

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter LVII: Kinnot (Lamentations)

Essay 9: Why Nebuchadnezzar was called “a lion.”

**מִדְרָשׁ** פְּרִשְׁת יִתְרוֹ, דְּבַר אַחַר אַרְיֵה שָׂאֵג מִי לֹא יִירָא, בְּאֵר וְרָאָה, בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ נִקְרָא אַרְיֵה, שְׂנֵאָמַר הוּא אַרְיֵאל אַרְיֵאל. וּמַלְכוּת בֵּית דָּוִד נִקְרָא אַרְיֵה, וְיִשְׂרָאֵל נִקְרָא אַרְיֵה, וּבְיָבֹכְדִנְצָר נִקְרָא אַרְיֵה, וְהַתְּהַרִיב בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, וְנִטְלַ מַלְכוּת בֵּית דָּוִד, וְהִגְלָה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְהִקְבִּי אֶת אִמִּי מֵעוֹן אֲרִיּוֹת, הֵיכָן הֵם בְּנֵי, בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׂעָה שָׂאֵג יִשְׂאֵג עַל-נְהוּ עַכ"ל. יֵשׁ לְדַקְדָּק לָמָּה כָּל אֵלֹו נִקְרָא אַרְיֵה, לָמָּה הוּצָרְדָּ שִׁיְהִיָּה נִקְרָא אַרְיֵה לְהַתְּהַרִיב בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ.

**Midrash Exodus Rabbah, parshat Yitro** (Ex. 18:1–20:23) reads:

**Another matter:** “I am the L-rd, your G-d” (Ex. 20:2; 20:5), as it is written, **“A lion has roared, who can but fear?”** (Amos 3:8) . . . **Come and see, the Temple was called “a lion,” as it is said, “Ah, Ariel, Ariel, city where David camped!”** (Isaiah 29:1). **And the kingdom of the House of David was called “a lion,”** as it says, “What a lioness was your mother! She crouched among the lions!” (Ezek. 19:2). **And the people of Israel were called “a lion,”** as it says, “Judah is a lion’s cub” (Gen. 49:9). **And Nebuchadnezzar was called “a lion,”** as it says, “The lion has come up from his thicket” (Jer. 4:7), **and he destroyed the Temple, carried off the kingdom of the House of David, and exiled Israel. And the Holy One, Blessed be He, says, “Where is the den of the lions?”** (Nahum 2:12). **“Where are my sons?”** At the same hour, **“He roars aloud over His [earthly] abode”** (Jer. 25:30).

- Midrash Ex. Rabbah 29:9

**We have to investigate why all these were called “a lion,” [and] why it was necessary that Nebuchadnezzar would be called “a lion” in order for him to be able to destroy the Temple.**

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וגיש לומר שהארנה הוא מלך שבסיוט וכל הבריות מתיראין מפניו, ואף על פי שיש דובים וזאבים אפילו הכי הוא מלך שבכלם. ולכן מלכות בית דוד גמשל לארנה מפני שגם הוא כבש כל העמים ונפל עליהם אימתה ופחד, וישראל נקראים ארנה מפני שהם עזים באומות. ונבוכדנצר נקרא ארנה משום דאתי מזרע דוד, כמו שכתב בעל עשרה מאמרות (במאמר אם פלתי ח"ב דף ג"ז), ומה שזכה נבוכדנצר להקרא ארנה, לפי דאתי מזרעו של שלמה ממלכת שבא אחר שגיררה, אלא שלכה לא נכון עמו וחרה לסורה, לכן רחקו בניו מישע.

**It's worth noting that the lion is the king of beasts, and all creatures are afraid of him. Even though there are also bears and wolves—even so, he is king of all of them. Therefore, the kingdom of the House of David is likened to a lion because he also conquered all of the nations, and “terror and dread fell upon them.”<sup>1</sup> The people of Israel are called “a lion” because they are impudent among the nations.<sup>2</sup> Nebuchadnezzar was called “a lion” because he came from the offspring of David, as the Rema M’Pano, the author of Asara Ma’amarot [Ten Utterances]<sup>3</sup> has written (in the essay “*Em Kol Chai*” [The Mother of All the Living]<sup>4</sup>, section 2, page 57b, siman 23). How did “Nebuchadnezzar merit to be called ‘a lion,’ because he came from the offspring of Solomon from the Queen of Sheba after she converted to Judaism. But her heart was not correct with him and she turned away; therefore ‘his children were far from success.’<sup>5</sup>”**

וכתוב עוד שם שאילו מת הארי ביד דוד לא הנה נבוכדנצר מתריב הבית, אלא שפחש גבורת הארי ולא המיתו, אבל מלכי מדי ופרס שהם הדוב רצו לבטל בגן הבית ולא יכלו, פי מת הדוב הרומז למלכותם ועיי"ש באורה עכ"ל. והבית המקדש נקרא ארנה פי ממנו הושפת העולם וכי הוא גבורת וחוזק העולם, לכן מין הראוי הוא שיפול ביד ארנה דוקא, וכל זה הוא לפי פשוטן של דברים.

**It's also written** by the Rema M’Pano **there** in *Em Kol Chai*, section 2, siman 22, about the incident with David, the lion and the bear. In I Samuel 17:34–36, David introduces himself to King Saul: “David said to Saul, ‘Your servant has been a shepherd of his father’s sheep, and the lion and the bear came and [one of those] carried off an animal from the flock. And I went after it and struck it and rescued [the sheep] from its mouth; and it rose up on me and I grabbed it by the beard and struck it and killed it. Also the lion and also the bear your servant has struck, and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, for he has defied the ranks of the living G-d.”<sup>6</sup> The interpretation followed by the Rema M’Pano is that David grabbed the bear by the beard and

<sup>1</sup> Derived from Ex. 15:16, “Terror and dread will descend upon them.”

<sup>2</sup> Beitzah 25b: “Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: There are three impudent ones: The Jewish people among the nations; the dog among animals; and the rooster among birds.”

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Menachem Azaria da Fano (“Rema M’Pano”) (1548–1620), Italian Kabbalist and commentator on the Talmud. *Asara Ma’amarot* (“Ten Utterances”) was published in Venice in 1597.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 3:20, “The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.”

<sup>5</sup> Job 5:4, “May his children be far from success . . .”

<sup>6</sup> Targum Jonathan translates “beard” as לוץא, the jaw, and Rabbi David Kimchi (“RaDak”) (1160–1235), a French biblical commentator, philosopher, and grammarian, extended this by saying that this referred to the lion. Other commentators say that David killed both animals. But the text can also be translated and interpreted as the Rema M’Pana will present, that David grabbed the bear and killed it, and that he struck both animals (but killed only the bear).

killed it, and that he also fought the lion, but only weakened it. He writes, **that if the lion had died at the hand of David, Nebuchadnezzar would not have been the destroyer of the Temple, but instead the might of the lion merely waned when David struck it and [David] didn't kill it. But the kings of Media and Persia, who were analogous to the bear, wanted to cancel the building of the Temple; and they weren't able to do so, because the bear—alluding to their kingdoms—died at the hands of David, and see there at length.** The Rema M'Pano explains that the beard represents the *mazal* (מזל), the constellation or guardian angel of the bear, and that David's physical actions in fighting the lion and the bear had a later metaphysical effect on the nations associated with the lion and the bear, affecting the power they had over Israel. **The Temple is called “a lion” because the world was founded from it, and because it is the might and strength of the world. Therefore, it is fitting that it should fall precisely at the hand of another “lion,” and this is according to the plain meaning of the words.**

אָמנם עֲדִיין יֵשׁ לְדַקְדָּק מַה בָּא הַמְדַרְשׁ לְלַמְדֵנוּ בְּאֵלּוּ הַשְּׁלֵשָׁה דְּבָרִים טוֹבִים שֶׁנִּקְרְאוּ אַרְיָה. הֲלֹא הָיָה דִּי לֹאמַר שְׂבִית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ נִקְרָא אַרְיָה וְנִבְּוֹכְדִנְצַר נִקְרָא אַרְיָה? וְאֵף אִם הָיָה רוּצָה לְהוֹסִיף שְׂמֵלֶכֶת בֵּית דָּוִד נִקְרָא אַרְיָה מִשּׁוּם נִבְּוֹכְדִנְצַר דְּאֵתִי מִינֵיהּ כִּנ"ל, לֹא הָיָה לוֹ עֲנִיין לְהַזְכִּיר כָּאן שִׁישְׂרָאֵל נִקְרְאוּ אַרְיָה.

**While it is still necessary to investigate what the Midrash came to teach us in these three good things called “lion,” viz, the Temple, the kingdom of the House of David, and the people of Israel. Wasn't it enough to say that the Temple was called a lion, and Nebuchadnezzar was called a lion? Even if [the author] of the Midrash wanted to add that the kingdom of the House of David was called a lion, because Nebuchadnezzar came from him, as stated above, there was no reason for him to mention here that Israel was called “a lion.”**

וַיֵּשׁ לֹאמַר שֶׁהַמְדַרְשׁ רָצָה לְרַמֵּז לָנוּ שֶׁיֵּשׁ לְאַרְיָה שְׁנֵי רְמִזִּים, שֶׁיֵּשׁ אַרְיָה מִצַּד הַחֶסֶד שֶׁהוּא שֵׁם שֶׁל ע"ב שְׁמוֹת הַיּוֹצְאִים מִהַפְּסוּקִים שֶׁל וַיֵּסַע וַיָּבֵא וַיֵּט לְאַחַר שֶׁנִּבְּנִנוּ הַבְּתָיִם כְּנֹדָע. וַיֵּשׁ בּוֹ רִי"ו אוֹתִיּוֹת גִּימְטְרִיָּא אַרְיָה, וְאֵז שְׂמֵאֲלָא אֵיתְכִלִּיל בְּמִינָא שְׂהָרִי הֵם יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל הֵם יִשְׂרָאֵל, דְּהֵינּוּ חֶסֶד דִּין וְרַחֲמִים מְתוּבָּלִים זֶה בְּזֶה. וְשְׁנֵי חוּטֵי הַקְּצוּוֹת הֵם פְּגָדָא וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וּבֵית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, וְהֵם בְּיוֹשְׂרָאֵל, וְהַחוּט הָאֲמָצְעִי הוּא הַפּוּךְ וְרוּמֵז לְדִין, וְהוּא נִגְדַּת מְלָכוּת בֵּית דָּוִד, דְּכַתִּיב בְּהוּ דִּינּוּ לְבַקֵּר מִשְׁפָּט. אֲבָל זֶה הַמִּשְׁפָּט הוּא תִּיקוּן הָעוֹלָם וְקִיּוּמוֹ לְהַבִּיא בְּעוֹלָם מִדַּת הָאֱמֶת דְּהֵינּוּ רַחֲמִים וְשְׁלוֹם, וְכֵן פְּתִיב וְחֶסֶדִי לֹא־אֶפִּיר מִעֲמוֹ, אֵף עַל גַּב דְּדִינָא דְּמִלְכוּתָא דִּינָא, וְהֵם הַשְּׁלֵשָׁה דְּבָרִים שֶׁמִּבִּיא הַמְדַרְשׁ שְׁנִקְרְאִים אַרְיָה, הוּאִיל שְׂפָלָם מִצְּרַפִּים לְהַכְשִׁיר.

**It can be said that the Midrash wanted to imply to us that the lion has two hints, that there is a lion from the standpoint of *chesed* (חסד) (kindness, with a Gematria of 72), which is the term for the 72 Names of G-d coming from the three verses of Ex. 14:19–21 that begin with “and he journeyed,” “and it came,” and he extended” (Ex. 14:19–21),<sup>7</sup> the Names becoming**

<sup>7</sup> Ex. 14:19–21: “*And he journeyed*—the angel of G-d—who had been going ahead of the Israelite army, and he followed behind them; and the pillar of cloud shifted from in front of them and took up a place behind them. *And it came* between the army of the Egyptians and the army of Israel; thus, there was the cloud with the darkness, and it cast a spell upon the night, so that the one could not come near the other all through the night. Then Moses *extended* his arm over the sea and the L-rd drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night, and turned the sea into dry ground; the waters were split,”

revealed **after the Temples were built**,<sup>8</sup> **as is known** to those who know Kabbalah. Each of these three verses has exactly 72 letters, so when the verses are combined, **they have within them 216 letters, which is the Gematria of aryeh** (אריה) (lion). **Then these letters joined the right side, which are straight-reverse-straight.** The boustrophedonic technique was described by Rashi in his commentary to Sukkah 45a and in Zohar II:52a. The first Name is taken from the first letter of the first verse, the last letter of the second verse, and the first letter of the third verse; the second Name is taken from the second letter of the first verse, the second-to-last letter of the second verse, and the second letter of the third verse; etc. Thus, the first and third letters of each Name are taken in “straight” order from the first and third verses, i.e., from right to left, while the second letter of each Name is taken in “reverse” order from the second verse, i.e., from left to right. In this way, the 216 letters are arranged into 72 three-letter words, each considered to be a Name of G-d. For each of these three-letter Names, the first letter represents **kindness** (*chesed*), the second letter represents **justice**, and the third letter represents **mercy**, three primary characteristics through which G-d interacts with the world, and by combining the letters in this way, the characteristics are **seasoned with each other**.

**The two end pieces of the string** of letters, i.e., the first and third letters of each of the 72 Names, **correspond to Israel and the Temple, and they are straight**, i.e., as noted above, taken from right to left from the first and third of the verses.

**The middle of the string** of letters **is reversed**, i.e., is taken from left to right from the second of the verses, and symbolizes **justice**, and corresponds to the **kingdom of the House of David**, as it is written in them, **“Administer justice in the morning”** (Jer. 21:12). **But this justice is the correction of the world, and the existence of the justice is to bring the attribute of truth into the world, namely mercy and peace.**<sup>9</sup> **Thus it is written** regarding G-d’s covenant with the House of David: **“If his sons forsake My Teaching and do not live by My rules; if they violate My laws, and do not observe My commands, I will punish their transgression with the rod, their iniquity with plagues. But I won’t take My kindness from him; I won’t betray My faithfulness. I will not violate My covenant.”** (Ps. 89:31–35), **despite the fact that “the secular law of the kingdom is the law.”**<sup>10</sup> I.e., members of the House of David violated the covenant with G-d, and therefore according to secular contract law, He had every right to break His covenant.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, He will not do so.

**These are the three things**, Israel, the Temple, and the House of David, **that the Midrash brings, called “a lion,” since each of them joins in making the world fit.**

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<sup>8</sup> The translator doesn’t know the source for the statement that the 72 Names of G-d weren’t known until after the destruction of the Temples. As always, the translator welcomes input.

<sup>9</sup> This perhaps relates to the fact that the Sefirah of Tiferet (splendor) is also known as Emet (truth) and Rachamim (mercy), but the translator is not aware of a connection to peace.

<sup>10</sup> Gittin 10b.

<sup>11</sup> Alshich on Ps. 89:35: “‘I won’t violate My covenant’: That is so even though it is possible to remove the vow.”

וגיש עוד ארנה מצד הגבורה והדין בלתי ממוג, שכן גבור"ה גימטריא ארנ"ה, שהן האותיות נפרדות ואז שמאל לא איתקליל[]ת בימינא. ובעונותינו הרבים נתבטלו חוטי החסד בשליטת הגבורה דהיינו נבוכדנצר שנקרא ארנה, והקב"ה אמר איה מעון אריות דהיינו הבתים הבנויים כנ"ל. שהשמאל היתה מתופלת בימין ועקשיו נחרבו הבתים ונפרדו האותיות ונחרב הבית וגברה השמאל.

**There is another “lion” from the standpoint of unconditioned courage and law, for “gevurah” (גבורה) (courage) has the same Gematria, 216, as “aryeh” (אריה) (lion), which are the separate letters and thus these did not join the right side. By our many sins, the threads of chesed (kindness) were voided by the authority of gevurah, which is Nebuchadnezzar, who is called “a lion.” The Holy One, Blessed be He, said “Where is the den of the lions?” (Nahum 2:12), which references the Temples that were built, as above. For the left side (sitra d’smola) of the Sefirot tree, representing strict judgment was previously seasoned with the right side of the Sefirot tree, representing mercy, but now the Temples are destroyed, and the letters are separated, and the Temple is destroyed and the left is strengthened.**

אמנם עדיין צריך עיון מה שסיים המדרש בני היכן הם באותה שעה שאג על-נהו, דמהו באותה שעה, והלא כשאמר מתחלה איה מעון אריות, כבר שלטה השמאל וכבר נחרב הבית וכבר גלו ישראל. ומה צריך לשאול היכן הם בני, ומלשון שאלה זו נראה שבאותה שעה דוקא שאג ושאג נכו'.

**Actually, still needing investigation is how the Midrash concludes: “My sons—where are they? At the same hour, ‘He roars aloud over His [earthly] abode’ ” (Jer. 25:30). For what is this “at the same hour,” since He first said, “Where is the den of the lions?”—the left side of the Sefirot tree, representing strict judgment, had already ruled and had already destroyed the Temple and had already exiled Israel! What need was there to ask, “Where are my sons?” And from the language of this question, it appears that it was especially at the same hour that, “He roars aloud.”**

וגיש לומר שכתב הרב גאלנטי על פסוק תשוב ה' להשחית, שבמקום המחשבה העליונה עלתה להשחית חומת בת-ציון, אמנם להיותו רחמים פשוטים, אב הרחמן הסכים לסתור על מנת לבנות, ומה עשה נטה קו ומדד ארד ורחב מקום ההשחית. כדי לחזור ולתקן. וזה הקו נקרא קו המדה ונהו עת להרוס ועת לבנות, שהעת שנקרא, אותו העת הנה, עת לבנות.

**It needs to be said that Rabbi Galante<sup>12</sup> wrote on the verse, “The L-rd resolved to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion; He measured with a line, and didn’t refrain from bringing destruction” (Lam. 2:8), that in the place of the supernal thought there arose the idea “to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion.” In truth, in order to have simple mercy, the Merciful Father agreed to “dismantle in order to rebuild” (Shabbat 31b), and what He did was: “He measured with a line” and He measured the length and width of the place of**

<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Abraham ben Mordechai Galante, d. before 1589, see Kinat Setarim, page 21a, which is a commentary on Lamentations based upon the Zohar. Kinat Setarim was edited by his son Samuel and is included in the sefer Kol Bochim (Venice 1589).

destruction, in order to return and to renew it. This line is called the “measuring line” (Jer. 31:39), and this is “a time to destroy and a time to build up,”<sup>13</sup> for the time that it was destroyed was the same time as the time to build up.

עוד כתב על פסוק אשר־טפתתי ורביתי איבי כלם דכד אסגיאו חיביין בעלמא נפתח נוקבא דתהומא רבא ומשם יוצאים כמה חבילי טריקין. וכשהיו הנשמות יורדות מלמעלה לפתח לבנת הספיר שם חטאת רובץ לעשקם בסוד דמעת העשקים, ונהו אשר־טפתתי בנד ימיני שהם נשמות הצדיקים שנקראו מעשה נדיו. ואם היו יורדות לארץ היו ראויים להיות צדיקים גמורים נעשקו בנד האובת הידועה וכו' עכ"ל.

[Rabbi Galante] also wrote on the verse, “Those whom I bore and reared, My foe has consumed” (Lam. 2:22), that: “When wicked ones proliferate in the world, a great abyss is opened, from which exits a number of angels of destruction. When the souls were descending from above towards the opening of ‘the brickwork of sapphire’ (Ex. 24:10), there by the opening ‘sin crouches’ (Gen. 4:7), to oppress them by the secret of ‘the tears of the oppressed’ (Eccl. 4:1)”<sup>14</sup>—and that is “those whom I bore” (Lam. 2:22), by My right hand, for they are the souls of the righteous, who are called His handiwork.<sup>15</sup> If they had descended to the ground, they would have qualified to be completely righteous; but they were stolen by the hand of the known enemy, i.e., sin.<sup>16</sup>

עוד אמרינו במדרש על פסוק אשר הוזהר ה' ביום חרון אפו, לא הנה חרון אפו של הקב"ה אלא יום אחד בלבד, אם ישראל היו עושים תשובה מיד היו נגאלים עכ"ל. וזו היא פוננת המדרש אף על פי שנחרב הבית וגלו ישראל מפני שגבר השמאל דהיינו איה מעון אריות, לא הנה מקום להתאונן ולהתמרמר, לפי שפבר נטה הקו והוא עת לבנות, ואם היו ישראל עושים תשובה היו נגאלים ליום המחרת. אמנם כשראה שישאל לא עשו תשובה אז אמר בני היכן הם, שאינם מעוררים הרחמים. אי נמי בני היכן הם דהיינו נשמות הצדיקים שתבאנה לעולם שהם נקראים בנים, היכן הם, שהיו נעשקים מן הקליפה, ולכן באותה [שעה] דוקא שאג ישאג ולא כל פה בשעת החרבון.

It also says in the Midrash Lam. Rabbah 1:40 on the verse, “When the L-rd afflicted (הוזהר) (*hoga*) me on His day of wrath” (Lam. 1:12), “Rav Acha says that the wrath of the Holy One, Blessed be He, [lasted only] one day; if Israel had repented, they would have been redeemed.” This is the intent of the Midrash: Even though the Temple was destroyed and Israel exiled, because the left side of the Sefirot tree grew strong—namely, “Where is the den of the lions?”—there was no place to complain and to be embittered by the situation, as the

<sup>13</sup> It is likely that the author meant to write, “עת לפרוץ ועת לבנות,” (“a time for tearing down and a time for building up”), from Eccl. 3:3. Instead of “לפרוץ” (to tear down), he used the word “להרוס” (to destroy). The words להרוס and לבנות (to destroy and to build up) appear together in Jer. 1:10 and in Jer. 31:28.

<sup>14</sup> Kinat Setarim, page 30b. The first sentence includes three phrases that appear in the Zohar: “That when wicked ones proliferate in the world”: I: 68a, II:10b, II:146a, III:75a; III:291b, III:218a; “a great abyss”: II:65a, III:91b; “a number of angels of destruction”: I:62b, I:243b, III:52b, III:62b, III:181a, III:291b.

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 60:21, “And your people, all of them righteous, shall possess the land for all time; they are the shoot that I planted, my handiwork in which I glory.”

<sup>16</sup> This is partly a paraphrase of Rabbi Galante’s Kinat Setarim, page 31a. Rabbi Natan Bonn, Shichechat Leket (Prague 1652), in the section Isha v’chol Inyanei Peria u’Revia (Woman and all Matters of Being Fruitful and Multiplying) mentions souls stolen by the hand of the *klipta*.

measuring **line** to measure the length and width of the destruction of Zion **was already turning aside and it was time to build, and if Israel had repented they would have been redeemed the next day. Actually, when He saw that Israel did not repent, then He said, “Where are my sons?”**, for they did not awaken mercy. Alternatively, **“Where are my sons?”**—namely, the souls of the righteous who come to the world are called **“sons”**—where are they? They will be removed from the *klipah*, and therefore at precisely the same hour, **“He roars aloud,”** and **it’s not so much at the hour of the destruction** of the Temple.

**עוד נש לומר** בדרך אחר דאיתא בזוהר פרשת בשלח ר' יהודה אומר [גשמותא] עילאה יהיב הקב"ה לאדם וכלל ביה חכמתא וסכלתגותא, מאן אתר יהיב ליה קב"ה, ר' יהודה אומר תוצא הארץ נפש מההוא, אתר דבי מקדשא עכ"ל. ואף למלכים הקב"ה נותן להם נפש מאתרא עילאה, שהרי פתיב ולב מלכים אין חקר. ואף למלכי אמות העולם עיני בזוהר פרשת מקץ, דחלמא דמלכא לאו אינון פשאר חלמיו, שאף למלכי האומות סלקו בדרךא עילאה על בר נש דעלמא ומודעין ליה מילין דקשוט וכו'.

**It should also be said in another matter, that it is brought in the Zohar in parshat Beshalach (Ex. 13:17–17:16):**

**Rabbi Yehuda said, the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave an elevated soul<sup>17</sup> to man, and included within it is wisdom and discernment** in order to know everything. **From where did [the] Holy One, Blessed be He, give it to him?** Rabbi Yitzchak says, ‘From the place from which the other holy souls come. **Rabbi Yehuda says, “From here, for it is written, ‘Let the earth bring forth a living soul’ (Gen. 1:24). What is this “earth”?** **From the same place where the Temple was.”**

- Zohar II:55a

**Even for Jewish kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He, gives them a soul from an elevated place, for thus it is written, “Is the heart of kings unfathomable?” (Prov. 25:3). Even for the kings of the nations of the world, i.e., non-Jewish kings, see the Zohar (I:194b) in parshat Miketz (Gen. 41:1–44:17), that the dreams of a king are not like the dreams of others, for even the kings of the nations ascend to a higher level than an ordinary person of the world, and they are informed of matters of truth.<sup>18</sup>**

<sup>17</sup> The first edition reads חוכמתא (wisdom) and was likely a publisher’s error for נשמתא (soul).

<sup>18</sup> This appears to be a paraphrase of Zohar I:194b: “Rabbi Yitzchak said, ‘Although we have learned that a man is shown only what is appropriate to his grade, this is not true for kings. They are shown supernal things that are different from those that other people are shown. Because a king is of a superior grade than other men, that which he is shown is of a higher grade than the rest, as it is written, “what the L-rd is about to do, He has declared to Pharaoh” (Gen. 41:25). But to other men, the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not reveal His works. He reveals them only to the prophets, the pious, and the wise men of the ages, as has already been explained.’ ”

אם פו לדוד ולזרעו שניתן להם המלכות מפי הקב"ה בנדאי דנהבו ליה נמי נפש יתירה מאתר עליא, וכן לנבוכדנצר נמי. מה שאין פו לשאר מלכין דעלמא שנעשים מלכים בתזקה אינם בכלל זה, ולכן הם נקראו ארניה שאר לארניה יש לו פח וממשלה מעין גבורה של מעלה. והכי נמי הבית נבנה על ידי זרע בית דוד ונחרב על ידי נבוכדנצר, על דרך מיניה וביה אבא ליזיל ביה נרנא.

**If so, then David and his descendants, who were given the kingship from the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He, certainly [David] also received an extra soul from a supernal place, and similarly Nebuchadnezzar, as a descendant of David. That is something not true for the remaining kings of the world, who became kings by force; they are not included in this rule, and therefore they are called “a lion,” for even a lion has power and dominion that is a microcosm of that of the Almighty Above. Indeed, the Temple was built by an offspring of the House of David and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, in the manner of the axiom, “from the very forest itself comes the handle of the ax that will destroy it” (Sanhedrin 39b).**

ונזהו דאמרין בריש בתרא שאני בית המקדש דלא סגי דלאו מלפא, ופירש שם מהרש"א שלא הנה יכול להבנות אלא על ידי מלך. ולכן נצטוו ישראל בכניסתם לארץ להעמיד להם מלך ואחר כך לבנות בית המקדש, וכן בגיטין אמרין דאי לאו מלפא את, לא איתמסר ירושלים בידך.

**This is what’s written at the beginning of tractate Bava Batra (4a), that “the Temple is different, it doesn’t thrive without a king,” and the Maharsha<sup>19</sup> explained there that it’s not possible to build [the Temple] without the hands of a king. Therefore, Israel was commanded upon their entry to the Land of Israel to install a king for themselves and afterward to build the Temple, and thus in tractate Gittin (56b) it is said, “If you were not a king, Jerusalem would not have been delivered to your hand.”**

ולפי דרך זה נבין הפסוקים דב ארב הוא לי, היו אורבים לי מלכי פרס שרצו לבטל בית המקדש ולא יכלו, והנה לבד אורב, אמנם ארניה במספרים. וקתיב ארניה וקרינו ארי. וכתב בעל עשרה מאמרות בדף הנ"ל שארי וארניה הם כמו נער ונערה. ולכן אמר ארניה שהוא רחמים נהפך לארי שהוא לשון דין.

**In this manner, we will understand the verses, “He is a lurking bear to me, a lion in hiding” (Lam. 3:10), they were lurking in ambush for me, those kings of Persia who wanted to cancel the Temple but weren’t able to, and he [i.e., Nebuchadnezzar] alone was lurking, indeed a lion in hiding. [The word “lion”] in Lam. 3:10 is written “אריה,” which is usually pronounced “aryeh,” but in this verse it is pronounced “ari.” Minchat Shai<sup>20</sup> says that aryeh is written as a hint to Nebuchadnezzar, as it says, “The lion has come up from his thicket” (Jer. 4:7). Why then is it pronounced differently? The author of Asara Ma’amarot writes at the page mentioned above (Em Kol Chai, section 2, page 57b, siman 24), that the words for lion, *ari* (ארי)**

<sup>19</sup> Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (1555–1631), Polish rabbi famous for his Talmud commentaries, Chiddushei Halachot and Chiddushei Agadot.

<sup>20</sup> Yediyah Solomon ben Abraham Nortzi (1560–1626), born in Mantua, and from the early 1600s served as co-rabbi of the city. Author of Minchat Shai, a critical and Masoretic commentary on the Bible.

**and *aryeh* (אַרְיָה) are related to each other like the words “young man” and “young woman” are related, i.e., *ari* representing masculine traits and *aryeh* representing feminine traits. Therefore [Scripture] says *aryeh*, a word which is representative of mercy, but it is reversed in pronouncing it to *ari*, which is language for strict judgment.**

במסִּתְרִים, מְשׁוּם שֶׁיֵּשׁ בְּזֶה סוּד כְּדֹכְתָב הָרַב הַגַּ'ל שָׁם, שְׁלֵמָה לֹא הֵמִית דָּוִד לְאַרְיֵי, כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּתְקַרַּב הַבַּיִת וְיִשְׁפּוּף הַקַּב"ה תִּמְתּוּ עַל עֲצִים וְאַבְנִים וְלֹא יִכְרִית חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם זָרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הָעוֹלָם, וְזֶהוּ בַּמִּסְתָּרִים בְּשִׁבִיל סוּד זֶה.

Scripture says, **“In hiding,” because within this there is an esoteric secret, as is written by the rabbi mentioned above there, i.e., the Rema M’Pano, that: Why didn’t David kill the lion? In order that [Nebuchadnezzar] would destroy the Temple, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, would pour out His wrath on wood and stones, and not cut down the seed of Israel from the world, G-d forbid. This is why it says, “in hiding,” because of this esoteric secret.**

אַחַר כֵּן דָּרְכֵי סוּרָר, אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁהֵינּוּ חַיִּיבִים מִיָּתֶה כְּבֵן סוּרָר וּמוֹרָה, מִכָּל מְקוֹם בְּחֶסֶדוֹ הַגָּדוֹל וְנִפְשָׁתְנֵי שְׂמֵנֵי שְׂמֵם וְלֹא הִכְרִיתְנִי. אֲלֵא דָרַךְ קִשְׁתּוֹ וַיִּצְיַבְנֵי כַּמְטָרָא לַחֲזָץ, כְּדָאֲמַרְיֵנּוּ בְּפִתְיָחָא דְאַיְכָה רַבְתֵּי עַל פְּסוּק וּזְכַר אֶת־בוֹרְאֵיךְ בִּימֵי בְּחֹרוֹתֶיךָ וְכוּ', הִתְחִיל קוֹסֵם קְסָמִים מְקַלְקֵל בְּחִיצִים שֶׁל רוּמֵי וְלֹא עָלְתָה, לְשִׁמָּה שֶׁל בִּירוּשָׁלַם עָלְתָה וְכוּ' וְעֵי"שׁ. וְכֵן בְּפָרֻק ה' דְּגִישׁוֹן אֲמַרְיֵנּוּ שְׂדָא גִירָא לְמִזְנַחָה, אֲתָא נָפַל בִּירוּשָׁלַם, לְמַעְרַב, אֲתָא נָפַל לִירוּשָׁלַם וְכוּ'.

Afterward, **“He has forced me off my way” (Lam. 3:11). Even though we were deserving of death as a “wayward and defiant son” (Deut. 21:18), yet with His great kindness, “He tore me to pieces and left me desolate” (Lam. 3:11) instead of destroying me. Rather, “He has bent His bow and made me the target of His arrows” (Lam. 3:12). As it says in the Introduction to Lamentations Rabbah on the verse, “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth” (Eccl. 12:1):**

Nebuchadnezzar was nervous and wanted to know if he was destined to attack Jerusalem or not. He called in sorcerers and diviners to reveal the future. **“ ‘The diviner began by shooting arrows’<sup>21</sup> [upward, to see whether the wind blew them right or left]. [He asked if his target] was destined to be Rome, but [the arrow] didn’t rise [to indicate that should be his target]. [He asked if his target] was destined to be Alexandria, but [the arrow] didn’t rise [to indicate that should be his target]. [He asked if his target] was destined to be Jerusalem, and [the arrow] rose [toward the right, indicating that he should attack Jerusalem].”**

- Lam. Rabbah, Introduction (para. 23)

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<sup>21</sup> See Ezek. 21:26–27, “For the king of Babylon has stood at the fork of the road, where two roads branch off, *to perform divination: He has shaken arrows*, consulted teraphim, and inspected the liver. At his right was the divination to Jerusalem . . . .” See also Rashi’s explanation there.

**Similarly, in the fifth chapter of tractate Gittin (56a), it says:** “The Roman authorities then sent Nero Caesar against the Jews. When he came to Jerusalem, he wished to test his fate. **He shot an arrow to the east** and the arrow **came and fell towards Jerusalem**. He then shot another arrow **to the west** and **it also fell towards Jerusalem**. He shot an arrow in all four directions of the heavens, and each time the arrow fell towards Jerusalem.”

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