

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter LVII: Kinnot (Lamentations)

Essay 3: The great danger of emulating the nations, and of drinking to excess.

**מדרש** רבה גלתה יהודה מעני על שאכלו חמץ בפסח. דבר אחר על שחבלו משכוננו של עני בבתיהם. ומרב עבדה, על שהיו משתעבדים בעבד עברי. יש לדקדק מה ענין אכילת חמץ בפסח לגלות, ומהו דבר אחר על שחבלו וכו'.

**Midrash Lam. Rabbah 1:28–29** discusses the verse, “**Judah has gone into exile because of misery** and harsh oppression; when she settled among the nations, she found no rest; all her pursuers overtook her between the straits” (Lam. 1:3). The Midrash states that Judah has gone into exile **because they ate chametz<sup>1</sup> on Passover. Another matter is that they seized the collateral of a poor person in their homes.** The word (עני) (*oni*) can denote “misery” or “poverty” or “a poor person.” It is used in Lamentations 1:3 in the sense of “misery,” and the Midrash uses the same word in the sense of “a poor person.” Regarding “**harsh oppression,**” this is **because they would enslave a Hebrew slave.<sup>2</sup> We should scrutinize how eating chametz on Passover is relevant to exile, and what is this other matter, that they seized [the collateral of a poor person in their homes]?**

ויש לומר דמי שאוכל חמץ בפסח חייב פרת, וכל חייבי כריתות שלקו נפטרו מידי פרייתתם, וכל חייבי מלקות שנתבזו נפטרו מן המלקות, כדכתיב ונקלה אחיד לעיניך משלקה הרי הוא כאחיד, ואף כאן היו חייבים פרת או לפחות מלקות או לפחות ביזיון גדול ולכן נתחייבו לגלות, אמן מיד שגלו היו פטורים.

**It’s worth saying that one who eats chametz on Passover deserves *karet*,** i.e., excommunication, or an early death imposed by Heaven. However, we know from a Mishnah<sup>3</sup> that **all those liable to receive *karet* who were flogged in court were exempted from *karet*. All who are liable to be flogged who are degraded are exempt from the lashes, as it is written,** “He may be given up to forty lashes, but not more, lest being flogged further, to excess, **your brother be degraded before your eyes**” (Deut. 25:3)—**when he has been flogged he is called**

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<sup>1</sup> Food with leavening agents, which is forbidden for Jews to eat, own, or benefit from on Passover.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrew slaves became slaves either because of extreme poverty (in which case they could sell themselves to an Israelite owner) or because of inability to pay a debt.

<sup>3</sup> Mishnah Makkot 3:15 (Makkot 23a): “All who have incurred [the penalty of] *karet*, on being flogged are exempt from their punishment of *karet*, for it says, ‘[He may be given up to forty lashes, but not more] ... lest your brother shall be dishonored before your eyes’ (Deut. 25:3). Once he has been lashed he is [once again considered] ‘your brother’ [which would not be the case if he were still excommunicated], the words of Rabbi Hananiah ben Gamaliel.”

**your brother**, from which we derive that he is no longer excommunicated. **Here too, they were liable to receive *karet*, or at least lashes, or at least a great disgrace, and therefore they were liable to exile**, being a great disgrace. **Indeed, as soon as they were exiled, they were exempted from *karet* or from lashes.**

ואם תאמר נמי על שחבלו משכונו של עני, מכל מקום הנה להקב"ה ליטול מהם הבית המקדש שנקרא משכן על שם משכון ולא להגלותם. וכן על שגשמתעבדו בעבד עברי הנה להם להיות עבדים אמנם בשש או ביוכל הנה להם לחזור לחירות. וזוהי קינת המקונן גלתה יהודה ולא היתה ראוינה לגלות כלל או לא היתה ראוינה להתעכב בגלות כלל, או אף אם היתה ראוינה להתעכב שם לא הנה לה להתעכב רק שש שנים.

**If you will say that they deserved exile because they also seized the collateral of a poor person, in any event the Holy One, Blessed be He, could have only taken the Temple from them—which was called *mishkan* [dwelling, Sanctuary] because it was a *mashkon* [security, pledge]<sup>4</sup>—and not exiled them. Regarding the fact that they enslaved a Hebrew slave, they could have been slaves within the framework of halacha, without any sin on the part of the slaveowner; indeed, after six [years]—or until the Jubilee—they would have returned to freedom. This is the lamentation of the mourner: “Judah has gone into exile,” and exile was not proper for the Jewish people at all; or at least even if an exile *was* appropriate, it should have been very brief, and an extended exile was not proper at all. Or even if one believes that an extended exile *was* proper, then certainly [the Jewish people] shouldn’t have been delayed in exile for more than six years.**

והנה מצינו שגלתה וכו' ואף ישבה בגויים ולא נגאלה אפילו בסוף שש, ואף לאחר זמן הרבה לא מצאה מנוח, דהיינו לא מצאה הבית המקדש, דכל דור שלא נבנה בית המקדש בנמיו פאילו נחרב בנמיו, ולמה כן בשביל שרדפיה השיגוה. דאמרינן בזוהר פרשת פקודי (דף רל"ו) כל זמנא דסטרך דקדושה שלטא, סטרך אחרך לא יכיל לשלטאה, ואיתכפא קמיה ועל דא תנינן, כל זמנא דירושלים תהא מלאה, מלכו אחרך והא חרבה עכ"ל.

**Here we point out that “[Judah] has gone into exile,” and even “when she settled among the nations,” and wasn’t redeemed, even after six [years], and even after much time, “she found no rest.” That is to say, she found no Temple, for “any generation in which the Temple is not built, it is as if it had been destroyed in their times” (Yerushalmi Yoma 5a). Why is this? Because “her pursuers overtook her.” As it says in the Zohar for parshat Pekudei (page 2:236a), “Whenever the Side of Holiness rules, the Other Side, i.e., the Side of Impurity, is not able to rule, and is submissive before [the holiness]. Therefore, we learned that whenever Jerusalem will be complete, evil will be destroyed.”<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>4</sup> Ex. Rabbah 51:3.

<sup>5</sup> The Zohar learns this from Pesachim 42b: “If this one [i.e., Jerusalem], is full, then that one [i.e., her enemy], is laid waste; and if this [enemy] is full, then she [Jerusalem], is laid waste. Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said: [This notion comes] from here, [where the verse states regarding Esau and Jacob:] ‘The one people shall be stronger than the other people’ (Gen. 25:23) [meaning that when one nation gains power, the other is weakened, because both cannot be strong at the same time].”

ולכן מיד שחרבה ירושלים קנו הם הממשלה, שפך היתה גזירת הבורא ולאם מלאם יאמץ פגודע, אבל שלטתם לא תתקיים כד לעולם חס ושלום, אלא בין המצרים בלבד, דהיינו שעקר טעם הגלות של ישראל הוא לקבץ הפזורים דהיינו הניצוצות והנשמות שנגדחו לקליפות מחמת עוונותיהם של ישראל. וכבר נודע שבבבל נתקבצו שם בימי נבוכדנצר כל האומות וכל הניצוצות ושם גלו ישראל כדי לקבצם. וכל עוד שאלו הניצוצות מובלעות בתוך הקליפה כל השפע וכל העושר וכל הממשלה הוא שלה, ומתגברת ומתגדלת בכם אלו הניצוצות שבתוכה.

**Therefore, immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem, the [foreign] government acquired [the Jewish people], for that was a decree of the Creator, “and one people shall be mightier than another” (Gen. 25:23), as is known. But their rule will not continue thus forever, G-d forbid. Rather, “her pursuers overtook her between the straits” only, that is, the main point of Israel’s exile is to gather the scattered, which is the fragments and the souls who were banished to husks because of the sins of Israel. It is already known that in Babylon, in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, all the nations and all the fragments were gathered there; and there Israel was exiled, in order to gather them. As long as these fragments are swallowed within the husk, all the bounty and all the wealth and all the rule belong to [the husk], and these fragments that are within her grow stronger and greater in strength.**

וזה סוד היו צריכה לראש, ואם היו ישראל מן הניצוצות לעשות תשובה ומעשים טובים ולהיות נבדלים מן האומות היו מקבצים אותם מיד והיו נמי נגאלים מיד. וזהו בין המצרים כלומר בין הגבולים, דהיינו עד שיהיה הפרש ברור ונדוע בין מצר וגבול של הקדושה למצר וגבול של הטומאה, ואז מיד יתקיים חיל בלע ויקאנו, וכן היה בסוף גלות בבל, פדכתיב ורבים מעמי הארץ מתנהדים וכו'.

**This is an esoteric secret, “Her enemies are now the masters” (Lam. 1:5), and if Israel had been quick to repent and to do good deeds and to be distinguished from the other nations they would have been gathered from their dispersion immediately, and they also would have been redeemed immediately. This is the meaning of, “All her pursuers overtook her between the straits” as if to say “between the boundaries”; that is, until there is a clear and known difference between the strait and the border of the holy and the strait and the border of the impure. That is, Israel is meant to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). Even in exile among the nations, it is essential for Israel to remain a nation apart, and for Jews to retain our way of life and not to copy the customs of the non-Jews. Then immediately, the verse will be fulfilled that, “he will vomit the riches he has swallowed” (Job 20:15), and thus it was at the end of the Babylonian exile, as it is written, “And many of the people of the land professed to be Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them” (Esther 8:17).**

ועוד יש לפרש בין המצרים, דאיתא [ב]במדבר רבה (פרשה ז') על פסוק וישלחו אותם אל-מחוז למחנה, אמר להם המקום לישראל הואיל ואתם רוצים בעבודה זרה אף אני אגלה אתכם למקום שיש שם עבודה זרה עכ"ל. וכתב הרמב"ם (בפירוש משנה ד' פקק קמא דעבודה זרה), כל עיר שיש בה עבודה זרה בלא ספק אותה העיר אסור לדור בה, אבל אנחנו אנוסים ונתקיים בנו מקרא שכתוב ועבדתם-שם אלהים מעשה ידי אדם וכו'.

We should also understand the term “between the straits,” as is brought in Midrash Numbers Rabbah (section 7:10) on the verse, “putting them outside the camp” (Num. 5:4), “G-d said to Israel, ‘Since you want idolatry, I will exile you to a place in which there is idolatry.’” The Rambam writes (in explaining the fourth Mishnah of the first chapter of tractate Avodah Zarah), “Every city in which there is idolatry is without a doubt a city in which it is forbidden for a Jew to dwell. But we are compelled, and see the fulfillment of the Scripture reading, ‘There you will serve man-made gods’ (Deut. 4:28).”

וכתבו המפרשים דמדאמר הכתוב ובקשתם משם את-ה' אלהיך ומצאת סמוך לקרא דנעבדתם-שם וכו', נראה שפונת הכתוב היא לומר שאם ישראל יזקרו בעצמם שלא יתקיים בהם ועבדתם דהיינו שיתרחקו לגמרי מהעולם הזה, אז תכף ומיד הקב"ה יגאלם וישיב שבותם. וזהו הדיוק של ובקשתם משם, משם דוקא וכו', את-ה' אלהיך ומצאת עכ"ל. וזהו ממש בין המצרים כדכתיב עד-מתי אתם פסחים על-שתי הסעיפים.

The commentators wrote about Scripture saying, “But if you search there for the L-rd your G-d, you will find Him” (Deut. 4:29), immediately adjacent to the reading, “there you will serve man-made gods” (Deut. 4:28). They wrote, “it appears that Scripture’s intent is to say that if Israel will be careful about themselves such that they won’t fulfill the verse, ‘You will serve man-made gods’—that is, if Israel will distance themselves completely from this world and not imitate the nations—then instantly the Holy One, Blessed be He, will redeem them and restore their captives. This is the precise meaning of the words, ‘But if you search there’ (there specifically) ‘for the L-rd your G-d, you will find Him.’”<sup>6</sup> This is exactly “between the straits,” as it is written, “Elijah approached all the people and said, ‘How long will you keep hopping between two opinions? If the L-rd is G-d, follow Him; and if Baal, follow him!’” (I Kings 18:21).

ועוד יש לפרש בין המצרים דאיתא בבראשית רבה (פרשה ל"ו) על פסוק ויתגל בתוך אהלה, ויגל אין כתיב אלא ויתגל, גרם גלות לו ולדורות, יוד השבטים לא גלו אלא בשביל יין דכתיב השתים במזרקי יין, וכתיב הוי משפמי בבקר וכו'. שבת יהודה ובנימין לא גלו אלא בשביל יין דכתיב וגם-אלה ביין שגו וכו' עכ"ל.

We should also understand the term, “between the straits” as is brought in Midrash Genesis Rabbah (section 36:4) on the verse, “[Noah] drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent” (Gen. 9:21): “It’s not written that he was uncovered by someone else, but rather that he uncovered himself. He caused exile for himself and for the generations to come. The ten tribes were exiled only because of wine, as it is written, ‘They

<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Nachmani’s source has not been identified.

**drink straight from the wine bowls'** (Amos 6:6), and it is written, **'Ah, those who awaken early in the morning** to chase liquor and until late in the evening are inflamed by wine!' (Isaiah 5:11). **The tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin were also only exiled because of wine, as it is written, 'But these are also muddled by wine** and dazed by liquor: priest and prophet are muddled by liquor; they are confused by wine, they are dazed by liquor; they are muddled in their visions, they stumble in judgment.' (Isaiah 28:7)."

ועוד נשם בסמוך, בשעה שנתה היתה הולך ליטע כרם פגע ביה שידא שמדון, אמר לו שותפי עמך אלא אינךהר בך דלא תיעול לחלקי, ואם תיעול בחלקי אגא חביל בך עכ"ל. וזהו בין המצרים שעברו המצר והגבול הראוי להם בשתיית היין, ובשביל זה גיזקו ונלקדו ברשות הנכרים והסטרא אחרא.

**Also adjacent to there (in Midrash Gen. Rabbah 36:3): "At the hour that Noah was walking to plant a vineyard, the demon Sh'madon [Asmodeus] met him, and said to him, 'Join with me! But watch out that you not enter my side of the vineyard, for if you do enter into my side, I will hurt you.' "** This is the meaning of **"between the straits,"** that they crossed the straits and the proper border of behavior for them in their drinking of wine, and because of this they were hurt and captured in the domain of the non-Jews and the Other Side, i.e., the side of impurity.

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