

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter II: Noah (Gen. 6:9–11:32)

Essay 7. The raven debates Noah

סנהדרין פָּרַק י"א "וַיִּשְׁלַח אֱת־הָעֹרֵב" אָמַר רִישׁ לְקִישׁ, תְּשׁוּבָה נִצְחָת הַשֵּׁיב הָעוֹרֵב לָנֶחָם, אָמַר לוֹ רַבִּי שׁוֹנְאֵנִי וְאַתָּה שׁוֹנְאֵנִי. רַבִּי שׁוֹנְאֵנִי, שְׂאֵמַר לִיקַח מִן הַטְּהוֹרִים שְׁבַעַה וּמִן הַטְּמֵאִים שְׁתַּיִם. וְאַתָּה שׁוֹנְאֵנִי, שְׂאֵתָה שׁוֹלַח מִמִּין שְׁנַיִם וּמִנִּים מִמִּין שְׁבַעַה. אִם פָּגַע בִּי שֶׁר נָשַׁל חֲמָה אוֹ שֶׁר נָשַׁל צָנָה לֹא יְהִי עוֹלָם חֶסֶר בְּרִיקָה? וְעוֹד אָמַר לוֹ שְׂמָא לֹא שְׂתִי אֶתָּה צָרִיד. אָמַר לוֹ, רְשָׁע בְּמוֹתָר לִי נֶאֱסָר לִי, בְּאֶסוּר לִי לֹא כָּל שְׂכָן וְכוּ'.

Sanhedrin chapter 11 says:

Regarding the verse: “**And he sent forth the raven, which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from the earth**” (Gen. 8:7), **Reish Lakish says: The raven [gave] a convincing response to Noah** [when he ordered him to fly from the ark]. **He said to him: Your Master [i.e., G-d] hates me, and you hate me. Your Master hates me, Who said to take [into the ark] from the clean [species] seven [pairs] and from the unclean [species] two [i.e., one pair]. And you hate me, as you send [me, an unclean bird] from the species of two [birds], and you preserve [the clean birds] from the species of seven [pairs of birds].**

If the angel of heat or the angel of cold harms me [and kills me], will the world not be lacking one [species of] creature [as then my mate would be the only raven left in the world]? Perhaps it’s my wife that you need [as a mate, and that’s why you are sending me away].

[Noah] **said to [the raven]: Wicked one! If with [the one] who is permitted to me, [my wife, intimacy] is forbidden to me [while we are in the ark],¹ then with [regard to animals and birds], which are forbidden to me, is it not all the more so [that they are forbidden to me]?**

- Sanhedrin 108b

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¹ Sanhedrin 108b explains that Gen. 6:18 described that Noah and his sons should enter the ark, and then Noah’s wife and his daughters-in-law; i.e., the men should separate from their wives on the ark. Gen. 8:16 then explains that Noah and his wife should emerge from the ark, and his sons and their wives; i.e., intimacy was allowed once again.

מקשים העולם למה לא תירץ לו גם כלום על הקושניא הראשונה אם פגע בי שר של חמה וכו', ודוחק לומר שמחמת זה אמר ריש לקיש תשובה נצחת השיב העורב. ונראה לתרץ דאין הכי נמי שגם תירץ לו אף הקושניא הראשונה, שלפי שהעורב לא ידע להקשות משום הכי הקשה לו שתי קושיות ונדא מגו נדא, קא מקשי ליה ושפיהן קושניא אחת לבדה, ומירויץ אחד עולה לשפיהן. אבל אם הנה יודע להקשות לא הנה מקשי ליה אלא קושניא אחת בלבד וזו הייתה תשובה נצחת בלי שום תירויץ.

The world asks why Noah didn't give an excuse for the first difficulty raised, "If the angel of heat or the angel of cold harms me." The Gemara stresses to say that because of this failure of Noah to answer, Reish Lakish said, "The raven [gave] a convincing response."

Zera Shimshon proposes two approaches.

Approach number 1: An apparent solution is that indeed, Noah solved even the first difficulty, since the raven didn't know to properly formulate his concern. Because of this, he raised two difficulties with [Noah], with one leading to the other. For if you question [Noah], and two questions are really only one, then the solution to one serves for both.

Approach number 2: But on the other hand, it's possible that the two difficulties raised by the raven were unrelated. If [the raven] did know to properly formulate a concern, then he was only raising one difficulty with his comment, "If the angel of heat harms me," and this was a convincing response to Noah's command to fly, without any solution.

Zera Shimshon first considers Approach number 1:

והיינו דמתחלה אמר לו העורב אם פגע בי שר של חמה וכו' נמצא שהעולם חסר ברירה. ועל זה היה יכול גם לתרץ אדרבא אם היה שולח ממין שבועה, היה אפשר שאם יפגע בהם שר של חמה וכו' ימותו לפי שאין בהם צורה לעולם ונמצא שאותו המין של שבועה היה חסר אחד. אבל אם ישלח ממין שמים שהם צורה העולם אי אפשר שיפגע בהם ויניקם שהקב"ה ישמרם כדי שיתקיים אותו המין בעולם.

For from the beginning, the raven said to [Noah], "If the angel of heat or the angel of cold harms me, will the world not be lacking one [species of] creature?" On this allegation, Noah could have given an excuse to the contrary, that if he would send [a bird] from the species of seven [pairs], it's possible that the angel of heat [would indeed harm one bird such that] it would have died, for regarding them, there was no need in the world for seven pairs of birds, and it would be found that that species of seven [pairs] would be lacking one bird, but that wouldn't matter, as even one surviving pair would be enough to repopulate the world with that species. But if [Noah] would send [a bird] from a species of two [birds, i.e., one pair], that they are needed in the world, it's impossible for them to be hurt and damaged, for then the species would go extinct, so the Holy One, Blessed be He, would guard over them in order that this species would continue to exist in the world.

משום הכי הוסיף שמה לאשתי אתה צריף, כלומר דילמא אין אתה חושש לקיום העולם כלל, אלא שאתה רוצה להיזנוג עם אשתי ובשביל זה אתה שולחני. ואם אתה תיזנוג עם אשתי תיעשה עקרה כדאמרינו בפרק אין מעמידין נכרי חס על בהמתו שלא תעקר, ואז אפילו שלא יזיקוני שר של חמה או שר של צנה ואחזור לכאן, עם כל זה העולם יהיה חסר ברירה אחת. ומחמת זה אפשר ששר של חמה וכו' ימיתוני לפי שאין בקיומי קיום העולם שפבר אין לי עוד בת זוג ראוי להוליד. ונת תירץ לו רשע במותר לי וכו'. ואם כן, אי אפשר שאני אשמע עם אשתי, ומהטעם זה אי אפשר נמי ששר של חמה יפגע בה מפני קיום העולם וכן נראה לי.

Even as the raven challenged Noah with this first concern, he anticipated that Noah could answer as given above. **Because of this, [the raven] added his second concern, “Perhaps it’s my wife you need,” as if to say, “perhaps you are not at all concerned about the existence of the world; rather, you want to marry my wife, and because of this, you are sending me away.” If you marry my wife, she will become barren, as it says in the second chapter of tractate Avodah Zarah, which begins, “One may not keep an animal in the inns of gentiles because they are suspected of bestiality.” The Gemara quotes Rav Tachlifa, who says that Rav Shila bar Avina says in the name of Rav, “A gentile spares his [own] animal [from bestiality] so that it will not become barren.”² Thus, even if the angel of heat or the angel of cold don’t hurt me, and I return here, with all this, the world will be lacking one fertile creature, so the ravens will be doomed to extinction.**

Because of this, the raven added, circling back to the first concern, **it’s possible that the angel of heat or the angel of cold will kill me, because through my existence alone there won’t be any existence for the ravens going forward, for I would no longer have a suitable mate who could give birth.**

Noah gave an excuse, Wicked one! If with [the one] who is permitted to me, [my wife, intimacy] is forbidden to me, then with [regard to animals and birds], which are forbidden to me, is it not all the more so [that they are forbidden to me]?” If so, it’s impossible for me to make use of your wife, and for that reason it is also impossible for the angel of heat to harm you, because the existence of the world requires ravens. Zera Shimshon adds: thus it appears to me.

Zera Shimshon then considers Approach number 2:

אמנם תשובה זו אינה תשובה הגונה רק לפי דבריו של העורב שהוסיף לו שמה לאשתי וכו' שהוא חשד על הכל ופשטות, שאם הנה יודע האמת לא הנה לו צורך לנה, דהא אמרינו בפרק ג' דכתובות הכל בידי שמים חוץ מצנינים פחים, ואין הכי נמי שהנה יכול למות מפני החמה או הצנה אף על גב שיש בו צורך לקיום העולם. ומשום הכי ניחא שפיר דנקט דוקא שר של חמה או שר של צנה ולא אונס אחר, ששאור אונסים הם בידי שמים ומפני קיום העולם הנה ניצול, אף מצנינים פחים אין לו תקנה אם יפגעו בו, וזהו דאמר ריש לקיש תשובה נצחת השיב העורב לזה.

Indeed, this theoretical first answer of Noah’s, that the raven anticipated, that G-d would guard over him and protect him from the angel of heat and the angel of cold, is not a genuine answer, according to the words of the raven, who then added to [Noah], “perhaps it’s my wife

² Avodah Zarah 22b.

you need.” This shows **that he was suspicious of nonsense, for if he knew the truth, he would have no need of this** “guarantee” from Noah. **Thus, it says in the third chapter of tractate Ketubot (30a), “Isn’t it taught [in a Baraita] that everything is in the hands of Heaven except for [illness from] cold and heat, as it is stated: ‘Cool [and] heat are on the path of the crooked; he who guards his soul shall keep far from them’ (Prov. 22:5).”** In other words, if there is heat, people can seek shade and hydrate themselves properly; if there is cold, people can dress more warmly. Presumably, animals can take similar precautions. Thus, G-d won’t necessarily protect people from their own negligence. **So it is indeed possible to die because of the heat or the cold, despite the fact that there’s a need for [the raven’s] existence in the world.**

For this reason, it’s very nice that [the raven] took the words, “the angel of heat or the angel of cold” for his challenge to Noah, and not some other form of violence. For other types of violence are in the hands of Heaven, and because of the existence of the world, which requires a raven, he would be saved from other types of violence. But from heat or cold, [the raven] would have no remedy if they would injure him, and that is why Reish Lakish said, “The raven [gave] a convincing response to Noah [when he ordered him to fly from the ark].”

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