

Daily Insight
into the
Second Reading of Vezot Habrachah

from Harav Yitzhcak Ginsburgh

Our daily meditation will focus on the final verse of the second reading of *Vezot Habrachah*: "To Benjamin he said: 'The companion of *Havayah*, may He dwell securely over him. He envelopes him all day, and dwells between his shoulders.'"¹

Benjamin was privileged to have the Holy Temple built in his territory in the Land of Israel. The Holy Temple is the place where God's Divine Presence, the *Shechinah*, dwells in our physical world. The words "may He dwell securely over him" refer to the First Temple; "He envelopes him all day" refers to the Second Temple; and, "[He] dwells between his shoulders" refers to the Third Temple, which will be built by the Mashiach.² In each Temple there appeared a different aspect of the Divine Presence. In the First Temple the *Shechinah* revealed the aspect of the Divine known as "the God of Abraham," which in Kabbalah corresponds to the *sefirah* of wisdom. In the Second Temple the *Shechinah* revealed the aspect called "the God of Isaac," which corresponds to the *sefirah* of understanding. In the Third Temple it will reveal the aspect of the Almighty known as "the God of Jacob," corresponding to the *sefirah* of knowledge.³

These three *sefirot*—wisdom, understanding, and knowledge—are understood in Kabbalah as representing a general principle (*klal*), a particular (*prat*), and a general principle (*klal*), respectively. In our case, we see that the verb used to describe the presence of the *Shechinah* in the First and Third Temples (the two general principles) is "to dwell" (שכן).⁴ But, in the case of the Second Temple, which is a "particular," we find the verb חפף, meaning "to envelope" used. In the Talmud,⁵ חפף means to clean one's hair. Rashi⁶ explains that this word means "scratching, like a person who scratches his head from worry because he has not attained the object of his desire." Likewise, during the time of the Second Temple, the Divine Presence dwelt there only partially.⁷ It was "scratching the surface" of the physical dimension, but not quite entering it completely. Indeed the verb חפף can be seen as an acronym for חכמה פרטי פרטים, meaning that light contained in חכמה (wisdom, which represents the general principle) particularizes (פרטי פרטים) when entering understanding, but may (as in this case) remain at the level of surrounding light, never quite fully connecting with the mundane.

The most central of all three Holy Temples is the third, may it be built soon in our days by the Mashiach. This Temple, as we saw, is described as "dwells between his shoulders." In Kabbalah, the *sefirah* of knowledge is pictured as situated "between the shoulders." Indeed, דעת יי-הוה ("knowledge of God") numerically equals the word כתר



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("shoulder"). The *sefirah* of knowledge is said to be situated between the shoulders particularly when higher knowledge⁸ (also referred to as the hidden knowledge) is enfolded within lower knowledge⁹ (also called: expanding knowledge). This causes the lower knowledge to expand and diverge into two symbolic shoulders: left and right, which represent the five judgments of knowledge¹⁰ and the five aspects of loving-kindness of knowledge.¹¹

The expansion of lower knowledge is one of the eschatological images described by the prophets. The Mashiach is destined to bring the two levels of consciousness together causing "the earth to be full of knowledge of God, as the waters cover the ocean."¹² (This is also the concealed meaning of the verses "And a wellspring will emerge from the House of God...",¹³ and "Living waters from Jerusalem."¹⁴) Numerically, **בין כתפיו שכן** ("He dwells between his shoulders") equals **דעת דעת** (2 times "knowledge"), alluding as such to the two aspects of knowledge. The gematria of the entire blessing: **ידיד ייְהוּה ישכן** **לבטח עליו חפץ עליו כל היום ובין כתפיו שכן** equals 1000 and **דעת דעת** (2 times "knowledge," as above), where the 1000 alludes to the verse "a thousand to you Solomon."¹⁵

At the end of the first chapter of the Tractate of *Baba Kama*, we find the following: "The sages learnt: [The bodies of] seven individuals were not subject to decomposition: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, and Benjamin the son of Jacob.... Benjamin the son of Jacob, as it says, "...The companion of *Havayah*, He dwells securely over him." *Rashi* writes: "The Talmud learns that Benjamin dwells securely [i.e., his body does not decompose], because of his nearness and companionship with the Divine Presence." That the body does not decompose is thus a product of the dwelling of the Divine Presence. But, since the *Shechinah* was only fully present in the time of the First Temple, it is clear that this is an effect related to wisdom (which we said above is the aspect of the Divine that dwelt in the First Temple). But, come the time of the Third Temple, "the God of Jacob,"¹⁶ as we explained earlier, not only will the body not decompose after death, but it will merit eternal life.

Now, the *gematria* of all seven individuals noted, **אברהם יצחק יעקב משה אהרן מרים בנימן** (note that Benjamin is written **בנימן**, with only one "*yud*," in Moshe's blessing), is exactly 41². Note that $\Delta 41$ (read: "triangle of 41"), which denotes the sum of all integers from 1 to 41, is equal to the numerical value of **בית המקדש**, "the Holy Temple."

Let us write the entire saying of the sages in exact Hebrew:

שבעה לא שלט בהם רמה ותולעה ואלו הם אברהם יצחק ויעקב משה אהרן ומרים ובנימן בן יעקב

We find that it equals $7 \cdot$ **תולעה**, or "decomposition." But, the word **תולעה** ("decomposition") itself is equal to $7 \cdot$ **חכמה** ("wisdom"). Therefore, the full phrase equals $7^2 \cdot$ **חכמה**, or **לבטח** ("securely") \cdot **חכמה** ("wisdom"). This numerical finding illustrates that there exists a positive state of "decomposition." The word **תולעה**, which we have translated so far as "decomposition," stems from the Hebrew word meaning "a worm" (**תולעת**). King David says of himself, "I am a worm, not a man."¹⁷ With these words, King David is not humiliating himself, but rather sharing the feeling that holy

self-nullification, which is the experiential state of wisdom, grounds the body. It is as if the body has already experienced decomposition (a worm-state) and therefore is no longer affected by decomposition after death. Thus, in order to save one's body from decomposition, one must experience during one's life the inner essence of the *sefirah* of wisdom—holy self-nullification, thereby achieving a physical state of nullification.¹⁸ The experience of self-nullification by Benjamin is hinted at in the *Zohar's* saying "the father founds the daughter." In this idiom, "father" refers to wisdom, the father principle; "founds" refers to the *sefirah* of foundation; and, "daughter" refers to the *sefirah* of kingdom. More deeply, the foundation referred to here is that of the "daughter," the foundation of kingdom, which is also referred to as the "point of Zion" of the *partzuf* of *Nukvah*. The archetypal soul of the "point of Zion" is Benjamin the *tzadik*, the lower *tzadik* in relation to Joseph. Out of Benjamin came Saul, the first King of Israel—the embodiment of the kingship quality stemming from the foundation of kingdom.

A number of different reasons are given for why the tribe of Benjamin merited having the Holy Temple constructed in its territory. Let us present these reasons in short form in order of their correspondence to the *sefirot*:

Loving-kindness: He longed (more than all of his brothers) to have the *Shechinah* dwell in his territory. Longing of a wife for her husband is an expression of love, which, in Kabbalistic terminology, originates from the spirit inserted into the foundation of the *partzuf* of *Nukvah* by her husband. In the Torah, this spirit is described as the cause for "your yearning will be to your husband," one of the consequences that the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge had on Eve. The Arizal explains that in the relationship between Jacob and Rachel, this spirit of Rachel's longing for Jacob became the soul of Benjamin.

Might: The Tribe of Benjamin was the first to leap into the Red Sea. This is a clear expression of the *sefirah* of might, which in this case manifests as holy recklessness; reckless action that is focused on the holy and the good.

Beauty: He completes Jacob's offspring. Jacob (Israel), his father, the archetypal soul of beauty, was destined to have 12 children and Benjamin was the last one born. In that sense, Benjamin can be called: "the beauty of Israel" (תפארת ישראל).

Victory and Acknowledgment: Benjamin was the only one of Jacob's children who did not bow down to Esau,¹⁹ as he had not yet been born. One bows down on one's knees, which correspond to victory and acknowledgment. Likewise, Mordechai, from the tribe of Benjamin, did not bow down to Haman (the descendant of Amalek, the grandson of Esau). In refusing to bow down to evil not only does one not surrender to evil (acknowledgment) but one defeats evil (victory).

Foundation: Benjamin did not take part in the sale of Joseph. Joseph is the archetypal soul of foundation.

Kingdom: Benjamin was the only one of the tribes born in the Land of Israel. The Land of Israel is the global planetary embodiment of the *sefirah* of kingdom and is founded, as above, from the father principle, which in the *Zohar* is associated with the concept of holiness.²⁰ This is why the Land of Israel is called the Holy Land. As the

father principle corresponds to the *sefirah* of wisdom, this is also the source for the sages' idiom: "The air of the Land of Israel makes one wise."²¹

We should integrate into our service of *Hashem* all of these special qualities exhibited by Benjamin. By doing so, we will merit that the Divine Presence dwell within us, as the Torah says: "And I will dwell within them."²² About his verse, the commentaries note: "It does not say '[I will dwell] within *it*' [thereby referring only to the Tabernacle, and later to the Temple], but 'within *them*,' meaning, [that the Divine Presence will dwell] within the heart of every one of the Jewish people."²³

Let us end by meditating on the structure of the verse itself. We will write out the full verse in Hebrew:

לְבַנְיָמִן אָמַר יְדִיד רְהוּהָ יִשָּׁבֵן לְבִטָּח עָלָיו חֲפָץ עָלָיו כָּל הַיּוֹם וּבֵין כְּתָפָיו שָׁבֵן

There are many examples of astounding numerical relationships and self-reference in this verse. Before we look at these, let us note that Benjamin is spelled in two variations in the Bible. The more common is the one in our verse, *בנימן*, without a second *yud*. The less common is *בנימין* with two *yud*'s. As we progress we will see that the "choice" of spelling *בנימן* with one *yud* is of numerical significance.

- The verse has 54, *יְהוּהָ יְדִיד* ("the companion of *Havayah*,") letters.
- The word *יְדִיד* ("companion") itself is the secret of the relationship between father (י) and daughter (ד) mentioned above. It is also the main part of the filling²⁴ of the letter י itself: יד.
- The verse contains י (10) letters *yud* (י), ו (6) letters *vav* (ו), and ג (2 = $\sqrt{4} = \sqrt{ד}$) letters *dalet* (ד).
- The י (tenth) letter from the beginning of the verse is a *yud* (י) as is the י (tenth) letter counting back from the end of the verse.
- The 36th (= 1 · 1) letter of the verse is a *vav* (ו).
- The sum of the locations of all the letters *yud* (י) in the verse is 256 = 16² = יי · יי
- The sum of the locations of all the letters *vav* (ו) in the verse is 216 = 6³ = 1 · 1 · 1
- The sum of the locations of the two letters *dalet* (ד) in the verse is 24 = 4! = ד!
- The sum of the locations of all three letters, *yud*, *vav*, and *dalet* in the verse is thus 496 = *מַלְכוּת* ("kingdom") = Δ אַל (the sum of integers from 1 to 31). But, when these three numbers are taken as the first three numbers in a quadratic series, we find, using the method of finite differences, that the base of the series is *בנימן* ("Benjamin") = 152!

24	216	256
	192	40
		-152

This provides a beautiful mathematical illustration to what we said above, that Benjamin is the foundation [base] of kingdom!!!

The letter *yud* is one of the four vowel letters in Hebrew: אהוי, *alef, hei, vav, and yud*. Let us now look at the other 3 vowels: אהוה. These three letters form a word in itself, אהוה,

which means “sought.” This word appears in the Bible in the context of the Divine Presence: “*Havayah* has chosen Zion, He has *sought* it as His dwelling place.”²⁵ So let us turn our attention to these three letters. We find that there is 1 (= א) *alef* (א), 3 *hei* (ה) and 6 (= ו) *vav* (ו). The total numerical value of all the instances of the letters אהוי in the verse therefore equals:

$$1 \cdot \text{א} + 3 \cdot \text{ה} + 6 \cdot \text{ו} + 10 \cdot \text{י} = 152 = \text{בנימן!}$$

The sum of the locations of all of these letters is $294 = 6 \cdot 7^2 = 6 \cdot \text{לבטח}$.

But, 294 is also the sum of the locations of the letters *yud* counted from the end of the verse!

The first six words²⁶ of the verse: לְבַנְיָמִן אָמַר יְדִיד יְיָ הָהוּא יִשְׁכֵּן לְבֵטַח = הַשְּׂרָאָת, meaning “the indwelling,” which refers to the idiom: “The indwelling of the *Shechinah* in Israel,” which as we have seen in length is the topic of this verse. The *gematria* of the entire idiom in Hebrew, הַשְּׂרָאָת הַשְּׂכִינָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, is 1839.

$1839 = 3 \cdot 613$ and it is also equal to גַּל עֵינַי וְאֲבִיטָה נִפְלְאוֹת מִתּוֹרַתְךָ, “Open my eyes and I will see the wonders of Your Torah.”

¹. Deuteronomy 33:12.

². *Ramban, ad. loc.* based on the *Sifri*.

³. The Almighty is described as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” in the opening benediction of the *Amidah*, or *Shmonei Esreh*. Abraham himself is the archetypal soul of the *sefirah* of loving-kindness. Just above loving-kindness, on the right axis of the model of the *sefirot*, lies wisdom. Therefore, “the God of Abraham” refers to the Divine revelation that emanates from wisdom. Isaac is the archetypal soul of the *sefirah* of might, which is situated in the middle of left axis of the *sefirot*. Just above it is the *sefirah* of understanding; thus, “the God of Isaac” refers to the Divine revelation that emanates from understanding. Finally, Jacob is the archetypal soul of the *sefirah* of beauty. Just above beauty, on the middle axis of the *sefirot*, is knowledge; therefore, “the God of Jacob” refers to the Divine revelation that emanates from knowledge.

⁴. In reference to the dwelling in the First Temple, the verb is written in future tense, יִשְׁכֵּן, which can be understood as a composite: י שְׁכֵּן, meaning that the letter *yud*, the letter of *Havayah* that corresponds to the *sefirah* of wisdom, dwells, serving to further strengthen the connection between the First Temple and the *sefirah* of wisdom.

⁵. *Nazir* 42a.

⁶. On *Yoma* 12a.

⁷. The Talmud states: “These are the five things that were in the First Temple but were not in the Second Temple: The Holy Ark, its lid, and the Cherubim; the fire [on the altar]; the Divine Presence; *Ru’ach Hakodesh* [the spirit of prophecy]; the *Urim* and *Tumim* [see Exodus 28:30]” (*Yoma* 21b). See also Maimonides, *Hilchot beit habechirah* 4:1-2.

⁸. Higher knowledge (דעת עליון) represents consciousness of reality from the Almighty’s perspective, as it were.

⁹. Lower knowledge (דעת תחתון) represents consciousness of the Almighty from the human perspective.

¹⁰. ה גבורות

¹¹. ה חסדים

¹². Isaiah 11:9.

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- ¹³. Joel 4:18.
- ¹⁴. Zachariah 14:8.
- ¹⁵. Song of Songs 8:12. See *Rashi* there.
- ¹⁶. In the *Amidah* we say "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, *and* the God of Jacob." The conjunctive "and," which in Hebrew is the letter *vav* symbolizes a conduit that draws down the light of the supernal crown into consciousness.
- ¹⁷. Psalms 22:7.
- ¹⁸. See also the *Ben Yehoyada* on this passage in the Talmud.
- ¹⁹. See Genesis 33:6-7.
- ²⁰. *Zohar* III, 94b.
- ²¹. *Bava Batra* 158b.
- ²². Exodus 25:8.
- ²³. See *Shnei Luchot Habrit* 69a; *Alsheich* on the verse, and others.
- ²⁴. "Filling" means that the letter is spelled out as it would be pronounced.
- ²⁵. Psalms 13:13.
- ²⁶. This number (906) is also equal to תולעת, "worm." The sum of the next five words, עליו חפף כל היום = 511, which is also the numerical value of תולעה ("decomposition"), as well as the numerical value of השראה ("indwelling") as above.