

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter LVII: Kinnot (Lamentations)

Essay 8: This essay presents two concepts related to the verse, “Her gates have sunk into the earth”: A) Why Asaph recited a song, instead of a lament; and B) The promise of a return to purity in the days of the Messiah.

A. Why Asaph recited a song, instead of a lament.

קדושיין פּרַק קמא אספניעא מילתא וְדַרַש אַבִּימִי מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף אֱלֹהִים בָּאוּ גוֹיִם בְּנִחְלָתָהּ. וּפִירַש רַשׁ"י הֵבִין בְּמִדְרַשׁ מִזְמוֹר אֶתְּךָ שְׁלֹא הָיָה מִבֵּין בּוֹ קוֹדֵם לְכֵן לְדוֹרְשׁוֹ, וַיֵּשׁ מִפְּרָשִׁים שֶׁבְּמִקְרָא זֶה לְבִדּוֹ דְרַשׁ, מִזְמוֹר לְאַסָּף וְכוּ' קִינָה לְאַסָּף מִיבְעֵי לֵיהּ, וְדַרַשׁ כֶּף שֶׁשָּׁפַף חֲמָתוֹ עַל יְעֲצִים וְאַבְנִים וְכוּ'.

The first chapter of tractate Kiddushin¹ (31b) states: “One day [Rabbi Abbahu] said to [Avimi his son]: Give me water to drink. Before he brought him [the water, Rabbi Abbahu] dozed off. [Avimi] bent over [and] stood over him until [his father] awoke. [Avimi’s performance of this mitzvah] **aided him** [i.e., as a reward G-d helped him in his studies], **and he interpreted** (*darash*) (דַרַש) the psalm: ‘**A psalm of Asaph. O G-d, heathens have entered Your property, defiled Your holy Temple, and turned Jerusalem into ruins.**’ (Ps. 79:1).”

Rashi explained the meaning of the word “interpreted” (*darash*) (דַרַש) in the above section: “[Avimi] **understood the homiletic interpretation** (*midrash*) (מִדְרַש) **of one psalm that he had not previously understood [well enough] to explain it. And some instead explain** the above section of Kiddushin **that he expounded** (*darash*) (דַרַש) **only one verse, ‘A psalm of Asaph’ etc., and not the entire psalm. Avimi had previously thought that [the verse] should have stated, ‘A lament for Asaph.’ With his new understanding, he expounded** that Asaph [instead] said a song, because of the fact **that [G-d] poured His anger on wood and stone** that was in His House, and because of this, exonerated the survivors in Israel. Were it not for this, the enemies of Israel [a euphemism for Israel] would not have left any survivors.”

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¹ The word is misspelled as קידושין in the first edition, which is likely a publisher’s error.

ובתוספות שם כתבו שאסף אמר שירה על שטבעו בארץ שעריה, משל לשפחה שיירדה לשאוב מים וכו', כך בני קרח שהיו בלועים, כשראו שטבעו בארץ שעריה אמרו שירה, לאמר מי שיוציא השערים יוציא גם אותנו לכך וכו', ומקשים העולם מה ענין הוצאת השערים עם קרח ובניו.

In the Tosafot there for Kiddushin 31b, they write that, “Asaph recited a song regarding the fact that ‘her gates have sunk into the earth’ (Lam. 2:9).” I.e., Ps. 79:1 states, “Heathens have . . . defiled Your holy Temple, and turned Jerusalem into ruins.” Why would Asaph be happy about that? Rashi’s view is given above, that Asaph was happy that only the buildings were destroyed, but not the people. Tosafot present another view: **“There is a parable about a maidservant who descended to draw water** from a well and whose pitcher fell into the well. She became distraught and began to cry, until the king’s maidservant came to draw water carrying a golden pitcher, and it too, fell into the well. At this point, the first maidservant began to sing. ‘Until now,’ she exclaimed, ‘I didn’t think that anybody would retrieve my cheap earthenware pitcher from the well. But now, whoever retrieves the golden pitcher, will retrieve mine as well!’ **Thus, the sons of Korach, who were swallowed by the earth, when they saw that ‘her gates have sunk into the earth,’ recited a song, saying, ‘Whoever rescues the gates will also rescue us!’** That explains why Asaph, who was from the family of Korach, recited a psalm, instead of a lament.” **Everyone asks: What does rescuing the gates have to do with Korach and his sons?**

ונש' לומר דאמרין בפרק ד' דסנהדרין מיום שפנתה הארץ את פיה וקבלתו לדמו של הבל, שוב לא פנתה, איתביה ותפתח הארץ את פיה, אמר ליה לרעה פנתה, לטובה לא פנתה, וכתבו שם התוספות, מיום שפנתה וכו', כל דמים נבלעים בארץ אלא שרישומן ניפר, ושל הבל אין רישומן ניפר עכ"ל.

It’s worth noting that it says in the fourth chapter of Sanhedrin (37b):

Rav Yehuda, son of Rabbi Chiya, says: **“From the day the earth opened its mouth and received the blood of Abel, its mouth has not opened again,** as it is stated: ‘From the corner of the earth have we heard songs: Glory to the righteous’ (Isaiah 24:16). [One can infer that the songs are heard] ‘from the corner of the earth,’ but not from the mouth of the earth [as the earth never again opened its mouth].”

Chizkiyya, [Rav Yehuda’s] brother, **raised an objection:** “The verse states concerning Korah and his assembly: **‘And the earth opened her mouth** [and swallowed them up with their households, all Korah’s people and their possessions]’ (Num. 16:32).”

[Rav Yehuda, son of Rabbi Chiya,] **said to him: “It opened [again] for a bad [purpose]; it did not open [again] for a good [purpose].”**

- Sanhedrin 37b

The Tosafot say there at Sandhedrin 37b, “From the day [the earth] opened etc.”: “All blood is swallowed by the earth, but it leaves a trace, but that of Abel left no trace.”

Scripture later says, “The sons of Eliab were Nemuel, and Dathan and Abiram. These are the same Dathan and Abiram, chosen in the assembly, who agitated against Moses and Aaron as part of Korach’s band when they agitated against the L-rd. Then the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with Korach—when that band died, when the fire consumed the two hundred and fifty men—and they became an example. The sons of Korach, however, did not die.” (Num. 26:9–11). The commentator Bechor Shor interprets Scripture to mean that the sons of Korach did not die because they were not among those swallowed by the earth. However, Sanhedrin 110a–b relates a *Baraita* that the sons of Korach *were* swallowed by the earth, but that they did not fall as far into Gehinnom as the others, and that they remain alive. In this essay, Zera Shimshon follows the view of the *Baraita*. There are a number of later references to the Korachite family: in Num. 26:58, as well as in I Chronicles, II Chronicles, and in a number of Psalms. Indeed, as brought earlier in this essay, the Tosafot on Kiddushin 31b identify Asaph as a descendant of Korach. This does not necessarily conflict with the *Baraita*, for while the sons of Korach were swallowed by the earth, there could have been grandchildren who were not swallowed.

ואם כן אף כִּשְׁבִלְעָה הָאֶרֶץ הַשְּׁעָרִים שֶׁהוּא דָבָר חוּץ מֵהַטְּבַע, כְּמוֹ שֶׁהִיָּתָה בּוֹלַעַת דָּמוֹ שֶׁל הַבָּל שֶׁלֹּא יֵהָא רְשׁוּמוֹ נִיכָר, צָרִיךְ לוֹמַר שֶׁפְּתָחָה פִּיהָ, וְהָא אֵינָה יְכוּלָה לִפְתּוֹחַ כִּי אִם לְרַעָה וּבְפַעֵם הַזֹּאת לְכַאוֹרָה נִרְאָה שֶׁהוּא לְטוֹבָה כְּדִי שֶׁלֹּא יִשְׁלְטוּ הָאוֹמּוֹת בְּאוֹתָם הַשְּׁעָרִים. וְצָרִיךְ לוֹמַר דְּגַם זֹאת הִיָּתָה לְרַעָה, שֶׁהָרִי הַשְּׁוֹנְאִים לֹא הָיוּ יְכוּלִים לְשַׁלוֹט בַּשְּׁעָרִים, כְּדָאֲמַרִּינָן בְּסוּטָה אֵלּוּ מִזְּשֶׁה וְדוֹד שֶׁלֹּא שֶׁלְטוּ שׁוֹנְאֵיהֶם בְּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהֶם, וְכָל עוֹד שֶׁהָיוּ הַשְּׁעָרִים קַיָּמִים גַּם הַשְּׁוֹנְאִים לֹא הָיוּ יְכוּלִים לִיכָנֵס, וְהִשְׁתָּא שְׁנַטְבְּעוּ יְכָלוּ הַשְּׁוֹנְאִים לְשַׁלוֹט.

If so, when the earth swallowed the gates of the Temple, which is something supernatural, such as swallowing the blood of Abel without leaving a trace was supernatural, it needs to be said also that “[the earth] opened its mouth.” Yet we have Rav Yehuda’s view from Sanhedrin 37b with regard to the earth opening its mouth to swallow blood, that it’s not possible for the earth to open its mouth for other than a bad [purpose], and yet at this time apparently we see that it was for a good [purpose], in order that the nations would not rule over those gates. It needs to be said that this too was for a bad [purpose], for the enemies wouldn’t be able to rule the gates, as it says in Sotah 9a, “This is [referring to] Moses and David, whose enemies did not rule over their achievements.”² As long as the gates are standing, the enemies won’t be able to enter the city, but now that they’ve sunk down, the enemies will be able to rule over Jerusalem.

² Sotah 9a explains: “[With regard to] David, [the citadel that housed his home and city, was not destroyed,] as it is written: ‘Her gates have sunk into the earth’ (Lam. 2:9), [as the gates of Jerusalem built by David were not destroyed by enemies, but sunk into the earth and were buried there. This is also so with regard to] Moses, as the master said: When the first Temple was built, the Tent of Meeting was sequestered, [including] its boards, its clasps, and its bars, and its pillars, and its sockets. Where is it sequestered? Rav Chisda says that Avimi says: Beneath the tunnels of the Sanctuary.”

והכי דייק קרא למימר טבעו בארץ שעריה, אז אבד ונשבר בריחיה. ומתחלה היו סוכרים בני קרח שהארץ אינה פותחת פיה כי אם לרעה, ואי אפשר עוד לבני קרח לעלות, שאין לארץ עוד פתיחת פה לטובה, וזהו נתכס עליהם הארץ, שפסחה עפר עליהם לעולם. אמנם עתה שראו בליעת השערים שבנדאי אלו יחזרו, צריך לומר שמה שאנו אומרים שאין לה עוד פה לארץ פי אם לרעה, היינו דוקא בעולם הזה, אבל לעולם הבא שיהיה הפל מתוקן תחזור הארץ לפתוח פיה אפילו לטובה. ואם כן אף קרח וסיעתו יכולים לעלות, שהרי יש לה פה לארץ אפילו לטובה.

Indeed, Scripture is precise to say, “Her gates have sunk into the earth” (Lam. 2:9), thus, “He has smashed her bars to bits” (ibid.). From the beginning, the sons of Korach were of the opinion that the earth would open its mouth only for bad, and it was impossible any more for the sons of Korach to ascend, for the earth no longer has a mouth opening for good. This is the meaning of “the earth covered them” (Num. 16:33), that the dirt covered them forever. Indeed, now that they saw the swallowing of the gates, that certainly these gates would return, it needs to be said that our saying that the earth no longer has a mouth for bad is precisely the case in this world, but in the World to Come, in which everything will be corrected, the earth will return to open its mouth even for good. If so, then even Korach and his faction will be able to ascend, for there will be a mouth for the earth even for good.

B. The promise of a return to purity in the days of the Messiah.

ועוד בדבר אחר, נדבר בו נבדודות ונתרץ קושניא אחרת, דמי הגיד להם לבני קרח שהשערים יחזרו לעלות, ודילמא יהיו נטמעים לעולם? דבפירוש רש"י על פסוק טבעו בארץ שעריה כתב שתי טעמים על זה, לפי שחלקו כבוד לארון, אי נמי לפי שהיו מעשה דוד, והיינו מה שכתבנו למעלה. אבל עוד בא שלישיה במתרגם שתרגם טמעו בארץ ארעא על די נכסו חזירא ואובילו מן דמיה עליהון וכו', ולפי זה הוא עונש שנענשו, ובשביל הקליפה ששורה עליהן הוטבעו בטיט הינו למרק הטומאה, כמו שכתב הרב גאלנטי.

Furthermore, in a different matter, we will speak about amazing things and solve a different difficulty, for who tells the sons of Korach that the gates will rise again, for perhaps they'll be embedded in the earth forever? For in the explanation of Rashi on the verse, “Her gates have sunk into the earth,” he writes two reasons for this, first, “Because [the gates] imparted honor to the Ark, as it is stated, ‘raise up your heads, O gates’ (Ps. 24:9), therefore no one had any power over them, and they sank into the earth.” Alternatively, because they were the handiwork of David, and this is what we have written above, i.e., that our enemies had no power over them. But a third [reason] also comes in translated [form] from the Targum, that translated into Aramaic, “Her gates have sunk into the earth because a swine was brought inside and its blood was delivered upon them.” Accordingly, this is the punishment by which [the Children of Israel] were punished, and because of the *klipa* that rests upon them, [the gates] were sunk in the mud and mire to cleanse the impurity, as Rabbi Galante wrote.³

³ Rabbi Abraham ben Mordechai Galante, d. before 1589, see *Kinat Setarim*, page 21b, which is a commentary on Lamentations based upon the Zohar. *Kinat Setarim* was edited by his son Samuel and is included in the sefer *Kol Bochim* (Venice 1589).

אֵלָא שְׁאֲמְרוּ ו"ל לְמָה נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ חֲזִיר שְׁעֵתִיד הַקַּב"ה לְהַחְזִירוֹ לָנוּ, הוֹאִיל שְׁהַשְׁעָרִים נִטְמְעוּ מִחַמַּת דָּם הַחֲזִיר. כְּשֵׁיחְזוֹר הַחֲזִיר עֲצָמוּ לְהִיּוֹת טְהוֹר בְּזִמְן שְׁכַלְע הַמְּנֹת לְנִצְחָ וְיִהְיֶה כָּל הָעוֹלָם מְתוּקָן, הַדִּין נוֹתֵן שְׁגָם הַשְׁעָרִים יִסְתָּרוּ לְמַעַלָּה מִתּוֹקָנִים. וְאִם פֶּן אֲמְרוּ בְּנֵי קִרַח הוֹאִיל שְׁהַשְׁעָרִים יַעֲלוּ מִחַמַּת הַתִּיקוֹן, גַּם קִרַח יַעֲלֶה, לְפִי שְׁאֵז יִהְיֶה הַכֹּל מְתוּקָן, כְּמוֹ שְׁכַתְּבוּ הַמְּקוֹבְלִים פִּי מִלְּשָׁה הִנֵּה גִלְגּוּלוֹ שֶׁל הַכֶּלֶב, וּמִצַּד הַנְּשָׁמָה שֶׁהִיא פְּלֵה טוֹב אֵינָה צְרִיכָה לְהִתְפַּרֵּר, וְנִהוּ וַתֵּרָא אֹתוֹ כִּי־טוֹב הוּא, אֲבָל בְּבַחֲיַנַּת הַנְּפֶשׁ הִיְתָה צְרִיכָה בִּירוֹר.

Rather, [the rabbis,] peace be upon them, said, “Why is [swine] called *chazir* (חֲזִיר)? Because in the future, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will return it (*le’hachaziro*) (לְהַחְזִירוֹ) to us for consumption,”⁴ because the gates were sunk because of the blood of the swine. When the swine itself will return to be pure, i.e., capable of being a kosher animal, at the time that death will be swallowed forever and the entire world will be repaired, the law provides that also the gates will return upward, repaired. If so, the sons of Korach said, “Since the gates will rise because of the repair, then Korach will also rise, because at that time everything will be corrected.” This is as the Kabbalists wrote, that Moses was a reincarnation of Abel; and from the side of the *neschama* which is entirely good, there’s no need to be purified. This is the meaning of “when she saw how good he was” (Ex. 2:2), but in the examination of the *nefesh*, purification was required. Kabbalah identifies five components of the soul, from the lowest level to the highest level: *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neschama*, *chaya* and *yechida*.⁵ In Chesed l’Avraham,⁶ Rabbi Abraham Azulai identifies Moshe as a reincarnation of Abel, having directly received the good elements of Abel from his *neschama*, which was entirely good. In addition, as alluded to above and as discussed again in the next paragraph, Moshe received the elements from Abel’s *nefesh* (and *ruach*), which required purification.

וְעוֹד כְּתוּבוֹ שְׁמִסְפָּר קַר"ח הוּא בְּחִינַת הַרְעֵ שֶׁל הַכֶּלֶב, שְׁאִם תִּסִּיר הַכֶּל"ל מִמִּשְׁ"ה נִשְׂאָר קַר"ח, וְהֵם ל"ו נִיצוּצוֹת טוֹבוֹת כְּמִנְיֵן הַכֶּל"ל, וְהַשְׂאָר צְרִיכוֹת לְהִתְפַּרֵּר. וְכַשֵּׁיִתּוֹקָן הָעוֹלָם וְיִתּוֹקָנוּ פֶּל הַנְּשָׁמוֹת שְׁבָאוּ מִקִּוּן וְהַכֶּל, וְיִסְתָּרוּ קִוּן וְהַכֶּל מִתּוֹקָנִים בְּעוֹלָם, אֵז אֶף קִרַח יִתּוֹקָן. שְׁהָרִי כָּל קִלְקוּלוֹ לֹא הִיָּה אֵלָא מִחַמַּת הַרְעֵ שֶׁהִיָּה בְּהַכֶּל, וְהִי מִמֶּשׁ דּוֹמִיָּא דְהַשְׁעָרִים.

It is also written that the number represented by the Gematria of Korach (308) is the bad element of Abel, for if one subtracts the number represented by the Gematria of Abel (37) from the number represented by the Gematria of Moses (345), Korach (308) remains, and there

⁴ Lam. Rabbah 1:9. The Hebrew name of the swine has the same root as the word for “return.”

⁵ These components can be described as follows: 1) *Nefesh*, the life-force of the body, the lowest level of consciousness, providing an awareness of the physical body and the physical world. 2) *Ruach*, which is related to emotion and morality, allowing one to love and fear G-d. 3) *Neschama*, which is related to intellect and the awareness of G-d, such that when the mind is clearly focused on an appropriate Divine concept, all of the senses become temporarily nullified. The emotions of love and awe are aroused to a much greater extent than in the previous level, where effort was required to arouse the emotions. This enables one to love G-d “with all one’s soul,” and allows for communion with G-d as the Creator of the universe. 4) *Chaya*, the soul merges into a state of complete nullification of the ego. There is no self-seeking and no self-identity outside of G-d. Chaya is called loving G-d “with all one’s being.” This is knowledge of the absolute truth of things. 5) *Yechida*, this is the essence of the soul that is naturally and immutably bound to the Holy One.

⁶ Rabbi Abraham Azulai (c.1570–1643), Chesed l’Avraham (Amsterdam 1685), M’Ayin Chamishi (5th Fountain), Nahar 25 (25th Stream).

are only 37 good sparks corresponding to Abel, and the remainder require purification. In other words, Abel had 345 elements: his *neshama* was completely good, with 37 good elements, but his *ruach* and *nefesh* were damaged, so he had 308 bad elements. His name represents only the good elements. Moses was a reincarnation of Abel, and he received not only the 37 good elements from Abel, but he also received the remaining 308 elements that had been repaired, so that he has a total of 345 elements, all good. Korach was also a reincarnation of Abel; Korach received all of the 308 bad elements, and none of the good elements, so his name represents the 308 bad elements. **When the world will be corrected, and when all of the souls that came from Cain and Abel will be corrected, and Cain and Abel themselves will be returned, corrected, into the world, then even Korach will be corrected. For all of the wrongdoing was because of the bad within Abel, and this is exactly the image of the gates.**

ואין להקשות איך יתקנה התזיר מותר לעתיד לבוא והלא הוא נגד התורה? ותירץ הל"ש [הלקט שמואל] שפינון שמעיקרא שמו תזיר אין זה נגד התורה. ועוד שאף אם נאמר כדברי הש"ך והבחי שפינון הדבר כפשוטו שיהיה התזיר טהור לישראל, אלא שהענין הוא שהפסח שלו שהוא מצר לישראל, לעתיד ישוב עם שאר הפחות לעזור ולתמוך לישראל, כדכתיב וגר זאב עם-כבש עכ"ל, מכל מקום שפיר יש לומר דהואיל שפסח המקטרג שיהיה בתזיר חוזר להיות טוב, גם השערים שהוטמעו מחמת פסח הטומאה והקטרוג יחזרו לעלות, שיהי איתו הפסח חוזר להיות טוב.

It's hard to understand how the swine will be permissible in the future to come, for isn't it against the Torah for Jews to eat pork? The Leket Shmuel⁷ resolves that because its name from the outset was established as *chazir*, i.e., the root for "to return," it is not against the Torah. Furthermore, according to the words of the Shach⁸ and Rabbeinu Bahya,⁹ the fact is not the simple meaning, that the swine will be pure for Israel to eat. Rather, "the matter is its power—as it currently hinders Israel, in the future will return with the other powers to help and to support Israel, as it is written, 'The wolf shall dwell with the lamb' (Isaiah 11:6)."¹⁰ In any event, it is good to say that since the power of the prosecuting force that was within the swine will revert to be good, the gates that were sunk because of the power of impurity and the accusation will also rise again, for this same power will revert to be good.

Rabbeinu Bahya also cites the Tanchuma that the exile of the Roman empire is compared to the swine, because in the future G-d will repay these people (*yachazir*) with the attribute of justice. Also brought in the Tanchuma is that G-d will force the Romans who destroyed the Temple to rebuild it. [The Rambam says that the Messiah will build the Third Temple using the labor of those who are the modern heirs of the Romans, so that they repay their debt to the Jewish people.]

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⁷ Shmuel Feivish ben Yozpa haCohen, *Leket Shmuel* (Venice 1694), *Erech Umot*, note 4 (page 19b) (לקט שמואל, ערך אומות, דף יט:ב, אות ד).

⁸ Rabbi Mordechai Ha'Cohen of Safed (1523–98), *Siftei Cohen on Torah* (Venice 1605).

⁹ Rabbi Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa (בחי בן אשר אבן הלואה, 1255–1340), Spanish commentator on the Torah.

¹⁰ Rabbeinu Bahya on the Torah, *Vayikra* 11:4.