

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXVI: Shemini (Lev. 9:1–11:47)

Essay 8. Disgusting creatures, circumcision, and the Sabbath

פסוק "כִּי אֲנִי ה' הַמַּעֲלֶה אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם" וְסָמִיד לֵיהּ "אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ" וְכו' "וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִמּוּל" וְכו', וְדָרְשׁוּ רַז"ל "בַּיּוֹם", אֶפִּילוֹ בְּשַׁבָּת. הַקָּשׁוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים לָמָּה כָּתוּב כָּאן מִצְוֹת מִלָּה. "וּבַיּוֹם", אֶפִּילוֹ בְּשַׁבָּת גַּם כֵּן קָשָׁה מְדוּעַ כָּתוּב כָּאן שְׂרִייתָא דְּשַׁבָּת וְהִנֵּה לוֹ לְכוּתְבוֹ לַעֲלִיל בְּפִרְשֵׁת מִלָּה.

There are **verses** at the end of our parasha:

For I am the L-rd, your G-d: you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy; you shall not make yourselves impure through any swarming thing that moves upon the earth. **For I am the L-rd, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt**, to be your G-d: you shall be holy, for I am holy. These are the instructions concerning animals, birds, all living creatures that move in water, and all creatures that swarm on earth, for distinguishing between the impure and the pure, between the living things that may be eaten and the living things that may not be eaten.

- Lev. 11:44–47

Adjacent to this, at the beginning of the next parasha, Tazria, we read: “Speak to the Israelite people thus: **When a woman at childbirth** bears a male, she shall be impure seven days; she shall be impure as at the time of her condition of menstrual separation. **On the eighth day** the flesh of his foreskin **shall be circumcised.**”¹

The rabbis, of blessed memory, interpreted: “**On the . . . day**” as meaning, “**even on the Sabbath.**”²

The commentators questioned: **Why is the commandment of circumcision written here? The interpretation of “on the . . . day” as meaning, “even on the Sabbath” is similarly difficult. Why was the permission of acting on the Sabbath written here, as it could have been written above, in the section on circumcision?**

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¹ Lev. 12:2–3.

² Shabbat 132a.

וניש לתרץ סמיכות הפרשיות, במה שאמר הכתוב "ואנכי נטעתיך שורק כלה זרע אמת", וקשה מהו זה הכינוי של "זרע אמת"? "זרע קדוש" או "זרע טהור" היה לו לומר, ומהו "זרע אמת"? ומהו "כלה", וכי סלקא דעתא שלא יהיה אלא מקצתו.

One can solve the juxtaposition of the sections with that which the verse said: "I planted you with noble vines, entirely a true seed."³ A difficulty is what is the meaning of the term of "a true seed"? "A holy seed" or "a pure seed" should have been said, but what is this "a true seed"?

Also, what is the meaning of "entirely"? Would you think that it would be only partially so?

וניש לומר שכתב העיון יעקב במציעא פרק [ה'] (נ"א) שטעם איסור השקצים והרמשים הוא כדי להיות היכר והבדלה בין ישראל לעמים. וקשה זה מנא ליה שהשקצים והרמשים דוקא יעשו היכר והבדלה, והלא כל המצוות הם הבדל בינינו לבינם. וניש לומר שההבדל שעושים השקצים והרמשים הוא ענגן פרטי מה שאין כן בשאר המצוות.

It can be said what the *Iyun Yaakov*⁴ wrote on chapter [5] of tractate Bava Metzia (page 61b), that the reason for the prohibition of disgusting creatures and creeping animals is to be a sign and distinction between Israel and the nations.

This is difficult: from where did he learn that disgusting creatures and creeping animals specifically create a sign and distinction? Aren't all the mitzvot distinctions between us and them? One could say that the distinction created by the prohibition of disgusting creatures and creeping animals is a specific matter, unlike that of the other commandments.

משום דאמרינן בפרק ט' דשבת הפולטת שבת זרע ביום השלישי טמאה, ופרש רש"י טמאה דיום השלישי אפתי לא מסרחה שבת זרע וראויה לקלוט ולהיות נלד נוצר ממנה וקרינן שבת זרע הראויה להזריע עכ"ל. ועוד איתא התם בעי רב פפא שבת זרע של ישראל במעי נכרית מהו, ישראל דדאיגי במצות, חביל גופייהו, גזים דלא דאיגי במצות, לא. או דילמא כיון דאכיל שקצים ורמשים חביל גופייהו ע"כ.

Because it is stated in chapter 9 of Shabbat, "[a woman who] discharges semen [even] on the third day [after relations] is ritually impure,"⁵ and Rashi explains: "Impure, that on the third day, the semen has not yet decayed and is still fit for fertilization and for producing a child from it, and it is called semen capable of insemination."⁶

³ Jer. 2:21.

⁴ Jacob ben Joseph Reischer (Bechofen) (1661–1733), Austrian rabbi. His sefer, *Iyyun Ya'akov* (Wilmersdorf, 1729) is a commentary on the Ein Ya'akov.

⁵ Mishnah Shabbat 9:3; Shabbat 86a.

⁶ Rashi on Shabbat 86a.

It is also brought there:

Rav Pappa raised a dilemma: What is [the halacha with regard to] semen of a Jew in the womb of a gentile woman? [Do we say that since] Jews are concerned about [fulfilling] mitzvot, their body [temperature] is hot [and semen that is not absorbed decays faster, versus gentiles who are not concerned about [fulfilling] mitzvot [for whom that is] not so? Or, perhaps, since [gentiles] eat detestable creatures and creeping animals their body [temperature] is [also] hot?

- Shabbat 86b

נמצאנו למדים שישראל ונכרים הם שונים בענין זה דחביל גופייהו, אלא שבישראל הוא מחמת ששומרים התורה, ובאומות מחמת אכילת השקצים. וזהו הפרש גדול בין ישראל לאומות, שהנכרים אם לא יאכלו שקצים לא חביל גופייהו, ואף אם יאכלום אינו בודאי שחביל גופייהו, דהא סלקא בתיקו. אמנם ישראל כלם שונים, שבודאי חביל גופייהו מחמת התורה והמצות. אבל אם גם ישראל יאכלו השקצים אף שחביל גופייהו לא יהיה ההבדל וההפרש, שהרי יאמרו דחביל גופייהו מחמת השקצים.

It's found that we have learned that Israelites and gentiles are equal in this regard, that their bodies may be considered heated. However, for Israelites, this is due to them observing the Torah, and for the nations, it is due to the eating of unclean creatures.

This is a great difference between Israel and the nations: for non-Jews, if they do not eat creepy creatures, their bodies are not heated; and even if they do eat them, it is not certain that their bodies will be heated, since the matter remains unresolved. But for Israel, all are equal: their bodies are certainly heated due to the Torah and the commandments. However, if Israelites also eat unclean creatures, then even though their bodies are heated, there wouldn't be a distinction and difference [from the nations], for they would say that their bodies are heated due to the unclean food.

ושפיר קאמר העיון יעקב שאיסור השקצים והרמשים הוא כדי להיות היכר והבדלה בין ישראל לעמים, ומשום הכי סמך הכתוב פרשת "אשה כי תזריע" לאיסור השקצים. וזהו נמי הטעם שנקראו דוקא "זרע אמת", וכתוב, "כלה זרע אמת", לפי שכל ההפרש בא מחמת שכל ישראל דאיגי במצות, דהיינו מחמת התורה שהיא אמת.

It's fine that the *Iyun Yaakov* said that the prohibition of disgusting creatures and creeping animals is in order to be a sign and distinction between Israel and the nations. For this reason, the Torah juxtaposed the section "when a woman at childbirth" with the prohibition of disgusting creatures. This is also the reason that they are specifically called "a true seed", and it is written, "entirely a true seed," because the entire distinction comes because all of Israel are involved in the commandments, that is, because of the Torah, which is truth.

עוד כתב הרב שם שלעתידי לבוא יהיו השקצים מותרים, והיינו לפי שבעולם הזה ישראל הם תחת ממשלת הקב"ה, והנכרים הם תחת ממשלת השרים של מעלה. וזהו, "המעלה אתכם מארץ מצרים" "והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים כי קדוש אני", אבל לעתיד שיתבטלו השרים ויהיו כלם "שפה אחת" לעבוד את ה' "והיה ה' למלך על-כל-הארץ" ויהיו כלם עבדי ה', אז יהיו השקצים מותרים לכל ע"כ.

The rabbi, i.e., the *Iyun Yaakov*, also wrote there that in the future to come, the disgusting creatures will be permitted. This is because, in this world, Israel is under the dominion of the Holy One, Blessed be He, but the nations are under the dominion of heavenly ministers. This is the meaning of the verses: “Who brought you up from the land of Egypt” and “you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy.” But in the future, when the heavenly ministers will be nullified, and all will be “of one language”⁷ to serve the L-rd, “and the L-rd shall be sovereign over all the earth,”⁸ and all will be servants of the L-rd, then the disgusting creatures will be permitted to all.

ומעתה ישראל נקראו "זרע אמת" לפי שהם מובדלים מן הגוים שהם זרע שקר, והבדל זה בא מאיסור אכילת השקצים, "כי אני ה' המעלה" וכו', ודווקא בעולם הזה נאסרו לפי שנקרא עולם השקר, בדאיתא בילקוט כשהעלה שאול את שמואל בבצלת אוב כד הניא גבד הניא קאים בעלמא דשקרא וכו' ברם השתא אנא קאים בעלמא דקושטא וכו'. ובעולם הזה נאסרו לפי שהאומות הם תחת השרים והיינו עלמא דשקרא, ומשום הכי צריך להבדיל בין ישראל לעמים, אבל לעולם הבא שיהיו כלם תחת ממשלת הקב"ה יהיו מותרים השקצים שאין צריך עוד שום הבדל. ולכן נקראו ישראל זרע אמת לפי שהם תחת ממשלת הקב"ה, דכתיב "וה' אלהים אמת", ולפי שישאלם הם זרע אמת לכך נקראו בשם יעקב שמדתו אמת, דכתיב "תתן אמת ליעקב" ולמה ליעקב ניתן לו האמת, לפי שמכר העולם הזה לעשו בשביל העולם הבא שהוא אמת, והעולם הזה הוא שקר.

Hence, Israel is called “a true seed,” because they are separated from the nations, who are called “a seed of falsehood,” and this distinction comes from the prohibition against eating disgusting creatures, “For I am the L-rd, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” It is specifically in this world that they are prohibited, for it is called the world of falsehood. This is as it is stated in the Yalkut Shimoni: “When Saul raised Samuel through the medium of the necromancer, [Samuel] said, ‘When I was with you, I was in the world of falsehood... but now I am in the world of truth.’”⁹

In this world, they were forbidden because the nations are under the dominion of the heavenly ministers, and this is the world of falsehood. Because of this, it is necessary to distinguish between Israel and the nations. But in the World-to-Come, when all will be under the rule of the Holy One, Blessed be He, the disgusting creatures will be permitted, since there will no longer be a need for distinction.

⁷ Gen. 11:1: “Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words.”

⁸ Zech. 14:9.

⁹ Yalkut Shimoni on Prophets 139:11.

Therefore, Israel is called “a true seed” because they are under the rule of the Holy One, Blessed be He, as it is written, “And the L-rd is a G-d of truth.”¹⁰ Since Israel is a true seed, therefore they are called by the name Jacob, whose character is truth, as it is written, “You will give truth to Jacob.”¹¹ Why was truth given to Jacob? Because he sold this world to Esau in exchange for the World-to-Come,¹² which is truth—while this world is falsehood.

ומטעם זה ניתן לשומרי שבת נחלת יעקב ונקא כדכתיב "אם-תשיב משבת" וכו' "אז תתענג עליה" . . . והאכלתיה נחלת יעקב אביה", לפי שמדת השבת הוא אמת כי כן חתם הפסוק "כי בו שבת מכל-מלאכתו אשר-בן-א אלהים לעשות", סופי תבות אמת, ועוד שהשבת הוא רמז ליום שכלו שבת שהוא אמת.

For this reason, the inheritance of Jacob is given specifically to Sabbath observers, as it is written: “If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath . . . then you can seek the L-rd’s favor . . . and you will enjoy the heritage of your father Jacob”¹³

That is because the character of the Sabbath is truth, as the verse concludes: “And G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because He rested on it from all His work created *ex nihilo* [ברא] [bara] by G-d [אלהים] [Elohim] for making [לעשות] [la’asot],”¹⁴ and the final letters of those last three words spell אמת [emet] [“truth”]. Also, the Sabbath is a hint of the day which will be entirely Sabbath, i.e., the World-to-Come, which is truth.

וזהו הטעם דאמרין בפרק ד' דמאי דאמת שבת על עמי הארצות, שמתיראים לעבור עבירה ולשקר בשבת יותר מבחול, ועיי"ש בפירוש הרע"ב, וקשה דהא עינינו הרואות שעושים כמה עבירות אחרות בשבת, ועוד כי אין עם הארץ חסיד. אלא לפי שמדתו של שבת הוא האמת כמו שאמרנו, משום הכי זכות השבת מגין עליהם שיזקרו בדבר זה ונקא שבו תלוי כל סוד השבת.

This is the reason we say in chapter 4 of Demai, Mishnah 1, that the fear of the Sabbath is upon the ignoramuses, for they are more afraid to transgress or to lie on the Sabbath than on weekdays. See there in the commentary of Rabbi Ovadiah ben Abraham of Bertinoro.

But it is difficult to understand this, for our own eyes see that they commit many other transgressions on the Sabbath. Furthermore, “an ignoramus is not a pious person.”¹⁵ Rather, since the attribute of the Sabbath is truth, as we said, therefore the merit of the Sabbath guards them so that they are careful specifically in this matter, in which the entire esoteric secret of the Sabbath depends.

¹⁰ Jer. 10:10.

¹¹ Micah 7:20.

¹² I.e., Esau sold his birthright, representing the Priesthood, Torah, and the World-to-Come, for a bowl of lentils, representing the physicality of this world.

¹³ Isaiah 58:13–14.

¹⁴ Gen. 2:3.

¹⁵ Pirkei Avot 2:5.

והנה יעקב נודע שהוא סוד נא"ו של השם, שארבע אותיותיו הם סוד ד' רגלי המרכבה, וכתב הילקוט ראובני (בפרשת תזריע) בשם ספר הפליאה וז"ל, "וביום השמיני ימול בשר ערלתו" מן אל"ף עד נא"ו עם הנא"ו עולה כ"א בשם אהי"ה, ואהי"ה פעמים אהי"ה גימטריא אמת, והיינו "תתן אמת ליעקב", ונפלאות השם הגדול. אמת בכוחותיו היינו אל"ף מ"ם תי"ו לקח אותיות ימ"ל נשקם שניות לאותיות הראשונות של "אמת", והאותיות הנשארות מן "אמת" ימ"ל הם פ"ו בגימטריא "מילה". וכל אותיות אמת עם המילוי הם שמונה וזהו "וביום השמיני ימול בשר ערלתו". וכיון שהמילה מפת אהי"ה המתגלגל אמת הוא יעקב, על כן המילה דווקא שבת. ויעקב נולד מהול שאין הערלה נוגעת שם עכ"ל.

Behold, it is known that Jacob is the esoteric secret of the letter vav in the Name of G-d,¹⁶ whose four letters are the esoteric secret of the four legs of the Chariot of Ezekiel.¹⁷ The Yalkut Reuveni, in parashat Tazria, writes in the name of Sefer HaPliah¹⁸ as follows:

“On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised [ימול] [yimol].” [Focusing on the vav of the word *yimol*, the Gematria value *mispar kidmi* is calculated by adding the values of the letters. Thus,] **from the alef to the vav total 21,¹⁹ as with the Name “I Will Be” [אהיה] [Ehyeh],²⁰ and 21 times 21 [the mispar ha’merubah ha’klali], is [441, which is the Gematria of] אמת [emet] [“truth”]. That is [the meaning of] “You will give truth to Jacob.” [I.e., Jacob is associated with vav, with a *mispar kidmi* of 21, the value of אהיה, which has a *mispar ha’merubah ha’klali* of 441, the value of אמת.] The wonders of the Great Name!**

“Truth” written fully, that is, [when the letters of the word אמת {emet} {“truth”} are spelled out] אל"ף [alef], מ"ם [mem], תי"ו [tav], **one can take the letters [for the word] ימ"ל [yimol] [“shall be circumcised”], which are second to the first letters, [viz,] אמת [emet] [“truth”]. The remaining letters [after taking] from [the spelled-out letters תי"ו מ"ם אל"ף {alef mem tav} the letters for the words] אמת [emet] and ימל [yimol] are פ"ו, which [has the value 86, which] is the Gematria for the word מילה [milah] [“circumcision”], [when spelled fully with a yod and when adding one for the word itself, i.e., the *mispar kolel*].**

All of the letters [of the word] אמת [emet] [“truth”] with the full [spelling of אל"ף מ"ם תי"ו] are eight [letters], and this is [an esoteric secret of the verse], “On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.” Since the circumcision is from the power of [the Divine Name] “I Will Be” [אהיה] [Ehyeh], which rolls into אמת [emet] [“truth”], which is Jacob. Therefore, circumcision overrides the Sabbath. Jacob was born circumcised, for the foreskin [representing falsehood] was not relevant there [for Jacob, who represents truth].

- Yalkut Reuveni, parashat Tazria

¹⁶ III Zohar 244b (Pinchas 609).

¹⁷ Ezek. 1:5–7: “In the center of it were also the figures of four creatures . . . the legs of each were [fused into] a single rigid leg, and the feet of each were like a single calf’s hoof.”

¹⁸ *Sefer haPliah* is a 14th or early 15th century composition on parshat Bereisheet in which the anonymous author collected interpretations of early Kabbalists.

¹⁹ I.e., the *mispar kidmi* of vav is calculated as follows: alef = 1, bet = 2, gimel = 3, dalet = 4, he = 5, vav = 6, the total of which is 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 = 21.

²⁰ Ex. 3:14: “I Will Be What I Will Be.”

ומכאן מוכח שסוד המילה וסוד יעקב וסוד אמת וסוד עולם הבא וסוד השבת הכל אחד, ואי אפשר לאמת וליעקב להיות רגע אחד עם הערלה לאחר יום השמיני דהיינו האמת במילואו שהם שמונה אותיות. ומשום הכי דוחה שבת, והוסמך זה לאיסור השקצים שגם הוא סוד העולם הבא כמו שאמרנו "כי אני ה' המעלה" וכו', והשקצים הם להיפר והבדל בין ישראל לאומות. והשבת הוא הבדל בין ישראל לעמים כההיא דאמרינו בפרק [ט"ז] דשבת תבלין יש לנו, ושבת שמה. כל המשמר את השבת, מועיל לו, ושאינו משמר את השבת, אין מועיל לו. והמילה היא ההבדל יותר נגלה מכלם כההיא דתא נהוי קלן לעמא סד. אנו דמהלינו לא מצינו מיהוי בנותיכו, ולפיכך הוסמכו אלו הפסוקים זה לזה.

From here, it is proven that the esoteric secret of circumcision, and the esoteric secret of Jacob, and the esoteric secret of truth, and the esoteric secret of the World-to-Come, and the esoteric secret of the Sabbath are all one. It is impossible for אמת [emet] ["truth"] and Jacob to coexist even one moment with the foreskin after the eighth day, which is אמת [emet] spelled in its fullness as above, which is eight letters. For this reason, circumcision overrides the Sabbath.

This is juxtaposed to the prohibition of disgusting creatures, which is also the esoteric secret of the World-to-Come, as we said: "For I am the L-rd, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt." The disgusting creatures are a sign and distinction between Israel and the nations.

The Sabbath is also a distinction between Israel and the nations, as it is said in chapter 16 of tractate Shabbat:

[The Roman] emperor said to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya: Why does the fragrance of a cooked Sabbath dish spread out? He said to him: **We have a certain spice called dill [shevet] [שֶׁבֶת],²¹ which we place in [the cooked dishes] and its fragrance spreads out.** [The emperor] said to him: Give us [some] of it. He said to him: **For anyone who observes the Sabbath, it is effective for him, but for one who does not observe the Sabbath, it is not effective for him.**

- Shabbat 119a

Circumcision is the most visible distinction of all, as it is said:

The emperor said to Rabbi Tanchum: Come, let us all be one people. [Rabbi Tanchum] said: Very well. **We, who are circumcised, cannot become [uncircumcised] as you [are]; you [all] circumcise [yourselves] and become like us.**

- Sanhedrin 39a

Therefore, these verses were placed adjacent to one another.

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²¹ Having the same consonants as the word שֶׁבֶת, Sabbath, though pronounced differently.