

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XX: Tetzaveh (Ex. 27:20–30:10)

Essay 4. The 11th and 12th stones of the *choshen*

בְּתָרָא פָּרַק ה' "וְשִׁמְתִי כְּכֹדֶד שְׁמֹשֶׁתֶיךָ" סָד אָמַר דְּשׁוֹהֵם וְסָד אָמַר דְּיָשֶׁפֶה, אָמַר הַקַּב"ה לְהִגִּי כְּדִין וְכְדִין עַב"ל.

Bava Batra, chapter 5:

“I will make your battlements of *kadkod* [כְּכֹדֶד], your gates of precious stones, the whole encircling wall of gems” (Isaiah 54:12). Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said: Two angels in heaven, Gabriel and Michael, disagree [with regard to the identity of *kadkod*, that will be used to form the walls of Jerusalem]. And some say [that this dispute is between] two *amora'im* in the West [i.e., the Land of Israel]. And who are they? Yehuda and Chizkiya, the sons of Rabbi Chiya. **One said** [that *kadkod* is] **onyx** [*shoham*] [שׁוֹהֵם], **and one said jasper** [*yashpeh*] [יָשֶׁפֶה]. **The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to them: Let it be like this** [כְּדִין] [*kedein*] **and like that** [וְכְדִין] [*uchedein*] [i.e., let them be formed from both together, as the word *kadkod* is a combination of this this, *kedein*, and that, *ukhedein*].

- Bava Batra 75a

צָרִיד עֵינֵינוּ לִמָּה דְּנִקְא יְהִי חוֹמוֹת מְאֵלוּ הַשְּׁמֵי אֲבָנִים שׁוֹהֵם וְיָשֶׁפֶה. וְנִשְׁ לִזְמַר שְׁבָאֵלוּ הָאֲבָנִים הֵיךְ כְּתוּב בָּהֶם בְּאֲבָנֵי הַחֹשֶׁן שְׁמוֹת יוֹסֵף וּבְנֵימִין.

We need to investigate exactly why the walls will be made of these two stones, onyx and jasper.¹ It can be said that in these stones the names of Joseph and Benjamin were written in the stones of the *choshen*. The *choshen* is described in Ex. 28:15–21, including the text: “. . . and the fourth row: a *tarshish*, a *shoham*, and a *yashpeh*. They shall be framed with gold in their mountings. The stones shall correspond to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, corresponding to their names. They shall be engraved like seals, each with its name, for the twelve tribes.” Thus, the *shoham* and *yashpeh* were the 11th and 12th stones of the *choshen*, corresponding to the birth order of Joseph and Benjamin.

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¹ While we translate *shoham* as onyx and *yashpeh* as jasper, there are many other opinions.

וכתוב בספר שלטי הגבורים שהשוהם יועיל לזכירה ולעינים, והוא טוב להעשיר, והוא מלמד לשון האדם להליץ ולדבר בקבמה להבין החידות הנעלמות, וכמעט גביא את האדם לידי נבואה. וניתנה אכן זו ליוסף מפני שהיה לו עינים טובים "בן פרת יוסף בן פרת עלי-עין", והיה לו זכירה כדכתיב "ויזכר יוסף" וכו', ומפני שהיה חכם בעל הלצה בפתרון החלום, ונצנצה בו רוח הקודש כדכתיב "אשרי הודיע אלהים" וכו', והיה איש מצליח עכ"ל. ולכן כדי לרמוז שלעתיד לבא ומלאה הארץ דיעה את ה' והצלחה רבה וזכירה טובה, יהיו החומות משהם.

It is written in the book Shiltei haGiborim that:²

The onyx helps the recollection and the eyes, and is good for enrichment, and it teaches the human tongue to express itself and speak wisely to understand the hidden riddles, and it will almost bring a man to the hands of prophecy.

This stone was given to Joseph: because he had good eyes [as it says], “Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine by a fountain” (Gen. 29:22); and [because] he had a good memory, as it is written “Joseph remembered [the dreams that he had dreamed about them]” (Gen. 42:9); and because he was wise, a master of rhetoric in solving the dream; and because the spirit of prophecy was kindled within him, as it is written, “[So Pharaoh said to Joseph] ‘Since G-d has informed [you of all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you]” (Gen. 41:39); and [because] he was a successful man.

Therefore, in order to hint that in the future, the land will be filled with knowledge of G-d, and great success, and good recollection, the walls will be made of onyx.

ומאן דאמר ישפה היינו מה שכתב הרב הנ"ל שיהישפה סגולתו לשמור האדם שלא יתנו לו הסמים הממיתים וכו'. וניתן לבגנמין לזכור לו זכות אמו שילדה אותו חי והיא הלכה לעולמה בעת לדתה, ולא הזיקה ולא המיתה אותו עמה.

And according to the one who says the walls will be made of jasper, we have what the aforementioned rabbi wrote that jasper has the virtue of keeping the person from being given a poison that can kill, etc. Benjamin can remember for himself the merit of his mother, who gave birth to him alive, and then she went to her World-to-Come at the time of giving birth, and she didn't injure or kill him with her. I.e., he survived the difficult childbirth, while his mother did not, and in honor of her sacrifice, his descendants merited to be represented by jasper, with its protective qualities.

² Abraham ben David Portaleone (1542-1612), Italian-Jewish physician. Author of Shiltei haGiborim (Mantua 1607), which related arts and sciences to the Temple.

ועוד דאיתא בילקוט על פסוק "ובין כתיפיו שכן", שהבית המקדש נבנה בחלק של בנימין לפי שכל השבטים היו במכירתו של יוסף חוץ מבנימין. ואם יבנו הם הבית המקדש וילכו להתפלל שם שיירחם הקב"ה עליהם, לא היו נענים, כמו שהם לא רצו לרחם על יוסף אחיהם. וזהו שאבנו של בנימין היה ישפה דמשמע "יש פה", לפי שבנימין דוקא יש לו פה להתפלל להקב"ה שיירחם על ישראל, מה שאין כן שאר השבטים.

Further, it is brought in the Yalkut Shimoni (parshat Vezot haBracha, remez 947) on the verse, “Of Benjamin he said: Beloved of the L-rd, he rests securely beside Him; ever does He protect him, as he rests between His shoulders” (Deut. 33:12), that the Temple was built in the portion of Benjamin because all of the tribes, i.e., the brothers, were involved in the sale of Joseph, except for Benjamin. If they would build the Temple and go to pray there that the Holy One, Blessed be He, should have mercy on them, they wouldn’t be answered, just as they didn’t want to have mercy on their brother, Joseph. This is [why] the stone of Benjamin was the jasper [yashpeh] [ישפה], which sounds like “yesh peh” [“there is a mouth”] [יש פה], because Benjamin precisely has a mouth with which to pray to the Holy One, Blessed be He, that he should have mercy on Israel—something that isn’t true with the other tribes.

והקב"ה אמר להגי כדיו וכדיו, שהרי שניהם בני רחל, ורחל היא הממאנת להתנחם, והפתוב אומר "עניה סערה לא נחמה" וכו' "ושמתי כדכד" וכו' כנגד שני בניד.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said, let it be like this and like that, for both of them are sons of Rachel, and Rachel is the woman who refused to be comforted.³ The Scripture says, “Unhappy, storm-tossed one, uncomforted!, I will lay carbuncles as your building stones, and make your foundations of sapphires. I will make your battlements of *kadkod*, your gates of precious stones, the whole encircling wall of gems” (Isaiah 54:11–12), and the *kadkod* corresponds to your two sons.

והטעם שקרא לחומות ירושלים "שמשתיה" מפני שקמו שהשמש הכל הולכין לאורו, כך ילכו גויים לאור של חומותיה שיהיו כמו שמש.

The reason that he called the walls of Jerusalem “your battlements” [*shimshotaich*] [שמשתיה] is because as with the sun [*shemesh*] [שמש], all go toward its light, similarly the nations will go toward the light of your walls, which will be like the sun.⁴

³ Gen. 37:35, “All his sons and daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted . . .”

⁴ The word *shimshotaich*, which we have translated as battlements, may be a notched area at the top of a defensive wall, through which defenders can position themselves to fight off attacking forces. As the rising sun can first appear through these notches, the word is derived from the word for sun, *shemesh*.

בְּדִאֲמַרְיֵנוּ הֵתֵם עֲתִיד הַקָּב"ה לַעֲשׂוֹת סוּפָה לְצַדִּיקִים מֵעוֹרוֹ שֶׁל לְוִיָּתָן, זָכָה עוֹשִׂים לוֹ סוּפָה, לֹא זָכָה עוֹשִׂים לוֹ צְלָצֵל, לֹא זָכָה עוֹשִׂים לוֹ עֵנָק, לֹא זָכָה עוֹשִׂים לוֹ קִמִּיעַ, וְהַשָּׂאָר פּוֹרְסוֹ עַל חוֹמוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם וְזִיווּ הוֹלְךָ מִסּוּף הָעוֹלָם וְעַד סוּפוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְהִלְכוּ גוֹיִם לְאוֹרְךָ וּמְלָכִים" וְכו'.

As it says there in Bava Batra 75a:

And Rabba says that Rabbi Yochanan says: [In the] **future, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will prepare a *sukkah* for the righteous from the skin of the leviathan**, as it is stated: “Can you fill his skin with barbed irons [*besukkot*]” (Job 40:31). [If one] **is deserving** [of being called righteous, an entire] ***sukkah* is prepared for him** [from the skin of the leviathan]; [if one is] **not deserving, a covering is prepared for his** [head], **as it is stated: “Or his head with fish-spears”** (Job 40:31).

[If one is] **deserving** [at least of this reward], a covering is prepared for him, [and if one is] **not deserving, a necklace is prepared for him**, as it is stated: “And necklaces about your neck” (Prov. 1:9). [If one is **somewhat** **deserving, a necklace is prepared for him**, [and if one is] **not deserving** [even of this, only] **an amulet is prepared for him** [from the skin of the leviathan], as it is stated: “Or will you bind him for your maidens” (Job 40:29).

And [with regard to] **the remaining** [part of the skin of the leviathan], **the Holy One, Blessed be He, spreads it on the walls of Jerusalem, and its glory radiates from one end of the world until the** [other] **end. As it is stated: “And nations shall walk in your light, and kings at the brightness of your rising”** (Isaiah 60:3).

- Bava Batra 75a

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