was the plain meaning, because here it is written, “How great are my troubles,” and here it is not written

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¹ Ps. 3:1.

² Ps. 3:2.

³ Ps. 2:1.

thus. I.e., is it true that David is not as concerned about the prophecy of Gog and Magog? That seems obvious, so why do we need Rashi's comment?

Question 2: **If the plain meaning of "Why are the nations in an uproar" teaches that this is a light matter, as per Rashi's interpretation, why did the Talmud need to bring a proof because "How great are my troubles" was not written there?**

Question 3: **It's also necessary to understand the plain meaning of the Scripture, as the Maharsha⁴ asked, that "How great are my troubles" and the end of the verse, "Many rise up against me," are duplicative language.**

גיש לומר שזה יובן במה שנודע שהקב"ה משיח יהיו צרות מרובות לישראל, וכמו שאמרנו ו"ל בסוף פתובות צירוף אחר צירוף, ובפרק חלק יימי ולא אהמיניה. ובתוף הצרות אי אפשר שאינה מישראל לא יעבור על דת חס ושלום, וזהו פונת גוג ומגוג דכתיב "ננתקה את-מוסרותימו ונשליכה ממנו עבתימו", שרצים שישראל יפרקו עולם חס ושלום מעם הקב"ה, ומכל שכן שמשים בו יוסף עתיד למות במלחמה זו, כדאיתא במסכת סוכה.

It can be said that this will be understood by what is known, that the birth pangs of the Messiah will be very troubling for Israel. As [the rabbis] of blessed memory said at the end of tractate Ketubot 112b, [the generation will undergo] refinement after refinement [i.e., several stages of cleansing]. Also, in the 11th chapter of tractate Sanhedrin, which is entitled "All Israel have a portion in the World to Come," it is written, "Ulla says, Let [the Messiah] come, but [after my death, so that] I will not see him [for I fear the suffering that will precede his coming]."⁵ Because of the troubles, it is impossible that some of Israel will leave the faith, G-d forbid, and this is the intent of "Gog and Magog," as it is written, "Let us break the cords of their yoke, shake off their ropes from us,"⁶ that [the nations] want Israel to separate forever, G-d forbid, from the Holy One, Blessed be He. We especially worry that the Messiah the son of Joseph⁷ is destined to die in this war, as is brought in tractate Sukkah 52a.

והנה אף בנדוד פשברח מפני אבשלום, אמרינו בפרק חלק "ניהי דוד בא עדה ראש אשר ישתחנה שם לאלהים", אמר רב יהודה אמר רב בקש דוד לעבוד עבודה זרה וכו', אמר לו חושי הארץ יאמרו מלך כמותי יעבוד עבודה זרה, אמר לו מלך כמותי יתרגנו בנו וכו' ע"כ.

Here regarding David, when he fled from Absalom, it states a comment in the 11th chapter of tractate Sanhedrin entitled "All Israel have a portion in the World to Come," regarding the verse, "When David reached the top, where people would prostrate themselves to G-d, Hushai the Archite was there to meet him, with his robe torn and with earth on his head."⁸ It states:

⁴ Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (1555–1631), Polish rabbi famous for his Talmud commentaries, Chiddushei Halachot and Chiddushei Agadot.

⁵ Sanhedrin 98b.

⁶ Ps. 2:3.

⁷ Jewish tradition indicates that a Messianic figure, Messiah the descendant of Joseph may have to arise and wage war against evil forces, and that he will fall in battle with the enemies of G-d and Israel, and that following G-d's resurrection of the dead, another Messianic figure, Messiah the descendant of David, will rule as king.

⁸ II Sam. 15:32.

“Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: David sought to engage in idol worship [during Absalom’s coup]. Hushai the Archite said to David: Shall they say a king like you will engage in idol worship? David said to him: [Is it preferable that they say with regard to] a king like me, [known to be righteous, that] his son will kill him?”⁹ I.e., He feared his death at the hands of his son would be a disgrace to G-d, and thought if he pretended to worship idols, he would destroy his image in the eyes of the people, and his death would be considered deserved and not a disgrace to G-d.

ואם כן זהו הפשט של "מה־רבו צָרֵי", מפני שאני מוכרח לעבוד עבודה זרה מקמת בני אבשלום, משום הכי אני אומר "מה־רבו צָרֵי", דהיינו שצָרֵי גדולה ורבה שהיא צרת הנפש. ואחר כך "רבים קמים עלי" על צרת הגוף, ומעתה קשה על דוד למה לא אמר "מה־רבו צָרֵי" אף במלקמת גוג וקא הקתם נמי אותם הצרות מכריחות על ישראל לעבוד חס ושלום. ומשום הכי תירץ רש"י שבתחלת המזמור גילה דעתו שדבר קל הוא בעיניו, והטעם הוא משום שיהיו נחשבים כאנוסים, ואם כן מטעם זה עצמו לא היה לו לומר כן באבשלום "מה־רבו צָרֵי", לפי שאף אם יעבוד עבודה זרה יהיה נידון כאנוס, אלא נדאי משום דאבשלום היה בנו ונתרבה בביתו, לא תועיל כל כך סברת אונס, כדאמרינן בעלמא ראו גידולין שאגידלתם וכו', ועוד קרא פתיב "את־אביה היא מחללת", ועוד פתיב "פתח בית־אביה וסקלוה" וכו'. ומשום הכי דוד "בִּכְרָחוּ מִפְּנֵי אֲבִשְׁלוֹם" דוקא, שם אמר "מה־רבו צָרֵי", אכל לא במלקמת גוג ומגוג, ושפיר איצטריך רש"י לפרש הכי.

Answer to Question 3: **If so, this is the plain meaning of “How great are my troubles”:** Because I am compelled to engage in idol worship because of my son Absalom, because of this, I say, “How great are my troubles.” That is, my affliction is great and powerful, which is the affliction of the soul. Afterward, it says, “many rise up against me” as meaning a hardship of the body. So the apparently duplicative language is explained, with the first part referring to an emotional trauma, and the second referring to a physical risk.

Answer to Question 1: **Now, a question regarding David is why didn’t he say “How great are my troubles” even for the war of Gog, for there also these same spiritual troubles compel Israel to engage in idolatry, G-d forbid. Because of this, Rashi solved that at the beginning of the psalm, he revealed his opinion that it was an easy matter in his eyes, and the reason is because they would be considered as though compelled to idolatry. If so, for that reason alone he should not have said here regarding Absalom, “How great are my troubles,” because even if he would engage in idol worship, he would be judged as someone compelled. Rather it’s certainly because Absalom was his son and grew up in his household, that a claim of compulsion would not help [David] so much, as it is said in the world, “See what you have brought up,”**¹⁰ i.e., David should bear some responsibility for the behavior of his own son. **Also, it is written in Scripture, “When the daughter of a priest defiles herself through harlotry, it is her father she defiles, she shall be put to the fire.”**¹¹ **Also, it is also written, “then the girl shall be brought out to the entrance of her father’s house, and her town’s council shall stone her to death.”**¹² Scripture stresses the relationship of the child to the father, because the child’s behavior may be traced to a defective upbringing.

⁹ Sanhedrin 107a.

¹⁰ Ketubot 45a.

¹¹ Lev. 21:9.

¹² Deut. 22:21.

Thus, the incident with Absalom threatened to lead David to pretend to engage in idolatry, and the battle of Gog and Magog could lead Jews to engage in idolatry. The reason why David expressed a lesser regret about Gog and Magog was because David could honestly say that the people would be compelled. He expressed a greater regret about Absalom, for he could not defend himself on the grounds of compulsion, as Absalom was perhaps an evil son because of a failure in his upbringing.

That is why “David, when he fled from his son, Absalom,” specifically said there, “How great are my troubles,” but did not say that regarding the war of Gog and Magog, and it’s fine that Rashi needed to explain thus.

וְשִׁפִּיר קְאָמֵר הַש"ס קִשָּׁה תְּרַבּוֹת רַעְיָה וְכוּ' יוֹתֵר וְכוּ', דּוּמְיָא דְגִידוּלִין שְׁגִידֵי לְתָם, וּמִשּׁוּם הֵכִי לֹא קְאָמֵר קִשָּׁה בְּן רַשָּׁע וְכוּ', מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהַכֹּל הוּא מִהַגִּידוּלִין דְּהֵינּוּ תְּרַבּוֹת רַעְיָה.

Answer to Question 2: **It’s fine that the Talmud¹³ says, “It’s more difficult having a bad upbringing [of a child] in a person’s home than the war of Gog and Magog,” similar to “See what you have brought up,” and because of this, it doesn’t say, “It’s more difficult having a bad son in a person’s home than the war of Gog and Magog,” because all is related to the upbringing, which is to say bad training on the parents’ part.** I.e., if the Talmud had said “a bad son,” then we would understand that the parents could have done everything right, and the child would still have turned out to be evil. Instead, the Talmud said “a bad upbringing,” to emphasize a case where the parents were at least partially responsible.

וְאִי נִמְי כְּדִאֲמַרְיָנָן הֵתָם בְּסִמּוּד “מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד” “קִינָה לְדָוִד”? “קִינָה לְדָוִד” הִלְשׁוֹן וְכוּ', סִבֵּר שְׁמָא עֲבָד אוּ מִמְזוֹר וְכוּ' בֵּינָן דְּחִזָּא דְּאֲבִשְׁלוּם הוּא, שְׁמַח. אָמַר סָתָם בְּרָא דְרַחֲמִים עַל אָבָא. אֵלָא שְׁבִכְפָּאן נְמִי יֵשׁ לְדִקְדֹק מַהוּ הִלְשׁוֹן שֶׁל “סָתָם בְּרָא” הִנֵּה לוֹ לֹא מֵר בְּרָא סָתָמִיָּה דְרַחֲמִים וְכוּ'.

Alternatively, as it says there in the adjoining section of tractate Berachot:

[How can it say:] **“A Psalm of David, when fleeing his son, Absalom”?** **The language is more like “A lament of David.”¹⁴ . . . He imagined that** when the Holy One, Blessed be He, told him [through Nathan the prophet, after the incident with Bathsheba], “Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your house,”¹⁵ [David] was despondent. He said: **Perhaps** [it will be] **a slave or a mamzer¹⁶** [who will rise up in my house, a person of such lowly status,] who will have no pity on me. **But once [David] saw that Absalom was the one, he was**

¹³ Literally, “the Shas,” an acronym for *Shisha Sedarim* [שֵׁשׁה סְדָרִים], the “six orders” of the Mishna and Talmud.

¹⁴ Berachot 7b.

¹⁵ II Sam. 12:11.

¹⁶ A *mamzer* is sometimes mistranslated as “bastard.” However, it is not related to a child born out of wedlock, but rather to a child born out of adultery or incest.

happy. He said, “An ordinary son who has mercy on a father.”¹⁷ That is why [David] said a psalm [not a lament, thanking G-d for punishing him in the least severe manner possible].

- Berachot 7b

But here we also have to be precise about this language of “an ordinary son who has mercy on a father,” as it should have said “a son, who ordinarily has mercy on a father.”

ונש לומר שיש להקשות דמי הבטיח לדוד שאבשלום לא יהיה ממזר ודילמא אשתו זינתה, ומפל שכן דלא חזינו דרחים עליה, אלא ודאי צריך לומר דכך עלתה במחשבתו של דוד לחוש גם על זה, ומשום הכי קאמר סתם ברא דהינו מי שהיה בן סתם ואינו ודאי ממזר, דרכו הוא דרחים על אבא, ואפשר שהגרוסא היא סתם ברא רחים על אבא, ואז אתי שפיר טפי, ואם תאמר דהא לא חזינו דרחים עליה, כבר תירצו בזה המפרשים, ועיין בעיון יעקב.

It can be said that one should question who promised David that Absalom would not be a *mamzer*, for perhaps his wife had committed adultery? What’s more, we don’t see that [Absalom] had mercy on him, i.e., Absalom was fully committed to killing David.

Rather, certainly it’s necessary to say that it arose in David’s thinking to fear this, and because of this, as it says, “an ordinary son,” that is one who is a regular son and is certainly not a *mamzer*, his way is to have mercy on the father.

It’s possible that the proper wording of the Talmud should be “an ordinary son has mercy on the father,” instead of “an ordinary son who has mercy on the father,” and this is better.

If you’ll say here we didn’t see that [Absalom] had mercy on [David], because he really sought to kill him, this has already been solved by the commentators, and see in the *Iyun Ya’akov*.¹⁸

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¹⁷ The Vilna edition of Berachot does not have this language, “Surely the son will have mercy on the father,” but it appears in the Oxford 366 manuscript, and in the *Ein Ya’akov*.

¹⁸ Jacob ben Joseph Reischer (Bechofen) (1661–1733), Austrian rabbi. His sefer, *Iyyun Ya’akov* (Wilmersdorf, 1729) is a commentary on the *Ein Ya’akov*.