

ויצא

ASHER

Asher is *Klal Yisrael's* guardian of *gashmius* — physicality — in *Olom Hazeh*; he was designated as a cause for happiness by his mother at birth:

באשרי כי אשרוני בנות

Happy am I! for the daughters will call me happy (*Bereishis* 30:13).

The *Navi* states:

וישב לחוף ימים ועל מפרציו ישכון

Asher sits at the seashore and at its shore he dwells (*Shoftim* 5:17).

The *Zohar* (ibid.) explains that Asher was the conduit for imported goods from foreign shores, for the benefit of *Klal Yisrael* and for the sake of Heaven. The *Sifri* explains that Asher's position in *Eretz Yisrael*

וארצו של אשר היתה מנעולה של ארץ ישראל

Was the lock of the land of Israel (*Devarim* 33:25).

This can be understood as physical guardianship and spiritual custodianship. Traditionally, the פּרִצוֹת, the openings (in this case the seashores) are the sites of the *Yeitzer Hara's* first attempts at infiltration. The delights and temptations of the outside world first present themselves to Asher, who is charged with containing and controlling this *gashmius*.

מאשר שמנה לחמו והוא יתן מעדני מלך

As for Asher, his bread shall be fat, and he shall provide royal dainties (*Bereishis* 49:20).

Yaakov's blessing to Asher ordained that his produce shall be abundant; the profuse bounty of his olives and fine fruits (Rashi, *Devarim* 33:24) were the delight of *Eretz Yisrael*. The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 38*) explains the great role that food plays in the life of man. Hashem created Adam only on the sixth day so that man would be enabled to immediately enter into a feast (*Tosafos, Berachos* 60:).

דרך ארץ הוא: הבא מן הדרך מקדימין להם במאכל ובמשתה

It is the custom of the world, when one comes from the road, that we greet him with food and drink (*Vayikra Rabbah* 34:8).

Once a man's physical needs have been satisfied, it is a much simpler task to grapple with his spiritual needs. This is evidenced by (*Bereishis Rabbah* 70:5):

לחם זו תורה

Bread is Torah

and:

אם אין קמה אין תורה

Without bread there is no Torah (*Pirkei Avos* 3:21).

It is obvious that Asher's blessing involved the spiritual role of Torah teacher.

Asher was also blessed with his children:

ברוך מבנים אשר

Blessed of sons is Asher (*Devarim* 33:24)

and

שהיו בנותיו נאות

His daughters were beautiful (Rashi *Ibid.*).

His daughters were sought after as wives by the High Priests and by kings.

דירה נאה, ואשה נאה, וכלים נאים, מרחיבן דעתו של אדם

A beautiful dwelling, a beautiful wife, and beautiful clothes, enlarge a man's spirit (*Berachos* 57:).

The prototype for the future generations of daughters was Serach, the daughter of Asher,¹ who was outstanding in her modesty, piety and good deeds (*Midrash Avos* 45), and in wisdom (*Koheles Rabbah* 9:2). She is credited with wisely and gently informing Yaakov *Avinu* of Yosef's re-appearance. For this deed alone she merited great longevity (*Sotah* 13:). The beautiful *gashmius* exterior of Asher's daughters only hinted at the vast spiritual attributes that lay within them. Asher thus represents the "happiness" and *gashmius* of *Klal Yisrael*. Asher's role in the *Shivtei Kah* was to utilize this mundane happiness to transport himself and *Klal Yisrael* to the highest spiritual levels. Simcha is an integral part of spiritual achievement — for without *simchah* the *Shechinah* does not rest on the individual (*Shabbos* 30:). As Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto (*Mesilas Yesharim* 19) states, happiness is one of the three prerequisites for perfection.

ושמחת בכל הטוב אשר נתן לך ה' אלקיך

You shall rejoice with all the good things G-d has granted (*Devarim* 26:11).

תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב

Because you did not serve G-d with joy and with a glad heart . . . you will serve your enemies (*Devarim* 28:47-48).

The restriction of joy diminishes one's gratitude for Hashem's blessings because gratitude is the result of joy (*Kuzari, Sha'ar* 8).

עוז וחזקה במקמו

Strength and happiness are in His place (*Divrei Hayamim* I 16:27).

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¹. According to the Ramban (*Pinchas* 26:46), Serach was actually only Asher's step-daughter. The point is nevertheless strengthened. For as Serach, who was not actually a blood relation of Asher, was nevertheless profoundly influenced by her contact with Asher, so too *Klal Yisrael* should be influenced by the personality of Asher.