

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XV: Bo (Ex. 10:1–13:16)

Essay 23. Haggadah: Salvation from our enemies

"היא שְׁעֵמְדָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ. שְׁלֹא אֶחָד בְּלִבָּד עָמַד עָלֵינוּ [לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ], אֲלָא שְׁבָכָל דּוֹר וְדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, וְהַקֵּב"ה מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם. "הַקֹּשֶׁה הַנִּזְכָּר פֶּסַח שְׁאַף שֶׁהָאֱמֶת הוּא שְׁאַבוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם נִיצוּלוֹ בְּשִׁבִיל הַיַּעֲוֵד שֶׁל [] הַבְּטָחָת בֵּין הַבְּתָרִים דְּקֹאֲמֵר לְעֵיל "בְּרוּךְ שׁוֹמֵר הַבְּטָחָתוֹ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל" וְכוּ', אִיךָ קֹאֲמֵר הַכָּא דְּאוֹתָהּ הַבְּטָחָה עִמָּדָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ, דְּאִיךָ נִיצוּיֵיר שְׁבִשְׁבִיל הַבְּטָחָת בֵּין הַבְּתָרִים אֲשֶׁר כָּבֵר גַּתְקִימָה בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם אֲנַחְנוּ נִיצוּלִים הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.

“And this [Covenant between the Parts]¹ is what has stood by our ancestors and us; for it was not one [enemy] alone who rose up to destroy us; rather, in every generation, they rise up to destroy us, but the Holy One, Blessed be He, saves us from their hands.”²

The Zevach Pesach³ asks: Even though the truth is that our forefathers were saved in Egypt because of the promise of the *Covenant between the Parts*, as mentioned above in the Haggadah, “Blessed is He who keeps His promise to Israel,” why does it say here that this promise stood for our forefathers and for us?

Question 1: How could it be understood that, because of the *Covenant between the Parts* which was already fulfilled at the Exodus from Egypt, we are saved even today?

וּלְדִידָן לֹא קוֹשִׁיָא כְּלָל שְׁהָרִי בְּמַעְמָד בֵּין הַבְּתָרִים הָרְאָה לוֹ הַקֵּב"ה לְאַבְרָהָם כֹּל הָאֲרָבָעָה מַלְכֵי־עוֹלָם, כְּמוֹ שְׁאַמְרוּ בְּמִדְרָשׁ "וְהָיָה אֵימָה חֹשֶׁכָה" וְכוּ', אֵימָה זֹאת בְּבָבֶל, חֹשֶׁכָה זֹאת מִדֵּי וְכוּ', וְאֵם כֹּן בְּנֻדָּאֵי שְׁבִאוֹתָהּ הַבְּטָחָה שְׁהַבְּטִיִּים לְאַבְרָהָם לְהַצִּילֵנוּ שְׁיִיכָא לְכָל הַגְּאוּלוֹת.

Answer to Question 1: For us, this is not difficult at all, for at the time of the *Covenant between the Parts*, the Holy One, Blessed be He, Showed Abraham all four of the kingdoms that would rule over Israel, as it is said in the Midrash:

“As the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and behold, a great dark dread fell upon him.”⁴ “Dread”—this is Babylon. . . . “Darkness”—this is Media. . . . “Great”—this is Greece. . . . “Fell upon him”—this is Edom.

- Gen. Rabbah 44:17

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¹ Gen. chapter 15.

² Pesach Haggadah, Magid.

³ Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508), *Zevach Pesach* (Monopoli 1496).

⁴ Gen. 15:12.

If so, then certainly the same promise that He promised Abraham to save us is relevant to every redemption.

אָמְנָם בְּדָרָךְ אַחַר נְבִיא לְדַיִק דְּבַרֵי הַמַּגִּיד "שְׁלֹא אֶחָד בְּלִבָּד עֲמַד עָלֵינוּ . . . , אֲלֵא שְׁבָכָל דּוֹר נְדוּר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ" וְכוּ', וְקוּשָׁה דְמַה־בְּצַע אִם יִהְיֶה אֶחָד עוֹמֵד עָלֵינוּ אוֹ רַבִּים, וְאַדְרַבָּא נִרְאָה שְׁיִוְתֵר טוֹב הֵיךָ לָנוּ אִם יִהְיֶה אֶחָד לְבַד וְלֹא שְׁיִהְיִי רַבִּים. וְכַוּוֹנָת הַמַּגִּיד לְכַאוּרָה הִיא לומר שְׁבִשְׁבִיל הַבְּטָחָתוֹ לֹא רָצָה שְׁיִהְיֶה אֶחָד בְּלִבָּד עוֹמֵד עָלֵינוּ אֲלֵא רַבִּים. וְעוֹד שְׁהֵיךָ לוֹ לְסִיּוּם דְּבַרְיוֹ אֲלֵא שְׁ"רַבִּים עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ", וְאַמְאִי סִיּוּם "שְׁבָכָל דּוֹר נְדוּר" וְכוּ', דְּמַה עֲנָן "בְּכָל דּוֹר נְדוּר" הִקְא.

However, in another way of looking at it, we would need to understand the words of the Maggid, who said, “for it was not one [enemy] alone who rose up to destroy us: in every generation, they rise up to destroy us.”

Question 2: **The question is: What difference does it make if there is one standing against us or many? On the contrary, it seems better for us if there is only one and not many.** That is, one way of understanding the Haggadah is: “[Although] [אף על פי] it was not just one enemy, but many, G-d saves us.” But the word “although” is not present, suggesting that **the Maggid’s intention, apparently, is to say that because of His promise, He did not want there to be one alone standing against us, but many.** Why would G-d desire that?

Question 3: **Also, he should have concluded his words by saying only “many stand against us,” but why did he conclude with “in every generation, [people] stand against us”? What is the relevance of “in every generation” here?**

אָמְנָם כְּבָר הוֹכַחְנוּ בְּסִדְרֵים וּבְדַרְוֵישִׁים הַקּוֹדְמִים, שְׁאִם הָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִתְעַפְּבִים בְּמִצְרַיִם עַד תְּשֻׁלוּם הָאָרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה לֹא הָיוּ מִשְׁתַּעֲבָדִים עוֹד בְּגִלּוּיּוֹת אַחֲרוֹת, וְלִפִּי שְׁיִצְאוּ קוֹדֵם זְמַנָּם הוֹכְרָחוּ לְחִזּוֹר בְּגִלּוּת. וְגַאֲלָם מִשֵּׁם בְּחִפְזוֹן לִפִּי שְׁכָבָר נִכְנָסוּ בְּמִ"ט שְׁעָרֵי טוּמְאָה וְאִם הָיוּ נִכְנָסִין בְּשַׁעַר הַנִּי' לֹא הֵיךָ חָס וְשָׁלוֹם עוֹד לָהֶם תְּקוּמָה. וְקוּשָׁה שְׁאִם מִחֲמַת צַעַר הַגְּלוּת נִכְנָסוּ בְּמִ"ט שְׁעָרֵי טוּמְאָה, סוּף אִף בְּגִלּוּיּוֹת אַחֲרֵים אֲפִשֶׁר שְׁיִבֹא לָהֶם כֶּף, וְמָה הוֹעִיל כְּבִיכּוֹל בְּתַקְנָתוֹ. וְאִם תֹּאמַר שְׁשִׁאֵר הַגְּלוּיּוֹת לֹא הָיוּ כֶּף אֲרוּכִים שְׁהָרִי גְלוּת בְּכָל לֹא הֵיךָ אֲלֵא שְׁבָעִים שָׁנָה וְכוּ', וְהֵלֵא גְלוּת זֶה בְּעוֹנֵתֵינוּ הַרְבִּים הוּא יוֹתֵר מֵאֲלָף וְת"ק שָׁנָה.

However, we have already proven in previous sections and teachings that if Israel had remained in Egypt until the completion of the 400 years,⁵ they would not have been enslaved in other exiles. But since they left earlier than their designated time, they were compelled to return to exile. They were redeemed quickly from [Egypt] because they had already entered into the 49 gates of spiritual impurity, and if they had entered the 50th gate, G-d forbid, they would have had no hope of redemption. The question is: if it was because of the suffering of the exile that they entered the 49 gates of spiritual impurity, ultimately, in other exiles, it is possible that they could reach the same situation. So, how was His remedy of an early release from Egypt effective? If you say that the other exiles were not as long, since the Babylonian exile lasted only 70 years, etc., then this current exile, due to our many sins, has lasted for more than 1,500 years.

⁵ Gen. 15:13: “And [G-d] said to Abram, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.”

וְנִשְׁ לֹמֵר דְּאִמְרֵינּוּ בְּפֶרֶק [ח'] דְּפִסְחִים (פ"ז) "צְדָקַת פְּרִזּוֹנוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל", צְדָקָה עֲשֵׂה הַקַּב"ה עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁפִּזְרָן לְבֵין הָאוּמוֹת, דְּבַהֲכִי לֹא יָדְעֵי הִיכִי לְמִי עֲבַד דָּאִי לִיכְלִינְהוּ לְכַלְהוּ לִיתְנַהּוּ גְבִייהוּ, לִיכְלוּ מְאִי דְאִיכָא גְבִייהוּ קָרוּ לִיהּ מְלֻכּוּתָא קְטִיעֵתָא וּבִהָא סְלִיקוּ וּבִהָא גָחַתּוּ עַכ"ל. וְאִם כֵּן שְׁפִיר קְאָמֵר הַמַּגִּיד "שְׁלֵא אֶחָד בְּלַבַּד עֲמַד עֲלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ", שְׂאִם הִנֵּה עוֹמֵד עֲלֵינוּ אֶחָד בְּלַבַּד הֵינּוּ בְּסַפְנָה גְדוּלָה, אֲמַנְנָם עִתָּה שְׁהֵם רַבִּים אֵינָם יְכוּלִים לְעַמּוֹד עֲלֵינוּ. וְנִהוּ הִיא "שְׁעֲמַדָּה לְאַבוּתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ", וְהוֹאִיל שְׁבִשְׂאָר הַגְּלוּיּוֹת הֵם מְפוֹזְרִים, אִי אֶפְשָׁר לָהֶם לְהַשְׁתַּקֵּעַ כָּלָם, מַה שְׁלֵא הִנֵּה כֵּן בְּגָלוֹת מִצָּרִים שְׁהִיוּ כָּלָם בְּקַבּוּץ אֶחָד, וּבְגָלוֹת בְּכָל לֹא יֵשְׁבוּ כִּי אִם שְׁבָעִים שָׁנָה.

It can be said as it stated in the 8th chapter of tractate Pesachim (page 87b):

Rabbi Oshaya said: What is [the meaning of that] which is written: **“The righteous deeds of His warriors [פְּרִזּוֹנוֹ] [pirzono] in Israel.”⁶ The Holy One, Blessed be He, acted righteously with Israel in that He scattered them [פִּזְרָן] [pizran] among the nations [instead of sending us all to one place where an enemy might destroy us].**

[Speaking to an apostate, he added:] **You do not know how to destroy all of [the Jewish people], as they are not [all] with you [in your kingdom]. [If you destroy] those [Jews] who are with you, you will be called a murderous kingdom. [The apostate] said to him: . . . With this [problem] we rise up, and with this [problem] we lie down.**

- Pesachim 87b

Answer to Question 2: **If so, it’s fine that the Maggid said “for it was not one [enemy] alone who rose up to destroy us,” for if only one had stood up against us,** that would have meant that we would have all been in one place, **and we would have been in great danger. However, now that they are many,** because we are scattered, **they are not able to rise up against all of us. This is the meaning of “and this [Covenant between the Parts] is what has stood by our ancestors and us,” since in the other exiles, they were scattered, it was impossible for them all to sink to the 50th level of impurity. This is something that was not the case for the Egyptian exile, where everyone was in one settlement. In the Babylonian exile, although most of the Israelites were there, they were only there for 70 years, not enough time to sink to the 50th level of spiritual impurity.**

וּבְדִי לְתַרְץ לְמַה נִּקְט "בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר" וְלֹא "בְּכָל אוֹמָה וְאוֹמָה", מִפְּנֵי שְׁלִפְעָמִים יֵשׁ אוֹמָה יוֹתֵר קִשָּׁה מִחִבְרֹתָהּ, כִּדְאִמְרֵינוּ אוּ בְטוּלָה, אוּ בְטוּלָא דְבַר עֲשׂוֹ, הָא מְשַׁמֵּי דַּתּוֹ חִבְרֵי לְבָבָל, הָא לְבַתֵּר דַּתּוֹ חִבְרֵי וְכוּ'. וְאֵינּוּ נִיכַר שְׁעוֹשִׂים זֶה בְּשׁוֹנְאָתָם אוֹתָנוּ אֶלָּא מִמַּדַּת אַכְזָרִיּוֹת שְׁלָהֶם. וְעוֹד אִמְרֵינוּ רָאֵה שְׂאִין יִשְׂרָאֵל יְכוּלִין לְקַבֵּל גְּזִירַת רוּמִיִּים, עֲמַד וְהִגְלָה אוֹתָם לְבָבָל.

But if the meaning is that we spread out geographically, why does it say “in every generation”? **In order to explain why it says “in every generation” and not “in every nation,” it is because sometimes one nation is more difficult than another, as we say in *Gittin*:**

⁶ Judges 5:11.

[Rabba, who suffered from persecution in a part of Babylonia that came under Persian influence,] **said: Merciful One!** [Let us live] **either in Your shadow or in the shadow of the descendants of Esau** [i.e., the Romans].

[Rabbi Chiyya questioned this, thinking that life in Babylonia had been better than life under the Romans.]

[This is] not difficult. **This** [view of Rabbi Chiyya spoke of the time] **before the Persians reached Babylonia** [when life in Babylonia was tolerable]. **That** [view of Rabba was] **after the Persians reached Babylonia** [when life there became difficult.]

- Gittin 17a

It is not known whether they did this because of their hatred of us, but rather because of their cruel nature. Also, it is said there in Gittin 17a, that when “[G-d] saw that Israel could not bear the decrees of the Romans, He rose up and exiled them to Babylon.”

ומשום הכי נקט דנוקא "בכל דור ודור", שלפי מעשה הדור אף האומה שאינה כל כך אכזרית עומדת עלינו לבלותינו, כדאמרין אין פורענות בא לעולם אלא בשביל ישראל, ועוד דאמרין בפרק תולין אי בטלי יהירי, בטלי אמגושי. אי בטלי דיני, בטלי גזירפטי. וכו', וביבמות גזרו על הבשר מפני המתנות, גזרו על המרחצאות מפני הטבילה. קא מחטטי שקבי מפני ששמחים ביום אידם. ואף על פי כן הקב"ה מצילנו מידם שלא יכלו אותנו.

Because of that, he particularly selected the wording, “in every generation,” because according to the actions of each generation, even a nation that is not as cruel will rise against us to destroy us. As it is said, “No calamity comes to the world except for the sake of Israel.”⁷

Also, as it is said in the 20th chapter of tractate Shabbat entitled Tolin: “Rav Pappa said: If the arrogant will cease [to exist], the [Persian] fire priests will cease [to exist]. If the [deceitful] judges will cease [to exist], the royal officers will cease [to exist].”⁸

In tractate Yevamot:

They decreed against meat [i.e., ritual slaughter], **due to** [the Jews failing to give the priests] **the gifts** [of the foreleg, the jaw, and the maw]. **They decreed against** [Jews bathing in] **bathhouses, due to** [the Jews neglecting ritual] **immersion. They exhumed the dead, because** [the Jews] **rejoice on holidays** [of the gentiles].

- Yevamot 63a

Answer to Question 3: Thus, in every generation, Jews sin in different ways, and our enemies are allowed to persecute us.

Nevertheless, the Holy One, Blessed be He, saves us from entirely perishing at their hands, so that they will not destroy us.

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⁷ Yevamot 63a.

⁸ Shabbat 139a.