

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter VIII: Vayishlach (Gen. 32:4–36:43)

Essay 9. Terms used for different groups of righteous

“One will say, ‘I am the L-rd’s,’ one will use the name of ‘Jacob,’ one will write on his arm ‘of the L-rd’ and adopt the name of ‘Israel.’ ” – Isaiah 44:5

מדרש גלות "נה יאמר לה' אני" לה' ולא נתערב בי סטא, "ונה יקרא בשם יעקב" אלו גרי צדק, "ונה יכתב ידו לה'" אלו בעלי תשובה, "ובשם ישראל יכנה" אלו יראי שמים עכ"ל.

There is a **Midrash Yalkut**:

“One will say, ‘I am the L-rd’s’”: [This means] “[I am] the L-rd’s and there is no admixture of sin in me.”

“One will use the name of ‘Jacob’”: These are the righteous converts.

“One will write on his arm ‘of the L-rd’”: These are the penitents
[*ba'alei tshuva*].

“And adopt the name of ‘Israel’ ”: These are those who fear Heaven.

- Yalkut Shimoni, Isaiah, remez 459

יש לדקדק למה הגרים נקראים בשם יעקב ואינם נקראים בשם אברהם שנקרא "אברהם", וכן כתב הר' עובדיה ברטנורא בשם הרמב"ם (בפ"ק דבכורים משנה ד') שאין הלכה כסתם משנה, אלא שיהגור מביא וקורא מפני שאברהם נקרא אב לגרים וכן כשמתפלל הגר יכול לומר אלהי אבותינו וכו' ועיי"ש, ואם כן הנה לו לומר ונה יקרא בשם אברהם, ועוד מה ענין "יכתב ידו" עם הבעלי תשובה.

The verse seems to describe three different groups of people, though the Midrash parses it to refer to four different groups. The first group are those Jews who were raised to be observant and who are truly righteous tzadikim. The Zera Shimshon does not have any questions about this first group, but does discuss the other three elements of the verse, as identified by the Midrash.

We need to check why converts are called by the name of Jacob and not by the name of Abraham, who is called the “father of the multitude of nations.”¹ Similarly, Rabbi

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¹ Gen. 17:5.

Bartenura² wrote in the name of the Rambam on the first chapter of tractate Bikkurim, mishnah 4. The Mishnah states, “The convert cannot say: ‘Which the Lord has sworn to our fathers, to give to us’ (Deut. 26:3),” as his ancestors were not from Israel and converts did not take a portion in the land. The Mishnah also states that “When he prays privately, he says: ‘G-d of *the* fathers of Israel,’ but when he is in the synagogue, he should say: ‘The G-d of *your* fathers.’ ” The Bartenura objects **that the halacha is not according to the plain meaning of the Mishnah; rather the convert brings [first fruits] and recites [Deut. 26:5–10], and when he prays, he is able to say, “the G-d of *our* fathers, G-d of Abraham, G-d of Isaac, and G-d of Jacob.”**

If so, [Isaiah] should have said, “one will use the name of ‘Abraham,’ instead of ‘Jacob.’ ” Also, what is the connection of “will write on his arm” with penitents?

וְיֵשׁ לֹמֵר שֶׁהַגֵּרִים נִקְרְאוּ דְּנִקְא בְּשֵׁם יִעֲקֹב לְפִי שֶׁהַכְּתוּב הַזֶּה יִרְנוּ כַּמָּה פְּעָמִים עַל אֲנֵצֶת הַגֵּר וְנִתֵּן לְבֵנו הַטַּעַם, "וְגֵר לֹא־תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ כִּי־גֵרִים הֵיְתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם". וְהַגְּלוּת שֶׁל מִצְרָיִם הִתְחִיל מִיִּעֲקֹב כְּדָכְתִּיב "לְגֹר בְּאֶרֶץ בְּאֵנוּ", שֶׁהִנֵּה הוּא רֵאשׁוֹן לִירֵד לְמִצְרַיִם, וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁמִּחְמַת גְּלוּת זֶה נִמְשָׁכָה לָהֶם טוֹבָה שְׂאִין אָנוּ יְכוּלִים לְהוֹנִתָם וּמִזֶּה מוֹכַח הָאֵהָבָה שְׂאוֹהֵב הַקֵּב"ה אֶת הַגֵּרִים. מִשּׁוֹם הֵכִי מְשַׁבְּחִים לֵה' בְּשֵׁם יִעֲקֹב וְלֹא בְּשֵׁם אַבְרָהָם, שְׂאֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁיְכוּלִים לֹמֵר "אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ" מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהֵם בְּנֵי אַבְרָהָם, מִכָּל מְקוֹם לֹא נִמְשָׁךְ לָהֶם שׁוֹם טוֹבָה שֶׁהָרִי לֹא נִטְלוּ חֵלֶק בְּאֶרֶץ כְּבָנֵי אַבְרָהָם.

It can be said that converts are called precisely by the name of Jacob, as the Scripture warned us a number of times against vexing the convert and gave us the reason, “You shall not wrong or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”³ The Exile of Egypt began with Jacob, as it is written, “we came to sojourn in this land,”⁴ for he was the first to descend to Egypt, and because of this Exile, a favor was extended to them, that we cannot deceive them, and this proves the love by which the Holy One, Blessed be He, loves the converts. Because of this, they praise G-d in the name of Jacob and not in the name of Abraham, because even though they are able to say, “the G-d of our fathers” in prayer, as they are spiritual sons of Abraham, nevertheless no favor is extended to them, for they did not take any part of the Land of Israel as an inheritance, as did the biological sons of Abraham.

"וְנִזְהָ יִכְתֹּב" וְכו' אֵלּוּ בְּעֲלֵי תְּשׁוּבָה, כְּתִבּוּ הַמְּקוּבָלִים שֶׁבְּזִמְן שֶׁהִנֵּה בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קָיָם לֹא הִנֵּה עוֹלָם הַעֲשִׂיָה צְרִיף תִּיקוּן, אֲבָל עֵתָה אַחַר הַחֲרָבָן צְרִיף תִּיקוּן, הוּא כְּשֶׁתִּלְמִיד וְתִיק אוֹ בְּעַל תְּשׁוּבָה כּוֹתֵב שׁוֹם דְּבָר מִיִּסוּדֵי תוֹרָה אֲזַ בְּאוֹתָהּ כְּתִיבָה מְתַקֵּן עוֹלָם הַעֲשִׂיָה עַכ"ל.

“One will write on his arm”: These are the penitents. The Kabbalists wrote that in the time that the Temple stood, the world of Asiyah⁵ did not need correction, but now after the

² Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura (c. 1445–c. 1515), Italian rabbi.

³ Ex. 22:20.

⁴ Gen. 47:4.

⁵ Kabbalah speaks of the four central worlds: Atzilut (“the world of emanation”), Beriah (“the world of creation”), Yetzirah (“the world of formation”), and Asiyah (“the world of action”). The last three terms appear (in verb form) in

destruction of the Temple, it requires correction. When an elder student or a penitent writes something from the fundamentals of Torah, then with the same writing, he corrects the world of Asiyah.⁶

וכן כתב המעבר יבק (פרק כ"ט מאמר ג') שכל חידושי התורה שמחדשים ישראל בגלות הנה עתידים הם לאומרם בעולם הבא, שכן הקרבנות היו עושים אף למעלה כמו שאנו אומרים, "ואשי ישראל ותפלתם" וכו', אם כן תיקון הקרבנות ותיקון החידושים אחד הוא, ומשום הכי קאמר "וזה יכתב ידו לה" שבתכתובת החידושי תורה שעושה הבעל תשובה הוא עושה תיקון גמור לנשמתו, שהרי חידושי תורה הם שמים חדשים כנודע, והשמים נבראו בידו של הקב"ה כדכתיב "אני ידו וטו שמים". ועוד כתיב "וימנעו ידיו מגיד הקיע", והבעל תשובה שפגם בשמים העליונים הוא מתקן בכתיבת החידושים שבורא שמים חדשים.

Similarly, the author of *Ma'avar Yavok* wrote in chapter 29, article 3, that every Torah novelty that Israel discovers while in this Exile will, in the future, be said in the World-to-Come.⁷ This is because the sacrifices took effect above, as we say, "Be pleased, O L-rd, our G-d, with Your people, Israel, and their prayer; and the fire-offerings of Israel and their prayer please accept, lovingly and willingly."⁸ We know that Temple sacrifices effected atonement for sins. If so, the correction of the sacrifices and the correction of the novelties are equivalent, and because of this, as it is said, "one will write on his arm 'of the L-rd,' " that in the writing of the Torah novelties made by the penitent, he effects a complete correction of his soul. For novelties of Torah are a new Heaven, as is known,⁹ and the Heavens were created by the hand of the Holy One, Blessed be He, as it is written, "My own hands stretched out the heavens."¹⁰ Also, it is written, "the Heavens proclaim His handiwork,"¹¹ and the penitent that had damaged the uppermost Heavens, he corrects this by writing the novelties that create a new Heaven.

Isaiah 43:7, "Every one that is called by My name, and for My glory, I have created him, I have formed him, indeed, I have made him." Atzilut emerges directly from G-d's infinite light (revelation); this world is all good. Atzilut is the soul and the source of life to Beriah, the first world created from nothing, where Seraphim are created. Beriah is mostly good, with some bad. Beriah is the soul and the source of life to Yetzirah, where angels are created, forces entrusted with performing tasks without any free choice. Yetzirah is half good and half bad. Yetzirah is the soul and the source of life to Asiyah, our finite world in which created beings have a strong sense of independence. Asiyah is mostly bad, though there is some good. Therefore, the worlds are all linked, and all have a connection to G-d's infinite light.

⁶ Yisrael ben Binyamin of Belzec, *Yalkut Chadash* (Lublin 1648), Beit haMikdash u'Kli haMikdash, note 5.

⁷ Aaron Berechiah ben Moses ben Nehemiah (d. 1639), Italian Kabbalist who lived in Modena. In 1626, he published *Ma'avor Yavok*, with readings, laws, and customs relating to sickness, deathbed, burial, and mourning rites.

⁸ Shemona Esreh (Amidah) prayer.

⁹ Zohar I:5a: "So now, when the new explanation on the Torah is uttered, the saying [i.e., the novelty] rises up, is crowned, and then stands before the Holy One, Blessed be He. And He guards that saying and shelters the person who said it so that it may be known only to Him, and to stop the angels from envying [the person] until a new Heaven and earth are made from that saying."

¹⁰ Isaiah 45:12.

¹¹ Ps. 19:22.

"ובשם ישראל יכנה" אלו יראי שמים, שכתב הפלי יקר בשם יעקב הוא גופני וישראל רוחני. ומשום הכי נשתיירו לו שתי שמות לפי שאי אפשר לאדם בלא גוף ונפש, והיראי שמים אינם הולכים אחר תאנות הגוף אלא תמיד יראים לנפשם, שלא די שאינם חוטאים אלא שיושבים תמיד בפחד ובדאגה שלא יבא איזה חטא לידם. ומשום הכי, "ובשם ישראל יכנה", ודייק שפיר שלא אמר "יקראו" אלא שהם מכונים ומשולים לשם ישראל.

“And adopt the name of ‘Israel’ ”: These are those who fear Heaven, for the author of the *Kli Yakar*¹² wrote that the name of Jacob is representative of the physical, and the name of Israel is representative of the spiritual. Because of this, two names remained to him, his original name “Jacob” and his later name “Israel,” because it’s impossible for man to exist without a body and a soul. Those who fear Heaven don’t go after the desires of the body, but rather always fear for their souls. For it’s not enough that they don’t sin; rather it’s essential that they sit always in fear and worry, lest some sin come to their hands. Because of this, “and [they] adopt the name of ‘Israel,’ ” and it’s fitting that it doesn’t say “they will be called [Israel],” rather, that they are named and likened to the name of “Israel.”

ועוד יש לומר שבגרים אמר שיקראו בשם יעקב מהטעם שכתב בעל עשרה מאמרות שכל הגרים מינן הוּו ונידחו בעון אדם הראשון מחמת הקלות שפאו לעולם ברמאות הנפש, ונתקנו אלו הקלות עם הברכות שפאו לעולם ברמאות יעקב, ואז הוכנו נשמות הגרים לתזור למקומם, ולכן יקראו ונקא בשם יעקב כי שלו נטל מתוך הקליפה ברמאות ו"הכי קרא שמו יעקב".

Also, it can be said that for converts, he said that they should be called by the name of Jacob for the reason that the author of *Asara Ma'amarot* [Ten Utterances]¹³ wrote (in the essay “*Em Kol Chai*” [The Mother of All the Living],¹⁴ section 3, chapter 8), that all the converts were held back and rejected because of the iniquity of the first man, because of the curses that came to the world through the deceit of the serpent.¹⁵

These curses were mended with the blessings of Gen. 27:28–29 that came into the world through the deceit of Jacob, when he acquired the blessings that Isaac had intended for Esau.¹⁶ Then the souls of the converts were prepared to return to their place, and therefore they were specifically called by the name of Jacob, because his name was taken from the

¹² Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz (1550-1619), rabbi of Prague and author of *Kli Yakar* (Lublin 1602).

¹³ Rabbi Menachem Azaria da Fano (“Rema M’Pano”) (1548–1620), Italian Kabbalist and commentator on the Talmud. *Asara Ma'amarot* (“Ten Utterances”) was published in Venice in 1597.

¹⁴ Gen. 3:20, “The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.”

¹⁵ Judaism recognizes that Eve and Adam were the first to sin, and that their sin brought death to the world. Nevertheless, unlike Christianity, Judaism does not recognize a hereditary transmission of sin, but believes that each individual is responsible for whatever sin he may commit. Nevertheless, there is a certain moral contamination that remains from Eve’s interaction with the serpent. Rabbi Yochanan said this moral contamination ended for the Jews at Mount Sinai, but did not end then for the nations. For those who convert, while they were not present at Sinai, their guardian angels were present, so their moral contamination ends upon their conversion. (See Shabbat 145b–146a; and Zera Shimshon, Chapter XVIII, Mishpatim, essay 8).

¹⁶ See also Shabbat 146a and Zera Shimshon, Chapter XVIII, Mishpatim, essay 8, as Rabbi Abba bar Kahana held that the moral contamination for Jews ceased with Jacob, which was long before the Revelation at Sinai.

klipah by deception, and “[Esau] said, ‘Was he, then, named Jacob that he might supplant me these two times? First he took away my birthright and now he has taken away my blessing!’”¹⁷

וּבְדֶרֶךְ אַתְרֵת יֵשׁ לְפָרֵשׁ מֵאֵי דְאָמַר "וּבְשֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל יִכְנֶה" אֵלּוּ יִרְאֵי שְׁמַיִם, דְּאִיתָא בְּוִיקְרָא רַבָּה עַל הַפְּסוּק "וּנְפֹשׁ כִּי־תִקְרִיב קֶרְבַּן מִנְחָה", "יִרְאֵי ה' הַלְלוּהוּ" אֵלּוּ יִרְאֵי שְׁמַיִם, וְהַקְשָׁה שֶׁם הַיְפָה תּוֹאֵר מֵה הוֹסִיף עַל לְשׁוֹן הַכְּתוּב, וְתִירֵץ שְׂדַעְתּוֹ לְפָרֵשׁ יִרְאֵי ה' עַל חֲסִידֵי אַמּוֹת הָעוֹלָם כְּמוֹ שְׂפִירְשׁוּ גַבֵי "יִרְאֵי ה' בְּרַכּוּ אֶת־ה'" שֶׁהֵם הַנְּכָרִים הַבָּאִים לְהַתְּפַלֵּל בֵּית ה' עַכ"ל.

In another way, one can interpret what is said, “ ‘And adopt the name of “Israel” ’: These are those who fear Heaven,” as is brought in Lev. Rabbah 3:2 on the verse, “When a person presents a meal-offering.”¹⁸ Lev. Rabbah says: “ ‘You who fear the L-rd, praise Him!’¹⁹ These are those who fear Heaven.” The *Yafeh To’ar*²⁰ questions there what [the Midrash’s comment “these are those who fear Heaven”] adds to the plain language of the Scripture. He solves that his spirit is to explain “You who fear the L-rd” as referring to the pious of the peoples of the world, as was interpreted concerning the verse, “you who fear the L-rd, bless the L-rd,”²¹ that they are the non-Jews coming to pray in the House of G-d.

וְהִכָּא נִמְי גִּימָא דְמִיִּירֵי בְּחֲסִידֵי אוּמּוֹת הָעוֹלָם, וְנִיִּיק שְׂפִיר טוֹבָא לְשׁוֹן הַכְּתוּב שְׂאוּמַר "וּבְשֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל יִכְנֶה", דְּשָׁמַע מִיִּנְהָ שְׂאִינָם מְכָלֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְעוֹד אֶתִּי שְׂפִיר דְּנִקְטִינְהוּ בְּסִדְרָא לֹא זֹו אִף זֹו, מִתְּחִלָּה מִיִּירֵי בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל שְׂלֵא חֲטָאוּ וְהֵם חִלְקֵהּ ה', וְאַחַר כִּד גְּרִי הַצִּדִּיק שְׂמָה שְׂחֲטָאוּ קוֹדֵם שְׂנִתְגַּיִירוּ אֲנוּסִים הֵם, וְאַחַר כִּד בְּעָלֵי תְּשׁוּבָה וְאַחַר כִּד חֲסִידֵי אוּמּוֹת הָעוֹלָם.

Here too, it’s speaking of the pious of the peoples of the world, and it’s very fitting that the language of the Scripture says, “And adopt the name of ‘Israel,’ ” for we hear from this that they are not in the category of Israel.

Also, it’s fine that one collected by the order of not only this, but also that, i.e., going in the order of what is most obvious to what is least obvious, [our verse] Isaiah 44:5 is initially speaking of Israelites that didn’t sin, and they are G-d’s portion; and afterward, the righteous converts, for regarding their sins prior to their conversion, it’s considered as though they were compelled; and afterward the penitents; and afterward the pious of the nations of the world.

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¹⁷ Gen. 27:36.

¹⁸ Lev. 2:1.

¹⁹ Ps. 22:24.

²⁰ Rabbi Samuel ben Isaac Ashkenazi Jaffe (d. late 16th century), rabbi of the Ashkenazi community of Constantinople. *Yafeh To’ar* was his commentary to the Midrash Rabbah: Genesis (Venice, 1597–1606); Exodus (Venice, 1597); and Leviticus (Constantinople, 1648).

²¹ Ps. 135:20.