

# MONTHLY STATEMENT

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

THE TORAH ITSELF says that Ya'akov Avinu, on his deathbed, was about to reveal to his sons what would occur at the End-of-Days. The Talmud explains that he lost the prophecy and was forced to move on with the blessings instead, but adds the following dialogue as well:

Rebi Shimon ben Lakish said: Ya'akov wanted to reveal to his sons the End-of-Days, but the Divine Presence left him. So, he said, "Perhaps, God forbid, there is something unfit from my bed, just as Yishmael was born to Avraham, and Eisav to my father Yitzchak?"

His sons answered, "Shema Yisroel, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad: Just as in your heart only [God is] one, so too in our hearts, there is only one."

At that moment Ya'akov said, "Boruch Shem kevod Malchuso l'olam va'ed—Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever!" (Pesachim 56a)

Ya'akov Avinu had assumed that the prophecy was taken from him because at least one of his sons was unfit to hear it. After all, Avraham had fathered a Yishmael, and Yitzchak had an Eisav. Perhaps he had given rise to another unfit descendant.

His sons disagreed. They insisted that each of them was in fact righteous, and that the prophecy must have been withdrawn for another reason. They recited the "Shema" to make their point.

Their father heard them, and in the end seemed to concur, responding with what is now the second verse of the "Shema." Seemingly satisfied with the outcome, the Talmud says nothing more about what happened and moves on.

What the Talmud is really saying though is: This is as far as we go HERE. If you want to understand what Ya'akov Avinu REALLY told his sons, check out the Zohar. It is the Zohar that says:

Ya'akov wanted to establish the "Mystery of Unity" below and composed the 24 letters of "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever." He didn't give it 25 letters [like the "Shema"] since the Mishkan had yet to be built. (Zohar, Terumah 139b)

This little anecdote changes the tone of the dialogue Ya'akov had with his sons. They responded to their father's query with a statement about God's unity being perfect in their hearts. According to the Zohar, Ya'akov's response said, "Not as perfect as you think. THAT level of unity won't occur for another 194 years, after your descendants build a Mishkan for the Shechinah:

Once the Mishkan was built, the first word was completed . . . With regard to this it says, "God spoke to him from the Appointed Tent, saying" (Vayikra 1:1), which has 25 letters. (Zohar 2:139b)

It started with an attempt to reveal the End-of-Days to his sons, resulting in a dialogue that included the reciting of what has since become the first two verses of the "Shema." This in turn connected the event to the construction of the Mishkan in Moshe Rabbeinu's time. What, if any though, is the connection to Chanukah?

This:

[The eighth sefirah of] Hod is the 8 days of Chanukah, [which occurs after the] 24 days [of Kislev, during which the Chashmonaim battled the Greeks]. They correspond to [the 24 letters of] "Boruch Shem kevod Malchuso l'olam va'ed." (Tikunei HaZohar 29a)

So, it turns out, the 24 letters of Ya'akov Avinu's answer to his sons, "Boruch Shem kevod Malchuso l'olam va'ed," were also an allusion to the 24 days of Kislev, during which the Chashmonaim battled the Greeks. They lead to the 25th day of Kislev, which alludes to the level of the yichud of the Shema, achieved through the Mishkan which, appropriately, was completed on none other than the 25th day of Kislev!

Kislev. Now that's interesting.

The truth is, though the names of the Jewish months are well known, less known is where they came from: Babylonia. They certainly aren't found anywhere in the Torah, which refers to Jewish months only according to their numerical order.

Nissan, being the month of the redemption and of the mitzvah to keep track of time, is the first month of the year. This would make Kislev, therefore, the ninth month of the year. However, even this is not mentioned anywhere in the Torah because, apparently, nothing worth recording ever happened in Kislev prior to the close of Torah in 1273 BCE.

The "Ninth Month" only becomes significant much later in time, around the 36th century from Creation, during the Second Temple Period. That is when the Greeks controlled Eretz Yisroel together with their henchmen, the Misyavim, or Hellenists. More importantly, it is when a small and heroic group of kohanim led a rebellion against their conquerors and took back the Temple, in the year 138 BCE.

The military victory was miracle enough, but they even found an undefiled jar of oil with which to rekindle the Menorah in the Temple. And, when the miracles did not end there, but included one day of oil that burned for eight days in total, they established the holiday of Chanukah the following year and for each year henceforth:

The following year, they established days of festivity for praise and thanks. (Shabbos 21b)

Hence, it was the Chanukah miracle that put the ninth month on the holiday map. Finally, something

important had happened in the month of Kislev to give it prominence. In the dead of winter and from the depths of exile, light previously hidden was able to break through and shine forth.

Now, there is no such thing as coincidence, especially when it comes to Jewish history. Nothing is incidental, no matter how much it seems that way to man. Something can have a humble beginning and yet end up being a key element in the master plan of God. We've already seen THAT happen MANY times.

Take the name "Kislev," for example. It has only four letters: Chof, Samech, Lamed and Vav. It could have a Yud after the Chof, but it is rarely ever written since it is a vowel, and can be represented by a dot under the Chof. For all-intents-and-purposes, "Kislev" has only these four letters.

Interesting, is it not, that the last two letters of Kislev are Lamed-Vav—36? It is the only month that is associated with the number 36, and the number itself is built into the name of the month? Is that only incidental?

Then there are the first two letters of the name Kislev: Chof-Samech. True they are part of a word that means "cover," as in the lid of a pot. But they are even more significant because they have been given their own prominence elsewhere:

The hand is on God's Throne—Chof-Sa-mech . . . (Shemos 17:16)

The hand of The Holy One, Blessed is He, was raised to swear by His throne, to be at war and [have] hatred against Amalek for eternity. Now what is the meaning of Chof-Samech [as opposed to Chof-Sa-mech-Aleph?] . . . The Holy One, Blessed is He, swore that His Name will not be complete and His throne will not be complete until the name of Amalek is completely obliterated. (Rashi, Shemos 17:16)

According to this, the letters Chof-Sa-mech are a reminder of the ongoing war against the Jewish nemesis, Amalek. They allude to what is wrong with Creation, and what must be done to rectify it. Rid the world of Amalek, and the missing Aleph will return and complete the word, ushering in the Messianic Era.

In fact, the Aleph itself represents the fundamental difference between Jewish and Amalekian beliefs. Amalek believes that history is random, even if God DOES exist. A Jew is SUPPOSED to believe that EVERYTHING is a function of Hashgochah Pratis—Divine Providence. For a Jew, there is NO such thing as coincidence.

This idea not only sheds light on the importance of the letters of Chof-Samech, it also helps to explain an interesting statement in the Talmud:

Rebi Elai said: In three matters a person's true character is ascertained: in his cup, in his pocket, and in his anger. (Eirubin 65b)

People spend a lot of time hiding their true feelings and thoughts. You can think you know someone

well only to be surprised one day by the way they act while intoxicated. Or, it may be revealing to see how generous or stingy they are with their money, or how quickly they get angry or how easily they avoid it.

There may be other circumstances that also reveal a person's true nature, but the Talmud chose these three. Though the reason may not be clear from the translation, it is clear from the Hebrew: b'koso, b'kiso, ub'ka'aso, each word having the same root: Chof-Samech.

However, what may matter more is not what they have in common, but how they differ from one another. One word has a Vav, one has a Yud, and one has an Ayin. Though the significance is not immediately clear, it is once the three letters are turned into a gematria: 6+10+70, or 86.

The number 86 may not seem significant at first either, until it is recalled that it is also the gematria of one of God's Names: Elohim, and THAT is EXTREMELY significant. For, according to Kabbalah, "Elohim" is the Name most affected by a constriction of the light, by an attack from Amalek.

"Elohim" was also the Name most impacted by Adam HaRishon's sin, which is why when God confronted him he asked him but one thing:

"Ayekah?" (Bereishis 3:9)

It translates as, "Where are you?" but it is never used again—EVER. There are other more popular ways to ask the same question. It does however have an interesting gematria: 36. And, the word can be divided into two parts: Aleph-Yud, which means "where" and Chof-Heh, which has a gematria of 25.

So, yes, the story of Chanukah began before Ya'akov even had his dream and found his jar of oil. The Chashmonaim were certainly not the beginning of it, and we're certainly not the end of it.

For 36 centuries the light of Chanukah tried to permanently make its way into history, but only came close, especially during Ya'akov Avinu's life. Kislev is the story of a light that was hidden, and how it finally became revealed for good, at least to those worthy of it:

[God] made a separation in the illumination of the light, that it should not flow or give off light except for the righteous, whose actions draw it down and make it shine. However, the actions of the evil block it, leaving them in darkness, and this itself was the hiding of the Light. (Sefer HaKlallim, Klal 18, Anaf 8, Os 4)

The actions of the evil block the light? How? And, what does it have to do with the Name "Elohim," and koso, kiso, and ka'aso?