

# Zera Shimshon

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Published Mantua 1778\*

## Chapter XI: Vayigash (Gen. 44:18–47:27)

### Essay 9. Why Jacob prayed “to the G-d of his father Isaac”

**פסוק** "וַיִּזְבַּח זְבָחִים לֵאלֹהֵי אָבִיו יִצְחָק". פִּירַשׁ רַש"י, מִפְּאֵן שְׁחַיִּיב אָדָם בְּכָבוֹד אָבִיו יוֹתֵר מִכָּבוֹד זָקֵנוּ עַכ"ל. מִקְשִׁים הַעוֹלָם מֵהַ קוֹשֵׁיָא הַרְגִישׁ רַש"י בְּפִסּוּק זֶה, דְּדִילְמָא עָשָׂה "זְבָחִים לֵאלֹהֵי אָבִיו יִצְחָק" מִפְּנֵי שְׁהֵיָה אָבִיו וְלֹא מִפְּנֵי הַכָּבוֹד?

There is a **verse**: “So Israel set out with all that was his, and he came to Beer-sheba, **and he offered sacrifices to the G-d of his father Isaac**” (Gen. 46:1). **Rashi explained, “A man is obligated in honoring his father more than in honoring his grandfather** (Gen. Rabbah 94:5); therefore [the sacrifices] are associated with Isaac and not with Abraham.” **The world asks what difficulty Rashi sensed in this verse, for perhaps [Jacob] offered sacrifices to the G-d of his father Isaac because he was his father and not because of the honor**, i.e., perhaps Jacob’s mindset was that he would pray as his father had prayed, and he wasn’t making any determination that he was obligated to honor his father more than his grandfather?

וַנִּרְאֶה לִזְמַר דְּשִׁפִּיר הוֹכִיחַ רַש"י דְּחַיִּיב אָדָם וְכו', מִשּׁוּם דְּקוֹשֵׁיָא לִיָּה דְהִכָּא אֲדַרְבָּא יַעֲקֹב לֹא הֵיָה לֹו לְזַבּוֹחַ אֱלֹא דְוָקֵא לְאַלֹהֵי אֲבִרְהָם, שְׁהָרִי עִתָּה הֵיָה הוֹלֵךְ לְמִצְרַיִם לְהַתְחִיל הַשְׁעָבוּד שְׁגִזַּר הַקַּב"ה עִם אֲבִרְהָם "יָדַע מִדַּע" וְכו'. וַיַּעֲקֹב קוֹדֵם שְׁיֵלַךְ לְמִצְרַיִם עָשָׂה זְבָחִים פְּדִי לְהַתְפַּלֵּל לְהַקַּב"ה שְׁיִוְצִיאֵם מִשְׁ[ם], כְּמוֹ שְׁאַמְרוּ ו"ל "אֲנֹכִי אֲרַד עִמָּךְ מִצְרַיִמָּה וְאֲנֹכִי אֲעֲלֶךְ גַּם-עִלָּה", וְכִמוֹ שְׁהִבְטִיחַ לְאַבְרָהָם "וְגַם אֶת-הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דָן אֲנֹכִי וְאַחֲרֵי-כֵן יֵצְאוּ" וְכו'. וְהַקְרָבָן הֵיָה הֵיָה לֹו לִזְמַר לְאַלֹהֵי אָבִיו אֲבִרְהָם פְּדִי שְׁיִקְצִיִם הַקַּב"ה מֵהַ שְׁהִבְטִיחַ לֹו, וְלָמָּה עָשָׂה הַקְרָבָן "לְאַלֹהֵי אָבִיו יִצְחָק"?

**We will see that it’s fine: that Rashi proved that a man is obligated** in honoring his father more than in honoring his grandfather, **because it’s difficult** otherwise to understand **here**, **as to the contrary, Jacob should have sacrificed only to the G-d of Abraham specifically. For at the moment, he was going to Egypt to begin the bondage that the Holy One, Blessed be He, decreed upon Abraham: “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years”** (Gen. 15:13). **Before going to Egypt, Jacob offered sacrifices to pray to G-d to bring them out from the Exile, as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said on the verse, “I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I Myself will also bring you back”** (Gen. 46:4).<sup>1</sup> **“But I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and in the end, they shall go free with great wealth”** (Gen. 15:14). Regarding **this**

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<sup>1</sup> See discussion at Zohar II:53a.

sacrifice, [Scripture] should have said, “to the G-d of his father Abraham,” so that G-d would fulfill what he promised [Abraham]. So why did he offer the sacrifice “to the G-d of his father Isaac”?

אֵלָא וּדְאֵי מוֹכְרֵי חַיִּים אָנוּ לֹא מְעַשֵׂה כֵּן בְּשִׁבִיל שְׁחִיב אָדָם בְּכָבוֹד אָבִיו וְכוּ', וְעֵשָׂה לוֹ כְּבוֹד זֶה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל לְהִקְבֵּה שְׁיִפְדָּם מִן הַגָּלוּת בְּזָכוּת יִצְחָק, הוֹאִיל שְׁמִמְנוּ הִתְחִיל הַגָּלוּת, כְּדָתִיב "כִּי־גַר יִהְיֶה וְרַעַד" וּמִיּוֹם לִידָתוֹ נִשְׁלְמוּ "אֲרַבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה".

Rather, it's certain that we must say that he did so because “a man is obligated in honoring his father more than in honoring his grandfather,” and he did him this honor by praying to the Holy One, Blessed be He, that he should redeem them from the Exile in the merit of Isaac. For the Exile began with [Isaac], as it is written, “your offspring shall be strangers” and from the day of [Isaac's] birth they shall complete “four hundred years.”<sup>2</sup>

וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לֹא מְעַשֵׂה שְׁטָעָם גָּלוּת מִצְרַיִם הִיָּה לְלִקֹּט כָּל הַנִּיצוּצוֹת שֶׁנִּפְלוּ שָׁם, וְזֶהוּ סוּד "וַיִּלְקֹט יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּל־הַכֶּסֶף" וְכוּ' כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתְבוּ חֲכָמֵי הָאָמֶת. וְזֶהוּ בְּסוּד שֶׁל "וַיִּנְצְלוּ אֶת־מִצְרַיִם" עֲשָׂאוּהָ כְּמִצְוֵהָ שֶׁאֵין בָּהּ דְּגִים. וּמִשּׁוֹם הֵכִי הוֹזְהָרוּ שֶׁלֹּא לָשׁוּב עוֹד בְּמִצְרַיִם לְפִי שֶׁלֹּא נִשְׁאַר בָּהּ שׁוֹם דְּבָר טוֹב, וְזֶהוּ הַסּוּד שֶׁל "וַאֲחֵרֵי־כֵן יֵצְאוּ בְּרַכְשׁ גָּדוֹל" כְּמוֹ שֶׁהָאָרְכָנוּ לְעֵיל בְּמִקְוָמוֹ, וְאֵף בְּמִסְכַּת פְּסָחִים אֲמָרִינָן לֹא הִגְלָה וְכוּ' אֵלָא כְּדֵי שְׁיִתְוַסְּפוּ וְכוּ' כְּלוּם אָדָם זֹרַע סָאָה וְכוּ'.

It also should be said that it is known that the purpose of the Egyptian Exile was to gather all the sparks that fell there,<sup>3</sup> and that is the secret of, “Joseph gathered in all the money that was to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan” (Gen. 47:14), as the sages of truth wrote.<sup>4</sup> In Kabbalah, to create the physical universe, G-d shined His light into a set of Vessels. They could not contain the light, and shattered, with the light escaping in the form of sparks of holiness that fell to earth, where they mixed with *klipot* (husks or shells) of the Vessels. The *klipot* contain all the evil and impurity in the world. Man's purpose is to tie together the spiritual and physical realities as one, thus repairing the original harmony that was destroyed with the breaking of the Vessels. This includes freeing the sparks, so that the *klipot* lose their power. This gathering of sparks is the secret of, “thus they ransacked Egypt” (Ex. 12:6), about which the Gemara quotes Reish Lakish as saying, “They made [Egypt] like an abyss [in the sea] without fish.”<sup>5</sup> Because of this, they were warned not to return to Egypt anymore,<sup>6</sup> as there was

<sup>2</sup> The rabbis teach us that the Jews were in Egypt for 210 years. They begin the count of the 400 years with the birth of Isaac. When Isaac was 60 years old, Jacob was born (Gen. 25:26), and Jacob was 130 when he met Pharaoh (Gen. 47:9). Therefore, when Jacob descended to Egypt, 190 years of the 400 years had already passed, thus leaving 210 years. This is the number of years that we are taught that the Israelites were in Egypt.

<sup>3</sup> Zohar I:244a.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Natan Shapira (1585-1633), Polish rabbi and Kabbalist, whose principal work was *Megaleh Amukot* (1637). *Megaleh Amukot* 176:2 equates Joseph's gathering of money with the gathering of sparks.

<sup>5</sup> Berachot 9b.

<sup>6</sup> Ex. 14:13, “. . . for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again.” Deut. 17:16, “[Your king] shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since the L-rd has warned you, “You must not go back that way again.” Deut. 28:68, “The L-rd will send you back to Egypt in galleys, by a route which I told you that you should not see again. There you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but none will buy.”

nothing good left in it, and this is the secret of “in the end, they shall go free with great wealth” (Gen. 15:14), as we explained at length above in the place where that verse is found, i.e., Chapter III, Lech Lecha, essay 20. Even in Tractate Pesachim (5b), it is said: “Rabbi Elazar said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, exiled Israel among the nations only so that converts would join them, as it is stated: ‘And I will sow her to Me in the land’ (Hosea 2:25). No one sows a *se’a* [of grain for any reason] other than to bring in several *kor* [of grain during the harvest. So too, the Exile is to enable converts from the nations to join the Jewish people].”

והנה עיקר ההקנה לניצוצות שיתמשכו מן הקליפות עשה אותם אברהם, כדכתיב "וְאֶת־הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ בְחֶרֶן", שָׂאז הוֹכְנוּ כָּל הַנְּשָׁמוֹת הַעֲתִידוֹת לְהִתְגַּיֵּר, וְנָה סוֹד הַפְּסוּק "וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ" הָאָמֹר בְּאַבְרָהָם, מִלְשׁוֹן הַבְּרִית הָאֵילָן, שְׂכָל הַגֵּרִים מִיָּנֵן הוּוּ וְנִדְחִי, וְעַיִן בְּאֹרֶךְ בְּעֵשְׂרֵה מְאֻמְרוֹת, מִן אֵם כָּל חַי, סִמְּן ו', ז', וְח'. וְלָכֵן אַבְרָהָם גִּיּוּרֵי גֵיּוּרִים, יִצְחָק אִף הוּא גִיּוּר גֵּיּוּרִים כְּדֵאִתָּא בְּמִדְרַשׁ בְּאַרְצָן מְגִיּוּרֵי אָבִיו, מְגִיּוּרֵי אָבִיו.

**This is the essence of the preparation for the sparks that were pulled from the husks: Abraham made them, as it is written, “and the souls they had made in Charan” (Gen. 12:5).<sup>7</sup> Then all the souls that were to be converted were prepared, and this is the secret of the verse, “I will bless those who bless you, and curse him that curses you; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed [נִבְרְכוּ] [nivrechu] through you” (Gen. 12:3). This is said of Abraham, from the language of the “kneeling [בְּרִיחַת] [berichat] of the tree.”** That is, the root of the word “blessed” is *berech* [ברך], which means “knee,” as kneeling is a sign of respect. The “kneeling of the tree” refers to an agricultural practice discussed in a Mishnah in Orlah 1:5, whereby, where a young shoot of a vine or tree is bent down (as though it’s kneeling), and the end farthest from the vine or tree is planted in the ground. A new vine or tree can then grow from the buried shoot, and it appears to be a new plant, but it is drawing nourishment from the parent vine or tree.<sup>8</sup>

**That is, all of the converts had been heretics and outcast, and see at length what Rabbi Menachem Azaria da Fano<sup>9</sup> writes in *Asara Ma’amorot*, from the article “*Em Kol Chai*,” section III, parts 6, 7, and 8. Therefore Abraham converted converts and they retained a connection to him, and Isaac too converted converts, as is brought in the Midrash Gen. Rabbah 84:4 on the verse, “Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned [as a stranger], the land of Canaan” (Gen. 37:1): “What is the term *me’gurei aviv* (מְגִיּוּרֵי אָבִיו) (‘his father had sojourned [as a stranger]’) telling us about Jacob’s father, Isaac? *Mi’giyurei aviv* (מְגִיּוּרֵי אָבִיו) (‘his father had made converts’).”**

<sup>7</sup> Gen. 12:5: “Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan.” The literal translation of “the persons they had acquired” is “the souls they had made.” Rashi notes that Abraham converted the men and Sarah the women, bringing them under the Shechinah, which is considered as though they “made” those souls. See also Gen. Rabbah 39:14.

<sup>8</sup> As explained by Rabbi Yisroel Zilberberg. This material from *Asara Ma’amorot* is also discussed in *Zera Shimshon*, Chapter LVI –Ruth, essay 7.

<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Menachem Azaria da Fano (“Rema M’Pano”) (1548–1620), Italian Kabbalist and commentator on the Talmud.

ומעתה יעקב, שהיה יודע שהליכתו למצרים היתה כדי לאסוף הנדחים, זבח זבחים להקב"ה כדי שיתן פת וסיוע לבניו ללקט הפל. ומן הראוי היה שיאמר לאלהי אברהם, שהוא דוֹקא תיקון והכין עֶזר וסיוע ליציאת הנדחים בכללותם אף לאותם העתידים להתגזיר, אלא לפי שגם יצחק גזיר גזירות תלה הנדחים ביצחק, לפי שחייב אדם בכבוד אביו יותר וכו'.

**Henceforth Jacob, who knew that his going to Egypt was to gather the outcasts, sacrificed sacrifices to the Holy One, Blessed be He, in order that He would give strength and support to his sons to gather everything. It would have been proper that he would have said [the prayer] to the G-d of Abraham, for he especially had established and prepared help and assistance for the departure of the outcasts in their entirety, even for those who were to be converted in the future. However, as Isaac also converted converts, he associated the sacrifices with Isaac, because, "A man is obligated in honoring his father more than in honoring his grandfather."**

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