

Parashat VaYechi

וַיְחִי יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שִׁבְעַת עָשָׂר שָׁנָה.

Jacob lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years.¹

As we know, Jacob was also known by another name, Israel. These names – particularly the latter – eventually became the names of the collective entity of the Jewish people. The phrase “the children of Israel” is first applied to the direct sons Jacob, but gradually comes to mean “the Israelites,” i.e., the whole nation, and later, the term “Israel” (without “the children of”) is also used.

Jacob is also referred to as “the choicest of the forefathers,” indicating that his way of serving G-d was in some way superior to that of Abraham and Isaac. As holy as Abraham and Isaac – and their respective ways of relating to and serving G-d – were, they each contained an element of imbalance that eventually surfaces as an imperfection. Unrestrained love can overflow into love of the wrong things; unrestrained fear can overflow into fear of the wrong things. This is indicated by the fact that although Abraham produced Isaac, he also produce Ishmael, and that although Isaac produced Jacob, he also produced Esau. Only Jacob’s sons were all righteous; only mercy, which tempers love and fear, is relatively immune to improper application.

In the following passage, the Arizal analyzes the names of Jacob/Israel and shows how they reflect perfected Divine consciousness.

ספר הליקוטים

דע, כי ג' בחי' יש ליעקב. האחד נקרא יעקב חסר ו', והב' יעקב מלא בוי', בסוד וזכרתי את בריתי יעקוב, והשלישי נקרא בשם ישראל.

Sefer HaLikutim

Know that there are three aspects to Jacob. The first is indicated by the name *Yaakov* written as it usually is, without a *vav*. The second is indicated by the name *Yaakov* written with a *vav*, as in the verse, “And I will remember My covenant with Jacob.”² The third is indicated by Jacob’s other name, Israel.

Yaakov is usually written *yud-ayin-kuf-beit*. In rare cases, a *vav* is inserted between the last two letters to indicated the “o”-vowel.

לרמוז לג' בחינות שבו נר"ן.

These three names allude to the three aspects of his soul, *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshamah*.

The *nefesh* is the vital, animating soul, the life-force of the body. The *ruach* is the emotional aspect of the soul, and the *neshamah* is the intellectual aspect of the soul.

נפש הוא שם יעקב חסר ו', רוח היא בחינת יעקוב מלא בוי', נשמה הוא בחי' ישראל.

The *nefesh* is indicated by the name *Yaakov* written without the *vav*. The *ruach*

1. Genesis 47:28.

2. Leviticus 26:42.

is indicated by the name *Yaakov* written with the *vav*. The *neshamah* is indicated by the name Israel.

The numerical value of the letter *vav* is six, indicating the six emotions.

וכבר ידעת, כי שלשתם חשובים הם כאחד.

As you already know, these three are considered one collective entity.

We do not normally experience three entities operating within our consciousness; the division into three aspects reflects the way the soul develops and manifests itself within us.

וכן האבות שלשתם הם א', בסוד מ"ש חז"ל שיעקב נקרא אברהם וכו'.

Similarly, the forefathers are considered one, as indicated by our sages' statement that Jacob was called Abraham, etc.³

The Midrash shows how the Torah refers to each of the patriarchs by the others' names.

We will now see how the three aspects of the soul are connected numerically to the names of Jacob.

וכן תמצא, כי נפ"ש בגי' אברה"ם יעק"ב.

You will also find that the numerical value of *nefesh* is the same as that of the two names Abraham and Jacob together.

Nefesh: *nun-pei-shin* = 50 + 80 + 300 = 430.

Abraham (*Avraham*): *alef-beit-reish-hei-mem* = 1 + 2 + 200 + 5 + 40 = 248.

Jacob (*Yaakov*): *yud-ayin-kuf-beit* = 10 + 70 + 100 + 2 = 182.

248 + 182 = 430.

רוח בגי' ויה"י יעק"ב עם שני מלות.

The numerical value of *ruach* is that of the two words "and Jacob lived" together with the *kolel* (unit values) for each word.

Ruach: *reish-vav-chet* = 200 + 6 + 8 = 214.

"And Jacob lived" (*Vayechi Yaakov*, the first words of this *parashah*): *vav-yud-chet-yud yud-ayin-kuf-beit* =

(6 + 10 + 8 + 10) + (10 + 70 + 100 + 2) = 34 + 182 = 216.

הנשמה בבחינת ישראל. באופן זה, כי הנשמה עולה ת', וישראל עולה תקמ"א

The *neshamah* is numerically associated with the name Israel as follows: The numerical value of "the *neshamah*" is 400, and that of Israel (*Yisrael*) is 541.

"The *neshamah*" (*ha-neshamah*): *hei-nun-shin-mem-hei* = 5 + 50 + 300 + 40 + 5 = 400.

Yisrael: *yud-sin-reish-alef-lamed* = 10 + 300 + 200 + 1 + 30 = 541.

חסר ת', שהיא הנשמה, נשאר קמ"א, חסר המ"א ותנה עם הת', הרי אמ"ת, בסוד תתן אמת ליעקב.

3. *Bereishit Rabbah* 63:3.

Subtract 400 from 541, i.e., “the *neshamah*,” and 141 is left. Subtract 41 from this remainder and add it to the 400 of “the *neshamah*,” and the result is the numerical value of the word for “truth” (*emet*). This is the mystical significance of the verse, “Give truth to Jacob.”⁴

$$541 - 400 = 141.$$

$$400 + 41 = 441.$$

$$Emet: \text{alef-mem-tav} = 1 + 40 + 400 = 441.$$

נשאר הק', קו"ף במלואה עולה בגי' יעקב עם די' אותיותיו.

100 remains from the 141 left when *neshamah* is subtracted from *Yisrael*. 100 is the numerical value of the letter *kuf*. The numerical value of the letter *kuf* spelled out is the same as that of Jacob with the four *kolels* of its four letters.

$$Kuf: \text{kuf-vav-pei} = 100 + 6 + 80 = 186.$$

$$Jacob (Yaakov): \text{yud-ayin-kuf-beit} = 10 + 70 + 100 + 2 = 182.$$

$$182 + 4 = 186.$$

The result of this arithmetic exercise can thus be summarized as follows:

$$\text{Israel} = (\text{“the } neshamah\text{”} + 41) + 100$$

$$\text{Israel} = \text{truth} + 100$$

but

$$100 \rightarrow 186 \text{ (i.e., } Jacob \text{ spelled out plus its four letters' unit values)}$$

so

$$\text{Israel} = \text{truth} + \text{Jacob}.$$

וקו"ף עולה בגי' מקו"ם,

Now, the numerical value of the letter *kuf* spelled out 186 also equals the numerical value of the word for “place” (*makom*).

$$Makom: \text{mem-kuf-vav-mem} = 40 + 100 + 6 + 40 = 186.$$

וגי"כ עולה במספר מרובע שם ההוי"ה, כזה, י"פ י' הם ק', ה' פעמים ה' הרי כ"ה, ו' פעמים ו' הרי ל"ו, ה' פעמים ה' הרי כ"ה, סך הכל יעלה מקו"ם.

It is also the numerical value of the square of the Name *Havayah*, as follows: *yud* squared 10^2 equals 100; *hei* squared 5^2 equals 25; *vav* squared 6^2 equals 36; *hei* squared 5^2 equals 25. The total equals 186.

$$100 + 25 + 36 + 25 = 186.$$

וזמשי"ה הנה מקום אתי:

4. Micah 7:20.

This is the mystical meaning of the verse, "Behold there is a place with Me."⁵

Based on this verse, the sages stated,⁶ "He is the place of the world, but the world is not His place," meaning that space exists as a created entity within G-d. G-d is not circumscribed by (i.e., exist entirely within) the parameters of space. In this connection, "the Place" (or "the Omnipresent") is one of the appellations of G-d. This connection of G-d and "place" is given mystically by the numerical association we have just seen.

Thus, we have here a connection between Jacob (182 → 186) and the Names of G-d.

ואמר רבי עקיבא קוף זה הקב"ה, ושם הקב"ה עולה יב"ק, שהוא בגי' גי' שמות אהי"ה הוי"ה אדנ"י,

Now, Rabbi Akiva said that the letter *kuf* alludes to the Holy One, blessed be He.⁷ Mystically, this means that the numerical value of the three Names of G-d is the same as that of Yabok, i.e., the combined numerical value of the Names *Ekyeh*, *Havayah*, and *Adni*.

In the Midrash *Otiot d'Rabbi Akiva*, in which Rabbi Akiva expounds on the midrashic significance of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, he states that the letter *kuf* alludes to G-d, since it is the first letter of the word *kadosh* ("holy"), used to describe G-d in the verse, "Holy, holy, holy is G-d of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory."⁸

Yabok is the name of the river that Jacob crossed on his way back to the land of Israel after spending twenty years with Laban, and was where he wrestled with the angel of Esau. As we have seen previously, it thus signifies the struggle between good and evil, or between mercy and judgment.

Yabok: *yud-beit-kuf* = 10 + 2 + 100 = 112.

Ekyeh: *alef-hei-yud-hei* = 1 + 5 + 10 + 5 = 21.

Havayah: *yud-hei-vav-hei* = 10 + 5 + 6 + 5 = 26.

Adni: *alef-dalet-nun-yud* = 1 + 4 + 50 + 10 = 65.

21 + 26 + 65 = 112.

וכן הוא עולה בגי' הוי"ה אלהיים.

It is also the combined numerical value of the two names *Havayah* and *Elokim*.

Elokim: *alef-lamed-hei-yud-mem* = 1 + 30 + 5 + 10 + 40 = 86; 86 + 26 = 112.

ואם תקח משם יעק"ב יב"ק, ישאר ע', שהם ע' שמות שיש להקב"ה.

If we subtract the numerical value of Yabok 112 from the numerical value of Jacob's name *Yaakov* 182, the remainder is 70, alluding G-d's seventy names.⁹

Thus, Jacob = Yabok + 70 = *Ekyeh-Havayah-Adni* + G-d's 70 Names.

We have now two additional connections between Jacob and G-d's Names.

וגי' שמות הנז' שהם אהי"ה הוי"ה אדנ"י, הם רומזים לכתר ות"ת ומלכות.

5. Exodus 36:21.

6. *Pesikta Rabati* 21.

7. *Otiot d'Rabbi Akiva*.

8. Isaiah 6:3.

9. *Bemidbar Rabbah* 14:11; *Midrash Zuta, Shir HaShirim* 1; *Pesikta d'Ra'v Kahana* 3:1; *Pardes Rimonim* 23:13.

The three Names just mentioned—*Ekyeh, Havayah, and Adni*—allude to the three *sefirot* of *keter, tiferet, and malchut, respectively.*

These three Names are associated with these three *sefirot*. When G-d is referred to by a particular Name, it means that He is acting through the associated *sefirah*, i.e., manifesting the Divine attribute associated with that *sefirah*.

והת"ת שרומז ליעקב,

***Tiferet* is associated with Jacob.**

Tiferet is the central and pivotal *sefirah* of the six *midot* that metamorphose into *Z'eir Anpin*, who, as we have seen previously, was personified by Jacob.

הוא קו האמצעי, בריח התיכון מבריה מן הקצה אל הקצה,

It is the heart of the central axis, which extends from one extreme of the *sefirotic* tree to the other.

The left and right axes of the *sefirotic* tree do not extend all the way up or down. Only the middle axis extends to the top (*keter*) and bottom (*malchut*).

Abraham is associated with the right axis, that centered on *chesed*, and Isaac is associated with the left axis, centered on *gevurah*. Thus, only Jacob personifies the Divine power to extend to all levels, from the highest to the lowest.

וסימנך אסתר למפרע.

An allusion to this may be found in the word *Esther*, when spelled backwards.

Esther is spelled *alef-samech-tav-reish*.

ופי, "סוף" תוך "ראש" א', היינו אסתר.

I.e., the initials of the words for "head" (*rosh*), "middle" (*toch*), and "end" (*sof*), together with the letter *alef*, spell *Esther* backwards.

The initials of the words *rosh*, *toch*, and *sof* are *reish*, *tav*, and *samech*, respectively. Thus, the word *Esther* also alludes to the Divine power to extend from the highest to the lowest levels.

בסוד ואנכי הסתר אסתיר.

This is the mystical meaning of the verse, "I shall hide (*haster*), yes, hide (*astir*) My face on that day."¹⁰

The root of the words for "hide" and "yes, hide" is the same as that of the word *Esther*. The classic interpretation of this phenomenon is that G-d's presence (or "face") is hidden during the exile, the context in which the story of *Esther* takes place. G-d's Name is not mentioned once in the entire book of *Esther*.

Here, the emphasis is on the fact that G-d's face or presence is specifically found in ("hidden" or ensconced within) the Divine ability to extend from the highest to the lowest levels, as alluded to in the word *Esther*.

10. Deuteronomy 31:18.

וזהו אותיות ישראל, הם ל"י רא"ש,

This is also indicated by the fact that the word *Yisrael* may be permuted to spell "a head for Me" (*li rosh*).

Yisrael: yud-sin-reish-alef-lamed.

Li rosh: lamed-yud reish-alef-shin.

This indicates that *Yisrael* embodies the ability to reach the highest levels of Divinity.

ישראל עלה במחשב"ה:

As the sages state, **"Israel arose in G-d's thought."**¹¹

This also implies that Israel embodies the ability to reach the highest levels of Divinity.

ונשמה משכנה בראש, שהוא המוח. והרוח בלב. והנפש בכבד,

The seat of the *neshamah* is in the head, i.e., the brain; the seat of the *ruach* is in the heart; and the seat of the *nefesh* is in the liver.

וסימנם "מלך, "מוח "לב "כב"ד.

The allusion to this is in the word for "king" (*melech*), whose letters are the initials of the words for "brain" (*moach*), "heart" (*lev*), and "liver" (*kaved*).

Melech: mem-lamed-kaf. A person whose consciousness descends from his brain to his heart and then to his liver, i.e., whose intellect rules his emotions, which in turn determine the way he acts, is a "king," i.e., in charge of himself and his body. If the order is reversed, i.e., fulfillment of bodily functions inspires the emotions, which then enlist the intellect to satisfy them, the word spelled is *kelem*, "embarrassment."

א"כ נמצא, שכל העולמות תלויים על שם יעקב וישראל, דכתיב בראשית, בשביל ישראל שנקראו ראשית.

It thus follows that all the worlds are dependent upon the names Jacob and Israel. As the sages said,¹² "In the beginning" implies "for the sake of Israel, who are termed 'the beginning.'"

The Torah begins: "In the beginning, G-d created heaven and earth." The prefix *beit* in the word for "in the beginning" [*be-reishit*], besides meaning "in," can also mean "by means of." The verse can thus be read, "By means of [that which is called] 'the beginning,' G-d created heaven and earth." The Jewish people are called "the beginning," as it is written: "Israel is holy to G-d; [they are] the beginning of His produce."¹³

והם סוד נשמה לכל הברואים, שנקראו קודש ישראל.

They are the soul of all creatures, and are termed "Israel is holy."¹³

The Jewish people, being the reason for creation and the means by which G-d created the world, are the "inner soul" of all creation. All creation finds meaning and purpose only in reference to the Jewish people, who are charged with fulfilling the Divine purpose of creation, making the world into

11. *Bereishit Rabbah* 1:4.

12. *Tanchuma* (ed. Buber) 3; *Vayikra Rabbah* 36:4.

13. *Jeremiah* 2:3.

G-d's home.

וזהו ויחי יעקב, שכל חיות וקיום העולמות הוא יעקב,

This, then is the mystical meaning of the verse, "And Jacob lived...." All the life-force and sustenance of the world is dependent upon Jacob.

The word "and he lived" is interpreted here as if it was vocalized to read "and he gives life-force" in the causitive.

והוא עתיד לישראל בעולם. ולזה נקרא יעקב לשון יעקב.

And he alone is destined to remain in the world. He is therefore called *Yaakov*, related to the word "he will follow" (*ya'akeiv*).

The Divine consciousness personified by Jacob incorporates that personified by Abraham and Isaac but balances them. In this way, life-force is prevented from being siphoned off by the forces of evil, and thus Jacob-consciousness can safely descend to the lowest levels of reality and successfully transform them, together with the rest of the world, into G-d's home.

והוא היה ל"י רא"ש, דהיינו תחילת המחשבה, והוא ג"כ סוף המעשה, ומה שהיה הוא שיהיה.

Thus, he was the "a head for Me," i.e., the beginning of G-d's thought, and he is also the final product of G-d's action, and "that which was is that which will be in the end."¹⁴

This type of Divine consciousness owes its ability to descend so low to the fact that it is rooted so high.

ודברים עתיקים, והמשכיל יבין, והי יאיר עינינו במאור תורתו אכי"ר:

"The matter is ancient,"¹⁵ but the wise will understand. May G-d enlighten our eyes with the inner light of His Torah. Amen, so may it be His will.

14. Ecclesiastes 1:9.

15. par. 1 Chronicles 4:22.