

# Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778\*

## Chapter XII: Vayechi (Gen. 47:28–50:26)

### Essay 9. Jacob blesses Joseph's sons

**פסוק** "וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אֵלֶּה", פֶּרֶשׁ רַשִׁי, בִּקְשׁ לְבָרְכֶם וְנִסְתַּלְקָה שְׂכִינָה מִמֶּנּוּ, לִפִּי שְׁעֵתִיד יִרְבְּעָם וְכו', "וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אֵלֶּה" מֵהֵיכָן יֵצְאוּ אֵלֶּה שְׂאִינָם רְאוּיִים לְבָרְכָה, אָמַר לוֹ יוֹסֵף "בְּנֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר־נָתַנְתִּי לִי אֱלֹהִים בְּזֶה" הִרְאָה לוֹ שְׂטֵר אִירוּסִין וְשְׂטֵר כְּתוּבָה וְכו', "וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־מִנִּי אֵלַי נֶאֱבָרְכֶם."

There are verse[s]: **“Israel saw the sons of Joseph, and he said, ‘who are these?’”**<sup>1</sup> **Rashi explained: “He wished to bless them, but the Shechinah departed from him, because it was destined that Jeroboam and Ahab would descend from Ephraim, and Jehu and his sons from Manasseh.”**<sup>2</sup> Regarding the end of the verse, **“and he said, ‘who are these,’**” Rashi explained, **“Who are these, who are unfit for a blessing?”**<sup>3</sup>

**Joseph said to him: “ ‘They are my sons, whom G-d has given me here.’”**<sup>4</sup> Rashi explained: **“He showed him the contract of betrothal and the contract of marriage,”** i.e., proof that their mother was Jewish, and that therefore Ephraim and Manasseh were Jewish, **“and Joseph requested mercy regarding the matter, and the Holy Spirit [again] rested upon [Jacob].”**<sup>5</sup>

**“And he said, ‘bring them to me, and I will bless them.’ ”**

יֵשׁ לְדַקְדָּק מֵהוּ שְׂאֵמַר לוֹ יַעֲקֹב "מִי־אֵלֶּה", וְכִי עֲדִיין לֹא הָיָה מִפְּרִיָם וְהָלֹא כָּבֵד כְּתִיב "וְעַתָּה שְׁנֵי־בָנֶיךָ" וְכו' "כִּרְאוּבֵן וְשִׁמְעוֹן יִהְיוּ־לִי", וְאִי תִימָא שְׂשָׁאֵל זֶה בְּשִׁבִּיל שְׁנִסְתַּלְקָה מִמֶּנּוּ שְׂכִינָה בְּשִׁבִּיל יִרְבְּעָם וַיְהִי, אִם יָדַע זֶה מֵה מְקוֹם לְשִׁאֲלָתוֹ. גַּם בְּתִשְׁבִּיבַת יוֹסֵף שֶׁהִרְאָה לוֹ שְׂטֵר אִירוּסִין וְכְתוּבָה מֵה תִּירוּץ הוּא זֶה, הִלֵּא הַשְׂכִּינָה לֹא נִסְתַּלְקָה אֲלֵא בְּשִׁבִּיל יִרְבְּעָם וְכו', וְאִידֵּךְ בְּתִשְׁבִּיבָה זֹאת מְתוּרָן זֶה שְׂאֵמַר כִּךְ בִּירֵד אוֹתָם, וְאִף הַמְּפָרְשִׁים הִרְגִּישׁוּ בְּזֶה.

**We need to check why Jacob asked “who are these,” for didn’t he already know them, and isn’t it already written, “Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are mine.”**<sup>6</sup> **If you’ll say that he asked this because the Shechinah departed from**

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

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 48:8.

<sup>2</sup> Rashi to Gen. 48:8, based on Midrash Tanchuma, Vayechi 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 48:9.

<sup>5</sup> Rashi to Gen. 48:9, based on Midrash Tanchuma, Vayechi 6.

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 48:5.

him because of Jeroboam and Jehu, if he knew this reason that the Shechinah left him, what place was there for his question?

Even with the answer of Rashi that Joseph showed him the contract of betrothal and the contract of marriage, what solution is this? For isn't it so that the Shechinah departed from him only because of Jeroboam, Ahab, and Jehu and his sons?

How does this answer solve this, that he blessed them afterward? Even the commentators feel this difficulty.

ויש לומר שפתיב הפרשת דרכים (בדרוש ד' דף י"ב) ש'ה' הפליא חסדו על ישראל, שפשוואה שעתידין להרע ולהטיב מטיב עמהם בשביל מה שעתידין להטיב, ואינו נמנע בשביל מה שעתידין להרע, וזהו שאמר בלעם "לא־הביט אֶנּוּ בְּנִעְקֵב", "שהקב"ה אינו דן את האדם אלא לפי מעשיו של אותה שעה ואף על פי שעתיד להרע דכתיב "וַיִּרְאֲאֶנּוּ וְלֹא יִתְבּוֹנֶן" וכתוב "בְּאִשֹּׁר הוּא־שֵׁם", אבל במצות מסתפל במה שעתידין לעשות ומטיב להם מעכשיו. וזהו שפסיים הפתוב "ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ עִמּוֹ", ומטיב להם במה שעתידין לעשות, וכן עשה בצאתם ממצרים שהטיב עמהם בשביל שהיו עתידין לקבל התורה ולא נמנע בשביל שעתידין לחטא בעגל, ומשום ה"י" אל מוציאם ממצרים" ועיי"ש שהאריה. עוד כתב הרב הנ"ל (בדרוש א' דף א' ע"ד) בפירוש המדרש על פסוק "אִזְ חִלַּקְתָּ יְצוּעֵי עֲלֵה", אמר לו יעקב איני לא מרסקה ולא מקרבך, אלא אני תולה אותה ברפיון עד שיבא משה שפתוב בו "ומשה עלה אל־האלהים", מה שדעתו לעשות בך יעשה וכו'.

It can be said that the *Parashat Derachim* (in essay 4, page 12) writes that G-d bestows His kindness on Israel when He sees that they will do both good and evil, because of the good that they will do, and he doesn't prevent this because of the evil that they will do.<sup>7</sup>

This is the meaning of what Balaam said: "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob,"<sup>8</sup> that the Holy One, Blessed be He, judges man only according to his actions of the hour. Even though he is destined to do evil, as it is written, "When He sees iniquity, does He not discern it?"<sup>9</sup> Also, regarding Ishmael, who would grow to be evil, it is written, "G-d has heeded the cry of the boy where he is,"<sup>10</sup> which Rashi explained that he is judged for his actions at the moment and not according to what he might do in the future.<sup>11</sup> But regarding the commandments, He looks at what one is destined to do and is good to them in the present time.

This is why the verse beginning "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob" concludes with, "The L-rd, their G-d, is with him," and He does good for them because of what they are destined to do. Thus, He acted in bringing them out from Egypt and doing good with them because they were destined to receive the Torah, and He wasn't prevented from this because they were destined to sin with the Golden Calf. See more there, at length.

The rabbi mentioned above, i.e., the author of *Perashat Derachim*, also wrote (in essay 1, page 1d) in explaining the Midrash Gen. Rabbah 98:4 on the verse, "You brought disgrace—my couch he mounted."<sup>12</sup> According to the Midrash, Jacob said, I am not distancing you and

<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Yehudah Rosanes (1657–1727), *Parashat Derachim*, essay 4 (Venice 1743).

<sup>8</sup> Num. 23:21.

<sup>9</sup> Job 11:11.

<sup>10</sup> Gen. 21:17.

<sup>11</sup> Rashi on Gen. 21:17.

<sup>12</sup> Gen. 49:4.

**I am not bringing you near. Instead, I am suspending judgment until Moses comes, for it is written about him, “Moses ascended to G-d.”<sup>13</sup> What he will know to do to you, he will do.** *Perashat Derachim* notes that with the receipt of the Torah at Sinai, the Israelites left the halachic category of the descendants of Noah and were treated halachically as Jews. However, there is a question whether the patriarchs themselves should be considered as Jews, or whether they were still part of the descendants of Noah. This will be discussed below, with its significance.

ופירש הרב הנ"ל דפילגשים הם בלא כתובה וקידושין, אם כן בלעה שהיתה פילגש יעקב לא חשיבה אשת יעקב מאחר שלא קדשה, ומשנה שלימה שנינו נושא אדם אנוסת אביו ומפומת אביו, והוא הדין לפילגש אביו. וכל זה הוא בישראל דנקא; אבל בבני נח, דלית בהו קידושין ובבעילה תליא מילתא, פשיטא שחייב על פילגש אביו ומשום אשת אביו ומשום אשת איש.

**Also, the rabbi mentioned above explained that concubines have neither contract of marriage nor contract of engagement. If so, Bilhah, who was a concubine of Jacob, was not considered a wife of Jacob, since she was not married. A complete Mishnah taught us that a man may marry a woman raped by his father or seduced by his father,<sup>14</sup> and this is the law for a concubine of one's father. This is specifically the law for Israel, but for the descendants of Noah, who do not have a contract of marriage and who marry only through intercourse,<sup>15</sup> it is obvious that he would be liable for relations with the concubine of his father, both because she's the wife of his father and because she's the wife of a married man.**

ויעקב היה מסתפק אם יצאו האבות מכלל בני נח ויש להם דין ישראל גמור או לא יצאו, דאם יצאו אין לראובן עון אשר חטא, דלא חשיבא בלעה אשת יעקב, ואם לא יצאו מכלל בני נח יש על ראובן חטא גדול, ומשום הכי אמר ליה איני מרחקך ואיני מקרבך וכו', ועיי"ש שהאריה.

**Jacob was unsure whether the patriarchs were considered outside the category of the descendants of Noah and thus had the full status of Jews, or whether they remained within that category. For if they were considered outside, Reuben would not have committed a sin for what he did, since Bilhah was not considered the wife of Jacob in this case.**

**But if they had not exited the category of the descendants of Noah, then Reuben committed a great sin, for non-Jews would legally recognize a state of marriage had existed by virtue of there having been intercourse between Jacob and Bilhah. That is why [Jacob] said to [Reuben]: I am not distancing you and I am not bringing you near, etc.**

**See there in *Perashat Derachim*, and he continues at length.**

<sup>13</sup> Ex. 19:3.

<sup>14</sup> Yevamot 97a.

<sup>15</sup> Sanhedrin 57b.

ובזה נבא לביאור דברי רש"י הנ"ל, שמה שהקב"ה אינו רואה ברע שעתידין לעשות אלא דוקא בטוב שעתידין לעשות. והו דוקא בישראל אבל לא במי שאינו ישראל דהיינו בן נח. וידוע שירבעם מתחלה היה חכם וצדיק גדול כדאמרנו בפירק חלק, "ושניהם לבדם בפעולה" שכל תלמידי חכמים דומין לפנייהם כעשבי השדה ואיפא דאמרי שכל טעמי התורה מגולין להם בפעולה, ואחר כך חטא. וכן יהוא מתחלה הרג כל עובדי הבעל ואחר כך חטא, ולפי דעת יעקב שלא היה יודע בבירור אלא היה מסתפק אם יצאו מכלל בני נח או לאו, אם כן מן הספק אינם ראויים לברכה לפי שעתידין ירבעם ויהוא לצאת מהם שסופם לחטוא.

**In this way, we will come to an interpretation of the words of Rashi above, that the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not see the evil that one is destined to do, but specifically only the good that one is destined to do. This is specifically true for Israel, but not for one who is not Israel, i.e., a descendant of Noach.**

**It is known that Jeroboam was initially a Torah scholar and a great righteous man, as it is said in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of tractate Sanhedrin entitled "All Israel has a portion in the World-to-Come," discussing the verse, "During that time, Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem and the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh met him on the way; he had put on a new robe; and the two were alone in the field."<sup>16</sup> The Gemara relates:**

Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: **All Torah scholars seemed, to them, like grass of the field** [as they were wiser than all of them]. **And there are those who say: That all the rationales of the Torah were revealed to them like a field** that is open for all to see.

- Sanhedrin 102a

**But afterward he sinned. Similarly Jehu, initially he killed all the worshippers of Ba'al,<sup>17</sup> but afterward he sinned.<sup>18</sup> According to the thinking of Jacob, that he didn't know clearly, but rather had a doubt as to whether they had left the category of descendants of Noah or not, if so, because of this doubt, [Ephraim and Manasseh] were not worthy of a blessing, because Jeroboam and Yehu were destined to descend from them, and their end was to sin.**

אבל אי אמרינו דנדאי יצאו מכלל בני נח אם כן הם ישראלים גמורים ובישראל פתיב "וירא-און ולא יתבונן", ומנשה ואפרים ראויים הם לברכה לפי שהם צדיקים ולא איכפת אם עתידים לצאת מהם ירבעם ויהוא. ומכל שכן שגם הם מתחלתם היו צדיקים וראויים לברכה. ולכן יוסף הראה לו לאביו שטר אירוסין [ו] כתובה, שנה אינו נוהג אלא בישראל שהרי כבן נח הפל תלוי בבבילית בעל, פלומר אני סבירא לי בנדאי שיצאנו מכלל בני נח ואם כן ראויים הם לברכה, וזהו, "אשר-נתן-לי אלהים בזה" וכו', ולפי דעת זה שררה עליו השכינה והתחיל לברכם.

**But if you say that they certainly exited from the category of the offspring of Noah, if so, they were completely Jews, and for Israel it is written, "When He sees iniquity, does He not discern it?" Manasseh and Ephraim were worthy of a blessing, because they were righteous, and it did not matter if Jeroboam and Jehu were destined to descend from them.**

<sup>16</sup> I Kings 11:30.

<sup>17</sup> II Kings 10:20–25.

<sup>18</sup> II Kings 10:29.

Certainly, even [Jeroboam and Jehu] were originally righteous and worthy of a blessing. Therefore, Joseph showed his father the contract of betrothal and marriage, which is a custom only among Israel. As for the descendants of Noah, everything depends on marital relations. This is as if to say, I hold in accordance with the opinion that they certainly left the category of the descendants of Noah, and if so, they are worthy of a blessing, and this is the meaning of, “whom G-d has given me here.” According to this thinking, the Shechinah rested upon him, and he began to bless them.

\* \* \*