

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter LVIII: Esther

Essay 9. The source of Esther's merit to approach the king

מדרש על פסוק "ביום השלישי נישא אברהם את־עיניו" וכו', הָדָא הוּא דְקָתִיב "ביום השלישי נתלבש אֶסְתֵּר מְלָכוֹת", בְּאִיזוֹ זְכוּת, רַבְּנֵי אֱמֹרֵי בְּזְכוּת יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי נֶשֶׂא מִתְּנַן תּוֹרָה, דְקָתִיב "וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְהִיט הַבְּקָר" וְכוּ', וְר' לֹוֹי אָמַר בְּזְכוּתוֹ שֶׁל יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי שֶׁל אֲבְרָהָם דְקָתִיב "ביום השלישי נישא אברהם את־עיניו" עכ"ל.

There is a **Midrash on the verse** regarding the binding of Isaac, **“On the third day, Abraham lifted his eyes”¹**:

This is [the meaning of] **what is written** [regarding Esther's decision to approach the king to appeal for the salvation of her people, following three days of fasting]: **“On the third day, Esther put on royal apparel** [and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, facing the king's palace, while the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room facing the entrance of the palace].”² **In what merit** [did she dare to approach the king without being called, as this could have meant death]? **The Rabbis say, in the merit** [בְּזְכוּת] [*bi'zechut*] **of the third day of the giving of the Torah, as it is written “And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning** [there was thunder, and lightning, and a dense cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud blast of the horn; and all the people who were in the camp trembled].”³ **Rabbi Levi said, in the merit** [בְּזְכוּתוֹ] [*bi'zechuto*] **of the third day of** [the narrative of] **Abraham** [and the binding of Isaac], **as it is written, “On the third day, Abraham lifted his eyes,” etc.**

- Gen. Rabbah 56:1

* English translation: Copyright © 2025 by Charles S. Stein. Additional essays are at <https://www.zstorah.com>

¹ Gen. 22:4.

² Esther 5:1.

³ Ex. 19:16.

קשה מהו סברתו של ר' לוי לתלוק עם רבנו, נהלא זכות התורה הוא זכותא דרבים ובנדאי דהוא קשוב יותר בזכותו של אברהם. ותיירץ הנה תאר שר' לוי רצה ללמוד זה מ"ביום השלישי" של אברהם לפי שקודם בתורה ל"ביום השלישי" של מתן תורה. וזה התיירץ אינו מספיק.

This is difficult: What is Rabbi Levi's reasoning for disagreeing with the Rabbis? Isn't the merit of the Torah a merit of the masses, and certainly this is more important than the merit of one person, Abraham. The explanation given by the *Yafeh To'ar* is that Rabbi Levi wanted to learn from "on the third day" of the narrative of Abraham and the binding of Isaac because in the Torah this precedes "on the third day" of the giving of the Torah. However, this answer is not sufficient.

ונראה לומר שר' לוי לא בא לתלוק אלא לתרץ מה שיש להקשות על מילתייהו דרבנו, שמה שאמרו הם בזכות יום השלישי של מתן תורה, קשה דמה זכות הוא זה לישראל, שיהי זה הפסוק אינו מדבר אלא שביום השלישי היו "קלת ובקרים" וכו' וכל זה היה מעשה של הקב"ה ולא של ישראל, ובשאלמא אם היה אומר בזכות "והיו נכנים ליום השלישי" נחא, שהיה משמע בזכות שהכינו עצמם לקד, אבל זה "ביום השלישי" אינו מראה שום זכות לישראל ומאי טעמייהו דרבנו.

It seems we can say that Rabbi Levi is not coming to argue, but rather to explain what one can question about the words of the Rabbis, for why did they say that Esther's willingness to approach the king was in the merit of the third day of the giving of the Torah. This is difficult, for what is the merit of Israel in this? This verse only says that on the third day there was "thunder, and lightning, and a dense cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud blast of the horn," and all this was the work of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and not of Israel! Granted, if it had said in the merit of the earlier verse, "Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day the L-rd will come down, in the sight of all the people, on Mount Sinai,"⁴ then it would be fine, as it would mean in the merit that they prepared themselves for this. But this statement that it was in the merit of "on the third day, there was thunder, and lightning," does not appear to be any merit to Israel. What was the meaning of the rabbis?

ולכן בא ר' לוי לתרץ בזכותו של יום השלישי של אברהם, כלומר למה זכו ישראל שקדמה שכונה לבא בהיות הבקר של יום השלישי, בזכותו של יום השלישי של אברהם דכתיב ביה "וישכם אברהם בבקר", שגזרז למצות בוראו, והשתא נחא, דלא פליגי כלל ר' לוי ורבנו. אלא ר' לוי בא לפרש דבריהם, ואין הכי נמי שזכות יום השלישי של מתן תורה גרם לאסתר שתמצא חן בעיני המלך, וזה של מתן תורה בא מחמת אותו של אברהם.

Therefore, Rabbi Levi comes to explain that it was in the merit of the third day of Abraham. That's as if to say, why did Israel merit that the Shechinah preceded to come on the morning of the third day? It was in the merit of the third day of Abraham, as it was written regarding him, after G-d commanded him to sacrifice Isaac, "And Abraham arose early in the morning,"⁵ indicating that Abraham hastened to fulfill the command of his Creator.

⁴ Ex. 19:11.

⁵ Gen. 22:3.

Now this explanation makes sense, that there is no disagreement between Rabbi Levi and the Rabbis. Rather, Rabbi Levi came to explain their words. It is indeed so that the merit of the third day of the giving of the Torah led to Esther finding favor in the eyes of the king, and this merit was due to the earlier merit of Abraham.

וְנִיחָא שְׁפִיר לִישְׁנֵיהּ דְר' לְוִי דְלֵא אָמַר "בְּזִכּוּת יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם" כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ רַבָּנִין "בְּזִכּוּת יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי שֶׁל מִתְּנֵן תּוֹרָה", אֲלֵא שְׁנֵי בְּדִיבּוּרֵיהֶּם וְאָמַר "בְּזִכּוּתוֹ שֶׁל יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם", דְּהֵינּוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי שֶׁל מִתְּנֵן תּוֹרָה בְּאֵל עַל יְדֵי יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי אַחַר שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם שֶׁנִּזְדָּרְזַר לְמִצְוֹת בּוֹרְאוֹ, וְכָל הַזְּרִיזוֹת אֵנוּ לוֹמְדִים אוֹתוֹ מֵאַבְרָהָם.

The language of Rabbi Levi is perfectly fine, that he did not say, “In the merit [בְּזִכּוּת] [*bi'zechut*] of the third day of Abraham,” as the Rabbis said “in the merit [*bi'zechut*] of the third day of the giving of the Torah.” Rather, his wording is different, and he said, “in his merit [בְּזִכּוּתוֹ] [*bi'zechuto*] of the third day of Abraham.”

I.e., the Rabbis' language, בְּזִכּוּת יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי, would translate literally to “in the merit [of] the third day of the giving of the Torah,” while Rabbi Levi's language, בְּזִכּוּתוֹ שֶׁל יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי, would translate literally to “in his/its merit, of the third day, of Abraham.” There is little substantive difference between the two wordings, but Rabbi Levi's choice of *bi'zechuto*, “in his/its merit” could lead one to decide that his intent was not to mean “it” as referring to the third day, but to mean “his” as referring to Abraham.

That is, with this understanding, **this third day of the giving of the Torah**, which was the immediate source of merit for Esther, itself **came about because of the different third day, that of Abraham, who hastened to fulfill the will of his Creator. We learn the entirety of this service of G-d with alacrity from Abraham.**⁶

* * *

⁶ Pesachim 4a: “It was taught [in a Baraita]: The the vigilant are early with mitzvot. As it is stated, ‘And Abraham arose early in the morning.’ ”