

Zera Shimshon



Profound Divrei Torah culled from the writings of the Gaon and Mekubal Rav Shimshon Chaim ben Rav Nachman Michael Nachmani zy"l, author of Sefer Zera Shimshon on Chumash and Toldos Shimshon on Pirkei Avos, who promised that all who study his words will be blessed with an abundance of good, wealth and honor, and will merit to see children and grandchildren thriving around their table.

Miketz-Hanukkah תשפ"ו • Zera Shimshon - the Limud that brings Yeshuos •

372 איין

אמרות שמשון

How Yosef Was Permitted to Circumcise the Egyptians

The verse states: "And there was famine in all the land of Egypt, and the people cried to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all Egypt: 'Go to Yosef; whatever he says to you, do'" (Bereshit 41:55).

Regarding the phrase "whatever he says to you, do," Rashi explains that Yosef told the Egyptians that, in exchange for provisions, he demanded that they circumcise themselves. When they went to complain to Pharaoh and said, "Thus he tells us to do," Pharaoh responded: "Why did you not store grain? Did he not announce to us that years of famine were coming?" They told him: "We stored much, but it rotted." He said to them: "If so, 'whatever he says to you, do,' for if he decreed upon the grain and it rotted, then what if he were to decree upon us that we die?"

A great difficulty arises here: How is it possible that Yosef forced them to circumcise themselves, given that even after circumcising, they remained Egyptians and that circumcision was not for the purpose of conversion to the People of Israel? For we have established in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 263:5) that it is forbidden to circumcise a non-Jew unless it is with the intention of conversion. This is especially difficult according to what the Taz wrote there (Chapter 158, subsection 3): since it is known from the words of our Sages that Abraham Avinu sits at the entrance of *Gehinnom* (Hell) and does not allow any circumcised Jew to descend there, it turns out that one who circumcises a foreigner nullifies this distinguishing sign of Israel. According to this, the difficulty is even greater: How could Yosef force them to circumcise themselves?

It can be explained that Yosef knew that the entire matter of his sale had occurred because there was a reason stemming from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, so that they would descend to Egypt and be enslaved there. And the essence of the exile was because Israel annulled the fulfillment of the covenant of circumcision in Egypt, as explained in the Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah*, Ch. 1, Art. 8), that when Yosef died, they broke the covenant of circumcision, and because of that, the exile began.

According to this, those who were born and died in Egypt before the Exodus could not be distinguished by Abraham to save them

from *Gehinnom*, since they were uncircumcised. Therefore, Yosef acted with wisdom and commanded that the Egyptians also be circumcised. His goal was to nullify this distinguishing sign for that generation, so that Abraham would not look at that generation based on the sign of circumcision, but rather would save from *Gehinnom* anyone who was of the descendants of Israel in general terms, or anyone who had suffered the exile in Egypt [and not necessarily only those who were circumcised].

(Zera Shimshon, Parashat Vayigash, Art. 4)

Hakadosh Baruch Hu Hinted to Them that the Exile Would Be for Their Benefit

The verse states: "And Pharaoh removed his ring from his hand and put it on Yosef's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck, and he made him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him: 'Avrech!'; and he set him over all the land of Egypt" (Bereshit 41:42-43).

It still remains to be analyzed why, initially, Yosef was punished with such a severe punishment by being sold as a slave, [slandered and imprisoned,] and in the end was elevated to such sublime greatness by becoming king. Both events appear contradictory to one another; for if the punishment of being a slave was because he had sinned, then after having been purified of his sin, it should have sufficed for him to go free from his master's hand [without becoming royalty].

It can be said that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wished to hint to Israel that the exile would be for their benefit — that after the exile they would rise to very sublime greatness. As our Sages said in *Shemot Rabbah* (1:1) and in the commentary *Yefe Toar*, through the exile of Egypt they merited the Torah, the Land of Israel, and the World to Come; there they were purified and refined, as it is written: "And He took them out of the iron crucible, from Egypt" (*Devarim* 4:20).

However, the tribes sold him thinking that exile would be something bad without any good. Therefore, when

Hakadosh Baruch Hu annulled the plan of the tribes — who thought Yosef would be a slave all his life—and on the contrary turned him into a king, it was established forever that even after Yaakov died and the eyes of Israel were closed due to slavery, Yosef remained king forever. And likewise, on every occasion when Israel was exiled, it was always for their good, as is known.

(Zera Shimshon, Parashat Miketz, Art. 10)

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The Essence of the Precept of Lighting Hanukkah Candles: In Remembrance of the War Victory, Not the Miracle of the Candles

Preeminence must be given to the publicizing of the miracle (*Pirsumei Nisa*) of Hanukkah. In truth, the subject of Hanukkah is related to the subject of the sale of Yosef, and this is the reason why *Parashat Miketz* — which deals with the redemption of Yosef in Egypt — always falls during Hanukkah.

We see that in the text of "*Al HaNissim*..." ("On the miracles..."), which is recited in the *Amidah* during the days of Hanukkah, the Sages who drafted it established the fall of the enemies at the hands of Israel as the main part of the miracle: "You fought their fight... You judged their judgment... You avenged their vengeance... You delivered [them]..."

Only afterwards, at the end, as if it were a secondary matter, do they mention by way of allusion: "...and they kindled lights in Your holy courtyards." From this, it is deduced that the essence of the Hanukkah candle is because of the victory and not because of the Menorah. And even regarding the answer given by the *Pri Chadash* (in *Orach Chaim*, ch. 670) — that the lighting on the first day is because of the victory — it remains difficult to say that we light candles because of a victory; for to remember a victory, we should not have lit candles, but rather commemorated the miracle in a different way.

Based on what we explained above [in previous sections], it is well understood: the reason for lighting the Hanukkah candles to publicize the miracle is not solely to make public the wonder of the oil they found to kindle the Menorah, [or that this small amount lasted eight days]. Rather, the lighting of the candles alludes to the great salvation from their enemies that Israel experienced.

Now it is understood why the Sages did not establish [Hanukkah with an obligation for] "feasting and joy" as they

did for Purim.

In Purim, the benefit and fruit of the victory was the salvation of the physical body from slaughter; therefore, it is appropriate to do the counterpart to this — joy and feasting — for the benefit of the body which had been decreed to perish, *chas veshalom* (Heaven forbid), were it not for the victory.

But in Hanukkah, the benefit and fruit of the victory was the ability to keep the commandments of HASHEM, ELOKEINU, without fear or dread. Thus, there is no place for [physical] joy and feasting, but rather to thank and praise His great Name. (And this answer is somewhat similar to the answer of the author of the *Levush*, which was rejected by the author of the *Turei Zahav*, although he did not explain it in this manner.)

And the precept of Hanukkah is "[to light] a candle for a man and his household" (*ner ish u'beito*). This is because the essence of the miracle performed with the Menorah was to teach that they had now emerged from darkness into light and were able to fulfill the commandments, as it is written: "For the commandment is a lamp" (*Mishlei* 6:23).

Behold, the obligation to fulfill most commandments falls upon each individual privately when the opportunity to fulfill that commandment arises — especially regarding the laws of the forbidden and the permitted, and similar matters. However, there are commandments that can be fulfilled in public,

and regarding them it is said: "In the multitude of people is the King's glory" (*Mishlei* 14:28), such as the recitation of the *Shema*, the *Tefillah*, and the like. Therefore, each person lights Hanukkah candles in his home [referencing the individual nature of *mitzvot*], and in the synagogue, they are lit for the sake of publicizing the miracle.



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(Zera Shimshon, *Parashat Miketz*, Art. 1; see there for an even broader and sweeter explanation, through which several difficulties are answered)

Published and distributed by The International Organization to Disseminate the Works of The Zera Shimshon
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