

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter LII: Vaveilech (Deut. 31:1–31:30)

Essay 7. The esoteric secret of the shofar

פְּסוּק "אֲשֶׁר־יָדְעוּ תְרוּעָה [ה' בְּאוֹר־פְּנֵיךָ יְהִלְכוּן]". קִשָּׁה מֵה קִשְׁר יֵשׁ לַתְּחִלַּת הַפְּסוּק עִם סוּפוֹ, וְלָמָּה דְּנִקָּא "יְהִלְכוּן" דְּמָה הִלִּיכָה שְׂיִיךָ פְּאֵן, וְלָמָּה דְּנִקָּא "בְּאוֹר־פְּנֵיךָ", וְעוֹד מֵהוּ "יִדְעִי" וְכִי אֹמְרוֹת הָעוֹלָם אֵינָם יִדְעִים לְהַרְיֵעַ.

There is a verse: **“Happy is the people who know the *teruah* [shofar blast]; O L-rd, they go in the light of Your countenance”** (Ps. 89:16). **A difficulty is:** (1) **What is the connection between the beginning of the verse and its end? Also:** (2) **Why specifically does it say, “they go,” for how is “going” relevant here? Also:** (3) **Why specifically does it say, “in the light of Your countenance”?** **Also:** (4) **Why does it say, “who know,” for don’t the nations of the world know how to make the *teruah* [shofar blast]?¹**

To answer these questions, Zera Shimshon first analyzes two other verses:

וְנִקְדִּים לְפָרֵשׁ פְּסוּק אַחַר "אֱלֹהִים יִחַנְנוּ וַיְבָרְכֵנוּ יְאָר [פְּנֵיו אֲתַנּוּ סְלָה]" דְּמָהוּ "סְלָה", דְּהָא "יִחַנְנוּ וַיְבָרְכֵנוּ" הֵם דְּנִקָּא בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, דְּבְעוֹלָם הַבָּא לֹא שְׂיִיכֵי אֱלוֹ הַלְשׁוֹנוֹת. וְ"סְלָה" מְשַׁמְעַ עַד בְּלֵי סוּף. וְאִם נֶאֱמַר לְפָסוּק הַעֲנִינוּ דְ"יִחַנְנוּ וַיְבָרְכֵנוּ" הוּא בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, וְעוֹד "יְאָר פְּנֵיו אֲתַנּוּ" לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, גַּם זֶה הַלְשׁוֹן לֹא שְׂיִיךָ כִּלְ כֶּד לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא דְּנִקָּא. וְעוֹד קָרָא כְּתִיב "יְאָר ה' פְּנֵיו אֱלֹהֵיךָ" וְאִחַר כֶּד "וַיִּחַנְנֶךָ" דְּמְשַׁמְעַ הַפֶּל בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה. וְעוֹד מֵאֵי שְׂנָא דְּהִכָּא קָאֵמַר מִתְחִלָּה "יִחַנְנוּ" וְאַחַר כֶּד "יְאָר" וּבְפָסוּק שֶׁל בְּרַפְת פְּהִגִּים הַקָּדִים "יְאָר" לְ"וַיִּחַנְנֶךָ"?

We will advance another verse, “May G-d be gracious to us and bless us; may He cause His countenance to shine with us, *selah*” (Ps. 67:2). **What is the meaning of this “*selah*,”** which usually means forever? **For this language, “be gracious to us and bless us” specifically means in this world, for this language is not relevant to the World to Come. The meaning of “*selah*” is “without limit.” If it’s said regarding the verse, that “be gracious to us and bless us” is in this world, and also that “may He cause His countenance to shine with us” is in the World to Come, then this language is not so relevant specifically to the World to Come. Also, [the**

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¹ The rabbis actually debate the proper way to blow a shofar, and our practice is to blow a variety of different sounds. These are called: “*tekiah*,” a single long blast of the shofar; “*shevarim*,” three connected short sounds; and “*teruah*,” many very short blasts. These sounds are blown in various combinations. The blowing of the shofar is a principal part of the Rosh Hashana service.

Priestly Blessing] is written in Scripture,² “The L-rd cause His countenance shine upon you,” and afterward it says, “and be gracious to you,” (Num. 6:25), for which the meaning is that it’s all in this world. Also, what is different in that here, in Ps. 67:2, it says first “be gracious to us” and afterward “shine,” but in the verse of the priestly blessing (Num. 6:25), “shine” precedes “and be gracious to us”? That is, we said above for Ps. 67:2 that the language “May G-d be gracious to us and bless us” refers to this world, and we considered that perhaps the ending, “may He cause His countenance to shine with us” referred to the World to Come, though we weren’t sure of its relevance in the World to Come. Here in Num. 6:25, the term, “The L-rd cause His countenance shine upon you” comes before “and be gracious to you,” and we definitely wouldn’t say that the first half of Num. 6:25 refers to the World to Come and the second half of the verse refers to this world. So we understand, both for Ps. 67:2 and for Num. 6:25, that having G-d’s countenance shine upon us refers to this world.

וְיֵשׁ לֹמֵר שְׂדוּעַ שְׁעָקָר כְּנוֹנַת הַצְּדִיקִים בְּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם הַטּוֹבִים לְהַחְזִיר הַנִּיצוּצוֹת שֶׁל הַקְּדוּשָׁה שֶׁנִּפְלוּ בַּחֲטָא הַקְּדוּם בֵּין הַקְּלִיפוֹת, דְּהֵינּוּ לְהוֹצִיאֵם מִשָּׁם וְלִיתֵן לָהֶם כֹּחַ לְהַעֲלוֹתָם לְמַקּוֹרָם הָעֲלִיוֹן. אֲמַנָּם בַּעֲשֵׂיית הַמַּצְנָה כְּתִיקוּנָה בְּנִדְאֵי שְׂמוּצִיאִים אוֹתָם מִשָּׁם אֲבָל לִיתֵן לָהֶם כֹּחַ לְחַזֵּר לְמַקּוֹמָם זֶה אִי אֲפָשֶׁר לְאַדָּם לַעֲשׂוֹת אִם לֹא בְּסִיּוּעַ הַקַּב"ה. וְעַל זֶה אָמַר הַכָּתוּב "ה' יִגְמַר בְּעַדִּי" וְכוּ', מִפְּנֵי שְׂצָרִיד לְנִקּוּתָם וְלַחֲצֻצָתָם קוֹדֵם שֶׁיְהִי רְאוּיִים לַעֲלוֹת לְמַקּוֹם הַקְּדוּשָׁה שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה מְלוּבָּלְכוֹת כָּלֵל וְעָקָר, וְצָרִיד "צִירוֹף אֶסֶר צִירוֹף" וְלִיבּוֹן אֶסֶר לִיבּוֹן, וְנִהְיֶה סוּד וְנִקְהָה הָאֲמוֹר בִּי"ג מִדּוֹת.

It can be said that it is known that the chief intention of the righteous in their good deeds is to restore the sparks of holiness, which because of the original sin of Eve³ fell between the *klipot* [husks or shells of impurity]. That is, the intent is to remove [the sparks of holiness] from [the *klipot*] and to give them strength to raise them to their lofty source. Indeed, in performing a mitzvah correctly, it’s certain that it removes [the sparks] from [the *klipot*], but to give them strength to return to their [proper] place is impossible for man to do without the assistance of the Holy One, Blessed be He. About this, Scripture says, “the L-rd will complete it for me” (Ps. 138:8), because it’s necessary first to clean them and to polish them so that they will be fit to rise to the place of holiness, without being dirty at all with any impurity from the *klipot*. This requires “refinement and refinement”⁴ and bleaching after bleaching, that is beyond the ability of man without the assistance of G-d, and this is an esoteric secret of Kabbalah based upon the word “and cleansing” [וְנִקְהָה] [*ve’nakei*] that is spoken of in the 13 *middot*.⁵

² Num. 6:24–26, “The L-rd bless you and protect you! The L-rd cause His countenance to shine upon you and be gracious to you! The L-rd lift up His countenance to you and grant you peace!”

³ 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.

⁴ Ketubot 112b.

⁵ The 13 *middot* are Divine Attributes of G-d that are listed in Ex. 34:6–7, with the last one (according to most authorities) being *ve’nakei* [וְנִקְהָה] [and cleansing (of sin), i.e., pardoning]. The 13 *middot* are recited as part of the Rosh Hashana service. The term “סוּד וְנִקְהָה” (the esoteric secret of [the word] *ve’nakei*) appears in Rabbi Chaim Vital’s *Pri Etz Chaim*, Gate of the Silent Prayer 4:11. He notes that if the letters of G-d’s name אֱהִיָּה [“I will be”] are spelled out

ונדוע שאין השם שלם עד שיובררו כל הניצוצין שאז "בלע המנות לנצח", ובכל יום ויום ובכל מצוה ומצוה שעושים ישראל מתבררים מקצת מהם. והעולם הזה שהוא זמן ממשלת האומות נמשל לחשוך, והעולם הבא שהוא זמן הגאולה נמשל ליום לפי שהוא יום שפולו אורה. וכתוב בספר הבהיר ובריקנאטי שקשישראל עושים רצונו של מקום גורמים הברכה וכשהברכה מתפשט אז הנשמות מתגלות בעולם והוא טוב להצלת הנפשות ולקיבוץ הנדחים.

It is known that the Name of G-d will not be complete until all the sparks will be separated out from the *klipot*,⁶ for then “He will swallow up death forever” (Isaiah 25:8). With each and every day, and by each and every mitzvah that Israel performs, some of [the sparks] are separated out from the *klipot*. This world, which is the time of the government of nations, is likened to darkness, and the next world, which is the time of redemption, is likened to a day, which is entirely light. It is written in the Sefer Bahir⁷ and in the Recanati⁸ that when Israel does the will of the Omnipresent, it causes blessing to come to the world, and when the blessing spreads, then the souls in Gehenna are revealed in this world;⁹ and this is good for saving the souls and for gathering the expelled sparks.

ומעתה שפיר קאמר הכתוב "אלהים יתגנו ויברכנו". אז הקב"ה "יאזר פניו אתנו", דהיינו: תן לנו כח להחזיר הניצוצות למקומם, שהוא ענין השייך לעולם הבא להחיש גאולת הניצוצות. ודייק לומר "יאזר פניו" מפני שהוא קירוב היום שכלו אורה, וכשהחזרו הניצוצות למקומם יושבים שם תמיד נצח "סלה", על דרך "סיל בלע ניקאנו".

Now it makes sense that Scripture says, “May G-d be gracious to us and bless us” (Ps. 67:2). Then, the Holy One, Blessed be He, “will cause His countenance to shine with us,” which is that He will give us the strength to return the sparks to their place, which is a matter relevant to the World to Come, to hasten the redemption of the sparks. It’s accurate to say that “He will cause His countenance to shine,” because He brings near the day that will be entirely light. Also, when the sparks return to their place, they will remain there forever and ever—“*selah*,” i.e., without limit—in the way that it says, “The *chayil* [that the wicked man]

ונקה 13th *middah* [ve' *nakei*], viz, 161, and he states that this 13th *middah* incorporates the previous 12 *middot*.

⁶ Ex. 17:16, “And he said: ‘The hand upon the throne of the L-rd: the L-rd will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.’ ” The phrase “the throne of the L-rd” only uses כס [ceis] instead of כפס [cisei] for “the throne,” and also only uses the first half of the Tetragrammaton. Rashi writes, “The hand of the Holy One, blessed be He, is raised to swear by His throne that He will have war and enmity against Amalek to all eternity. And what is the force of כס — why does it not say as usual כפס? And the Divine Name, also, is divided into half! The Holy One, blessed be He, swears that His Name will not be perfect nor His throne perfect until the name of Amalek be entirely blotted out.”

⁷ Sefer Bahir [“Book of Illumination”] is an anonymously-written mystical work, distributed in manuscript form c. 1174. Sections 34 and 129 discuss Israel bringing blessing to the world by doing G-d’s will.

⁸ Rabbi Menahem ben Benjamin Recanati (1223–1290), Italian rabbi, Perush Al ha-Torah (Venice, 1523). Bereishit 227 discusses Israel bringing blessing to the world by doing G-d’s will.

⁹ If a soul never performed a mitzvah properly, the soul is committed to Gehenna. While Gehenna can purify sins, it cannot fill in what is lacking, and so *gilgul neshamot*, reincarnation of the soul in a new body, is required to fulfil the mitzvot that were not properly performed in previous incarnations. In addition to the *gilgul* providing the opportunity to perform these mitzvot, it can also provide a greater opportunity for purification from sin than was possible in Gehenna.

swallows, he vomits; G-d seizes it from his stomach” (Job. 20:15). The word *chayil* appears frequently in the Torah, typically meaning strength, might, or power. For this verse, Rashi interprets *chayil* to mean “wealth,” but a kabbalistic interpretation would be “power.” Thus, “The power [i.e., the sparks of holiness] that [the wicked one, i.e., the *klipah*] swallows, he vomits; G-d seizes it from his stomach.”¹⁰ This kabbalistic interpretation of Job 20:15 is the theme of this essay: The sparks of holiness are trapped within the *klippot*. Israel’s good deeds can begin their liberation, but G-d is necessary to cleanse them and restore them completely to their proper place.

וְהָכָא מִיָּרִי שְׂאִינָם צְדִיקִים גְּמוּרִים, כְּמוֹ שֶׁהִתְחִיל הַפְּסוּק "אֱלֹהִים" שֶׁהוּא לְשׁוֹן דִּין, וְאַף עַל פִּי כֵן "יִחְנְנֵנוּ" דֵּהֲיָנוּ יִתֵּן לָנוּ חֵן, כְּמוֹ שֶׁמְצַיְנוּ בְּגַם דְּכֵתִיב "וְגַם מִצָּא חֵן", וְאַמְרוּ בְּמִדְרָשׁ אַף גַּם לֹא הָיָה כְּדָא אֱלָא שֶׁ"מִצָּא חֵן", וְאַחַר שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ לָנוּ חֵן יִתֵּן לָנוּ הַבְּרָכָה כַּנ"ל.

Here, in Ps. 67:2, [Scripture] is saying that they are not completely righteous, as the verse begins by referring to “G-d” as אלהים [Elokim] which is the language of justice, and nevertheless, “may He be gracious to us,” which is may He give us grace, as we find with Noah, as it is written, “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the L-rd” (Gen. 6:8), and it says in Midrash Gen. Rabbah 29:1, “But Noah was not deserving, rather ‘he found favor in the eyes of the L-rd,’ ” and after He gave us grace, He gave us the blessing, as explained previously.

אָמְנָם בְּפִסּוּק שֶׁל בְּרַכַּת פְּהַנִּים שֶׁם כְּתִיב שֵׁם הַמְּיוּחָד וּמִיָּרִי שְׂרוּצָה לְהִיטִיב לָנוּ בְּמַדַּת הַחֶסֶד שֶׁהוּא מִדְּתוֹ שֶׁל פֶּהוּן הַמְּבָרָךְ. וּבְזָכוֹת אוֹתָהּ הַבְּרָכָה שֶׁהָיוּ אוֹמְרִים אוֹתָהּ בְּשֵׁם הַמְּפֹרָשׁ מִמִּילָא הָיָה מִתְּבָרָךְ הָעוֹלָם. וּמִתְעַלִּים הַרְבֵּה נִיצוּצוֹת מִחֵמַת בְּרָכָה זוֹ, שֶׁהָרִי שֵׁם הָיְתָה הַשְּׂרָאָת הַשְּׂכִינָה.

Indeed, in the verse[s] of the priestly blessing (Num. 6:24–26), there is written not the name *Elokim*, symbolizing judgment, but the specific name, i.e., the Tetragrammaton, representing mercy. [The verse] is saying that it wants to improve our lot through the attribute of kindness, which is the same attribute of the priest who is reciting the blessing. In the merit of this priestly blessing, which is said with the explicit name, i.e., the Tetragrammaton, by itself the world was blessed. Also, many sparks would rise because of this blessing, for there was the inspiration of the Shechinah.

¹⁰ Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai (“the Chida”) (1724–1806), writes in *Chomat Anakh* (Pisa 1803) on the first three words of Job 20:15, "חֵן לְעַלְמֵנוּ": “The rabbi, the Ari of blessed memory, explains that the first letters of the three words spell out the Holy Name, which raises the holy sparks and oppressed souls within the side of impurity. And see in the siddur of the Ari of blessed memory, at the blessing for the blowing of the shofar.” This name of G-d, חֵן, is one of the 72 [three-lettered] Names of G-d known to kabbalists, derived from Ex. 14:19-21. While Zera Shimshon predates the publication of *Chomat Anakh*, Rabbi Nachmani was undoubtedly familiar with the same source[s], and included this verse from Job in this essay, as the Arizal’s interpretation of the verse parallels the theme of the essay, viz, raising the holy sparks from the *klipot*, and the oppressed souls from Gehenna.

[As to the meaning of חֵן, the 1610 Prague edition of *Sefer Kinah Chochmah Kinah Binah* says that it stands for חֵסֶד בְּרוּךְ וּמְבֹרָךְ (“Pious, the source of blessings, and He will be blessed”), but the 1730 Wilhermsdorf edition has changed this to חֵן חַיִּי בְּרַחֲמִים וְאֶחֱיָהּ (“I live in mercy, and I will be”). The Chida gives the second version in his posthumously published *sefer*, *Shomer Yisrael* (Jerusalem 1841) 3:69.]

ומשום הכי מתחיל "בְּרַכָּה" וכו' דהיינו שמתבא הברכה, ואף אם לא יהיו צדיקים גמורים כמו שפייס "וישמרה" מן המזיקים, שאם תאמר שהיו צדיקים, אין צורך לשמירה פרטית, שהרי כל העוסק בתורה מזיקין גדלין ממנו. ועוד שפייס "ישא . . . פניו" וכו' ואמר "ל ולא אשא פנים וכו' שדקדקו עד כזות דשמע מינה שהיה מקום למדת הדין לחלק. וכשיש הברכה ועילוי הניצוצות בא הארת פנים, אלא שבכאן פתיב "אליד" מפני שנעשה שלא על ידינו ובפסוק "אלהים יתנו" פתיב "יאר פניו אתנו" דהיינו על ג' צירוף מעשינו.

Because of this, [the priestly blessing] begins “May He bless you,” which is that the blessing should come. This is so even if [those being blessed] are not completely righteous, as indicated by the fact that [the first blessing] concludes “and protect you,” for the damaging forces stay away from one who engages in Torah. Also, [the priestly blessing] concludes, “The L-rd lift up His countenance upon you and grant you peace,” and [the rabbis] of blessed memory said:

[G-d said], **“How can I not lift My Countenance** to Israel, as I wrote for them in the Torah: ‘And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless the L-rd your G-d’ (Deut. 8:10), [meaning that there is no obligation to bless the L-rd until one is satiated]; **yet they are exacting with themselves** [to recite Grace after Meals even if they have eaten] **as much as an olive-bulk** or an egg-bulk. [Since they go beyond the requirements of the law, they are worthy of favor.]

- Berachot 20b

We hear from this that there is room for the attribute of justice to argue, i.e., there is room for leniency. **When there is a blessing spreading in the world and the rising of the sparks, a shining countenance comes, except that here [in the priestly blessing] it is written, “The L-rd cause His countenance to shine upon you and be gracious to you! The L-rd lift up His countenance to you and grant you peace!” because [the lifting of G-d’s countenance to shine upon us] is not done by us.** That is, with regard to the priestly blessing, it is solely a gift from G-d, whether deserved or not. **But in the verse, “May He be gracious to us and bless us” (Ps. 67:2), it is written, “may He cause His countenance to shine with us,”** and it says “with us,” rather than “upon us” or “to us,” because **it is in combination with our own good deeds** and performance of mitzvot.

ומעתה נבא לביאור הפסוק "אשרי העם" וכו' שידוע שכל סוד השופר הוא לקבץ הנדחים וכדכתיב "ביום ההוא יתקע בשופר גדול ובאו האבדים" וכו' ואשרי מי שידע לכונן הפנונות הראויות לזה. ולכן אמר "יודעי תרועה" יודעי סוד התרועה שגורמים העלאת הניצוצות ואחר כך בסייע העליון הולכים וחוזרים לאיתנם הראשון. ועיין עוד לקמן בפסוק.

Now we come to an explanation of the initial verse that we discussed, “Happy is the people who know the *teruah* [shofar blast]; O L-rd, they go in the light of Your countenance” (Ps. 89:16). It is known that every esoteric secret of the shofar is to gather the expelled sparks of holiness, and as it is written, “And in that day, a great ram’s horn shall be sounded; and they will come—those lost in the land of Assyria and those expelled in the land of Egypt—and worship the L-rd on the holy mount, in Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 27:14). Happy is he who knows how to direct

the proper intentions to this purpose. Therefore, [Scripture] said, “who know the *teruah* [shofar blast],” who know the esoteric secret of the *teruah* [shofar blast], that causes the rising of the sparks, and afterwards, with Supernal assistance, they go and return to their initial place. And see further below in the next essay.

Thus, we asked, 1) What is the connection between the beginning of the verse and its end? We understand now that the esoteric secret of the shofar blast assists the sparks of holiness to escape from the *klipot* with the assistance of Jews performing mitzvot. G-d shining his countenance upon Israel signifies that G-d is providing assistance in this matter, as He will clean and polish the sparks to ensure that they have no remnants of dirt from the *klipot*.

2) Why does it say, “they go,” for how is “going” relevant here? We understand now that once freed from the *klipot*, the sparks receive assistance from G-d and are able to go to return to their original and proper place.

3) Why does it say, “in the light of Your countenance”? The light represents the World to Come, and the gathering of the sparks of holiness is essential in order for G-d’s Name to be complete, and to allow us to properly experience the World to Come.

4) Why does it say, “who know,” for don’t the nations of the world know how to make the *teruah* sound? We understand that we are not talking of the physical act of blowing the shofar, but the esoteric secrets associated with the mitzvah, and the proper intentions of the associated prayers.

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