

כראשית פרק כט פסוק א

וַתֵּהָר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר הַפֶּלֶם אֲדָה אֶת יְקֹנָן לְכָל בֶּן קָרָאָה שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה וַתִּלְמַד מִפְּלִדָּת:

When Leah gave birth to a fourth son, she said, "Now I will thank God." Therefore, she named him Yehudah. And she ceased giving birth.

Every member of the Children of Israel identifies with the term "Jew." We are known as, and respond to the name *the Jewish People*. However, the term "Jew" derives from Judah, the translation of Yehudah. Being that there are twelve, or thirteen tribes of Israel (depending on how you view Ephraim and Menasheh) it is curious that we associate ourselves solely with the tribe of Judah.

It takes little more than a superficial knowledge of basic Jewish history to explain this phenomenon. As we know from *tanach*, after King Solomon died, the Jewish monarchy was split in two. King Solomon's son, Rechavam, ruled over Judah and Benjamin, while Yeravam son of Nevat, from the tribe of Ephraim, ruled over the other ten tribes. From that point on there were two kings over Israel, the Davidic dynasty ruling over Judah and Benjamin, while kings from other tribes ruled over the other ten tribes. This continued until Assyria conquered Samaria and exiled the ten tribes from the land of Israel. At that point, only the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained in the land of Israel. For some reason, either because the monarchy belonged to Judah, or perhaps additionally because Judah was so much larger than Benjamin (see the last two chapters of Judges), the remaining members of the children of Israel were termed Judeans.

אסתר פרק א פסוק ו

אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבְּיָרָה וְשֵׁמוֹ מְרֹדֶכַי בֶּן יָאִיר בֶּן שִׁמְעִי בֶּן קִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי:

There was a Judean man in the capital city of Shushan. His name was Mordechai the son of Yair, the son of Kish, a Benjaminite.

The Talmud (Megilla 12b) points out a contradiction in the above verse. First we are told that Mordechai was from the tribe of Judah, but the end of the verse states that he was from Benjamin. Several answers are offered to resolve this contradiction.

ש"י אסתר פרק א פסוק ז

אִישׁ יְהוּדִי. עַל שְׁגִלָּה עִם גְּלוּת יְהוּדָה כָּל אוֹתָן שָׁגְלוּ עִם מַלְכֵי יְהוּדָה הֵיוּ קְרוּיִים יְהוּדִים בֵּין הַגּוֹיִם וְאֶפְּלוּ מִשְׁבַּט אַחַר הַס:

[He is referred to as Judean] Due to the fact that he was exiled along with the exiles of Judah. All that were exiled along with the kingdom of Judah were called Yehudim among the nations, even if they were from another tribe¹.

1. See Megilla 14b where *chazal* relate that the prophet Jeremiah brought back members of every tribe to the land of Judah and Benjamin.

Rashi, always eager to explain verses based on the most straight-forward approach, quotes the opinion of *chazal* that despite the fact that he was actually from the tribe of Benjamin, Mordechai was called Judean because, he part of the *Judean* exile. From this we understand why all Children of Israel today are referred to as Jews.

However, there is another explanation for the identification of Mordechai with Judah in the Talmud.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת אשילף ז' א' - ט'

קרי ליה יהודי, אלמא מיהודה קאתי, וקרי ליה ימיני, אלמא מבנימין קאתי! ...רבי יוחנן אמר לעולם מבנימין קאתי, ואמאי קרי ליה יהודי? על שום שכפר בעבודה זרה, שכל הכופר בעבודה זרה נקרא יהודי. בדכתיב איתי גברין יהודאין וגו' (דניאל ג').

He is called Judean, implying that he is from the tribe of Judah. Yet, he is called a Benjaminite, implying that he is from the tribe of Benjamin! ...Rebbi Yochanan said, "In reality he was from the tribe of Benjamin, so why is he called Judean? Due to the fact that he rejected idolatry. Anyone who rejects idolatry is called Yehudi, as it says, 'There are Yehuda'in men... O king, your god they do not worship, and to the golden statue that you have erected they do not bow (Daniel 3).'"

According to Rebbi Yochanan, the term *Yehudi*, or *Jew* in modern terms, refers to one who rejects idolatry. He derives this definition from the story related in the book of Daniel regarding Chananyah, Misha'el and Azariah who refused to bow to the statue of Nevuchadnetzar, and were therefore deemed *Jews*².

I think that this idea of Rebbi Yochanan is not merely a nice philosophical idea, but rather a critical part of our Jewish identity, and something we should consider whenever the term *Jew* is mentioned. Additionally, I believe that this idea, in its essence, can be traced back to the naming of Judah himself. Allow me to explain.

This has great *halachic* significance as well; see Tosafos *b'zman she'atah* on Gittin 36b as to how *shmitah* was obligatory according to Torah law in the times of the first and second Temple.

2. See the Maharsha who explains the proof from this verse that "Jew" means anything other than a member of the exile of Judah. He claims that the words "three Jewish men" are extraneous. As is apparent from the rest of the story, Nevuchadnetzar never appears to view the actions of these three individuals as a reflection of the Jewish attitude in general. Therefore, the fact that they are Jews was irrelevant. Had they been non-Jews, the response of the king would have been the same. If so, why are they referred to as *Jews*? According to Rebbi Yochanan, to teach us that whomever rejects idolatry is deemed a *Jew*.

ראשית פרק כט פסוק א

וַתֵּהָר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר הַפֶּלֶם אֲוִדָה אֶת יְקִוֵּק לְכֹל בֵּן קָרָאָה עִימוּ יְהוּדָה וַתִּלְמַד מִפִּלְדָּת:

When Leah gave birth to a fourth son, she said, "Now I will thank God." Therefore, she named him Yehudah. And she ceased giving birth.

The word *hoda'ah* in Hebrew has two possible meanings. On the one hand, it refers to thanksgiving. On the other hand, it refers to admission. Rav Yitzchok Hutner *zt"l* in his *Pachad Yitzchok* points out that we find both meanings in our daily prayers. In the paragraph *modim anachnu lach* in the *amidah* prayer, we begin with the statement, "We admit to You that You are God etc." Yet, a few sentences later we add, "and thank You... for etc." The Hebrew words for admit and thank are *modim* and *nodeh* respectively, both rooted in the word *hoda'ah*. Similarly, in the naming of Judah we find references to both ideas.

ש' ראשית פרק כט פסוק א

הַפֶּלֶם אֲוִדָה. שְׁנַטְלָתִי יוֹתֵר מִחֶלְקִי, מֵעַתָּה יֵשׁ לִי לְהוֹדוֹת:

[This time I will thank] because I have taken more than my share. Due to this, I should thank.

Rashi explains that the wives of Yaakov knew prophetically that there were to be twelve tribes from four wives. Even distribution would allow each wife to have three sons. Once Leah had a fourth boy, she realized that she had received more than her fair share, and thanked God for this. She therefore named her fourth son *Yehudah* based on the word *hoda'ah*, meaning thanksgiving, and formulated (perhaps unwittingly) to include all four letters of the Tetragrammaton.

ר'ט"ח ראשית פרק כט פסוק א

הַפֶּלֶם אֲוִדָה אֶת ה'. הוּא הַשֵּׁם הָרִאשׁוֹן שֶׁבִּי"ג מִדּוֹת הַיָּא מִדַּת הַתְּשׁוּבָה, וְלִכְךָ נִרְמַז הַשֵּׁם הַזֶּה בְּשֵׁמוֹ, כִּי הוּדָה וְלֹא בּוֹשׁ וְגֵרָם לְרִאוּבֵן שִׁיּוּדָה, וְלִכְךָ יֵצֵא מִזְרַעוֹ דוֹד ע"ה שֶׁהָקִים עוֹלָה שֶׁל תְּשׁוּבָה.

[This time I will thank Hashem] This [name of God] refers to the first name of God in the thirteen attributes, and references the trait of repentance. Therefore, this name of God is hinted to in his (Judah's) name, because he admitted [to being wrong] and was not embarrassed³ (see Gen. 38:26). He also caused Reuven to repent (see Sotah 7b). Therefore, David, peace be upon him, who established the burnt offering of repentance (see Avodah Zarah 4b-5a), was his

3. See Sotah 10b where the Talmud states that Yehudah, who sanctified the name of God in public (through his public admission of guilt), merited that his name was composed of all the letters of God's name. The Maharsha explains that even though Leah named him Yehudah based on the Hebrew word for thanksgiving, God inspired her to use every letter of the Tetragrammaton and add the letter *dalet*, a reference to admission - because due to the additional *dalet*, meaning his admission, he merited the other four letters.

descendant.

While Rabbeinu Bechayei is certainly addressing a hint in the verse, as opposed to the straight-forward interpretation of Rashi, nonetheless, you see that in addition to the element of thanksgiving inherent in the name Judah, there is also an element of admission.

There is overlap between thanksgiving and admission. When one thanks another, in effect, he is admitting that were it not for that person, he would be lacking. When we thank someone, we recognize that we are not the source of that which we have received. Thanking God is, in essence, also recognizing that He is the source of that for which we are thanking Him. The requests that we make in the daily *amidah* are also recognitions that we depend on Him for everything. Ultimately, a Jew is one who recognizes that God is the source of everything. This is what Rebbi Yochanan is teaching us.

Rejection of idolatry necessarily involves the recognition of the one true source of existence. As opposed to the idolatrous view that multiple forces are at work in the world, independent of a higher authority, a *Jew* believes that all forces in the world are an expression of the will of the one true God. There is a drive in man to broaden his sense of self, and limit his perception of God's influence. When allowed to break free, this drive results in idolatry. The rejection of this drive involves admission, *hoda'ah* that everything is influenced by God and is under His control. This attitude and outlook comes with broad implications for every aspect of our lives that we should attempt to keep at the forefront of our consciousness. In this way, we prove ourselves to be true *Jews*.