

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter LIV: Vezot haBracha (Deut. 33:1–34:12)

Essay 10. Connecting the last verse to the first verse

"ולכל היד התזקה ולכל המורא הגדול אשר עשה משה לעיני כלי־ישראל".

“Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the L-rd singled out, face to face, for the various signs and portents that the L-rd sent him to display in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and his whole country, **according to the strong hand, and according to the great awe which Moses performed before the eyes of all Israel.**”¹

גרסינו בפרק קמא דמעניית תנא: בזמן שהצבור שרוי בצער, אל יאמר אדם: אלה לביתי, ואוכל ואשתה, ושלום עליך נפשי. ואם עושה כן עליו הכתוב אומר וכו'. אלא, יצער עצמו עם הצבור, שכן מצינו במשה רבינו ע"ה שנצטער עם הצבור, שנאמר "וידי משה כבדים" וכו', וכי לא היה לו למשה כר אחד או פסת אחד, אלא כך אמר משה: הואיל שהצבור שרוי בצער אף אני אהיה עמו בצער, וכל המצער עצמו עם הצבור זוכה ורואה בנחמת צבור ע"כ.

It is taught in the first chapter of tractate Taanit:

A Baraita teaches: When the community is immersed in suffering, a person may not say: I will go to my home and I will eat and drink, and peace be upon you, my soul. And if he does so, the verse says about him: “And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine; let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die.”² And what is written afterward: “And the Lord of hosts revealed Himself in my ears: Surely this iniquity shall not be expiated by you until you die.”³

...

Rather, he himself should suffer with the community, as we found with Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, that he suffered with the community, as it is stated [during the war with Amalek]: “But Moses’ hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat upon it.”⁴ **But didn’t Moses have one pillow or one cushion to sit upon? Rather, Moses said as follows:**

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¹ Deut. 34:10–12.

² Isaiah 22:13.

³ Isaiah 22:14.

⁴ Ex. 17:12.

“Since the Jewish people are immersed in suffering, I too will be with them in suffering.” Anyone who suffers with the community will merit seeing the consolation of the community.

- Taanit 11a

ולכן אמר הכתוב "ולכל היד התזקה" שציער עצמו עם הצבור כמו שכתוב "וידי משה כבדים", "אשר עשה משה לעיני כל ישראל" שעשה כן משום שכל הצבור היה שרוי בצער, ומי שעשה כן יזכה לראות בנחמת צבור פשינתם הקב"ה את ישראל מצרותם, ויזכה לראות "בראשית ברא אלהים" כלומר הישועה הקדושה אשר יעשה האלהים, שאז יחזור העולם לתיקונו הראשון.

Therefore, Scripture says, “according to the strong hand,” that he afflicted himself with the community, as it is written, “And the hands of Moses were heavy.”

“[W]hich Moses did before the eyes of all Israel,” that is, he did this because the whole community was immersed in suffering. Whoever does likewise will merit to see the consolation of the community, when the Holy One, Blessed be He, will comfort Israel from their troubles, and he will merit to see “In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth,”⁵ as if to say, the new salvation which G-d will bring about, when the world will return to its original perfection.

אִי נִמְי בְּדָרוֹ אַחַר הַנָּה אָמְרוּ בַּפֶּרֶק ב' דְּשִׁבְתָּ דְּמִי שְׂיֵישׁ בּוֹ יִרְאַת שְׁמַיִם שְׁקוּל כְּנִגְדָּ כָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוֹ, וְכָל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוֹ לֹא נִבְרָא אֱלֹא בְּשִׁבִיל זֶה, וּמִנְשָׂה הַשְּׂיֵיג הַתְּכִלִּית הָאֲמִתִּי נֶשֶׁל יִרְאַת שְׁמַיִם שְׁלִימָה, כְּמוֹ שְׂאֲמְרוּ ו"ל עַל פְּסוּק "מֵה ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ שְׂאֵל מַעֲמֶךָ" וְכוּ' כְּלִי גְדוֹל, וְיֵשׁ לוֹ וְכוּ' דְּלִגְבֵי מִשָּׁה מִיִּלְתָּא זוּטְרְתִי הִיא.

Alternatively, in another way of understanding this: Here they said in chapter 2 of tractate Shabbat (30b) that one who possesses the fear of Heaven is equivalent to the entire world, and the whole world was created only for his sake. Moses attained the true goal of complete fear of Heaven, as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said on the verse, “What does the L-rd your G-d ask of you,” etc., “A large vessel, and he has one,”⁶ but for Moses it was a small thing. I.e., someone who does not own a large vessel may imagine that it is difficult to part with, but someone who owns one may readily give it away. Thus, while fear of Heaven seems challenging to acquire, Moses had it an found it easy.

⁵ Gen. 1:1.

⁶ Berachot 33b.

וְנָהוּ "וּלְכָל הַמּוֹרָא הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינָיו כְּלִי-יִשְׂרָאֵל", כְּלוֹמֵר כֹּל כֶּף הִנֵּה מֹשֶׁה יָרָא אֶת ה' שֶׁהִנֵּה שָׁקוּל כְּנֶגֶד כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וּכְנֶגֶד כָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוּ. וְנָהוּ "בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ", שֶׁכָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוּ לֹא נִבְרָא אֶלָּא בְּשִׁבִיל כָּל "הַמּוֹרָא הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה" וְכוּ, וְהָכִי אֶמְרִינָן בְּמִדְרָשׁ "בְּרֵאשִׁית" בְּשִׁבִיל מֹשֶׁה שֶׁנִּקְרָא רֵאשִׁית.

This is the meaning of “and according to the great awe which Moses performed before the eyes of all Israel,” as if to say that Moses’ fear of G-d was so great that he was equivalent to all Israel and to the entire world. This is the meaning of “In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth,” for the whole world was created only because of “all the great awe which Moses performed,” etc. Thus, it is said in Midrash: “ ‘In the beginning’—for the sake of Moses, who is called ‘beginning.’ ”⁷

וּלְפִי דִרְדָּךְ זֶה אָמַר קִהְלֵת "יָדַעְתִּי כִּי כְּלִי-אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא יִהְיֶה לְעוֹלָם עָלָיו אֵין לְהוֹסִיף וּמִמֶּנּוּ אֵין לְגָרֹעַ וְהָאֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה שִׁירָאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו", דְּהֵינּוּ עַל כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים אֵי אֶפְשָׁר לְהוֹסִיף וּלְגָרֹעַ, מִפְּנֵי שְׁמִי שֶׁיֵּשׁ בּוֹ יִרְאַת שָׁמַיִם הוּא שָׁקוּל בְּכַף מֵאֲזִנָּיִם מִדָּה בְּמִדָּה כְּנֶגֶד כָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוּ. וְאִם כֵּן הוּאִיל שֶׁהָאֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה הָעוֹלָם כֹּד שִׁירָאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו כְּדִי שִׁיְהִיָּה דִּוְקָא שָׁקוּל כְּנֶגֶד כָּל הָעוֹלָם, אֵין לְהוֹסִיף וּלְגָרֹעַ עַל הָעוֹלָם, שְׂאֵז לֹא הִנֵּה עוֹד שָׁקוּל.

According to this way of understanding, Kohelet said, “I realized, too, that whatever G-d has brought to pass will recur evermore: nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it—and G-d has brought to pass that men revere Him.”⁸ That is, regarding all that G-d has made, one cannot add or subtract, because whoever possesses fear of Heaven is, as it were, balanced on the scales measure for measure against the entire world. Since G-d made the world in such a way that people should fear before Him, so that such a person would be precisely equivalent to the whole world, nothing can be added or taken away from the world, for then [the person] would no longer be equivalent to the world.

וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לְדַקְדָּק לְמַה הוֹזְכְּרוּ שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ, תְּחִילַת כָּל הַנִּבְרָאִים. וְאִתָּא בְּנִלְקוּט הַאֲזִינוּ לְמַה קָרָא מֹשֶׁה לְשָׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ כְּדִי שְׂאֵם יִסְטָאוּ תַּהִיָּה בְּהֵם יָד הַעֲדִים תְּחִילָה. דְּבָר אַחֵר שְׂאֵין הַקֹּב"ה גּוֹאֵל אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶלָּא עַל יְדֵן וְכוּ, דְּבָר אַחֵר שֶׁלֹּא נִיתְּנָה הַתּוֹרָה אֶלָּא עַל יְדֵיהֶם עַכ"ל.

Further, we must note why heaven and earth, the first of all created things, are mentioned. It is found in Yalkut Shimoni, parashat Haazinu:

Why did Moses call upon heaven and earth? So that if Israel should sin, the testimony of the witnesses would be first against them.⁹

Another explanation: Because the Holy One, Blessed be He, will redeem Israel only through them, as it is said: “Shout, O heavens, for the L-rd has acted;

⁷ Gen. Rabbah 1:4, based on an interpretation of Deut. 33:21, “He provided the *first part* [ראשית] [*reisheet*] for himself, because a lawgiver’s portion was reserved there.”

⁸ Eccl. 3:14.

⁹ See Chapter LIII, Haazinu, essay 1.

shout aloud, O depths of the earth! Shout for joy, O mountains, O forests with all your trees! For the L-rd has redeemed Jacob, has gained glory through Israel.”¹⁰

Another explanation: Because the Torah was given only through them, as it is said, “From the heavens He let you hear the divine voice to discipline you; on earth He let you see the great divine fire; and from amidst that fire you heard G-d’s words.”¹¹

- Yalkut Shimoni, Haazinu 942

ולכן בא הפתוב להודיע מדריגת שמים וארץ "לקל-האמת והמופתים אשר שלחו ה' לעשות בארץ מצרים", לרמוז על הגאולה, "ולכל היד התזקה" לרמוז על התורה שניתנה מיד ליד, "ולכל המורא הגדול" שעשה לישראל שאם יחטאו תהיה בהם יד העדים תחילה.

Therefore, Scripture comes to inform of the rank of heaven and earth “for the various signs and portents that the L-rd sent him to display in the land of Egypt,” to allude to redemption.

“[A]ccording to the strong hand,” to allude to the Torah, which was given from hand to hand. “And according to the great awe” which he performed did for Israel, that if they should sin, the hand of the witnesses would be first against them.

אי נמי לכל "המורא הגדול אשר עשה משה לעיניו" וכו' דאיתא שם במדרש דבר אחר "האזינו השמים" תנו דעתכם שלא תקטרגו את ישראל לאחר מותי אלא כך תהיו זכורים כאילו אני חי ועומד ומבקש רחמים על ישראל עכ"ל. ולמה יש להם כל כך יכולת מפני שהזכרו ראשית כל הנבראים "בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים" וכו', ולמה הזכירם בראשית מפני שעמיד להיות להם כל אלו המעלות.

Alternatively, “for all the great awe which he performed before the eyes of all Israel”: it is stated there in the Midrash:

Another explanation: [Regarding] “Give ear, O heavens,”¹² Moses said, “Pay attention, you heavens, that you not prosecute Israel after my death, but remember as if I were alive and standing and pleading for mercy on behalf of Israel.”

- Yalkut Shimoni, Haazinu 942

Why do they have such power? Because they are mentioned first of all created things: “In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth.” Why were they mentioned at the beginning? Because in the future they would possess all these virtues.

* * *

¹⁰ Isaiah 44:23.

¹¹ Deut. 32:2.

¹² Deut. 4:36.