

- 25 *He said: Cursed be Canaan; he shall be a servant of servants to his brothers.* כה וַיֹּאמֶר אָרְוֹר כְּנָעַן עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים יִהְיֶה לְאֶחָיו:
- 26 *And he said: Blessed be God, the God of Shem; may Canaan become their servant.* כו וַיֹּאמֶר בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי שֵׁם וַיְהִי כְנָעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ:
- 27 *God will open [people's] emotions to Yefes, but He will dwell in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be a servant to them.* כז יִפֹּת אֱלֹהִים לְיִפְתַּי וַיִּשְׁכֵּן בְּאֶהֱלֵי-שֵׁם וַיְהִי כְנָעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ:

child. This constitutes a serious warning: “Honor your *father* and your *mother*, lest you be punished through your *children*!” Cham must not sin against Noach, lest he be punished through Canaan! Sins that children commit against their parents will be punished by the manner in which their own children, in turn, will deal with them!

The same rule applies in the development of the generations. The younger generation must stand reverently at the grave of the generation that preceded it. It must take a garment and cover the nakedness, the weakness, of its forebears, and at the same time receive from them their spiritual legacy, so as to build its own future. Only then will the generations develop like a flourishing tree. But if the new generation gloats, like Cham, over the “nakedness” of its ancestors; if it sees only their human frailties and derides their spiritual tradition; if the sons scornfully sever the bond with the generation of the fathers — then their *own* future, too, is only a dream: Just as they sneered at the memory of their forefathers, so will their own descendants sneer at them. *Cham is always the father of Canaan!*

25–27 We have here what may be the most profound and far-reaching vision of the future that God ever permitted a mortal to behold or to utter. The entire history of mankind — past, present, and future — is contained in these three verses.

We have already seen (above, 6:10) that the names of Noach’s sons

reflect their personal character traits. The names also allude to the predominant traits — spiritual, physical or emotional — of the nations that will descend from the brothers. Here, Shem, Cham and Yefes appear in their dual roles: as individuals and as founders of nations.

- 25 When Noah awoke and heard about Cham's behavior, his first thought was: This attribute of Cham, which manifested itself here, has no right to exist and *has no future*. (It is not necessary to interpret ארור always as an expression of a wish, in the conventional sense of a curse. Rather, it is possible — particularly here — that ארור expresses a declaration.) Uncontrolled, "hot" sensuality, which has no respect for spiritual values, is incapable of ruling and is unable to preserve its freedom. It is inherently barren, without vigor, unproductive; it bears in itself its own ruin.

עבד עבדים. Not "the lowest of slaves," but, rather, "a servant of servants." (Cf. אלקי האלקים, which means not "the highest God," but, rather, "the God of gods.") The others, too, will be עבדים, but Canaan will be עבד לעבדים.

Since these verses repeatedly state that Canaan will be an עבד, the implication is that there is a close connection between Canaan's character and the fate of an עבד. Indeed, Canaan is ארור by his very nature; for the future is reserved only for those who are pure of heart, not for those who are coarse and uncivilized. The same applies in social and national life, in relationships between people and between nations. Only those who can control themselves can gain and retain their freedom. *Unrestrained desire leads to slavery*. He who at all times controls his passions will not be led astray by bribes or enticements. He is not captivated by money, and his hands are not bound in golden chains. He may be destroyed and die, but he will never become a slave. This applies to individuals as well as to nations.

- 26 **ויאמר**. This is a second paragraph, containing a new pronouncement; hence ויאמר is repeated.

אלקי שם is meant here in the same sense as the later expression אלקי אברהם. God is called "the God of Avraham," which implies no limitation of the concept of God, as alleged by the Gentiles. Rather, this designation is common in Scripture because God revealed Himself especially in His guidance of the patriarchs and in the history of Israel. Moreover, the

patriarchs knew God and proclaimed in His Name. Hence, this designation is necessary. For so many different conceptions have been attached to the term “god” — from crude pantheistic fetishism to the speculative idea that reduces the essence of God to an empty abstraction. Hence, it is necessary to distinguish clearly between the true and trustworthy God and all the gods of fantasy and delusion, and the only way to express this distinction is through the designation “God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov,” meaning: the God *they* knew and of Whom *they* taught.

It is in this sense that God is called here אלקי שם. Avraham, and even Jacob, learned about God in the school of Shem; and before Avraham was chosen to proclaim in the Name of God, Shem already knew God. אלקי שם, then, means the God Shem knew and revered, the God Whose priest Shem is.

Thus, the God of Shem is ברוך, as opposed to Canaan, who is ארוּר. Recognition of ה', the God of Shem, will grow and spread and conquer all hearts, and all material forces will ultimately submit to it. Cham represents crude, brazen desire, whereas the God of Shem not only created heaven and earth — as the first cause of all that exists — but is *still* קונה שמים וארץ, Ruler of every created thing. Our lives belong to Him and our wills are subject to His Will. Shem, then, is the antithesis of Cham.

Later, we will return to discuss the words ויהי כנען עבד למו. Here, let us note only this: From the plural form למו we learn that Shem and correspondingly Canaan as well are not viewed here as individuals; rather, they represent the nations that will descend from them.

- 27 On the basis of the meaning of פתה in Aramaic, יַפֵּת is usually interpreted: “God will extend the bounds of Yefes.” One should, however, adhere to the following principle when explaining the meaning of words: Another language — even a closely related one — should be consulted only if the vocabulary of the source language does not provide the solution of the problem. That is not the case here, as the meaning of פתה in Hebrew is unequivocal. פתה denotes emotional openness to external impressions and influences. Thus, a פתי is one who can easily be persuaded or deceived. פתאום: something for which we are unprepared suddenly occurs, catching us off guard and vulnerable. The same applies to פתע. פתה is related to פתח, פדה, פדע, all of which denote opening. יַפֵּת is a הפעיל form

and hence means: he will open the hearts. God will open the hearts to Yefes; He will give him influence over the human heart.

We have here, then, three representatives of nations; they represent three main attributes of individuals and of nations. שם represents the intellect; he assigns everything a name and is able to conceptualize. In contrast to him is חם (המם, חמם): the height of burning sensuality. The essence of שם is the intellect, which analyzes everything objectively. This requires tranquility, without המום — and certainly without חמום. In the case of חם, however, intellect is reduced to a minimum. יפת is in the middle. He represents the meeting point of intellect and sensuality — namely, emotion, sentiment.

These three forces predominate in man's inner life, and they also characterize nations. Obviously, there is no such thing as a one-sided nation that has only intellect or only emotion, etc. But in this respect nations are like individuals: All three of these attributes are found in every individual, yet only one of them is dominant in him, and *that* is the attribute that characterizes him. The same is true of nations.

Noach spoke his words at the dawn of history. We, however, can survey a past of four thousand years. For us it should be easy to trace, in retrospect, the influence of these divergent forces on the course of history.

The nations that have created the greatest stir in world history are those dominated by חם, by sensuality that harnesses minds and emotions to its chariot and permits the spirit to function only as a vehicle for the physical. These are nations that conquer and destroy, and relish what they have taken. Nations rise and fall, and their whole essence is brute force, sensuality, and bestiality.

But there are other nations that devote their energies to beauty, nations characterized by their cultivation of the arts and of aesthetics. They recognize that there is a higher ideal to which man must ascend. They teach man to value beauty, to spread a cloth of elegance over crude sensuality. Guided by grace and beauty, they engage in spiritual endeavors such as poetry, music, and the fine arts. A nation that promotes these values, which win over the heart and appeal to the emotions, exemplifies the character of יפת.

However, the education of mankind through the sense of beauty is not the highest goal. A civilization cannot endure if the sole standard by which to measure a person's actions is the satisfaction of his own aesthetic

sense. There must be an ideal outside of man, an ideal that shines forth with its own light. Only the recognition of what is good and true in itself can lead man to the heights of his calling. A nation that promotes spiritual values and thus contributes to the recognition of the truth exemplifies the character of שם and advances the welfare of mankind.

Considering the historical reality, we may say: the fullest flowering of Yefes was יון, ancient Greece; the fullest flowering of Shem is עבר, the Hebrews, the people of Israel, which proclaims ה' בשם among the nations of the world. *Until this very day, only the descendants of Yefes and Shem, the Greeks and the Jews, have been the real educators and teachers of humanity.* All the spiritual treasures of mankind derive from Shem and from Yefes; even today, every new cultural or educational advance is a continuation of their contribution. Even the spiritual contribution of the Romans came from the Greeks. Yefes brought aesthetic refinement; Shem enlightened the spirit and refined morality. The culture of Greece and the Torah of Israel have been powerful, dynamic forces in the work of educating mankind; in comparison, the rest of the world has been like passive, raw material.

We explained these verses at length in our essay "Hellenism and Judaism" (*Collected Writings*, vol. II, pp. 199ff.), to which the reader is referred.

Thus, Noach envisioned three things:

He saw: ארור כנען! Man will not blossom and flower by means of coarseness and burning sensuality. Nations that are absorbed in passion and controlled by base desire will lose their freedom and independence and ultimately become עבדים, slaves. Indeed, days are coming in which all awareness of man's freedom will be lost; Canaan will be an עבד עבדים, but the others, too, will be עבדים. *Only nations that are themselves enslaved set out to enslave others.* He who wants to conquer the world and to subjugate other nations must first subjugate his own people, which must serve as a blind instrument of his lust for power. Cham's descendants produced tyrants, "hunters of men," who ruled according to the dictates of their own hearts. Lust leads to slavery, not to freedom. Freedom, חרות, is found only where the law of morality reigns supreme over all. Man can attain freedom, only if the law of morality is engraved (חרות) upon his heart. Lust is the breeding ground of slavery; חם begets עבדים; and where lust is at its peak, as in the case of כנען, it begets עבדי עבדים.

But Noah's glimpse rises, and he sees, in contrast: ברוך ה' אלקי שם. A different nation will bring man redemption.

Cham, too, has gods, but they are gods of brute force, powers that express their "godliness" in the subjugation of man and in the shattering of his might. Man can only tremble before them. Tyrants build altars to these gods, so that people should submit to their tyranny; they hope that the splendor of the gods will reflect upon themselves and win them the honor of the people.

Then comes Shem בשם השם, calling out to the peoples in the Name of ה', the one God, before Whom the enslaving gods disappear. The one God of Shem liberates man. He endows every person with equal dignity and exalts him above the forces of nature. The breath of God's spirit lives within *every* man, investing him with inalienable dignity. God, in His mercy and compassion, is close to *every* man; He calls every man to His service, which liberates, uplifts, and fills one with rapture.

The God of Shem is ברוך, blessed, and His Teaching is blessed. His Teaching wages its struggle not by might and not by power, and not through the enticing attractions of the senses. It is destined to spread and increase in strength and in power, and finally to emerge victorious.

Noah expresses the *wish* (he does not say ויהיה or יהיה, but, rather, יִהְיֶה — the common expression for a wish or prayer) that Canaan should be an עבד of Shem. This shall be Cham's salvation — that his antithesis should be the master. Although it is ordained that Canaan will be an עבד, let him be Shem's עבד. Only thus will כנען, too — the height of decadent sensuality — come to serve God through the mediation of Shem. By submitting to Shem, Canaan shall have the privilege of fulfilling his Divine mission.

But this goal cannot be achieved at once. Yefes mediates between Cham and Shem. Cham is not ready to receive immediately the Teaching of the God of Shem. The *uncivilized* person must first become a *cultured* man. The God of Shem is very demanding; He requires of man complete devotion and total submission. A person must first be refined and taught to acquire a "proper taste," to appreciate values that are incomprehensible to the savage — even if these, too, are merely material values. The savage who paints his skin and changes his outer appearance has thus begun to fashion his image and already stands on the threshold of culture. Ultimately, he will learn to subordinate himself — in his external appearance, in his surroundings, in his behavior — to the law of beauty and decency. The culture of gracefulness, the subordination of the savage to the prin-

28 *Noach lived after the deprivation of life 350 years.* נח וַיְחִי־נַח אַחַר הַמְבּוּל שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה:

ciple of the “beautiful and good,” the *kalokgathos* [“the goodness of man”] of Yefes culture, is the vestibule that leads to the teachings of Shem; it prepares man to subordinate his whole heart to a higher principle of a higher beauty, so that ultimately he makes a harmony of all the aspects of his life and learns to subordinate his heart to the Will of the one God.

Noach thus envisions: *יפה אלקים ליפה*, the hearts will be opened to the beauty of Yefes. First, Yefes will fulfill his mission — that of imparting culture to the nations; only then will Shem fulfill his mission, and will the ultimate goal of humanity be attained, *וישכן באהלי שם*. From Shem man will learn to make his home a dwelling for the Shechinah; from Shem he will learn to rectify his life, and the Shechinah will again dwell with man. *ויהי כנען עבד למו*: By submitting to Shem, Canaan, too, will have the privilege of fulfilling his Divine mission.

Allow us to add a further observation on two expressions appearing here. They were uttered by the patriarch of the new humanity, and they embody the whole essence of Jewish consciousness. We are referring to the expressions *ישכן* and *ברוך ה'*.

ברוך. There are those who hesitate to render this word according to its plain sense, and thus they confuse its whole meaning. In their view, the meaning of this word, when it refers to man relating to God, differs from its meaning when it refers to God relating to man. Hence, they consider it an adjective, meaning “source of blessing,” just as *רחום* and *חנון* mean “source of grace and mercy.”

But this interpretation gets them nowhere. Countless times we are called upon *תברך את ה'*, and the soul of every living thing *לברך את ה'*. If man is *מברך את ה'*, then God is *ברוך*, and there is no escaping this. But why should we seek an escape? *The moment God made the fulfillment of His Will on earth dependent on man's free decision, He said to man: ברכני!* Further My aims, perform My commandments, realize My Will, bless My work, whose completion on earth depends on you! Just as *מלאכיו* (His angels), *כל צבאיו* (all His hosts, His servants who do His Will), *משרתיו עושי רצונו* (all His works in every place of His kingdom), are *מברכים את ה'* — they not only *praise* God, but *bless* Him and participate in the real-

ization of the world's purpose — so does every Jew say to his own soul: ברוך אתה, "You, too, my soul, bless God!" And when the Jew says ברוך אתה, he vows to devote all his energies to the fulfillment of God's Will.

Thus, ברכה is the fundamental idea of the Jew's whole life. The whole purpose of the Torah is to teach us how to bless God, לברך אתה.

We must not confuse the concept of ברכה with mere praise and adoration. Praise and adoration *become* ברכות if they have an effect on us, if they illumine our minds and purify our hearts, and thus help us to do the work that God requires of us.

ברכה expresses in words what עבודה expresses in deeds. What makes בקשות an acceptable substitute for קרבן (תפילה במקום קרבן) is not the שמונה עשרה, but the ברכות that conclude them. For when we say ברוך, we vow to devote all our energies and resources to God's service — as להם אשה לה, to sustain and perpetuate the holy.

It is important to note that this concept appears already in the vision of Noach, the earliest ancestor of the new humanity. When we say ברוך, we are carrying on the work that here is assigned to all of mankind; we pronounce the first word that ever was spoken to express man's relation to God.

ישכן. Another concept that is characteristic of Judaism is שכינה, and this concept, too, is already mentioned here by the patriarch of the new humanity. Other religions teach what man must do in order to attain closeness to God in the *next* world; Judaism teaches what we must do so that God will draw near *to us* in *this* world. Judaism teaches that עיקר שכינה בתחתונים (Bereshis Rabbah 19:7); God seeks, first of all, to dwell on earth together with man; He says: ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בהם (Shemos 25:8), "Let them make of their lives on earth a sanctuary to Me, and then I will dwell in their midst." To perfect the world through the reign of the Almighty — not only in the heavens above, but also on the earth below — is the mission of Israel and the purpose of its Torah.

That is why all the Torah's promises relate to *this* world. Any charlatan can sign checks that are payable in the next world; it is easy to promise reward or punishment — in heaven or hell. But only האלקים אמת ומלך עולם can make promises that are fulfilled on earth before our very eyes.

The Torah's ideal is שכינה. Wherever man sanctifies his home and makes his camp holy, האלקים ממנו; God fills him with rapture on earth and allows him to experience in this world מעין עולם הבא. This is the Torah's aim and goal for the Jewish people, and this is destined to

29 *When all the days of Noah were 950 years, he died.* כֹּת וַיְהִי כָּל-יְמֵי-נֹחַ תְּשַׁע מֵאוֹת
 שָׁנָה וַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת: פ

be the lot of all mankind, when they return to “the way that leads to the tree of life.”

שכינה implies man’s connectedness with God in this world, but the very word “שכינה” acts as a preventive against *false ecstasies*. Indeed, Judaism — unlike all other religions — has remained free of any admixture of false ecstasy. To elaborate:

It is noteworthy that *שכן* means “to dwell” and also “to be a neighbor.” This suggests an exalted social concept. In Hebrew language expression, “to dwell” means “to be a neighbor.” When a person chooses a dwelling place, he must also allow his fellow man space for a dwelling place. Without a neighbor (*שֶׁכֶן*), there can be no true dwelling (*שִׁכּוּן*). The Jew says to his neighbor: *צִרְיָ לִי הַמָּקוֹם גְּשָׁה לִי וְאֶשְׁבָּה* (*Yeshayahu 49:20*), “True, this place is narrow for me; nevertheless, only if you join me will I settle here.”

This conception of שכינה applies also to the dwelling of God’s Presence with man. God draws near to man, but He does not encroach upon the human sphere; man is allowed to develop in accordance with his own free will, as a man on earth. This acts as a preventive against false ecstasies. God becomes the שכן (neighbor) of man, and man the שכן of God, but they do not merge. Jewish wisdom says: עֵיקַר שְׂכִינָה בַּתְּחִיבוּתָא, and yet also says: מְעוֹלָם לֹא יֵרְדָה שְׂכִינָה לְמַטָּה (מעשרה) (Sukkah 5a).

The spirit of Israel does not produce ecstasies who lose their grip on reality and go mad. Judaism yearns for God’s closeness, but requires of man clarity of thought, a composed and sober mind. Ecstasies who “merge with the divine” lack freedom of choice; they imagine that they themselves do nothing, but that God acts through them. This is not the way to serve God. Our task is to make use of the intellect and the freedom God has given us, in the earthly sphere which He has assigned to us; to serve God faithfully, conscientiously, and with a clear mind. Only thus will we attain the highest perfection a person can reach; only thus will our actions be sanctified, and will we be worthy of God’s closeness.

Ten *טפחים* are reserved for human activity, and only where they end does the realm of the *שכינה* begin.