

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter LIII: Haazinu (Deut. 32:1–32:52)

Essay 7. The war of Gog and Magog

ענין גוג ומגוג בנדאי הוא דבר סתר ויש בו סוד, אבל נעיינ בו לפי הפשט, שלכאורה יש בו כמה קושיות שאם הכוונה כמו שפכתב הנפה תואר (ריש פרשת שמעוני) דהיינו להעשיר את ישראל ולהנקם מהרשעים, קשה והלא אין מעצור לו ותברך להעשרם בלא זה, ואי כדאי להנקם מהם, מה צורך שיתאספו יחד כל האומות הללו לבא על ישראל אם כבר הוא סוף העולם וכלם ימותו וישארו ישראל בלבד עם הגרים ואין לה נקמה גדולה מזו.

The matter of the war of Gog and Magog against the Jews is certainly a hidden matter and there is an esoteric secret in it. But let's examine it according to the plain explanation, that apparently has some difficulties.

Question 1: **If the intention is as written by the Yafeh To'ar¹ (at the beginning of parashat Shemini), which is to enrich Israel and take revenge on the wicked, there is no stopping Him, may He be blessed, to enrich them without this. I.e., G-d could certainly enrich Israel without causing us to be attacked by a powerful force. If it was in order to take revenge on [the wicked], what is the need for all these nations to gather together to come against Israel? I.e., G-d could certainly take revenge upon the wicked without involving Israel. If it is already the end of the world, and if they will all die, and if only Israel will remain with the righteous converts, you have no greater revenge against the wicked nations than this.**

ועוד מהו "והתגדלתי והתקדשתי ונודעתי לעיני גוים רבים ונדעו" וכו' אם סוף כלם למות, ואף אותם שיהיו, מגדולתם של ישראל יודו לשמו והנה הוא ושמו אחד, ועוד פתיב בצפננה "פיראז אהפך אל-עמים שפה ברוחה" וכו', ומה צורך למלקמה זו אם אז "וגר זאב עם-כבש" וכל רע יבולע מן הארץ ולא יהיה רק מדת הטוב.

Question 2: **Furthermore, what is the meaning of, "Thus will I manifest My greatness and My holiness, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations. And they shall know that I am the L-rd"² I.e., what is the point if the end of all of [the wicked] is to die? Even for those who will live, i.e., the Jews who survive the battle of Gog and Magog, from the beginnings**

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¹ Rabbi Samuel ben Isaac Ashkenazi Jaffe (d. late 16th century), rabbi of the Ashkenazi community of Constantinople. Yafeh To'ar was his commentary to the Midrash Rabbah: Genesis (Venice, 1597–1606); Exodus (Venice, 1597); and Leviticus (Constantinople, 1648).

² Ezek. 38:23.

of Israel, they acknowledged His Name and that He and His Name are One. So what is the verse teaching?

Question 3: Also, it is written in Zephaniah, “For then I will make the peoples pure of speech.”³ What need is there for this war of Gog and Magog if then “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb,”⁴ and all evil will be swallowed up from the earth and there will only be good conduct?

ועוד קשה על המדרש רבה פרשת נח שלפי שיפת פסה ערות אביו וכו בניו לקבורה דכתיב "אתן לגוג מקום-שם קבר", ואף היפה תאר הקשה שם על מדרש זה שהרי לא נקברו אלא מטעם הסרחון וכו'. ועוד שגם בני שם כלם היה מן הראוי שיהיו נקברים כלם ואדרבא מצינו במדת רשעים "לא יאספו ולא יקברו" וכו' ועיי"ש, וכל הענין הוא דבר תמוה ויש לתת בו איזה טעם לשבח דרך הפשט.

Question 4: Another question is on the Midrash Rabbah, parashat Noach (36:9), that because Japheth covered the nakedness of his father,⁵ his sons merited burial, as it is written, “I will assign to Gog a burial site there in Israel.”⁶ But the Yafeh To’ar questions this Midrash, that his understanding is that they were only buried because of the stench of decomposition.

Question 5: Also, the sons of Shem were all supposed to have been buried, as Shem joined Japheth in covering Noah. But to the contrary, we find that the way of the wicked is that “they shall be taken out of their graves and . . . they shall not be gathered and shall not be buried [again]”⁷ and see there. The entire matter is strange, and should be given some praiseworthy reason for the simple meaning.

ויש לומר שהואיל שאותו הזמן הוא סוף התיקון של העולם, והקדושה רוצה ליטול מן הקליפה כל ניצוצי הקדושה שבלעה לאסוף כל הנדחים ולקבץ כל הפזורים. ומשום הכי הקליפה מתאמצת בכל כחה לעכב מה שתחת ידה ועורכת מלקמה עם הקדושה, ולפי שהניצוצות נתפזרו בכל שבעים אומות שהם כנגד השבעים נפש שיירדו למצרים משום הכי גו"ג ומגו"ג עולה בגימטריא שבעים, כלומר שיתקבצו כל השבעים אומות ביחד במלקמה זו.

It can be said that it is because that time of the battle between Gog and Magog is the end of the correction of the world. At that time, the holiness wants to take from the *klipa* (a husk or shell of impurity) all the sparks of holiness that it has swallowed, to collect all the rejected ones and gather all the scattered ones. Because of this, the *klipa* strives with all its might to delay what is under its control, and wages war against the holiness. Since the sparks have been scattered throughout the seventy nations, which parallel the seventy souls who descended to Egypt,⁸ because of this, “Gog and Magog” have a Gematria of seventy, meaning that all seventy nations will gather together in this war.

³ Zeph. 3:9.

⁴ Isaiah 11:6.

⁵ Gen. 9:22–23.

⁶ Ezek. 39:11.

⁷ Jer. 8:1–2.

⁸ Gen. 46:27.

ולפי שִׁפְתַּי זָכָה לְכִסּוֹת עֲרֹנוֹת אָבִיו מִשּׁוּם הִכִּי מִדָּה כְּנִגְדַּי מִדָּה נַעֲשֶׂה מִלְבוּשׁ וְכִסּוֹת לְרֹב הַנִּיצוּצוֹת שֶׁנִּתְלַבְּשׁוּ בּוֹ יוֹתֵר מִהָאוֹמוֹת אֲחֵרוֹת, וְלִפְיָךְ אֶמְרוּ יִפְיֹתוּ שֶׁל יָפֶת וְיִשְׁכּוּן בְּאַהֲלֵי־שֵׁם דִּהְיִינוּ לְשׁוֹן יְנִי.

Because Japheth merited to cover his father’s nakedness, because of this, measure-for-measure, clothing and covering was made for most of the sparks that were clothed in him—more than the other nations. Therefore, they said, that the beauty of Japheth will reside in the tents of Shem,⁹ which is speaking of the Greek language.¹⁰ I.e., the Greeks are one of the descendants of Japheth, and their language will also serve as a sacred language in the tents of Shem, where Torah is studied.

וּמִזֶּה הַטַּעַם הַמְּלִךְ וְהַנְּשִׂיא שֶׁהוּא הָעֶקֶר בְּמִלְחָמָה זֶה נִקְרָא גוֹג שֶׁהוּא מִזֶּרַע מְגוּג כְּמוֹ שֶׁפִּירֵשׁ רַד"ק בִּישְׁרָאֵל, וְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִתְעַשְׂרִים דְּנִקְרָא בְּדָרָךְ זֶה כְּמוֹ שֶׁנִּתְעַשְׂרוּ מִהִרְכּוּשׁ גְּדוֹל כְּשִׁנְצִאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם, דִּהְיִינוּ שֶׁלְקַטְנוּ מִשָּׁם כָּל נִיצוּצוֹת הַקְּדוּשָׁה כִּידוּעַ אֲצִלְנוּ וְזֶה גָרַם שֶׁנִּזְכְּנוּ לְכָל הַמְּמוֹן שֶׁל מִצְרַיִם, שֶׁמִּתְחַלְקָה לֹא זָכוּ בּוֹ הַמִּצְרַיִים אֲלָא מִחֲמַת הַנִּיצוּצוֹת שֶׁהִיָּה לָהֶם בְּתוֹכָם וְנִמְצָא שֶׁכָּל הָעוֹשֵׁר הָיָה שֶׁל אוֹתָן הַנִּיצוּצוֹת, וְלִפְיָךְ רָצָה הַקַּב"ה שֶׁיָּבֹא לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּלִשׁוֹן שְׂאֵלָה כְּדִי לְהוֹדִיעַ שֶׁאֵף כְּשֶׁנִּתְּנוּ לַמִּצְרַיִים לֹא נִתְּנוּ אֲלָא בְּלִשׁוֹן שְׂאֵלָה, דִּהְיִינוּ שֶׁיִּשְׁתַּמְשׁוּ בּוֹ כֹּל עַתָּה שֶׁהִיוּ תַּחַת יָדֶם אוֹתָן הַנִּיצוּצוֹת.

For this reason, the king and the chieftain, who is the principal party in this war, is called Gog, who is a descendant of Magog, as explained by Radak¹¹ in Ezekiel (38:2). Israel is enriched precisely in this way, as they became enriched from the great property of the Egyptians when they exited from Egypt. That is, they gathered from there all the sparks of holiness, as we know, and this caused them to merit all the wealth of Egypt. Initially, the Egyptians only merited because of the sparks that they had within them, and it was found that all the wealth was from those sparks. Therefore, the Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted it to come to Israel in the language of borrowing, to make it known that even when they gave the wealth to the Egyptians, they gave only in the language of borrowing, meaning that they would use [the wealth] as long as the sparks were in their possession.

Thus, we understand the answers to Questions 1 and 3. As the Yafeh To’ar said, the goal of the war of Gog and Magog is to enrich Israel and to take revenge on the wicked. This is a joint goal, and is to be accomplished in a way that parallels what happened in the Exodus from Egypt, in which the Jews were threatened with destruction, but in the end were enriched while the Egyptians suffered defeat.

⁹ Cf. Gen. 9:27, “May G-d enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem.”

¹⁰ Megillah 9b.

¹¹ Rabbi David Kimchi (1160–1235) (“RaDaK”), medieval rabbi, Biblical commentator, philosopher, and grammarian.

ומשום דקנימא לן תשמיישי קדושה — נגנזין. אם כן אלו האומות שנעשו תיק וחסות ונרתק לאותן הניצוצות הקדושות יזכו לקבורה ויהיו נגנזין, כמו שאר מצרים זכו לקבורה. אמנם אותם האומות שלא שמרו אותן הניצוצות כראוי להן אלא אדרבא נשתדלו לקלקלם אז הם לא נקראו כלל תשמיישי קדושה, ועיין מה שכתבנו בזה בפירוש מלות, ולפיכך יהיו נתונים למאכל העופות "לעית צפור" וכו', ואם כן האסיפה זו נוקא גורמת סוף תיקון העולם.

Because we maintain that articles associated with the sanctity of G-d's name, even after they are no longer used, must be interred in a respectful manner,¹² if so, these people who became a container and covering and wrapping for these holy sparks merited to be buried and will be interred, just as even Egypt merited burial. Indeed, the peoples who did not guard the sparks properly, but rather to the contrary strove to destroy them, they are not in the category of articles of sanctity. See what we've written on this in parashat Matot (note 4), and therefore they will be given as food to the carrion birds,¹³ and if so, this gathering will precisely cause the end of the correction of the world.

Thus, we understand the answers to Questions 4 and 5. Japheth's descendants merit burial in part because they took care of the sparks of holiness that were in their domain, such as by covering Noah's nakedness. In contrast, the descendants of Shem, even though they also had a part in covering Noah's nakedness, failed in other ways to take care of the sparks of holiness in their domain, and to the contrary sought to destroy the holiness, and therefore they do not deserve burial.

וזהו "והתגדלתי והתקדשתי", דהיינו שהקדושה אוספת נדחים ומתגדלת ומתקדשת ואז לא ישאר בעולם רק מדת הטוב, ואז יהיה ה' אחד ושמו אחד, כי נתקבצו כל הפזורים ונתמלאה הקדושה באחדות גמור, ומה שמצינו ברשעים בני שם לא יאכפו ולא יקברו, לפי שהם השחיתו דרכם וקלקלו בנשמתם, ו"הכל הולך אל-מקום אחד" וענין אחד.

To answer Question 2: **This is the meaning of, "Thus will I manifest My greatness and My holiness," which is that the holiness gathered the rejected ones and grows and becomes holy. Then there will only be good conduct in the world, and then G-d will be One, and His Name will be One. All the scattered will be gathered and the holiness will be filled with complete unity, but we found that the wicked ones, the sons of Shem, will not be gathered and will not be buried. This is because they corrupted their ways and corrupted their souls, and "all go to the same place,"¹⁴ and the same matter.**

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¹² Megillah 26b.

¹³ Ezek. 39:4.

¹⁴ Eccl. 3:20.