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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Vayeshev

Chanukah: Strategy and the Supernatural

Yosef said to the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers: “If only you would think of me... and mention me to Pharaoh, then you would get me out of this building.” (40:14)

Something very strange happens on the twenty-fifth of the Hebrew month of Kislev. Two completely different festivals are observed.

One festival celebrates a military triumph by a small group of partisans who manage by their own bravery to overcome vastly superior forces and restore Jewish statehood to the Land of Israel. The other commemorates a supernatural victory against powers of darkness that wished to adulterate the Jewish People and their Holy Torah.

The bizarre thing is that both these festivals have the same name. They are both called Chanukah.

The secular version of the Chanukah story makes Mattityahu and Yehuda Hamaccabee sound like characters out of a war movie. True, there's a seven-branched candelabra somewhere there at the back of the set, but, in this version, Chanukah is really a nationalistic *shoot-em-up*, where the good guys win and the bad guys lose, and, well, Hashem got written out of the plot at the first script meeting.

The other version of Chanukah focuses on the supernatural events that surround Chanukah. The miracle of the oil lasting eight days; of a small minority who manage to hold on to their Judaism against the blandishments of materialism and hedonism. True, there's a military victory somewhere in there, but it's a miraculous victory against impossible odds, a victory which is no more than the revelation of Hashem's providential Hand.

There's a fine line between faith and folly. There's an equally fine line between thinking that the Jewish People win wars because we have the best tanks and planes and the best training.

In 1967, the Six Day War opened with a blistering attack on the Egyptian airfields by the Israeli Air Force. They managed to knock out some 90% of the Egyptian planes while they were still on the ground. Now, 90% is an interesting statistic — because it can't happen. Warplanes bombing a tiny ground target under fire can achieve 40%, maybe 50%. But 90% doesn't happen.

After the Six Day War ended, you couldn't buy a pair of *tefillin* in the whole of Israel. There were appeals in the United States for anyone who had a spare pair to send them to Israel. The Jewish People realized that Hashem had given them a miraculous victory against five Arab armies on four fronts, and the upswell in the observance of Judaism was remarkable. Equally remarkable was the short-lived nature of this awakening. Nothing much had changed in three thousand years, and just as the Jewish People were capable of cavorting around a golden calf a few weeks after they had witnessed the splitting of the sea and all the miracles in Egypt, so too the Jewish People soon forgot Who it is Who fights our wars, and were busy bragging about the invincible Israeli army.

So, as it were, to give us a little reminder of Who's really running things, some six years later, Arab enemies attack again. This time, they manage to make deep inroads into the heartland of the country. But they make a fatal mistake. They think that they will attack on Yom Kippur when everyone is fasting and weak.

They forget two things. One strategic and the other supernatural. Strategically, the most difficult thing about starting a war without a large standing army is to mobilize. The major problem is to find everyone. However, on Yom Kippur you can find *everyone* because almost everyone is in *shul*. So, all you have to do is to take a truck drive from *shul* to *shul* and call out the names at the back. Also, the roads are empty so you can mobilize your army in about half the time it would normally take. Secondly, the Arabs forget to read their history books. If they had paid closer attention, they'd have realized that, traditionally, the Jewish People always used to fast before going into battle to purify themselves before Hashem. And even in the secular State of Israel, anyone with the remotest connection to his Judaism is davening his heart out in *shul* and the angels are taking his prayers upstairs to the King of Kings. Not a good day to attack really.

Again, the same thing happens. A realization of a miraculous miracle followed by a return to “with my own power and the strength of my own hand” way of thinking.

So next time, Hashem, as it were, says, “So you think it's your army that's winning these wars? I'll tell you what. Next time, your army will sit on its benches, and I will send the largest and most powerful navy in the world steaming half way around the world, and your army and your navy and your air force will do absolutely zero.”

And that's exactly what happened in the Gulf War. I remember sitting in a taxi at the time, and this totally secular taxi driver was quoting me a verse. I think it was from the Prophet Yeshayahu. All about how Hashem will tell us to go into a sealed room for a little while until the danger passes. "Who is like your people Israel?! One nation in the land!" Even the taxi drivers quote you the Prophets!

I also remember when the day the Gulf War ended. It "just happened" to be Purim. I went into my own sealed room and I ripped the plastic off the window and threw the window open wide to let in the sweet air of freedom wafting in the holy city of Jerusalem.

If I live to a hundred and twenty, I don't think I'll ever have a Purim like that one.

And nowadays, that same holy air is filled with the sounds of *jihad*, and not-so-distant guns, and the shrill threats of another Haman, and the promise of weapons that should keep us awake at night. Isn't the message that Hashem is sending us clear enough?

"If only you would think of Me... and mention Me to Pharaoh, then you would get me out of this building."

In this week's Torah portion, Yosef asks the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers twice to intercede on his behalf to Pharaoh. By his lack of trust in Hashem, by asking the Chamberlain twice, Yosef languished two further years in jail.

Rabbi Chaim of Brisk once asked Rabbi Shimon Shkop how long Yosef would have been kept in prison if he had asked the Chamberlain only one time to help secure his release.

Rabbi Shimon replied that if Yosef had asked only once, he would have spent only one year in prison.

Rabbi Chaim disagreed. "He wouldn't have had to spend any more time in prison at all. To try to secure his release by asking once is considered to be *hishtadlut* — the human effort that Hashem expects of each of us. To ask twice showed a lack of trust in Hashem. So, it would have been two years or nothing."

The Jewish People are faced yet again with the threat of war. Again, there are those who rise, as they do in every generation, wishing to annihilate us. If we must fight, we must fight with everything we have. With our bodies. With our minds. But mostly we must fight that little voice inside us that tells us that we ourselves are doing all this. The greatest fight is the fight to remember that whatever we do, there is only one Master of War.

Miketz

Trial by Tribulation

“It happened at the end of two years [to the day]” (41:1)

I just got back from a speaking trip to Denver. What a beautiful community! The Yeshiva there is like finding a glorious inn in the middle of a desert.

My journey there was somewhat interesting, to put it mildly. We made landfall in the US at Minneapolis. I had two hours and twenty minutes to clear immigration before my onward flight to Denver, and I thought that would be more than enough... The immigration officer happened to be a “rookie.” This was clear because he constantly referred to another officer, who stood behind him with his arms folded. I stood in the line for an hour and three quarters and there were still plenty of people in front of me. I wasn’t going to make the flight.

I started asking people if I could go ahead of them, and kindly they let me move up, until I met someone who refused. “I have a flight to catch,” I said. “I have a business meeting,” was his reply. Could it have had something to do with the fact that I was wearing a black hat and had a beard?

I started to feel a small surge of panic in my stomach, and then the other four lines that had been taking only US passports opened up and we started to move. I ran to the scanners and put all my stuff in trays. At the other side, I put everything back and made my way to the gate. I arrived there with exactly three minutes to spare. Hashem saves you in the blink of an eye!

I reached into my pocket to pull out my phone to show the lady my boarding pass. It wasn’t there. I was sure I had put it in my inside jacket pocket. Maybe I put it in my coat? Maybe in my carry-on? It was then that I realized it was gone. I searched through everything again, and then rechecked a third time. It wasn’t there.

“Sir. I’m sorry. We have to close the flight. Are you going to board?” So, there I was, faced with either missing the flight or permanently losing my phone. I chose to miss the flight. All I had in my pockets were my credit cards and the phone number of Rabbi Ahron Wasserman of Yeshivas Toras Chaim, but with no phone to call him on. As powerful as today’s phones are, to that same degree do they leave you powerless when you lose them.

“I must have left it at the scanner,” I thought to myself. As I walked out of the international area, a small passenger cart slowed down. I asked the driver, who looked

to me like an Arab, if he could give me a ride back to International. “Sure thing,” he smiled. “Put your cabin bag on the back of the cart.”

And we zoomed off to International. Everyone there was very helpful. We searched through all the trays that had gone through the scanner. Nothing. It looked like someone had taken it.

“Maybe try round the corner at Central?”

I walked over to Central. “I’m sorry sir. Maybe if you come back in a couple of days to the lost and found...”

“A couple of days?! I have to deliver a lecture in Denver tomorrow.” I walked back to International, very dejected. And then I realized. “This is a *nisayon*; I was being sent a test sent from Hashem! Let’s see how much I really trust Hashem!”

One of the most difficult things about a test is to recognize that it’s a test. It’s all too easy to get carried away in the moment by worry and stress. We have to stop. Think. What’s going on here? Everything is from Hashem. If my phone has been stolen, then that’s exactly what was supposed to happen.

As I rounded the corner, one of the guys working the scanner called to me, “Sir, is this your phone?” They found it!

And then I realized that I had left my carry-on bag on the back of the cart that had given me a ride back to International, and it was now located on the other side of the airport.

That wasn’t such a problem. I got another driver to walkie-talkie his buddy, and the case was back with me in a few minutes.

I caught the next flight for Denver, a little more worn, but with a big, new insight into what a test from Hashem is.

“It happened at the end of two years [to the day]”

Because Yosef placed his trust in Chamberlain instead of Hashem, Yosef’s prison sentence was increased by two years. Few things can be as claustrophobic as being incarcerated in jail. It’s only human nature to want to get out of prison, to breathe the air of freedom, but each of us, on our own level, must rise to the occasion when we meet the inevitable trials and tribulations of our lives, whether they be as large as being locked up or whether it be the loss of a phone.

▪ *Based on Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe*

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Batra 171-177

The Order of Damages

Rabbi Yishmael said, “One who desires to become wise should pursue the study of monetary laws, since there is no portion of the Torah that is larger than it, as it is like a spring of water that never ceases to flow.”

The statement is taught in the final *Mishna* of *masechet* Bava Batra, and with the completion of the study of the *gemara* on this *Mishna* we conclude this tractate and celebrate by making a *siyum* with a festive meal, as is the widespread custom.

I’ve heard from more than one Rosh Hasyeshiva over the years that the custom in *yeshivot* to study many Tractates and chapters from Seder Nezikin — the Order of Damages — is based on this *Mishna*: The study of monetary matters helps increase one’s wisdom. One reason is because many concepts and ideas in this area of study are often largely based on logical and analytical thinking, and not derived from verses in the Torah. Another reason is that it helps instill the wisdom of treating other people and their property in a conscientious manner in everyday life, and what the consequences are for causing monetary or other damages to another person or his property.

What exactly is meant by the statement by Rabbi Yishmael that study of monetary laws will make one wise? The commentary of the Tiferet Yisrael on our *mishna* explains this connection in great, poetic detail. He notes that the Written Torah gives one main directive in dealing with monetary cases: “You shall judge your fellow with righteousness” (Lev. 19:15). However, since what people think to be “righteous judgment” is liable to be mistaken, the Oral Law — the *Mishna* and the *Gemara* — was developed and redacted by countless great Sages who elucidated in greater detail the proper meaning of “righteous judgment”. But even with all the guidelines that are recorded in the Written Law and the Oral Law, there is still the possibility that the judge in a monetary case will need to make very difficult decisions in how to apply these guidelines to the specific case he is dealing with, using his finely-honed ability to reason logically according to the wisdom of the Torah. This is why Rabbi Yishmael greatly urges a person involved in judging monetary litigation to be an expert in his ability to reach logical conclusions that are in tune with the teachings of the Torah. This can be accomplished only by deep immersion into the study of the many complex teachings regarding monetary laws that are found in the Torah, thereby acquiring the appropriate wisdom needed for judging such cases.

The Tiferet Yisrael adds another point that stresses the importance of a judge attaining superior wisdom in monetary laws in particular. Regarding other Torah rulings, in deciding whether a particular act is permitted or prohibited, if the judge is in doubt, he always has the prerogative to be strict and thereby avoid a mistaken transgression occurring as a result. However, in matters of monetary cases, there are two people standing in front of him: one who is claiming monetary compensation and the other who is counter-claiming an exemption from payment. In this type of case, there is no such concept as being strict since being strict to one party would automatically mean being lenient to the other party, and vice versa. Therefore, the judge must be absolutely certain in his judgments being wise and true beyond a shadow of a doubt.

A kollel I was part of as a newlywed had disbanded, and a *chevruta* with whom I studied decided to join a prominent Choshen Mishpat Kollel, where they studied the sections of *gemara* and the *halachot* dealing with monetary matters. One reason he gave for his decision to study there was our *mishna*, and stated that he wanted to increase his wisdom as much as possible. At first, I thought that it was a somewhat unusual choice since virtually all of the other participants there were decades older than him and desired this particular Kollel in order to prepare to become *dayanim* — judges — who could be part of a recognized Beit Din to rule in cases of monetary claims. Once, when I visited him at his Kollel, I was taken aback somewhat when I saw a number of the older and “more experienced” students often approaching my friend to seek help in understanding the subject matter they were studying. In fact, more than one student, who had been there for a number of years, told me that y friend was by far the *wisest* Torah scholar in the kollel.

▪ *Bava Batra 175b*

PARSHA OVERVIEW - Vayeshev

Yaakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him, signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven's intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable.

Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers.

In the Torah portion's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in similar circumstances. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line culminating in the *Mashiach*.

Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In prison, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is reinstated, and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in prison.

PARSHA OVERVIEW - Miketz

It is two years later. Pharaoh has a dream. He is unsatisfied with all attempts to interpret it. Pharaoh's wine chamberlain remembers that Yosef accurately interpreted his dream while in prison. Yosef is released from prison and brought before Pharaoh. He interprets that soon will begin seven years of abundance, followed by seven years of severe famine. He tells Pharaoh to appoint a wise person to store grain in preparation for the famine. Pharaoh appoints him as viceroy to oversee the project. Pharaoh gives Yosef an Egyptian name, Tsafnat Panayach, and selects Osnat, Yosef's ex-master's daughter, as Yosef's wife. Egypt becomes the granary of the world. Yosef has two sons, Menashe and Ephraim.

Yaakov sends his sons to Egypt to buy food. The brothers come before Yosef and bow to him. Yosef recognizes them but they do not recognize him. Mindful of his dreams, Yosef plays the part of an Egyptian overlord and acts harshly, accusing them of being spies. Yosef sells them food, but keeps Shimon hostage until they bring their brother Binyamin to him as proof of their honesty. Yosef commands his servants to replace the purchase-money in their sacks. On the return journey they discover the money, and their hearts sink. They return to Yaakov and retell everything. Yaakov refuses to let Binyamin go to Egypt, but when the famine grows unbearable he accedes. Yehuda guarantees Binyamin's safety and the brothers go to Egypt. Yosef welcomes the brothers lavishly as honored guests. When he sees Binyamin, he rushes from the room and weeps. Yosef instructs his servants to replace the money in the sacks and to put his goblet inside Binyamin's sack. When the goblet is discovered, Yosef demands Binyamin to be his slave as punishment. Yehuda interposes and offers himself instead, but Yosef refuses.

PARSHA OVERVIEW - Vayigash

With the discovery of the goblet in Binyamin's sack, the brothers are confused. Yehuda alone steps forward and eloquently but firmly petitions Yosef for Binyamin's release, offering himself instead. As a result of this act of total selflessness, Yosef finally has irrefutable proof that his brothers are different people from the ones who cast him into the pit, and so he now reveals to them that he is none other than their brother. The brothers shrink from him in shame, but Yosef consoles them, telling them that everything has been part of Hashem's plan. He sends them back to their father Yaakov with a message to come and reside in the land of Goshen. At first, Yaakov cannot accept the news, but when he recognizes hidden signs in the message which positively identify the sender as his son Yosef, his spirit is revived.

Yaakov, together with all his family and possessions, sets out for Goshen. Hashem communicates with Yaakov in a vision at night. He tells him not to fear going down to Egypt and its negative spiritual consequences, because it is there that Hashem will establish the Children of Israel as a great nation although they will be dwelling in a land steeped in immorality and corruption.

The Torah lists Yaakov's offspring and hints to the birth of Yocheved, who will be the mother of Moshe Rabbeinu. Seventy souls in total descend into Egypt, where Yosef is reunited with his father after 22 years of separation. He embraces his father and weeps, overflowing with joy. Yosef secures the settlement of his family in Goshen. Yosef takes his father Yaakov and five of the least threatening of his brothers to be presented to Pharaoh, and Yaakov blesses Pharaoh. Yosef instructs that, in return for grain, all the people of Egypt must give everything to Pharaoh, including themselves as his slaves. Yosef then redistributes the population, except for the Egyptian priests, who are directly supported by a stipend from Pharaoh. The Children of Israel become settled, and their numbers multiply greatly.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 20)

UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

“My walk on the moon lasted three days. My walk with G-d will last forever.”
(Charles Duke – Lunar Module Pilot, Apollo 16)

Kiddush Levanah finishes with *Aleinu Leshabeyach*, which is the concluding *Tefillah* for most of our daily *Tefillot*. Why was it added to Kiddush Levanah? The *Mishna Berurah* is the

Chofetz Chaim's masterful commentary on *Orach Chaim*, the first section of the *Shulchan Aruch*. It defines the rules of prayer and the synagogue, Shabbat and the *Yamim Tovim*. Aside from his main commentary, the Chofetz Chaim also authored the *Biur Halacha*, which is printed on the same page, together with the *Mishna Berurah*. The *Biur Halacha* is an analysis of the many approaches that are found within Jewish law and custom.

In the *Bi'ur Halacha* (426), the Chofetz Chaim explains that the Ashkenazic custom to recite *Aleinu Leshabeyach* at the end of Kiddush Levanah derives from a concern that people might otherwise mistakenly assume that we are praying to the moon. In order to prevent this serious mistake, the practice of saying *Aleinu Leshabeyach* was instituted because *Aleinu Leshabeyach* clearly states that all of our praises are directed only to Hashem.

For this reason, the *Mishna Berurah* rules (*ibid.*) that we should not stare at the moon while reciting Kiddush Levanah. Rather, we should glance at the moon briefly just before saying the blessing, and we should not look at the moon again until after completing Kiddush Levanah.

Minhag Yisrael Torah, an anthology of Jewish customs, adds another intriguing reason for reciting *Aleinu Leshabeyach* at the conclusion of Kiddush Levanah. He cites the unknown author of the foundational Halachic compendium, *Kol Bo*, saying that according to ancient tradition, *Aleinu Leshabeyach* was composed by Yehoshua. But what is the connection between Yehoshua and Kiddush Levanah?

The Talmud, in *Bava Batra 75a*, relates that when it became clear that Yehoshua was Moshe's designated successor, the *Zekenim* (elders/leaders) of the Jewish nation declared, "The face of Moshe is like the sun; the face of Yehoshua is like the moon." Although it seems clear from the continuation of the narrative that the *Zekenim* felt the comparison to not be positive in nature since the light of moon is incomparable to that of the sun, the Chofetz Chaim explains that comparing Yehoshua to the moon is actually the greatest accolade of all! If Moshe Rabbeinu, the peerless leader of the Jewish People, is described as being like the sun – as the source of the Holy Torah, of the spiritual light – then the most appropriate individual to continue to shine that light into our world is Yehoshua, who, like the moon, is not a source of independent light but rather one who reflects the Torah that he received from Moshe.

Therefore, it is quite apt for this prayer, that was composed by the person described by our Sages as being like the moon, should be the *Tefillah* that concludes the series of prayers that sanctify the moon.

Finally, after *Aleinu Leshabeyach* there is a beautiful custom for the participants to form a circle and dance while singing words from the Shabbat morning prayers that extol the virtues of the sun and the moon, "*Tovim Meorot* – Good are the luminaries that our G-d has created, He has fashioned them with wisdom, with insight and discernment... Glad as they go forth and exultant as they return..." As we joyously sing, we acknowledge that it is the moon's cycle

that allows us to recognize the new months and thereby keep the Jewish yearly cycle of the *Yamim Tovim*.

But there is something deeper as well. What is it exactly about Kiddush Levanah that generates such a sense of joy and optimism? Once the moon of the previous month ceases to give light, the new moon is “born.” The new moon embodies a new beginning. A new beginning that does not necessarily subject the moon to the decree to become smaller as the month progresses. In effect, each new moon represents a wellspring of spiritual potential. As it comes into being, the new moon is not constrained by the past, of having to wane. Rather, each new moon contains within it the potential to continue growing until it returns to its original dimensions. To the size that it was before it was commanded to diminish itself.

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

The Hebrew Hammers

As the holiday of Chanuka approaches, I felt that it would be appropriate to focus our attention on one of the enigmatic terms associated with the holiday — Maccabee. Although conventional wisdom understands that word as a Latinized form of the Hebrew makevet (“hammer”), various other ways of explaining the term Maccabee have been proffered over the generations. Therefore, Part I of this essay explores the different ways that Maccabee has been explained, focusing on what the word might mean and how it should really be spelled. In Part II of this essay, we discuss various Hebrew words for “hammer” and attempt to determine whether or not those words are truly synonymous.

It should be stated from the onset that the term Macabee does not appear in the Talmud or anywhere elsewhere in Chazal, and certainly not in the Bible. Yet, for reasons to be made clear below, the name has been associated with the Hasmoneans whose victory over the Syrian-Greeks led to establishment of the holiday of Chanuka. That appellation is especially associated with one of the heroes of the Chanukah story, Judah Maccabee, a son of Matityahu. But it also came to refer to all the Hasmoneans and those who fought on their side against the Syrian-Greeks.

One of the popular interpretations of the term Maccabee is that it is an acronym. An acronym is an abbreviation formed from the initial letters of words in a phrase and pronounced as a single word (e.g., NASA for "National Aeronautics and Space Administration"). Unlike an initialism, which is also formed from initial letters but pronounced letter by letter (e.g., F.B.I.

for "Federal Bureau of Investigation"), an acronym combines the letters into a pronounceable term. In this case, Maccabee is said to be an acronym formed by the Biblical verse *mi kamocho b'eilim Hashem* – “Who is like You among the gods, O Hashem?” (Ex. 15:11). The first letter of the four words in that phrase uttered at the Song of Sea spell out Maccabee. The *Tikkunim* in the *Zohar Chadash* (73b) also uses this verse to explain the name of the angel Michael, and then adds that his name is also Maccabee, which the *Biur HaGra* (there) explains is an acronym in line with the above.

The earliest sources that cite this explanation of Maccabee include *Peirush Rokeach* (to Ex. 15:11), *Rabbi Avraham Saba's Tzror HaMor* (Deut. 6:7), *Alshich* (to Ps. 118:12), and the *Shelah* (p. 259 in the old print). *Siddur HaRokeach* (p. 219, also cited in *Seder HaDoros Year 3622*) adds that term Maccabee was written on Judah Maccabee's flag or shield. This was probably done to remind the Jews that the Hasmonean victory should be attributed to Divine intervention, and not to mere human effort. Interestingly, the historical fiction writer *Marcus Lehmann* (1831–1890) wrote that *Shlomo Molcho* and *David HaReuveni* wrote the word Maccabee on their flag when they led the Jews on a triumphant return to Regensburg, but I am not sure if this historically happened.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer (*Lishkat HaSofer* to *Even HaEzer* §129:7, *Torat Moshe Parashat Miketz*) sees the term Maccabee as a sort of patronymic surname, interpreting it as an acronym that refers to Judah Maccabee's illustrious father, *Matityahu*. The first letters of the phrase *Mattiyahu Cohen ben Yochanan* spells out Maccabee.

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (1522–157), also known as the *Ramak*, in his commentary *Ohr Yakar* (to *Tikkunei HaZohar* p. 66) sees the term Maccabee as a related to the Hebrew term *kibui* (“extinguishing”). The way he explains it, war/battle can be likened to a raging fire that needs to be put out, and Judah Maccabee was suited for engaging in that fire and extinguishing it without getting burnt himself. The *Ramak* further offers a Kabbalistic layer to this, explaining how fire is associated with justice (and thus the archangel *Gabriel*), while Judah Maccabee was associated with mercy (and thus the archangel *Michael*).

Rabbi Yisroel Hopstein of *Kozhnitz* (1737–1814) offers a similar explanation in *Avodat Yisroel* (to *Avot* 5:3), seeing Maccabee as a term of humility, as though it were related to *kibui*. He explains that when one recognizes the Hand of Hashem in all his endeavors, then he looks at himself as akin to an extinguished candle vis-à-vis Hashem as the Great Candle, which is why this term also relates to the aforementioned initialism.

Rabbi Moshe Yair Weinstock (1899–1982) in his commentary to *Seder Olam Zuta* (*Yemot Olam* 8:4) writes that the appellation Maccabee is clearly related to the Biblical personal name *Machbanai* borne by one of King David's warriors (*I Chron.* 12:14), and to the place name *Machbeinah* (*I Chron.* 2:49)

In the first part of this essay, we discussed various ways of understanding the term “Maccabee.” Conventional wisdom understands it as a Latinized form of the Hebrew word makevet (“hammer”). In this section we explore various Hebrew words for “hammer” and attempt to determine whether or not those words are truly synonymous.

The term *makevet* appears five times in the Bible. Arguably, the most famous appearance of this word is in the story told of Jael, the wife of Hever the Kennite, who lured Sisera (the Canaanite general) into her tent and gave him milk to drink. Then, Jael took a *makevet* ("hammer") and used that to hammer the peg that held up her tent into Sisera's head, effectively killing him (Jud. 4:21). From this story, we see that *makevet* refers to a heavier type of hammer, often associated with a "mallet" or "sledgehammer." The mention of that heavy tool highlights the forceful or dramatic circumstances surrounding the way Jael killed Sisera. [It is always interesting to think about how the story of Jael killing Sisera has a later parallel in the Chanuka story of Yehudit/Judith killing the Greek general Hefornes, but we will leave that discussion for another time.]

In another famous verse, Isaiah implores the Jewish People to look back to their roots and think about the forefathers: "Look to the stone from which you were hewn / and to the chisel-hammer [*makevet*] of the pit from which you were dug. Look to Abraham, your father / and to Sarah, who gave birth to you" (Isa. 51:1–2). In this case, the word *makevet* refers to the tool used for boring/piecing such holes (a sort of "hammer/mallet").

In another instance, the Bible (I Kings 6:7) reports that in the construction of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, *makavot* (plural of *makevet*) and other metal tools were not heard. The final two times that the word *makevet* is used in the Bible are in the context of the manufacturing of idols to be used for illicit idol worship (Isa. 44:12, Jer. 10:4).

The word *makevet* also appears in the Mishnah (*Keilim* 29:5, 29:7) in the context of discussing how much of that tool's handle is considered part of the implement as regards the laws of ritual purity and impurity. It again appears when detailing the laws of burning the Red Heifer (*Parah* 3:11). As mentioned earlier in Part I, an additional place where a cognate of *makevet* appears in the Mishnah is in the term *makavan* (*Bechorot* 7:1) in reference to a sort of blemish or birth defect that disqualifies a Kohen from functioning in the Temple. The Talmud (*Bechorot* 43b) explains that *makavan* refers to a person who is hammer-headed (*makavan*). The Mainz Commentary ascribed to Rabbeinu Gershom (to *Bechorot* 43b) and Rabbi Nossan of Rome (in *Sefer Ha'Aruch*) further explain that this refers to a person whose forehead and back-head protrude outwardly, making his head look like a *makevet* — "hammer." Rashi (there) takes a slightly different approach, seeing the word *makavan* as another word for *kardum* ("hatchet").

In terms of the etymology of the word *makevet*, early lexicographers like Ibn Janach, Ibn Parchon, and Radak in their respective books of *shorashim* list this word under the root NUN-KUF-BET. As Ibn Parchon clarifies, the *dagesh* in the letter MEM of *makevet* represents the letter NUN which had been dropped from the word (as though the word should really be *menakevet*, which is similar to the Modern Hebrew word *menakev* for "hole-puncher"). Interestingly, Menachem Ibn Saruk in *Machberet Menachem* totally ignores the word *makevet* and does not list under any root.

In this essay's first part, we presented an explanation from Rabbi Moshe Tedeschi-Ashkenazi (1821–1989), which accounts for how *makevet* in the sense of stating something "explicitly" relates back to the core meaning of NUN-KUF-BET as related to "piercing/boring/making a

hole.” For our purposes, he further explains that *makevet* is related to NUN-KUF-BET — because it denotes a sort of “hammer” used primarily for helping one wedge a nail into a hole.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740–1814) takes up a similar approach, but instead of seeing a hidden NUN signified by the *dagesh* in the MEM, he sees the MEM as extraneous to the word’s core root. Therefore, he traces *makevet* to the biliteral root KUF-BET, defined as the act of “making a hole.” In line with that, Rabbi Pappenheim defines *makevet* (“hammer”) as a tool used for making holes. Other words that he sees as deriving from this same root include *nekev* (“hole”), *nekeivah* (“female”), *kav* (a unit of measurement that is measured by using a hollowed out piece of wood, whose hole becomes a receptacle), *yekev* (a pit used in wine production), *kubah* (a chamber made of hewn stone, wherein important people domicile), *keivah* (“stomach,” an internal organ which has a hole in its entrance for the intake of food and a hole at its exit for the excretion of waste), and *nokev* (“stating something explicitly/cursing,” which is a way of metaphorically boring a hole or opening into something that is otherwise vague and closed due to its ambiguity).

Moving on to our next synonym for “hammer,” we now discuss the word *kurnas* (sometimes vocalized as *kornas* as Kohut prefers, or *karnas* as HaBachur prefers). This word does not appear in the Bible, neither in the Hebrew parts of the Bible, nor in the Aramaic parts of the Bible. But Rashi (to Jer. 10:4) defines the term *makevet* discussed above as *kurnas*. Readers may be familiar with the term *kurnas* from when Rashi (to Ex. 25:31, Num. 10:2, *Menachot* 28a) writes that the Menorah in the Tabernacle and Temple was supposed to be fashioned from one hunk of gold that was beaten into shape by a *kurnas*. The word *kurnas* also appears several times in the Mishnah (*Shabbat* 12:1, 17:2, *Keilim* 13:4, 29:6).

Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (in his work *Meturgaman*) defines the Mishnaic Hebrew word *kurnas* as a “big *makevet*,” although Rabbi Nosson of Rome in *Sefer He’Aruch* defines *kurnas* as a “small *makevet*” and as a “big *patish*.” Rashi (to *Shabbat* 21b) defines *patish* as a “big *kurnas* used by blacksmiths.” In this sense, *kurnas* refers to a blacksmith’s hammer or a larger, industrial-style hammer. Elsewhere, Rashi (to *Shabbat* 73a, *Moed Katan* 11a) simply equates *patish* and *kurnas*. This term is used in Modern Hebrew particularly in technical or mechanical contexts.

The etymology of the word *kurnas* is subject to dispute. Rabbi Binyamin Mussafia (1606–1675) already writes in *Mussaf He’Aruch* that this word comes from Greek. In fact, Rabbi Ernest Klein (1899–1983) in his etymological dictionary of Hebrew explains that *kurnas* derives from the Greek word *koryne* (“bat/baton/club/mace”), which is apparently related to the Greek words *korys* (“helmet”), *korymbos* (“zenith,” “corymb,” “cluster of flowers”), and *koryphe* (“head,” “top/ summit/highest point”). However, Dr. Alexander Kohut (1842–1894) in his *Aruch Completum* contends that *kurnas* is a native Aramaic/Syriac word.

I propose a possible etymological connection between the Mishnaic Hebrew word *kurnas* (“hammer”) and the name of the Greek deity Cronus (the Titan father of Zeus), based on their notable phonetic similarity and shared consonantal structure. Some scholars have traced the name of the Greek god Cronus to the Proto-Indo-European root *(s)ker-*, meaning “to cut,” which bears conceptual overlap with the function of a hammer as a tool used for striking and

shaping. While numerous mythological figures across various cultures have been depicted wielding hammers or mallets (as discussed in Part I), there is, to my knowledge, no evidence that Cronus himself was represented in this manner. Nevertheless, the convergence of phonetic resemblance and thematic association warrants further exploration of a potential linguistic or symbolic link between these terms.

In Modern Hebrew, the most generic and commonly used word for the standard household “hammer” is *patish*. That word actually appears thrice in the Bible: Isaiah (41:7) uses the word *patish* in describing how in fashioning an idol, the artisan will use a hammer to flatten the piece of the metal. In Jeremiah, Hashem says that His words (that is, the Torah) is “like a fire... and like a *patish* it will smash a stone” (Jer. 23:29). Jeremiah also foretells of the downfall of the Kingdom Babylon, prophesying that people will wonder how “the *patish* of the world” will have been so thoroughly taken apart and broken (Jer. 50:23). In the first two cases, Targum Aramaicizes the Hebrew word *patish* into *patisha*.

To situate the word *patish* within our discussion, it should be noted that Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim* defines *patish* as “a big *makevet*.” Similarly, Rabbi Yitzchak Avineri (1900–1977) writes that *makevet* refers to a type of *patish* which has one sharp head. The word *patish* is traced to the root PEH-TET-(YOD)-SHIN, which yields no other words besides for *patish*, so it is difficult to pin down its etymological basis further.

Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh of Carpentras (an 18th century grammarian and *dayan*) in *Aholei Yehuda* connects *patish* with the trilateral root PEH-SHIN-TET (“spreading/flattening”), in reference to what a hammer is to adept at doing. Similarly, Rabbi Moshe Tedeschi-Ashkenazi writes that *patish* derives from either the root TET-VAV-SHIN (“fly,” see Job 9:26) or NUN-TET-SHIN (“spread,” see Num. 11:31) in reference to the “hammer” used for smashing stone in such a way that little pieces of rock go flying about and spread everywhere.

When Deborah’s Song poetically retells the story of Jael killing Sisera, it says: “Her [Jael’s] hand she sent forth toward the peg / and her right hand to the hammer [*halmut*] of the toilers / and she broke [*halmah*] Sisera...” (Jud. 5:26). Using our intertextual deduction, we can cogently conclude that *halmut* is a poetic word that means the same thing as the prosaic *makevet*, because in the context of Jael killing Sisera both words are used to describe the selfsame item.

Indeed, Ibn Janach and Radak in their respective *Sefer HaShorashim* define *halmut* as *makevet*. In fact, Targum (to Jud. 4:21) translates *makevet* in the context of Jael as *arzafta*, and also translates (to Jud. 5:26) *halmut* as *arzafta*. From a lexicographical/etymological perspective, the term *halmut* derives from the trilateral root HEY-LAMMED-MEM (as explained by Ibn Saruk, Ibn Janach, and Radak), which also yields the verb for “breaking.” In that way, the hammer refers to the very tool used for carrying out the action of “breaking.”

The word *arzafta/marzafta* for “hammer” is used in Talmudic Aramaic (*Brachot* 34a, *Megillah* 25a, *Gittin* 56b). Rashi (to *Brachot* 34a, *Gittin* 56b, *Bava Batra* 20a) defines *arzafta* as *kurnas*, which brings us full circle (see also Targum Jonathan to Isa. 41:7, who translates

holem as *kurnas* and Targum to Ps. 73:10). There is also an Arabic cognate of this word *marzaba*, which means "sledgehammer."

Going back to the root of *halmut*, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (in his works *Yeriot Shlomo* and *Cheshek Shlomo*) traces the three-letter root HEY-LAMMED-MEM to the more basic biliteral root HEY-LAMMED, thus seeing the final MEM as extraneous to the core root. He explains the general theme of HEY-LAMMED as related to "spreading out," and thus explains a whole bevy of words in that fashion. Some examples: *yahel* refers to the "diffusion" of light as it spreads outwardly, *yahalom* refers to a precious gem whose countenance shines and "spreads out," *mahul* refers to the dilution of a thick liquid as it "spreads" within a thinner liquid, *hallel* refers to "spreading" the stories of one's praise and publicizing their virtues, *tehillah* is the type of song associated with the act of praising, *halah* refers to an unspecified faraway place, *halom* refers to an unspecified nearby spot, and *ohel* refers to a tent whose cover is "spread out" over the pegs that hold it up. Following this rubric, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the verb *halmah* ("breaking") refers to the act of smashing something, which causes its broken-down pieces to "spread about." Although Rabbi Pappenheim does not explicitly take note of this, the noun *halmut* as a "hammer" is the instrument used to bring about this end, so it also fits the bill.

Finally, Rabbi Moshe Tedeschi-Ashkenazi writes that *halmut* derives from CHET-LAMMED-MEM or ALEPH-LAMMED-MEM, both of which refer to something "healthy/strong/powerful." In this case, it refers specifically to the sort of "hammer" that is so big and powerful, that even if an abled, strong person used it to render a blow, it leaves that person tired out.

**To learn more about the fascinating history of the term Maccabee and what it might mean, check out the full version of this Ohrnet Magazine article at:*

http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

***SPECIAL NOTE: This Shabbos Chanuka, I am celebrating the Bar Mitzvah of my oldest son, Binyamin Eliezer. In honor of the special occasion, I published a new sefer (in Hebrew) called Lechem M'Merchack. That sefer and some of my other books are available on Amazon: <https://amzn.to/3Bj2dlO>*

Questions

1. "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef...." Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't G-d reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept." To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar's father?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "hand" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that G-d was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

Answers

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and G-d, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitzchak, who wept because of Yaakov's suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem
- 11.38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
- 12.38:30 - To allude to his descendent, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
- 13.39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar's wife.
- 14.39:3 - Yosef mentioned G-d's name frequently in his speech.
- 15.39:11 – Potiphar's wife.
- 16.40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king's goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king's bread.
- 17.40:4 - Twelve months.
- 18.40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler's dream.
- 19.40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
- 20.40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.

Q & A - Miketz

Questions

1. What did the fat cows being eaten symbolize?
2. How did Pharaoh's recollection of his dream differ from Nevuchadnetzar's recollection of his dream?
3. What was significant about the fact that Pharaoh dreamed repeatedly?
4. What does "Tsafnat Panayach" mean?
5. What happened to the Egyptians' grain that was stored in anticipation of the famine?
6. What did Yosef require the Egyptians to do before he would sell them grain?
7. Did Yaakov and his family still have food when he sent his sons to Egypt? If yes, why did he send them?
8. What prophetic significance lay in Yaakov's choice of the word "redu" — "descend" (and not "lechu" — "go")?
9. Why does the verse say "Yosef's brothers" went down to Egypt (and not "Yaakov's sons")?
10. When did Yosef know that his dreams were being fulfilled?
11. Under what pretext did Yosef accuse his brothers of being spies?
12. Why did the brothers enter the city through different gates?
13. Who was the interpreter between Yosef and his brothers?
14. Why did Yosef specifically choose Shimon to put in prison?
15. How does the verse indicate that Shimon was released from prison after his brothers left?
16. What was Yaakov implying when he said to his sons: "I am the one whom you bereaved"?
17. How did Reuven try to persuade Yaakov to send Binyamin to Egypt?
18. How long did it take for Yaakov and family to eat all the food that the brothers brought back from Egypt? Give the answer in terms of travel time.
19. How much more money did the brothers bring on their second journey than they brought on the first journey? Why?
20. How did the brothers defend themselves against the accusation of theft?

Answers

1. 41:4 - That all the joy of the plentiful years would be forgotten. (Not that the good years would provide food for the bad years.)
2. 41:8 - Pharaoh remembered the contents of his dream but didn't know its meaning. Nevuchadnetzar forgot even the contents of his dream.
3. 41:32 - It showed that the seven good years would start immediately.
4. 41:45 - He who explains things that are hidden and obscure.
5. 41:55 - It rotted.
6. 41:55 - Become circumcised.
7. 42:1 - Yes, but he sent them because he did not want to cause envy in the eyes of those who did not have food.
8. 42:2 - It hinted to the 210 years that the Jewish people would be in Egypt: The word "redu" has the numerical value of 210.
9. 42:3 - Because they regretted selling Yosef and planned to act as brothers by trying to find him and ransom him at any cost.
- 10.42:9 - When his brothers bowed to him.
- 11.42:12 - They entered the city through 10 gates rather than through one gate.
- 12.42:13 - To search for Yosef throughout the city.
- 13.42:23 - His son Menashe.
- 14.42:24 - Because he was the one who cast Yosef into the pit and the one who said, "Here comes the dreamer." Alternatively, to separate him from Levi, as together they posed a danger to him.
- 15.42:24 - The verse says Shimon was bound "in front of their eyes," implying that he was bound only while in their sight.
- 16.42:36 - That he suspected them of having slain or sold Shimon, and that they may have done the same to Yosef.
- 17.42:37 - He said, "Kill my two sons if I fail to bring back Binyamin."
- 18.43:2,10 - Twice the travel time to and from Egypt.
- 19.43:12 - Three times as much, in order to repay the money they found in their sacks and to buy more even if the price had doubled.
- 20.44:8 - They said, "We returned the money we found in our sacks; can it be that we would steal?"

Q & A - Vayigash

Questions

1. What threatening words did Yehuda say to Yosef?
2. Why did Yehuda say his missing brother died?
3. Why was Yehuda the one to plead for Binyamin?
4. What do we learn from Yosef telling his brothers, "Go up to my father"?
5. What two things did the brothers see that helped prove that he was really Yosef?
6. Why did Binyamin weep on Yosef's neck?
7. Why did Yosef send old wine to Yaakov?
8. What did Yosef mean when he said, "Don't dispute on the way"?
9. What happened to Yaakov when he realized Yosef was alive?
10. Why did G-d tell Yaakov, "Don't fear going down to Egypt"?
11. "I will bring you up" from Egypt. To what did this allude?
12. What happened to the property that Yaakov acquired in Padan Aram?
13. Who was the mother of Shaul ben HaCanaanit?
14. When listing Yaakov's children, the verse refers to Rachel as "Rachel, wife of Yaakov." Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah are not referred to as Yaakov's wives. Why?
15. Yosef harnessed his own chariot instead of letting a servant do it. Why?
16. Why were shepherds abhorrent to the Egyptians?
17. Why did Yosef pick the weakest brothers to stand before Pharaoh?
18. What blessing did Yaakov give Pharaoh when he left his presence?
19. Yosef resettled the land of Egypt, moving the people from city to city. What were his two motives for this?
20. Whose fields were not bought by Yosef?

Answers

1. 44:18 - He threatened that Yosef would be stricken with leprosy, like Pharaoh when he took Sarah from Avraham. Alternatively, Yehuda threatened to kill Yosef and Pharaoh.
2. 44:20 - Yehuda feared that if he said his missing brother was alive, Yosef would demand to see him.
3. 44:32 - He was the one who took "soul" responsibility for him.
4. 45:9 - We learn that Eretz Yisrael is higher than all other lands.
5. 45:12 - He was circumcised like they were, and he spoke lashon hakodesh.
6. 45:14 - Binyamin wept for the destruction of Mishkan Shilo built in Yosef's territory.
7. 45:23 - Elderly people appreciate old wine.
8. 45:24 - He warned that if they engage in halachic disputes, they might not be alert to possible travel dangers.
9. 45:27 - His ruach hakodesh (prophetic spirit) returned.
- 10.46:3 - Because Yaakov was grieved to leave Eretz Canaan.
- 11.46:4 - That Yaakov would be buried in Eretz Canaan.
- 12.46:6 - He traded it for Esav's portion in the Cave of Machpelah.
- 13.46:10 - Dina bat Yaakov.
- 14.46:19 - Rachel was regarded as the mainstay of the family.
- 15.46:29 - Yosef wanted to hasten to honor his father.
- 16.46:34 - Because the Egyptians worshipped sheep.
- 17.47:2 - So Pharaoh wouldn't see their strength and draft them.
- 18.47:10 - That the waters of the Nile should rise to greet Pharaoh.
- 19.47:21 - In order to remind them that they no longer owned the land, and to help his family by removing the stigma of being strangers.
- 20.47:22 - The Egyptian priests.

Q & A - Chanukah

Questions

1. Which miracle do we celebrate with the lighting of candles?
2. How did they know that the oil found was uncontaminated?
3. Who led the battle against the Hellenites?
4. During which of the "four exiles" did the miracle of Chanukah take place?
5. Name two non-halachic customs connected with Chanukah.
6. How many blessings are made before lighting candles?
7. Why do we light the extra candle known as the "*shamash*"?
8. What is added to our regular prayers at least three times a day?
9. What is the special reading of the Torah each day?
10. Is it obligatory to eat a meal like on Purim?
11. When do we have occasion to use three Sifrei Torah on Chanukah?
12. What three *mitzvot* did the Hellenites decree against?
13. What damage did the Hellenites do to the Beit Hamikdash?
14. What two military advantages did the Hellenite army have over the Jews?
15. Is it permissible to do work on Chanukah?
16. Why is there no Mussaf prayer on Chanukah except for Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh?
17. How does the name Chanukah indicate the date when this holiday begins?
18. What special prayer do we add to the morning services?
19. What did the Jews do after victory that explains the name Chanukah?
20. Which regular prayers in the morning service do we omit on Chanukah?

Answers

1. The oil for lighting the menorah in the Beit Hamikdash after the victory over the Hellenites was only enough for one day and it miraculously lasted for eight days until a new supply of pure oil was available. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
2. Its container had the seal of the *kohen gadol*. (*Mesechta Shabbat* 21b)
3. Matityahu, the *kohen gadol* and his sons. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1, and the “*Al Hanissim*” prayer in the Siddur)
4. The third exile under Hellenite oppression during the era of the second Beit Hamikdash. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
5. Eating either donuts or potato pancakes made with oil and playing with the *sivivon* (dreidel).
6. Three blessings the first night and two the other nights. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:4)
7. Since it is forbidden to benefit from the light of the candles we light an extra one so that if we do benefit it will be from that one called the *shamash* because it is sometimes used to serve as the lighting agent. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 673:1)
8. The prayer “*Al Hanissim*” (Ibid. 682:1)
9. The gifts of the *nesi'im* (heads of the twelve tribes at the inauguration of the Sanctuary as recorded in *Bamidbar* 7:1-8). (Ibid. 684:1)
- 10.No. But if the meal is accompanied by songs of praise to Heaven it is considered a *seudat mitzvah*. (Ibid. 670:2)
- 11.When Rosh Chodesh Tevet is on Shabbat and we read selections for Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and Chanukah. (Ibid. 684:3)
- 12.Shabbat, circumcision and Rosh Chodesh. (*Midrash*)
- 13.They made breaks in the walls and contaminated the sacred items. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
- 14.They were stronger and more numerous. (“*Al Hanissim*” Prayer)
- 15.It is permissible to work but women have a custom of refraining from work for the first half hour that the candles are burning. (*Mishna Berurah* 670:1)
- 16.Because there were no additional sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash during Chanukah. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 682:2)
- 17.If we break up the word into two parts — *Chanu*, and the letters *chaf* and *hei*, we read that they rested from the war on the 25th day of the month.
- 18.Hallel (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)
- 19.They rededicated the altar in the Beit Hamikdash, which the Hellenites had defiled. (“Chanukah” means inauguration.)
- 20.Tachanun and Psalm 20 before *Uva Letzion*. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance.” (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)

Yibum and Chalitzah

Mitzvos #597-599 (*Devarim* 25: 5-10)

Our *parashah* contains the first recorded incident of one of the most intriguing Mitzvos, Yibum (levirate marriage). When Yehudah’s firstborn Er died without progeny, he instructed his second son, Onan, to marry the widow, Tamar in fulfillment of Yibum. When Onan, too, died childless, and Tamar saw that Yehudah was not instructing his third son, Shelah, to perform Yibum, she took matters into her own hands and tricked Yehudah into doing so (*Bereishis* ch. 38).

In truth, the Mitzvah of Yibum was only given to the Jewish people centuries later at Sinai, and even then, the Mitzvah would be exclusively allocated to the brother of the deceased, such as Onan or Shelah, and not any other relative, even the father of the deceased, such as Yehudah. Henceforth from the Giving of the Torah, it is a severe sin for someone to marry the widow of his deceased son, and even the widow of his deceased brother, in circumstances where Yibum does not apply. The above incident can only be understood in light of the idea that the Patriarchs began keeping the Torah voluntarily even before it was given at Sinai, according to their understanding and with flexible application of the laws to accommodate the circumstances. Therefore, as long as the union did not involve incest, any family members could choose to perform the Mitzvah, though preference would be given to brothers to fulfill the Mitzvah completely. It is remarkable that the union between Yehudah and his son's widow, which was regarded then as a Mitzvah, would have been regarded as a severe sin had it occurred after the Giving of the Torah (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:16, *Ramban*, and *Malbim*).

According to one view, even after the Giving of the Torah, the concept of the Mitzvah remained applicable to extended family members in a case where there is no surviving brother, as long as the union does not involve incest. It was in this limited sense that Boaz performed Yibum by marrying his great-nephew Machlon’s widow, Rus. For a discussion about this incident and about Yibum in general, see *Divros Tzvi* (*Yevamos* §1-§4); this excellent work provided some of the sources of this article.

We will summarize some of the practical details of Yibum and Chalitzah, and then we will explore their meaning. A brother is only commanded to perform Yibum if he is capable of having children. After performing Yibum, he inherits the deceased brother’s possessions. If he does not want to perform Yibum, the Torah gives him the option of performing Chalitzah

instead. Even if he wants to perform Yibum, if the Beis Din determines the marriage to be practically inappropriate, such as if there is a great age gap between him and the widow, the Torah instructs the Beis Din to advise for the alternative of Chalitzah. In most cases, however, Yibum is the ideal choice for the living brother, and only if he chooses not to forego the fulfillment of this great Mitzvah does the Torah give him the option of Chalitzah, which is considered to be a lesser Mitzvah. It is a public ritual in which the widow removes the living brother's sandal and spits on the ground in front of him.

We will present a selection of the ideas behind this Mitzvah on two levels of understanding: the basic level and the esoteric level. On the basic level, Yibum may be understood as a means to grant continuity to a man who dies without progeny. When a brother, who is born of the same father, marries the widow of the deceased and inherits his house and possessions, and *only because* the deceased married without having children, the progeny that emerges from the Yibum union becomes known as the progeny of the deceased (*Toldos Yitzchak* and *Maharal*). This may be further understood in light of the idea that a husband and wife are considered one entity (*Bereishis* 2:24). In this sense, the deceased lives on in his wife, and the children she has from her husband's "substitute" may be regarded as the children of the deceased, and the merits earned by those children and their line of progeny for all generations will be linked to the soul of the deceased (*Sefer HaChinuch*). It is therefore an act of eternal kindness for the living brother to marry the widow, so much so that Hashem regards him as if he partnered in the creation of the world (*Zohar Chadash, Rus*). It is also an act of kindness for the widow, who might otherwise be left without a husband, without children, and without a means of livelihood (*Shai LaMorah* to *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:49). This seems to have been a primary consideration behind Boaz's decision to perform Yibum with Rus, a penniless convert. Nevertheless, with the lessening of the nation's spiritual caliber over the generations, many people were no longer performing this Mitzvah for the sake of Heaven, and the Sages enacted that the alternate option of Chalitzah be followed instead.

As noted, Chalitzah involves the widow's spitting in front of the living brother. The Midrash (*Tanchuma, Mishpatim* §7) calls this a *chok*, a Divinely ordained decree without an apparent logical basis, but the Commentators nevertheless shed light on its meaning. Some explain that it is an expression of disgust over the living brother's refusal to grant continuity to the soul of his deceased brother (*Recaniti*). The putrid drop of spit is also meant to resemble the living brother's seed that was meant to grant continuity to the deceased brother's soul. Thus, the spitting implies that the living brother has foolishly substituted eternal kindness for eternal disgrace (*Hilchos Gedolos*, cited in *Sifsei Kohan*). She removes his sandal to indicate that until now, his brother was not truly dead, for his soul still had hope for continuity, and now that the living brother has effectively eliminated that hope, he ought to stand barefoot in mourning over his brother's loss (*Rabbeinu Bechaye*). Generally, the removal of a sandal is an intricate task that includes the unwinding of straps, which a person sometimes accomplishes with the assistance of his wife. Thus, the widow's removal of the sandal adds disgrace to the living brother, for she implies that had he agreed to grant continuity to his brother through Yibum, she would have become his wife, and now, all the involved parties have lost out (see also *Rashbam*).

To summarize, on the basic level, we may understand Yibum as an act of kindness and a beneficial societal arrangement. In the event that a brother refuses to comply, Hashem does not force him to do so, but rather indicates His disapproval by means of the ritual of Chalitzah.

On the esoteric level, which we will examine from afar and describe in general terms, the soul of the deceased becomes reincarnated in the product of the Yibum union. For example, according to one view, Er and Onan became reincarnated in Tamar's twins, Peretz and Zerach, and so too, Machlon became reincarnated in Rus's son, Oved. The reincarnation of these souls was particularly important because they were links in the chain of generations that led to King David, and eventually to Mashiach. The soul of the childless deceased brother remains within the widow and then emerges into her son through Yibum with the living brother because the souls of brothers are closely related (see *Recaniti to Bereishis 38:8* and *Yahel Ohr*, Vol. 1, 28a).

In the event that the living brother does not want to perform Yibum, the widow may release the soul of the deceased from her by means of Chalitzah. The freeing of the living brother's foot from the sandal alludes to the freeing of the soul of the deceased from the widow. The soul must then wait for its rectification through other means, such as through the merit of a great Torah scholar (*Yahel Ohr*, *ibid*).

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Chanukah Special Feature for the Family!

8 Reasons for 8 Days

The Chanukah miracle: A flask with one night's oil burned for 8 nights. But being that there was oil for one night, the miracle actually lasted only 7 nights. So why is Chanukah 8 nights?

Here are 8 approaches to answer this question:



They divided one night's oil into eight portions. Miraculously, each portion lasted an entire night.

Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim 670



The Greeks ransacked the Temple many days in search of oil to defile. Despite their strength and numbers, they overlooked one flask. A few weak, battle-weary Jews found it immediately.

HaMeiri in Lehdos U'lehallel; Sefer HaEshkol, Chanukah 6:13



Wanting the oil to last, they made the wicks one-eighth of the normal thickness. Nevertheless, the flames burned just as brightly as if the wicks had been the normal thickness.

Chidushei HaRim



The golden Menorah was ritually impure. So were all the Jewish soldiers, having come in contact with death on the battlefield. Therefore, they were forced to make a temporary earthenware Menorah, because earthenware is more resistant to impurity. But earthenware is porous, and when it's new it absorbs a small but significant part of any oil put in it. Therefore, one night's oil for a gold Menorah was not sufficient for an earthenware menorah because some of the oil is lost to absorption.

Bava Metzia 40a & Maharsha Chullin 55



In one account, the text reads "and there wasn't enough (oil) it to burn *even* one day..."

Sheiltos DeRav Achai Gaon, Parshas Vayishlach found in footnote to Megillas Antiochucus in Siddur Otzar Hatefilos



Seven days commemorate the miracle of the oil, and one day commemorates the miracle that a few weak Jewish soldiers defeated the mighty Greek legions.

Kedushas Levi



Chanukah occurred in the year 3622 (139 BCE). Calendar calculations and other historical sources indicate that the 25th of Kislev, the first day of Chanukah, fell on Shabbat that year. Therefore, they needed to light the menorah before sunset Friday night, and consequently needed a little more than a night's-worth of oil.

Atzei Zayis



The commandment to light the Menorah with pure oil is written in the Torah (Leviticus, chapters 23 and 24) immediately after the commandment to observe the *Succos* festival for 8 days (7 days of *Succos* followed by *Shemini Atzeres*). The Sages saw this as a Divine hint that Chanukah should be for 8 days.

Bnei Yisaschar in the name of the Rokeach

**Research based on Sefer Ner Lemeah, Rabbi Yerachmiel Zeltzer*

*Ohr Somayach wishes all of our friends, alumni and readers of Ohrnet Torah Magazine a festive and luminous Chanukah that will bring peace, and light up our lives with good health, much happiness and success.
Chanukah Somayach!*

INSIGHTS INTO HALACHA

5785 – The Rarest Year of Them All Part IV

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

As detailed in previous installments in our series, our current year, 5785, is not only a rare one, but calendarically speaking, actually the hands-down **rarest** of them all. 5785 is classified as a *HaSh" A* year in our calendars. This abbreviation is referring to Rosh Hashana falling out on Thursday (*hei*), both months of Cheshvan and Kislev being *shalem* (*shin* - 30 day months instead of possibly 29; these are the only months that can switch off in our set calendar), and Pesach falling out on Sunday (*aleph*).

A *HaSh" A* year is the rarest of years, and out of the 14 possibilities in *Tur*'s 247-year calendar cycle, this year type occurs on average only once in about 30.19 years (approximately 3.3 percent of the time). Indeed, at times there are 71 years (!) in between *HaSh" A* years. The last time this year type occurred was 31 years ago in 5754 / 1994. The next time will be 20 years hence in 5805 / 2044. The next several times after that are slated to be 27 years further, in 5832 / 2071 and then a 51 year gap in 5883 / 2122.

The reasons and rules governing the whys and whens this transpires are too complicated for this discussion; suffice to say that when the *Mishnah Berurah* discusses these issues he writes "*ain kan makom l'ha'arich*," that this is not the place to expound in detail, which is certainly good enough for this author.

Obviously, such a rare calendar year will contain many rare occurrences. This series article sets out to detail many of them. Perhaps as we get nearer to the actual events, we will discuss them in greater detail. Let's continue on our journey through our unique year.

Cheshvan – Kislev Calculations

In Part Three we explained the significance of Cheshvan and Kislev both being *shaleim* this year. As noted, these months are the only months that can either have 29 or 30 days depending on the year. Some years both are *chaseirim* ('missing'; meaning 29 day months); other years both are *malei'im* ('full'; meaning 30 day months), and others Cheshvan is *chaseir* and Kislev *malei*. What is a given, is that this is one of the changing variables in our set calendar. As mentioned previously, in 5785 both months are *malei* – making this a *shaleim* year.

Skip the Birthday

This detail actually had interesting, and quite dramatic, ramifications this year, especially as pertains to Bar Mitzvah *bachurim*. You see, if a boy was born on the 30th of Cheshvan - which is also the first day of Rosh Chodesh Kislev, in a year that Cheshvan was *malei*, and in his Bar Mitzvah year Cheshvan is a *chaseir*, meaning there is no 30th of the month, our little lad does not become a man until the 1st of Kislev. In other words, he does not truly have a birthday, as in that year, his birthdate simply does not exist. Hence, his birthday is skipped and is pushed off one day until the next month. He may have been born in Cheshvan, but his Bar Mitzvah will assuredly be observed in Kislev.

The reason for this is that *halachically* one cannot become truly a Bar Mitzvah until he completes 13 entire years. Since there is no 30th of Cheshvan in his Bar Mitzvah year, he does not actually reach that milestone until the next day, which is the one-day Rosh Chodesh Kislev, a.k.a. *Alef* Kislev.

Bar Mitzvah-ed a Day Early

Yet, it is when the flip side of this equation occurs when it gets real interesting. The *Elyah Rabba*, based on a ruling of the *Bach*, maintains that if a boy is born on the 1st of Kislev in a year when Cheshvan only had 29 days, and in his Bar Mitzvah year Cheshvan has 30 days, then the boy becomes Bar Mitzvah on the first day of Rosh Chodesh Kislev, which is actually the 30th of Cheshvan! Since he completes 13 full years on that day (as there now is an extra day added to that year), he is obligated in Mitzvos on the day prior to his birthday. His birthday might be *Alef* Kislev, but his Bar Mitzvah is *Lamed* Cheshvan.

This fascinating, albeit relatively obscure *psak* of becoming a Bar Mitzvah one day before the birthday, is actually cited as *halacha* by the consensus of many great *Acharonim*, and codified as halacha by the *Mishnah Berurah*. In fact, it is due to this reason that the great Bobover Rebbe, Rav Shlomo Halberstam *zt"l* claimed he became Bar Mitzvah one day before his Bar Mitzvah date. He was born on *Alef* Kislev in a year when Cheshvan was *chaseir* (5668), and in his Bar Mitzvah year (5681) Cheshvan was *malei*.

The same fascinating occurrence happened this year. Thirteen years ago, in 5772, Rosh Chodesh Kislev was a one-day Rosh Chodesh, as Cheshvan that year was *chaseir*. Yet, this year, 5785, as mentioned previously, both Cheshvan and Kislev are *malei*. Ergo, Rosh Chodesh Kislev is a two-day Rosh Chodesh. That means that a boy who was born on 1 Kislev 13 years ago (the singular one-day Rosh Chodesh Kislev that year), actually became Bar Mitzvah this year on *Lamed* Cheshvan, the first day of Rosh Chodesh Kislev, or, in other words, one day prior to his actual birthday!

In other words, to put a bit differently, on Monday, the first of Kislev, 5775 there were no Bar Mitzvahs at all – as anyone born thirteen years prior would have been observing his Bar Mitzva on the previous day! Fascinating, no? Just another noteworthy feature of our exceptional year.

No Early *Yahrtzeit*

However, it is important to note that according to the *halachic* consensus, this rule does not actually apply regarding *Yahrtzeits*, as a *Yahrtzeit* is strictly observed on the exact date when someone is *niftar*. Moreover, as *Yahrtzeit* observance is technically considered a *neder* (vow), the rule of thumb is that regarding *nedarim*, its observance follows the common vernacular. As *Lashon Bnei Adam* is to refer to the 1st of Kislev as *Rosh Chodesh Kislev*, that is the date that must be observed as proper *Yahrtzeit*, regardless of the month's makeup.

Hence, in our current year, a *Yahrtzeit* for someone who was *niftar* 13 years ago on 1 Kislev (which, back in 5772 was a one-day Rosh Chodesh Kislev), would still have been observed this year on 1 Kislev, even though this year it actually ended up being the second day of Rosh Chodesh Kislev.

This maxim is in contrast to Bar Mitzvahs, as a child becomes Bar Mitzvah on the day he completes 13 full years. In other words, and as diverging from *Yahrtzeit* observance, the upshot of this discussion is that a Bar Mitzvah technically does not necessarily have to occur exactly on the boy's actual birthday, as is showcased with a Rosh Chodesh Kislev Bar Mitzvah on this rare year.

Our fascinating journey detailing the many remarkable facets of our rare year will IY”H be continued...

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch famously wrote that “the Jew’s catechism is his calendar.” It is this author’s wish that by showcasing the uniqueness of our calendar year and its rare *minhagim*, this series will help raise appreciation of them and our fascinating calendrical customs.

This author wishes to thank R’ Yosef Yehuda Weber, author of ‘Understanding the Jewish Calendar,’ for being a fount of calendrical knowledge and for his assistance with this series.