



PARSHAT RE'EH

PATHS OF DIVINE SERVICE: FROM KABBALAH TO BRESLOV

In *parshat Re'eh*, the Torah restates that there are only a limited number of kosher cattle, “This is the cattle that you may eat: ox, sheep and goat.”¹ However, this time, it adds a list of seven kosher animals that may also be consumed, “the gazelle, the deer, the roebuck, the ibex, the antelope, the buffalo, and the giraffe.”²

When we survey this list from the point of view of Chassidic teachings we find that it clearly corresponds to the ten *sefirot*. The three species of kosher cattle (ox, sheep, and goat) correspond to the first three *sefirot*, crown, wisdom, and understanding; the seven kosher animals correspond to the seven *sefirot* of the heart—loving-kindness, might, beauty, victory, thanksgiving, foundation, and kingdom.

More in depth, each of the kosher species represents a particular state of being. The three species of kosher cattle represent states of observing and performing the Torah’s commandments, while the seven species of kosher animals represent different pure and holy approaches found in the service of the Almighty. Indeed, a wondrous allusion to this last idea—that the seven kosher animals symbolize different paths, each unique and equally desirable, in the service of God—is that the numerical value of their Hebrew names as they appear in the verse (**אֵיל וְעֵבִי וְחֲמוֹר וְאֶקוּ וְדִישָׁן וְתָאוּ**) (**וְזֶמֶר**) is 1568, or 224, the value of the word “path” (**דֶּרֶךְ**) times 7. In other words, the average value of each animal is the same as the *gematria* of the word “path” (**דֶּרֶךְ**)—i.e., a unique path or manner of Divine service. 1568 is also the value of a very important verse describing the path of serving God, “In all your paths know Him and He will straighten your way”³ (**בְּכָל דֶּרֶכְיָךְ דָּעָהוּ וְהוּא יִשְׁרֵךְ אֶרְחֹתֶיךָ**).

Let us now specify the seven pure paths of Divine service and how each corresponds to one of the 7 kosher animals.

Wearers of White Clothing: The gazelle corresponds to loving-kindness and to Abraham, the archetypal soul of loving-kindness. It symbolizes the Divine path of the *Sephardi* Kabbalists who wear white clothing (especially on Shabbat) and who concentrate on revealing the light of loving-kindness found in Kabbalah (as Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai told his students before passing on, “Our path is based on love”⁴).

Masters of the Revealed Torah: The deer, representing might and Isaac, symbolizes the Lithuanian tradition of publicly learning only the revealed aspects of Torah. This path centers on the intellectual debate figuratively called, “the battle of Torah”⁵ (**מַלְחַמַּתָּה שֶׁל תוֹרָה**), which also strongly contracts and limits (both aspects of the *sefirah* of might) the inner light of Torah.⁶

Chabad: The roebuck, which represents the *sefirah* of beauty and Jacob, alludes to the Divine service of Chabad. The Chabad *yeshivot* are called *Tomchei Temimim* (Supporters of the Earnest), a name that relates to Jacob who is described as an earnest man. The Chabad methodology places great emphasis on balancing the inner teachings of the Torah, Kabbalah and Chassidut (corresponding to loving-kindness), with its revealed teachings (corresponding to might). The service that reflects the *sefirah* of beauty can be described as, “Gazing upon the beauty of the king,”⁷ revealing God’s beauty through profound intellectual meditation.

Torah of Eretz Yisrael: The ibex, corresponding to the *sefirah* of victory, symbolizes the Torah of the Land of Israel which emphasizes the eternal (a synonym for victory) nature of the Jewish people and on the victorious outlook needed to hold onto the Land of Israel. Victory is a branch of loving-kindness and the Torah of the Land of Israel indeed receives its vitality from the path of the Kabbalists corresponding to loving-kindness, as above.

Musar: The antelope corresponds to the *sefirah* of acknowledgement and symbolizes the path of *musar*, the teachings of Torah dedicated to rectifying man’s moral character. Following the path of *musar* requires that the individual be willing to acknowledge the blemishes in his character. The blemishes themselves are caused by a fallen faculty of thanksgiving and acknowledgment, as suggested by the verse, “My thanksgiving has turned into my destroyer.”⁸ In the *musar* volume, *Duties of the Heart*, it is explained that the foundation of all moral character is the ability to be grateful and give thanks where thanks is due. Thanksgiving is an extension of the *sefirah* of might and indeed serving God through the elevation of moral character is ubiquitous in Lithuanian Torah (corresponding to might, as above).

Universal Chassidut: The buffalo, that represents foundation, symbolizes the way of universal Chassidut (which developed mostly in Poland, Galicia, and Romania). Universal Chassidut is based on the notion of clinging to the *tzadik*, the holy and righteous individual that leads each group. The *tzadik* is described as the foundation of the world and through the *tzadik* each of his followers attains a state of righteousness befitting his own individual status.

Breslov: The giraffe corresponds to the *sefirah* of kingdom and symbolizes the path of Breslov. The essence of the Breslov way requires assuming the stance of one who has nothing of his own and stands in total supplication before the Almighty. This is the

spiritual stance of King David, who described himself as, “I am prayer.”⁹ Kingdom represents a state of awareness in which a person realizes that he possesses nothing that is his, but rather everything is given to him by God. The Breslov method for picking one’s self up is based on searching for good points in one’s self, the secret of the verse, “I will sing to my God as long as I exist”¹⁰—looking for the good in my existence. This too is related to the *sefirah* of kingdom and to the Hebrew name of this animal, זָמֵר, which is the same as the Hebrew word for “song” (זָמַר)!)

Let us sum up the full correspondence in the form of a *partzuf*,

might גְּבוּרָה
Masters of Revealed Torah

loving-kindness חֶסֶד
Sephardic Kabbalists

beauty תְּפִאֲרֵת
Chabad

acknowledgment הוֹד
Musar

victory נִצְחָה
Torah of Eretz Yisrael

foundation יְסוּד
Universal Chassidut

kingdom מְלֻכוֹת
Breslov

Notes:

1. Deuteronomy 14:4.
2. Ibid. 14:5. It is important to note that the identification of the 7 kosher animals is not exact. We do not have a clear tradition about which animals the Torah is referring to.
3. Proverbs 3:6. The *gematria* of all 10 kosher cattle and animals is equal to that of the verse (Isaiah 25:1), “*Havayah*, my God, I will exalt You and praise Your name for You have given wondrous advice from afar, with enduring faith” (יְיָהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲתָהּ אֲרֻמְמֶךָ אוֹדָה שְׂמֵךְ כִּי עָשִׂיתָ כְּלָא עֲצוֹת מְרַחֵק אֲמוּנָה אֲמֵן). Each of the kosher species exalts the Creator and teaches us a wondrous path of Divine service complete with advice that is far-reaching in instructing us in the ways of faith.
4. *Zohar* III, 128a.
5. *Megilah* 15b
6. It must be stressed that the masters of the Lithuanian methodology are not opposed to the teachings of Kabbalah and most delve into it in private. But, there are others who completely invalidate the inner dimension of Torah. Their path can no longer be included among the kosher animals/paths of Divine service. Such an outlook is similar to Esau’s—Isaac’s spiritual waste. Indeed, the *midrash* describes that, “Esau’s head lies in Isaac’s bosom” and one who opposes the inner teachings of the Torah may still have a fine mind for in-depth study of Talmud.
7. *Zohar* I, 199a.
8. Daniel 10:8.
9. Psalms 109:4.
10. Ibid. 104:33.

Dedicated to the merit of David Ely ben Gidon Y”N
May he be successful in all his endeavors, material and spiritual alike