

THE MIXED MULTITUDE ACCORDING TO THE ZOHAR

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The Bible calls the people that accompanied the 60 myriads of Israelite men out of Egypt *erev rav*, a mixed multitude. *The Israelites journeyed from Raamses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. Moreover, a mixed multitude went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds* (Ex. 12:37-38).

The Zohar says these were Egyptian converts:

Who were the 'mixed multitude'? Were they Lydians, Ethiopians, or Cyprians? Were they not all Egyptians, and did they not all come from Egypt? If they had consisted of a mixture of many different nations, would not the plural verb *alu* (went up) have been used instead of the singular *alah* (Ex. 12:38)? In fact, however, the mixed multitude consisted entirely of one people all the members of which spoke one language, namely, all the sorcerers of Egypt and all its magicians, as it is written *Then Pharaoh, for his part, summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and the Egyptian magicians, in turn, did the same with their spells* (Ex. 7:11); for they wanted to oppose the wonderful works of the Holy One, blessed be He. When they beheld the signs and the wonders which Moses wrought in Egypt they came to Moses to be converted. Said the Holy One to Moses, "Do not receive them!" Moses, however, replied, "Sovereign of the universe, now that they have seen Thy power they desire to accept our Faith, let them see Thy power every day and they will learn that there is no God like unto Thee." And Moses accepted them (Zohar, Exodus, Section 2, 191a-b, Soncino translation).

The possibility of strangers joining the Israelites was discussed by Moses while in Egypt: *If a stranger who dwells with you would offer the Passover to the Lord, all his males must be circumcised; then he shall be admitted to offer it; he shall then be as a citizen of the country. But no uncircumcised*

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person may eat of it. There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among you (Ex. 12:48-49). According to the Zohar, Moses wanted the Egyptians to join because he hoped that they would learn that He is the true God. Additionally, the fact that Moses was saved as an infant by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in the palace may have indicated to Moses that there was some good to be found among the Egyptians.

However, this mixed multitude would never really become part of the Israelites. According to the Zohar, the mixed multitude didn't travel under the clouds of glory and they didn't eat manna in the desert:

Observe that all the clouds of glory which moved with the people in the wilderness covered only the children of Israel, and the cloud of glory went before them, as it is written: *The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, to guide them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, that they might travel day and night* (Ex. 13:21). But this mixed multitude, and all the cattle, walked on behind, outside the camp. Observe also this: that all the forty years that the Israelites walked in the wilderness no unclean object was permitted within that cloud-canopy. Therefore all the cattle, the grass eaters, remained outside together with those who tended them. Said R. Eleazar: 'Father, in that case, that mixed multitude did not partake of the manna?' R. Simeon replied: 'Certainly not, indeed! They only had what the Israelites chose to give them, as one gives to a slave' (Zohar, Exodus, Section 2, p. 191b, Soncino translation).

Even though the Torah informs us that God *befriends the stranger* and commands us to do the same, *You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt* (Deut. 10:18-19), the Egyptians were something of an exception. It seems that the message of the Zohar is that not all evil can be turned to good. The Egyptians as a mixed multitude never truly joined the Israelites and were a source of trouble during the years of wandering in the wilderness. The Torah in fact gives a special rule for Egyptians who wish to join the Jewish People, only a third-generation Egyptian convert may marry an Israelite (Deut. 23:8-9).

Isaiah Chapter 19 is a prophecy of the future, when God will punish Egypt severely; however, in the end, Egypt along with Assyria will serve God and become a partner with Israel:

The Lord will first afflict and then heal the Egyptians; when they turn back to the Lord, He will respond to their entreaties and heal them. In that day, there shall be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians shall join with the Egyptians and Egyptians with the Assyrians, and then the Egyptians together with the Assyrians shall serve [the Lord]. In that day, Israel shall be a third partner with Egypt and Assyria as a blessing on earth; for the Lord of Hosts will bless them, saying, 'Blessed be My people Egypt, My handiwork Assyria, and My very own Israel' (Isa. 19:22-25).

This, according to the Zohar, represents the culmination of the unsuccessful conversion process begun by the Egyptians as the mixed multitude, which will only be complete in Messianic times.



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