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The Uniqueness of the Jewish People

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1.

HOW FORTUNATE TO BE A JEW!

On the verse,¹ “Now, please, let the strength of Ad-nai be increased,” the Zohar remarks:²

Rabbi Acha and Rabbi Yossi said: The Jewish people are more fortunate than the idol-worshiping nations of the world, as Hashem desires them, is called by them, and is glorified by them. For the world was only created for the sake of the Jewish people... and the Jewish people... sustain the world and all the other nations.

Thus, the Zohar cites three special qualities of the Jewish people, and **these** three specifically. Namely, that Hashem desires (and chooses) the Jewish people; Hashem is known by the name *Yisrael*; and Hashem is glorified by them. Other, however, seemingly superior qualities of the Jewish people, such as “{the Jewish people} are called children of Hashem,”³ are not mentioned.

In my father’s glosses on the Zohar,⁴ he explains that the rationale for the Zohar here is in accordance with its later teaching that the Jews are the “heart of the entire world.” [As the Zohar goes on to say, the Jewish people “sustain the world.”] This is why the Zohar delineates the three qualities that correspond to the three emotional vectors — *chesed*, *gevurah* and *tiferes* — as “the emotions dwell **in the heart**.”

[As he goes on to explain that “He desires them” — desire and choice — “is the aspect of *chesed*;” “He is called by them” is the aspect of *gevurah*, as the name *Elokim* {which is associated with *gevurah*} is numerically equivalent to the word כּוּי {nickname};⁵ and “He is glorified by them” is the aspect of *tiferes* {beauty or glory}].

¹ *Bamidbar* 14:17.

² *Zohar*, vol. 3, 161a.

³ *Avos* 3:14.

⁴ *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak* commenting on *Zohar*, *loc cit*.

⁵ *Tikkunei Zohar*, Introduction (15a, at the end); *Tikkun* 22, beg.; *Tikkun* 26 (71b).

This clarifies why mentioning the quality of the Jewish people as Hashem's children, or other qualities, would be inappropriate here. For this quality expresses how the Jewish people are **completely beyond** all of existence, as per the teaching of our Sages,⁶ "The {Divine} thought of the Jewish people preceded {the creation of} all things." In contrast, the relevant point here in the Zohar is how the Jewish people constitute the goal and purpose of creation ("the world was only created for the sake of the Jewish people") and they sustain the world, **in** {the context of} **the world**. For this reason, the Zohar describes the Jewish people as the heart of the world, as mentioned.

2.

POINTS TO CLARIFY

However, we need to clarify the following:

- a) How does this teaching, describing the three aforementioned qualities of the Jewish people, relate to the verse which the Zohar cites — "Now, please, let the strength of Ad-nai be increased?"
- b) Prior to listing the three qualities of the Jewish people, the Zohar begins by saying, "The Jewish people are more fortunate than the idol-worshiping nations of the world, as Hashem desires them...." The style and flow of the wording implies that this is a **novel** concept, which raises the question: How could the thought be entertained that the Jewish people were not "more fortunate than the idol-worshiping nations of the world"?

The whole idea that "the Jewish people are more fortunate than the idol-worshiping nations of the world" is difficult to understand. Meaning, {how can we imply that} the quality of the Jewish people is ascertained by drawing a **contrast** with the idol-worshiping nations, while the Jewish people are of an entirely different sort; they are exalted and distinct from the nations of the world!

⁶ *Bereishis Rabbah* ch.1, sec. 4.

3.

IS HE THE MASTER OR NOT?

We will understand this by prefacing with an explanation of the verse, “Now, please, let the strength of Ad-nai be increased.” With this prayer, Moshe, presumably, sought to elicit Hashem’s forgiveness for the sin of the spies, as the Midrash interprets the clause, “*Now, please, let the strength of Ad-nai be increased* — so that the attribute of mercy should overcome the attribute of justice.”⁷ But this is not clear:

- (a) Since Moshe wanted to awaken the attribute of mercy, he ought to have associated his prayer with the name of **Havaya**⁸ — the attribute of mercy; Why did he plead “Now, please, let the strength of **Ad-nai** be increased,” which (presumably) means an increase in the strength of **Ad-nai**, a name that connotes **sovereignty** (which is related to the attribute of justice)?
- (b) Why is the plea, “Now, please, let the strength of Ad-nai be increased” specifically found in the {plea for} forgiveness of the spies’ sin, and not when Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to effect Hashem’s forgiveness for the sin of the Golden Calf (or other sins)?

The explanation is as follows: The spies wanted to prevent the Jewish people from entering the land of Israel not because they had denied — Heaven forbid — Hashem’s ability to perform miracles, etc. Rather, they had failed to appreciate Hashem as “...Ad-nai, for You are the **Master, אדני, of all Your creations,**”⁹ as will be explained in Section 4. Since their sin had blemished the name of Ad-nai, the correction had to be through {fixing the blemish, as the verse intimates}, “Now, please, let the **strength of Ad-nai be increased.**”

⁷ *Bamidbar Rabbah*, “*Shelach*,” ch. 16, sec. 22. See also *Ramban, Rabbeinu Bachya*, et al, on the verse; *Or Hatorah*, “*Shelach*,” p. 471, at the end.

⁸ {In Chassidic texts, the Tetragrammaton, Hashem’s four letter name, is usually written as ‘הוי — *Havaya*, where the letters are transposed so as not to constitute the actual name of Hashem.}

⁹ *Bereishis Rabbah* 17:4; see also *Shaar Ha’yichud V’ Ha’emunah*, ch. 7. {The Midrash relates that before the creation of Adam, the angels asked about man’s nature. Hashem replied that man’s wisdom was superior to that of the angels. To demonstrate, Hashem first asked the angels to name various creatures. They could not. So then He asked Adam, who successfully gave meaning names to all of them, including himself. Finally, Hashem asked Adam, “And (what about) Me?” Adam answered, “It is appropriate for You to be called *Ad-nai*....” }

4.

HE IS!

Our Sages comment on the verse,¹⁰ “They are stronger than us, ממנו,” and teach that the spies argued, “Even the Homeowner {Hashem} is unable to remove His utensils from there, as it were.”¹¹ The meaning of this is (as already explained at length elsewhere):¹²

The spies argued that Hashem’s supernatural conduct was appropriate only for the desert, where the Jewish people were cut off from civilization and unburdened by involvement in physical concerns — **in a place** where they were not subject to the natural order.

However, when they would arrive in a civilized place, regarding which the **Torah** instructs, “When you enter the land... you shall sow your field for six years...”¹³ — in a place where a person plows and sows,¹⁴ and daily life would be, with the **Torah’s** say-so, defined by the laws and limitations of nature — they could not simultaneously live by an approach that **defies** nature. And since the inhabitants of the land were, in the natural order, stronger than the Jewish people, the spies felt that remaining in the desert was necessary, for “we do not rely on miracles.”¹⁵

This is the meaning of the statement, “Even the Homeowner is unable to remove His utensils from there, as it were”: Clearly, the spies knew that Hashem could perform miracles, and beyond that — that even the natural order is a Divine system. As the wording of their argument itself underscores, they are “**His** utensils” — **Hashem’s** utensils. However, they argued that since the **Homeowner** (Hashem) ordained that the “**home**” (the world) should run in accordance with the natural order, He **wants** us to conduct ourselves accordingly, and therefore, “{He} is unable to remove His utensils from there, as

¹⁰ *Bamidbar* 13:31.

¹¹ *Sotah* 35a.

¹² *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, p. 1041, et passim.

¹³ *Vayikra* 25:2-3.

¹⁴ See *Berachos* 35b.

¹⁵ See *Pesachim* 64b; *Zohar*, vol. 1, 111b, 112b.

it were.” There is no allowance, Heaven forfend, for conduct that transcends the limitations of nature.

However, the truth is that while Hashem has ordained that the world should function naturally, it is impossible to say that He “is unable” (bound) to this conduct. After all, Hashem is **Omnipotent**, and He can always alter the natural order. What’s more, this extends to the Jewish people as well, who are “a veritable part of Hashem Above,”¹⁶ and “Hashem’s portion is His people,”¹⁷ and {as such,} they are not constrained by the natural order. They have the wherewithal to place themselves beyond the limitations of nature, wherever necessary.

This is why Moshe pleaded, “Now, please, let the strength of Ad-nai be increased”: The name “Ad-nai” is the source of the natural order. (As the Alter Rebbe explains, creation of the world such that it appears to be an “existence of absolute reality, independent of Hashem” derives “from this {Divine} attribute and name.”)¹⁸ Yet, along with this explanation, the name “Ad-nai” also denotes Hashem is “the **Master** {*adon*} of all Your creations” — He is the Master and the Homeowner {in charge} of the entire universe (with the ability to alter, etc., as He so desires).

With their argument that “even the Homeowner is unable to remove His utensils...,” the spies impaired the name of Ad-nai — Hashem’s sovereignty over creation. Therefore, Moshe pleaded “Now, please, let the strength of Ad-nai be increased,” as explained above — that the power of Ad-nai be amplified¹⁹ and revealed, {demonstrating} that Hashem is an absolute Master over the natural order.²⁰

¹⁶ *Tanya*, beginning of ch. 2.

¹⁷ *Devarim* 32:9; *Iggeres HaTeshuva*, ch. 4.

¹⁸ *Shaar Hayichud V’ HaEmunah*, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ For in order to fill a void, there must be a revelation; “lit., “We must draw down Divine light” from a higher source; see *Likkutei Torah*, “*Shelach*,” 39b-c.

²⁰ {This resolves the question in Section 3, sub-sections a and b.}

5.

AS HE IS THE MASTER, SO ARE WE

The spies' failure to appreciate that "You are the Master of all Your creations" — that Hashem's sovereignty over the world is completely unconstrained by the laws of nature, was related to their failure to appreciate the {parallel} quality of the Jewish people, who are also unconstrained by the parameters of nature, {even} **as the Jewish people exist within the world.**

According to the premise of the spies, the value of a Jew in the context of his bond with Hashem which transcends the world, is found specifically when a Jew is in the Torah study hall or in *Shul*, occupying himself with Torah study and prayer, or when he is busy performing mitzvos.

However, if a Jew engages in worldly matters, which superficially seem to be the same as the conduct of a gentile, the spies could see no advantage of the Jewish people over other nations, Heaven forbid.

Therefore, since they did not perceive this special quality of the souls of the Jewish people, how the Jews embody the supra-natural within the natural, through their "veritable part of Hashem Above," the spies also failed to appreciate that Hashem is "the Master of all Your creations." They couldn't see how transcendent G-dliness is found within nature itself.

This will also explain the teaching in the Zohar, "The Jewish people are more fortunate...":

The way that the "increase" in the "strength of Ad-nai" is expressed within the **Jewish people** emphasizes their unique quality over "the idol-worshipping nations of the world": Even when the Jewish people are within {and affected by} the world's concealment and obstruction {of G-dliness}, and their advantage and superiority over the nations are not clearly visible — to the extent that there could be a thought that the Jews are no different than "the idol worshipping nations of the world" — the truth remains that even then, "the Jewish people are

more fortunate than the idol-worshipping nations of the world.” Even in such a situation, the Jewish people are **utterly distinct**.²¹

As a follow-up to this point, the Zohar mentions three special qualities: “{Hashem} desires them, is called by them, and is glorified by them.” Similar qualities can be observed throughout creation (as will be explained) — for the Jewish people stand out from all of creation, even in **these** areas.²²

6.

NOTHING CREATED IN VAIN

Our Sages teach that “of all that Hashem created in His world, not one thing was created in vain.”²³ This means that Hashem has a purpose and desire for everything in the world. Still, the accolade that “He desires them” applies only to the Jewish people.

The reason: Since the Jewish people represent the purpose and objective of creation {as they are Hashem’s foremost desire}, then His desire for {the existence of} the creation, and all it contains, is predicated on another {more fundamental} desire. Thus, Hashem’s desire for creation is subordinate to (and a means of fulfilling) the primary purpose of creation. For matters pertaining to creation, **per se**, there is no Divine desire. The ultimate (and core) of Hashem’s desire is focused only on the Jewish people — “**He desires**” only “**them**.” Understandably, then, any desire for a lesser entity is an expression of Hashem’s kindness.

²¹ {This resolves the question in Section 2, sub-section b.}

²² {This sets the stage for the answer to the question in Section 2, sub-section a.}

²³ *Shabbos* 77b.

7.

WHAT'S IN A NICKNAME?

The reason why “He is called by them” — that the Jewish people are a nickname for Hashem:

On the one hand, a nickname obscures a person’s name. It is possible that a nickname neither explains nor abbreviates a person’s **name**. (If it does, it would also possess a connection to the person called by the name.) A nickname might even be in a different language. On the other hand, a nickname also has a connection to the person’s name, which is why a nickname allows us to at least make an educated guess about what the person’s name might be.

The same is true with respect to the Jewish people and Hashem: Since the Jewish people are “a veritable part of Hashem Above,” it is possible to perceive and sense G-dliness in a Jew. However, there are two forms this can take:

When a Jew is occupied with matters pertaining to the “part of Hashem” {within him} (his soul), Torah study, and service of Hashem, then **everyone** can recognize that this is a Jew who has within him a “veritable part of Hashem Above.” As the verse says,²⁴ “All the nations of the earth will see that the name of Hashem is proclaimed over you.”

However, when a Jew walks down the street and is occupied with bodily and worldly matters, G-dly sanctity is frequently not noticeable upon him — a gentile doesn’t notice it, and sometimes even a Jew (*lehavdil*) doesn’t. In **such** a scenario, a Jew is a “**nickname**” (a garment and a concealment) for the “part of Hashem” {within him} [i.e., a mode of] *gevurah*,²⁵ which gives rise to concealment]. But even then, a Jew alludes to and provides an indication of G-dliness; it is just not in a manner that is apparent to **all**. For this, a person has to be a maven.

²⁴ *Devarim* 28:10.

²⁵ {Lit., “discipline” or “severity”; the *sefirah* associated with limitation, restraint and judgment. This refers to the concept discussed in Section 1 that a nickname is associated with *gevurah*.}

Once, the Rebbe Rashab strongly praised certain simple folk, saying that they possessed tremendous qualities. Upon hearing such words, the chassid Reb Monye Moneszohn said to the Rebbe Rashab: “I don’t see it.”

R’ Monye had a pouch of diamonds with him at that time (he was a successful diamond dealer). Later on, the Rebbe Rashab asked him to show him the diamonds that were in the pouch. Reb Monye laid out the diamonds for the Rebbe Rashab, and as he did so, he highlighted a particular stone, saying that it was a wondrous and exquisite diamond.²⁶ The Rebbe Rashab responded, “I don’t see it.” To which R’ Monye answered, “One must be a maven.” The Rebbe Rashab told him, “A Jew is wondrous and exquisite,²⁸ but {to appreciate it} one must be a maven.”²⁷

8.

THE DEPTH OF A NICKNAME

This is the novelty introduced by the Zohar’s teaching that the Jewish people are more fortunate than the nations of the world, even with respect to the idea that “Hashem is called by them”: The virtue that “Hashem’s name is proclaimed over you,” in a revealed form, is **only** the case with the Jewish people. However, the quality that “Hashem is called by them” (that the hidden connection to G-dliness can be recognized) also exists, in some form, in other aspects of creation.

For since the whole existence of every creation is the Divine word that vivifies it. Therefore, if one is a maven, it is possible to perceive within each creation, the Divine word that enlivens it. How much more so is this true in light of what is written²⁸ about the Maggid of Mezeritch. By just looking at some

²⁶ {In the original, פלאי פלאים; lit, “wonders upon wonders.”}

²⁷ *Sefer HaSichos* 5705, p. 41 ff.

²⁸ *Shaar HaEmunah* by the Mitteler Rebbe, end of ch. 27; *Maamar Vayavo Amalek* 5709, ch. 4; see also *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5662, p. 84.

handicraft, he was able to gauge the abilities of a craftsman.²⁹ (For this reason, he discerned by looking at an artifact that its artisan was blind in one eye.)

Nevertheless, the truest expression of “He is called” is specifically “**by them**” — in the Jewish people — for the whole of creation cannot be considered a “nickname” for Hashem. On the contrary, a created being sees itself as an autonomous entity, since it is given existence by means of an **action**.³⁰

Conversely, the Jewish people — who are “a veritable part of Hashem Above,” even while existing in an environment of {Divine} concealment in this world, they remain unified with G-dliness. This is why they are, even then (at the very least) a “**nickname**” for Hashem.

9.

ULTIMATE GLORY

The reason that “He is glorified by them” — that Hashem prides Himself with the Jewish people — is because the way that the Divine Presence is present within a Jew **in this world** is superior, as it were, to the way it is present Above. (This is why “the **Essence** of the Divine Presence was in the lower realm”³¹ — the Essence (and core) of the Divine Presence is to be found in this world.) Therefore, “Hashem... is **glorified** by them,” for through the Jewish people and their service here on earth, the Divine Presence is enhanced, as it were.

This concept also exists, in a similar way, in other aspects of Creation, since all worlds, and all beings that are enlivened and vivified by Hashem, disclose the greatness of Hashem. For this reason, our Sages teach “everything that Hashem created in His world, He created solely for His honor.”³² That is, every created being contributes to Hashem’s honor, and expresses His

²⁹ {In the original, “כה הפועל בנפעל”; lit., “the power of the producer in the product.”}

³⁰ {Creation means that G-dly energy actively brings (distinct) entities into existence, and not that they “automatically” come into existence as a reflection of G-dly light. Thus, these created entities perceive themselves as distinct from G-dliness. See also the *mamaar* entitled *Shuvah Yisrael 5737* (1) sec. 2.}

³¹ *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* on 5:1.

³² *Avos*, end of ch. 6.

sovereignty (as the *Beraisa*³³ cites the verse, “Hashem will reign forever and ever”³⁴ in support of this teaching).

Nevertheless, this is not **at all** comparable to the idea {expressed by the verse}, “Yisrael, in whom I glory”³⁵ — or in the language of our Sages,³⁶ Hashem says, “I will make you a **unique entity** in the world.”³⁷ For the Jewish people are the purpose of all of Creation, as discussed. This is analogous to a king who builds a palace for his daughter and son-in-law. Obviously, the palace enhances the honor of the king (as only a great and exalted king would be able to build such a great and wondrously beautiful dwelling). Yet what value does the whole beautiful dwelling have, together with all of its beautiful furniture, compared with those for whom the building was constructed (his daughter and son-in-law)?

The same is true here: “Everything that Hashem created in His world, He created solely for His honor.” But who expresses the true greatness of Hashem, with which Hashem prides himself — “He is glorified by them”? Only, “Your people, Yisrael, one nation on earth.”³⁸

— From talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Shelach*, 5731 (1971) and 5732 (1972)

³³ {Ch. 6 of *Avos* originates in the *Beraisa*, not Mishnah. It was appended to *Avos* at a later time.}

³⁴ *Shemos* 15:18.

³⁵ {*Yeshaya* 49:3.}

³⁶ *Berachos* 6a.

³⁷ {In the original, “הטיבה.” Compare to “מחוטב עציך” in *Devarim* 29:10, which means one who splits or separates wood. The Gemara in *Berachos*, *ibid.*, is expounding the verse in *Devarim* 26:17: “Hashem *did single you out* (האמירך, translated by Onkelos as חטבת) this day to be to you as a G-d....”}

³⁸ *Divrei Hayamim* 1, 17:21.