"Open my eyes so that I may see the **wonders** of Your Torah"

בס"ד

Wonders

Weekly Magazine of the Shiurim and Farbrengens
of HaRav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

Issue 222

Shabbat Vayishlach 5787 ❁ **November 27-28, 2026**
שַׁבָּת וַיִּשְׁלַח ❁ יז-יח כִּסְלֵו תשפ"ז



The Maggid put on his spectacles. This was his sacred practice: whenever he wished to focus on a particular detail, he needed to narrow his spiritual vision by putting them on, for without them all the details of the world appeared to him at once, making it difficult to focus on any one thing in particular. He then looked closely at the young man's face.

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The Lubavitcher Rebbe to Rav Ginsburgh, Elul 5741

"…It would be proper to publish your classes in book form. With blessings for success…"



Wonders

An anthology from the shiurim and farbrengens
of HaRav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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STORY

THE MAGGID OF MEZRITCH: CONFESS!

Rav Dovber, the Maggid of Mezritch, was the disciple and successor of the holy Baal Shem Tov. During the years of his leadership, the overwhelming majority of the great figures of the next generation joined the Chasidic movement. Unlike his master, the Maggid was by nature a homebound figure who rarely set out on journeys himself, but he sent his disciples to many places throughout Poland and Lithuania, and even as far as distant Germany. Chasidut flourished, and, as is the way of things, the opposition to it deepened as well. It is told that the Maggid passed away as a result of the fierce controversy surrounding him: several of his disciples answered the attacks in kind, and the toll of this struck first at his health, and ultimately cost him his life. In the year 5532 (1772), a plague broke out in Mezritch. His disciple, Rebbe Zusha of Anipoli, brought the Maggid to Anipoli, where he resided for about seven months, until the day of his passing, on the nineteenth of Kislev, 5533 (1772). After his passing, his disciples scattered throughout Europe and spread Chasidut wherever they settled, laying the foundations of the Chasidic movement as it is today.

[Related by Reb Yaakov Kaidaner]

I was staying at an inn in the German lands, in the city of Königsberg [then in Prussia; today called Kaliningrad, in Russia], where a number of prominent merchants were lodging. Among them were merchants from the town of Slutsk—wealthy men and eminent Torah scholars—and the conversation in the group turned to the ways of the *chasidim*. One said this, another said that; the people of Slutsk were well known as strong opponents of the Chasidic movement, and they spoke disparagingly of the leading rabbis of the Chasidic community, until the conversation turned to the holy Rav of Mezritch. At that point the men of Slutsk said: "One must not speak ill, heaven forbid, of a man of such wonders. For although we are indeed strong opponents of the chasidic way, what our own eyes beheld and not another's, we cannot deny—the great wonder we witnessed firsthand from this great Rav. And they related the following story:

A young married man from our town traveled through the province of Volhynia [in northwestern Ukraine] on business and lost his way for half a day and half a night, wandering until he arrived, after midnight, at the holy community of Mezritch. He was very cold and wanted to warm himself, but did not see a candle lit in any house. He continued down the street until he came to a house where a

candle's light was shining, knocked on the door, and it was opened for him. He went inside to warm himself, and there, in one room, was a light and that room was the sacred chamber of the great master, Rav Dovber, the Maggid.

When the holy Rav heard that there was a guest in the house, he came out, greeted him, and asked where he was from. The man said he was from Slutsk, and told him how he had lost his way. The holy Rav said: "It was no accident that you lost your way and came to my house. There is surely something behind this!" He then put on his spectacles [this was his sacred practice: whenever he wished to focus on a particular detail, he needed to narrow his spiritual vision by putting them on, for without them all the details of the world appeared to him at once, making it difficult to focus on any one thing in particular], and looked closely at the young man's face. He said to him: "At the time you set out from home, your son was gravely ill." The man answered that this was so. The holy Rav told him: "Do not worry about anything. Thank God, he is now in perfect health."

He continued: "When you arrive home safely, you will find the town in an uproar, for young children are becoming ill and dying, while your own son, thank God, remains in good health. The town's rabbi and the *dayanim* [judges] are searching and investigating for the sin responsible for these deaths.

Tomorrow, there will be a *brit milah* at the home of a certain prominent burgher, who will hold a festive meal in celebration, and you will be among the invited guests. All the notable men of the town will be present at the meal, and they will speak there of the deaths of the children, and they will fix their suspicion on a certain young man as the sinner responsible. In truth, he is entirely innocent. However, among the foremost of the guests will be a certain wealthy man, one of the town's leaders, and he is the true sinner, the one on whose account the children are dying.

When everyone rises and strikes the young man to force a confession from him, the wealthy man, too, will raise his hand to strike him, calling out, 'Wicked one, confess!' At that very moment, you are to seize his hand and say to him instead: 'Wicked one, confess! For you are the sinner, and it is because of you the children are dying!' He will then immediately confess all his sins, and afterward, God willing, the deaths will cease.'

The holy Maggid of Mezritch added: "And if you fail to do as I have instructed you, know with certainty that your own son will die suddenly, at that very moment."

The young man traveled home and carried out everything exactly as the holy Maggid had instructed him. Not one word of it failed to come true, and the whole town was astounded by the wonder of what had occurred. They said: "Could there be such a man of God, in whom the spirit of God has spoken?" This we ourselves witnessed, and it cannot be denied.

(*Sippurim Noraim*)

At the heart of the story stands the theme of confession and repentance and the communal pressure brought to bear in reaching them, pressure which the Maggid takes care to redirect to its proper goal. Confession is the practical aspect of the *mitzvah* of repentance. It is the outward expression of the heart's return to God, and it must give voice to a sincere and genuine emotion. Maimonides explains that one who confesses without true inner repentance in the heart is "like one who immerses in a *mikveh* while holding an impure creature in his hand." Such a confession has no value at all.

This is the inner secret of the *sefirah* of acknowledgment (*hod*, in Hebrew, from the same root as "confession," *hoda'ah*) in the soul: an honest and direct disclosure of the heart's inner experiences. The fact that confession is the goal and conclusion of the *mitzvah* of repentance reflects the secret that "understanding extends as far as acknowledgment." Repentance, i.e., *teshuvah*, belongs to the realm of understanding (*binah*), and its extension and outward revelation reaches as far as the *sefirah* of acknowledgment, the final *sefirah* on the left axis, meaning that repentance and return to God culminate in the confession that acts as the signature of the *mitzvah*.

Yet confession also carries a reverse dimension, not as a result of repentance, but as its cause. This is one of the ideas expressed in our story. On the inner level, confession is bound up specifically with the acknowledgment of truth, even when that truth is unpleasant. Confession involves a clear and open admission that the act committed was indeed a sin, and this admission itself brings about regret and a change of course, for "one who confesses and forsakes [his sin] will be met with compassion" (Proverbs 28:13). This form of confession, too, requires earnestness and sincerity—the internal experiences of the *sefirah* of acknowledgment. Without inner honesty, a person grows cunning and self-justifying, unwilling to admit his own fault. Even in confession's external dimension, the willingness to bring the truth already known within the heart into open, spoken acknowledgment is where the power to spur a person toward repentance lies.

Honesty can even prevent sin from occurring in the first place. The holy *Shelah* (author of the *Shenei Luchot HaBrit*) explains that a father must educate his child to speak the truth as the foundation of all else, for this alone will prevent sin: a child who does not lie, and who knows that he will one day have to confess his wrongdoing and bear its consequences, will refrain from the sin to begin with.

Indeed, the story also makes the danger inherent in such external pressure keenly felt. Where one is not dealing with a true *tzaddik* possessed of genuine Divine inspiration, the attempt to bring another person to repentance can entirely miss its mark and harm the innocent. The lesson for us, therefore, is first and foremost an inner one:

Confession, and the outward expression of one's sin, help a person feel the shame and lowliness inherent in it, confront it, and ultimately forsake it. Here again, two factors work together: the disclosure of inner feelings and experiences (or hidden deeds) to the outside world, and the inability to continue concealing these deeds from

oneself. The very act of confessing and externalizing them reveals just how absurd self-justification truly is, and thus compels an honest acknowledgment of the truth, with the correction of one's deeds following in its wake.

(Based on *HaNefesh*)

THE WONDERING JEW

PARADISE, REASONS FOR CREATION, COMMUNICATION, MASTERING HEBREW

We continue our series reviewing HaRav Ginsburgh's book of tweets and blog entries titled The Wondering Jew: Mystical Musings and Inspirational Insights. Each short article begins with a quote from the book followed by an elucidation and discussion written by one of the Rav's students, based on his teachings elsewhere.

Down to Earth

Our ascent to Paradise is meant to bring a bit of heavenly consciousness inspired awareness of God and His will down to earth.

Knowing about Paradise should teach us not to long for Paradise but to long for God, for the revelation of His essence here below. God doesn't want us to remain in Paradise; He needs us down here.

As explained in our previous installment, Paradise is apparently the Romanized form of the *Pardes*, meaning the Orchard, spoken about in Jewish mysticism. It is explained in Chasidut that of the four Sages who entered the *Pardes*, only Rabbi Akiva was focused on the importance of integrating his mystical experience in the upper worlds in a manner that could be applied in our practical, material world. The other three Sages were not as grounded therefore, they were overly focused on the mystical "high," and subsequently each in their own way was blemished by the experience. Rabbi Akiva understood from the outset that

every experience no matter how spiritual or mystical is ultimately only meaningful or productive if it can be integrated and applied in the world of practicality.

Four Reasons For Creation

Why did God create the world? A hard question to answer. Probably only God knows.

Still four answers have been suggested. These answers correspond to the four letters in God's essential name, Havayah (י-הוה), and to their matching sefirot that serve as channels of creation.[1]

Though it remains a profound mystery why the Infinite—Who transcends time, space, and all needs—yearns for a relationship with humanity, we find in the rabbinic literature four reasons:

Answer #1: The first reason, aligned with the letter *yud* and the *sefirah* of wisdom (*chochmah*), the source of inspirational insights which draws directly from the highest *sefirah* of the crown (*keter*), is that God possessed a passion to establish a dwelling place in the lower worlds. This idea traces back two millennia to the Midrash,[2] and is recognized as the deepest motive, defining the core mission of humanity and the Jewish people.

Answer #2: The second reason is that God wants to be known to others and is connected to the first *hei* in God's Name and the intellectual *sefirah* of understanding (*binah*). This reason is echoed by the *Zohar* and aligns to a degree with Maimonides' intellect-focused theology. In human terms, it parallels the innate need to have one's essence and creative inspiration appreciated, akin to an artist, poet or any creative person who wants to share their works with others.

Answer #3: God wants to shower his goodness on others. This is traditionally quoted as, "the nature of the Good is to do good." This answer corresponds to the *sefirah* of beauty (*tiferet*), representing compassion and mercy. This answer is linked to the letter *vav* in God's Name, a letter that represents, and especially in this case, a loving connection between giver (God) and recipient (creation). Because God's essence is goodness, there must be a recipient. The universe was thus formed to benefit from Divine benevolence.

Answer #4: The final reason corresponds to the second and final *hei* of God's four-letter essential Name and the *sefirah* of kingdom (*malchut*). This is continuously affirmed by observant Jews who recite a hundred blessings daily declaring God as the "King of the universe," and is especially emphasized during High Holidays prayers of Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur when we coronate God king.

Obviously, all of these answers are no more than a glimpse from afar. We can never really know why God created the world and why we are here.

It is the nature of human beings to seek answers to these existential questions even though we cannot know them with certainty. Although we may never know definitively why God created the world, these four answers give us a firm basis on which to build our faith and knowledge of the world we live in and our connection to the Creator of all.

Creation Through Communication

God created the world ex nihilo with speech... "And God said: 'Let there be light.'" Communication is creation. Learn to communicate.

The Genesis account of Creation, particularly in the first chapter, describes God creating reality with speech. Clearly the Torah is using speech as an analogy, because God does not "speak" the way human beings do. Still, the analogy is plainly stated in the Torah's text and does not originate from mystical teachings. It led the Sages to state that, "With ten sayings the world was created."[3] The Sages arrived at this number of 10 saying by carefully reviewing the text of the account of Creation.

Nine times, the Torah records that God said, in some way, followed immediately by the enactment of His saying. The first example is on the first day: "God said: 'Let there be light,' and there was light."[4] There are differing opinions as to what the tenth saying is, but the plain reference is to the Torah's first verse, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," which the Sages consider an all-encompassing saying. Thus, according to the Oral Torah, which was given along with the Written Torah, the world was created with ten sayings; Divine speech is quite literally the instrument of creation.

There is a Midrash that speaks in God's name and declares, "Just as I create worlds, so too can you create worlds."[5] This amazing statement reflects the idea that humans, created in God's image,[6] are bestowed by Him with the ability to create. In fact, it is when we are engaged in the act of creation (whether through music, art, or any other creative endeavor) that we are most poignantly emulating our Creator. From this, we understand the incredible power of speech in particular: Just as God creates the entire world through speech, so too human speech creates reality. When we speak, we are harnessing that primordial potential to build up, or God forbid, tear down.

MAN AS A SPEAKING SOUL

In fact, according to *Onkolos*, who wrote the Aramaic translation of the Torah still used today to understand the meaning of the written text, the very definition of a human being is that of a speaker. With

regard to the verse, "God formed man of dust from the ground, and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living soul,"[7] Onkelos translates "a living soul" as a "speaking spirit." In English, the four categories of creation are: mineral, vegetable, animal, and human. In Hebrew, these four categories are translated as: silent, growing, animal and speaker. Thus, here we see clearly that what separates and defines a human is the ability to speak.

It is interesting to note that the oral tradition is called *Torah SheBa'al Peh* which literally means "the Torah that is upon the mouth." The oral tradition has been faithfully communicated for thousands of years, from teachers to students and parents to children, until this very day through speech. There is a timeless tradition, which is still practiced in some communities, of singing the Mishnah—the core of the Oral Torah. If we take the letters of the Hebrew word for Messiah, *Mashiach*, and pronounce the letter *shin* as an "s" sound (the pronunciation of the letter *shin* can be "sh" or "s"), the word means "a speaker." The Mashiach will show the indisputable and celestial power of speech, and through it, will bring all of humanity together into a new, more expanded level of consciousness, which will ultimately unite the world in peace and harmony. In fact, the traditional word for "leader" (*dabar*) literally means "one who speaks."

Learning Torah by Mastering Hebrew

The Torah has both a body and soul. Its bodies are its laws, its soul—its mysteries. Both derive from a common source: the Hebrew language.

The Book of Formation (Sefer Yetzirah) is both the first text of the Kabbalah and the first text on Hebrew grammar. Every one of the Oral Torah's many laws is the product of an intense and detailed analysis of the syntax of the Bible's Hebrew text.

The first step toward Torah scholarship is to master Hebrew. Hebrew is the holy tongue, the language of Creation. The Hebrew name of an entity is its life-force it is continuously being recreated by the power of its name. Just as the Torah begins with the account of creation, so Torah study should begin with mastering the language of Creation.

Every day in the Morning Service we recite the following words: "Blessed is the One who spoke and the world came into being." On Shabbat and holidays, we express a similar sentiment, when we recite the following verses from Psalms: "By the word of God were the heavens made and all the hosts of them by the breath of His mouth.... For He spoke and it was, He commanded and it stood fast."[8]

Further bolstering this notion of the creative power inherent in God's speech, the Sages teach that the instruments of Divine speech, the Hebrew letters, are

the building blocks of creation.[9] Not just linguistic symbols, these letters contain an animating Divine force. Thus, for instance, the letters spelling the word for "light" (אוֹר), constitute light. Indeed, not only are the letters an animating force, the Torah is considered the blueprint of Creation, as the *Zohar* teaches: "God looked into the Torah and created the world."[10]

In a similar fashion, scientists describe the building blocks of creation as atoms, particles, molecules, and elements; and just as an incredible amount of energy is packed into an infinitesimally small atom, Divine light and energy are intensely contracted into the Hebrew letters, which function as conduits, serving as the channels of Divine speech.[11] Consequently, in the Divine creative process, speech is action—there is no separation between the two.

Since human beings are created in "the image of God," they share this creative capacity, as discussed previously. Words spoken impulsively or in anger can touch someone to his or her very core: destroying life-long relationships, ruining a person's reputation, and even leading to murder, or war. More positively, compassionate and loving speech can heal old wounds, give strength to the weary, provide people with hope, and inspire the masses.

For this reason, we should be extremely careful with our words, as speech has the power to create and destroy worlds, as King Solomon says, "Life and death is in the hands of the tongue."[12] As God creates through Divine speech, we too should use the gift of speech wisely. Furthermore, we should realize the power and wisdom inherent in the Hebrew language, especially since Hebrew is the language God chose to reveal His wisdom and His will through the Torah.

Notes
1 See also *Sod HaShem Liyereiʾav*, pp. 205-206.
2 *Tanchuma*, Naso 16; *Tanya* ch. 36.
3 *Avot* 5:1.
4 Genesis 1:3.
5 *Yalkut Shimoni*, based on Psalms 62:9.
6 Genesis 1:27.
7 Ibid 2:7.
8 33:6, 9.
9 See "Introduction" to *The Hebrew Letters*.
10 *Zohar* 2:161b.
11 See "Introduction" to *The Hebrew Letters*.
12 Proverbs 18:21.

TORAH ZODIAC

THE SCORPION AND ANCIENT GREECE

The Sages provided us with a rectified version of the Zodiac constellations and their meanings. As part of his 82nd birthday farbrengen, Rav Ginsburgh spoke in length about the Torah underpinnings of the Zodiac sign of Scorpio, the constellation associated with the month of Cheshvan and its connection with the ancient Greeks. This article serves as a preparation for Chanukah that we will be celebrating in a couple of weeks.

The following is an edited excerpt from these teachings as they appeared in Hebrew in the Toldot 5787 issue of Nifla'ot.

THE ZODIAC IN THE SERVICE OF MAN

What do we do when we see individual Divine providence, when we see God's providence plainly? We do *teshuvah*, we repent, that is, we return to God out of love, which is what Mashiach comes for, "to make the righteous do teshuvah."[1]

In *Midrash Tanchuma*, we find a wondrous statement that describes the 12 signs of the Zodiac from the perspective of human life. The *midrash* expounds on how all the signs describe different stages in a person's life:

> A person is likened to the twelve signs of the zodiac. At first, when he is born, he is like a lamb [Aries, *Nissan*], tender; and he grows strong like a bull [Taurus, *Iyar*] when he grows up; and he becomes twins [Gemini, *Sivan*]—that is, whole—and the evil inclination grows in him; and at first it is weak like a crab [Cancer, *Tammuz*; it is a weak crawling creature (*Kad HaKemach*)]; and afterward, when he has grown up, it grows strong like a lion [Leo, *Av*; meaning the evil inclination]; and if he sins he becomes like a virgin [Virgo, *Elul*; meaning that he is drawn to the material, which Scripture compares in many places to the female. And since a virgin is delighted with kinds of pleasures more than the other women, therefore the Midrash likens the delights of this world to the delights of a virgin (*Kad HaKemach*)]; and if he adds sins they weigh him in the scales [Libra, *Tishrei*]; and if he persists in his rebellion they bring him down to the lowest She'ol, She'ol and Gehinnom, like a scorpion [Scorpio, *Cheshvan*] cast to the ground and into the clay pits; and if he repents they throw him out like an arrow shot from a bow [Sagittarius, *Kislev*]… immediately he becomes tender and clean like a kid [Capricorn, *Tevet*], and they purify him as at the hour he was born and sprinkle pure water on him [meaning that the Holy blessed One will throw pure water upon him and forgive his sins] from the bucket [Aquarius, *Shevat*]; and he grows in great delight like fish [Pisces, *Adar*] enjoying the water, so he immerses at every hour in rivers of balsam and in milk and oil and honey, and eats always

1 Based on *Zohar* 3:153b.

from the Tree of Life that is planted in the company of the righteous, and his body leans on every table [meaning that its branches lean on, etc.] of each and every righteous person, and lives forever.[2]

In the language of the *midrash*, the scorpion is a metaphor for the person feeling that "I have already descended to the lowest depths of the abyss." An interesting state... How can we understand such a state as reflecting holiness? This state can also be termed lowliness—a person feeling that he is at a low point beyond which no one can be lower. What happens at the end of the month of *Cheshvan*? He suddenly does repentance (completing the service of the month of *Tishrei*). Today, the 28th of *Cheshvan*—begins the last three days of *Cheshvan*, the conclusion of the sixty days of the scorpion, and this is already the culmination of the revelation of providence.

When I am in the lowest depths of the abyss, what should I contemplate? It would be appropriate to think of the verse, "If I make my bed in the abyss, behold, You are here"[3]—I have reached the abyss and here His very Essence is revealed to me up close, "You are here," more than "If I ascend to heaven, You are there," where You are only "there," still far from me.[4] Out of this experience the person does *teshuvah*, and then, in the language of the *midrash*, he is shot like an arrow out of the abyss—this is already the sign of Sagittarius (*Kislev*), who shoots arrows. When a person has reached the culmination of the scorpion, as though naturally, he is shot, thrown, outward because he contemplated repentance.

Then he becomes tender as a kid (Capricorn, *Tevet*), and they purify him with pure, holy water, the secret of the sign of Aquarius (*Shevat*), and in the end they provide him with pleasure, Pisces (*Adar*). This is the end of the story. We see that the winter months are very pleasant. In any case, the culmination of the "descent for the sake of ascent"[5] is here, in this Midrash, the scorpion.

THE SCORPION—GREEK CULTURE

The constellation sign of the month of Cheshvan is the scorpion. In the Torah, we find the conjunction: "snake, fiery serpent, and scorpion."[6] The Sages say[7] that "'snake' is Babylon," referring to the Babylonian empire and the Babylonian exile; "'fiery serpent' is Media"; and finally "'scorpion' is Greece." This in itself illustrates a connection between the sign of the month of Cheshvan and the Hasmoneans' war against the Greeks, which in its essence is the war against Greek philosophy, specifically, its rejection of Creation *ex nihilo*, and the renewal of Creation, an error that originates in the belief in a primordial existence of the substance of this world.[8]

Although we must continue to deny this heresy with self-sacrifice, as the Hasmoneans did, it is written that, in the end, "God shall beautify Jephte, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem."[9] Jephte is Noah's son who was the progenitor of the Greeks and so this verse states that we need to extract the beauty of Greece, specifically their sense of symmetry, and adopt it, convert it, and to include it

2 *Tanchuma*, *Ha'azinu* 1. Its wording (the notes in brackets are from the Etz Yosef commentary).
3 Psalms 139:8.
4 See *Likkutei Halachot, Yoreh De'ah*, Laws of Redemption of the Firstborn 3:8.
5 *Likkutei Torah*, *Behar* 41a, based on *Makkot* 7b. And elsewhere.
6 Deuteronomy 8:15.
7 *Bereishit Rabbah* 44:17. See *Vayikra Rabbah* 13:5.
8 See *Haneirot Halalu*, sixth candle.
9 Genesis 9:27.

within the tents of Shem.[10] What are the tents of Shem? The Holy Temple. Who does this? Initially, it was Matityahu Apparently, the continued rectification of Greece belongs to his many soul reincarnations.[11]

In any case, it is written explicitly that the sign of Cheshvan, which we are now concluding, includes all three—the serpent, the fiery serpent, and the scorpion. It is named after the scorpion because the essence of what is called Western culture today is Greek culture, the scorpion.

THE COLD OF HERESY AND A NEW BIRTH

What is the difference in Jewish law between a snake and a scorpion? When praying the *Amidah*, if a serpent is wrapped around one's heels one does not interrupt, but if a scorpion is wrapped around them, one does interrupt.[12] That is, a scorpion is more dangerous than a serpent. Why? The explanation in Chassidut[13] is that "its venom is cold"—within the scorpion (עַקְרָב), pronounced *akrav*, there are the letters "cold" (**קָר**)—whereas the venom of the snake is hot. What is the difference between hot and cold venom in Chasidic psychology?

The answer ties into the difference between pride and cravings.[14] Which is worse? The snake corresponds to cravings which are the warmth of the evil inclination stemming from the heart. The scorpion is associated with the coldness of heresy, which like the wisdom of Ancient Greece, is from the brain—cold. It is written in Chassidut[15] that there is nothing as cold as the intellect—external intellect. Another synonym for cold in Hebrew is frost (כְּפוֹר), which is cognate with heresy (כְּפִירָה). The brain, the intellect is the source of heresy and of pride, particularly the external aspect of the intellect.

The Arizal writes[16] that the scorpion, whose venom is cold, is the feminine aspect of the impure husks, whereas the serpent is their masculine aspect. In impurity, the feminine is more dangerous, and that is the reason if it is on a person's leg, he stops even during the Amidah. Likewise, heresy (which originates in pride) is far worse than cravings. But following the principle that, "God has made one as well as its opposite"[17] there are both a snake and a scorpion of holiness. Moreover, "the measure of the good is greater than that of the negative,"[18] therefore the scorpion of holiness, too, is far holier than the snake of holiness. The snake (**נָחָשׁ**) as we know is Mashiach (**מָשִׁיחַ**) and the scorpion is even more so, since scorpion (**עַקְרָב**) equals "Mashiach David" (**מָשִׁיחַ דָּוִד**).[19]

SECRETS OF THE SCORPION

What we want to understand then is what makes the scorpion of holiness greater than the snake of holiness? To do so, we need to think deeply about what this holy scorpion is.

It is written[20] that scorpion alludes to "70

10 Based on *Megillah* 9b.

11. As delineated in the Arizal and explained in length in the complete transcript of this class.

12 Based on *Berachot* 30b; 33a.

13 See *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 2, end of *Eikev*, and elsewhere.

14 The *Simchat Beit HaSho'evah* farbrengen (the part published in Wonders, *Bereishit* 5787 issue.

15 *Hayom Yom* for 11 Sivan.

16 See the *Be'ur HaGra* on *Tikkunei Zohar*, *tikun* 21.

17 Ecclesiastes 7:14.

18 *Yoma* 76a.

19 In ordinal numbering, the snake (**נָחָשׁ**) equals 43 and the scorpion (**עַקְרָב**) equals 57. In this numbering scheme, too, the difference between them is David (**דָּוִד**), but the novelty is that they complete each other to 100, which equals Michal (**מִיכַל**; David's wife) in normative numbering.

20 *Ba'al Shem Tov* on the Torah, *Vayishlach*, sec. 14.

come close" (**עַ-קָרֵב**), meaning that he can bring closer all seventy (**ע**) nations of the world, with their seventy (**ע**) languages.

It is written explicitly in Kabbalah[21] that *akrav* (**עַקְרָ-ב**) is the "mistress of the household"[22] (עֲקֶרֶת הַבַּיִת).

Jacob's name (יַעֲקֹב) was given to him by the Almighty[23] because, "his hand was grasping the heel (עֲקֵב) of Esau,"[24] How does name a righteous person after a wicked one?! There is an opinion[25] that according to grammar the three-letter root of "scorpion" (**עַקְרָב**) is עֲקֵב, because the ר is only for the beauty of the language. Thus, there is a connection between Jacob and the scorpion.

There is also a connection to Abraham seen when God blesses Isaac, it is in the merit of Abraham: "Because (עֵקֶב) Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, etc."[26] The word "because" (**עֵקֶב**) alludes to the 172 years Abraham followed God, since he discovered God when he was 3 years old and he passed on at 175.

We now have a few different references to what the scorpion might mean in holiness.

THE BASE-SIXTY SYSTEM

The Sages explain the scorpion as a symbol for Greece with the following statement, "Just as the scorpion gives birth to sixty, sixty, so the kingdom of Greece established sixty, sixty." There are two explanations of this statement. The first explanation[27] is that the scorpion gives birth after sixty days, but this is not the main explanation. The second explanation[28] is the main one: that the scorpion spawns sixty baby scorpions in each litter. This reflects the Greeks who used the number sixty through their official bureaucracy.

The Greek arithmetic system was perhaps the most important thing they adopted and inherited from Babylonians who used 60 as the base of their number system. That is why there are sixty minutes in an hour and sixty seconds in a minute, and 360—6 times 60—degrees in the circle of the year, and so on. The Sages adopted this as well and it is clearly seen in the Laws of the Sanctification of the New Moon in the Rambam[29]; all the calculations done in base 60. Maimonides does not explicitly state that it is based on Babylon and Greece, but the adoption of the base 60 system for astronomical observations is one of the most straightforward and important examples of, "God shall beautify Jephte, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem."

They chose the number 60 as their base because it is divisible by 12 different numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 15, 20, 30, and 60. There is no other number up to 60 with so many divisors. 60 itself is 5 times 12. There are many secrets and allusions in this, and we will mention only the main ones: the sum of all the divisors squared is 5460, which is the product of 3 and 1820 (the number of times God's essential Name, *Havayah*, appears in the Penateuch). 1820 is the product of 70 and 26, where 70 is the value of "secret" (**סוֹד**) and 26 is the value of *Havayah* (**יְ-הוֹה**). 5460 is also the product of 60 and 91 (which is itself the sum of the squares of the first six numbers, from 1 to

21 *Tikunei Zohar*, *tikun* 21 (42b).
22 Psalms 113:9.
23 *Rashi* on Genesis 25:26.
24 Genesis 25:26.
25 Jastrow's Dictionary (Philadelphia, 1883–1903), *s.v.* "*akrav*."
26 Genesis 26:5.
27 The German translation of the *Midrash Rabbah* (Wünsche, Leipzig 1881), *Bereishit Rabbah* 44:17.
28 *Vayikra Rabbah* 13:5. And see *Shemot Rabbah* 1:8.
29 *Hilchot Kidush HaChodesh* 11:7 and ff.

6). The number sixty is considered by the Sages to be the foundation of Greek wisdom, which makes their symbol the scorpion who is essentially connected to this number.

There is a Torah principle that "everything follows the inception." The first appearance of the number 60 in Torah is in the verse we discussed earlier, "[And afterward his brother came out, and his hand was grasping the heel of Esau, and he called his name Jacob;] and Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them" (**וְיִצְחָק בֶּן שִׁשִּׁים שָׁנָה בְּלֶדֶת אֹתָם**), the value of this phrase is 2148, or 6 times Mashiach (**מָשִׁיחַ**), which means that the average value of each word is "Mashiach," 358. The initials alone (**ובששבא**) equal 611, the value of "Torah" (**תּוֹרָה**)![30]

SIXTY AND THE MONTH OF KISLEV

When considering the year, if the month of *Cheshvan* is deficient (29 days), the sixtieth day is the 1st of Kislev, and if *Cheshvan* is full (30 days)—as it this year, 5787—the sixtieth day is the 30th of Cheshvan. Either way, the sixtieth day is *Rosh Chodesh Kislev*, either the only day of *Rosh Chodesh*, or the first day of *Rosh Chodesh*. We must say that the scorpion is not only the sign of the month of *Cheshvan*—it also completes the sign of Libra of the month of Tishrei, completing sixty days, and also connects to the next sign, the sign of Sagittarius.[31]

The most important allusion in the Torah to the base-60 arithmetic is in the Priestly Blessing, which has 60 letters in it. The 60 letters of the Priestly Blessing are alluded to in the verse[32] "Behold, Solomon's bed, sixty mighty men surround it, from the mighty men of Israel,"[33] which is why we recite this verse as part of the Reading of Shema before going to sleep. In fact, the first word of the verse, "behold" (**הִנֵּה**) itself equals 60.

Chanukah is a festival of the priests, since it is they that led the war against the Greeks.[34] The word "sixty" appears only once more in Scripture, in the verse from Song of Songs (the "holy of holies"[35] of the entire Bible): "sixty are the queens"[36] referring to the sixty

30 Here it becomes clear that Isaac is the scorpion, the secret of "I am understanding [*binah*, the source of the scorpion, as follows], I have might [*gevurah*, Isaac, whose source too is in laughter and the joy of understanding]" (Proverbs 8:14). Isaac and *akrav* (**יִצְחָק עקְרָב**) equal 580, the value of "fiery serpent" (**שְׂרָף**), in the secret of "snake, fiery serpent, and scorpion," all of which are included in the scorpion, as above.

31 And an allusion: Libra-Scorpio-Sagittarius (**מאזנים-עקרב-קשת**) equal 1320, which is 22 times 60, a clear allusion to the Priestly Blessing, which has 60 letters, but from its first 22 letters—"May *Havayah* bless you and guard you. May *Havayah* shine"—comes the holy name of 22 letters that one should have in mind before the blowing of the *shofar* on *Rosh HaShanah* (see *Sha'ar HaKavanot*, topic of *Rosh HaShanah*; *Mishnat Chasidim*, *Rosh HaShanah*; and, *Sod HaShem Liyrei'av*, *Sha'ar* "*Kol Shofar*")!

32 *Bamidbar Rabbah* 11:3.

33 Song of Songs 3:7. "Behold, the bed of Shlomo, sixty" (**הִנֵּה מִטָּתוֹ שֶׁלִּשְׁלֹמֹה שִׁשִּׁים**) alone equals 1870, the same as, "God shall beautify Jephte and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem" (**יַפְתְּ אֱלֹהִים לְיֶפֶת וְיִשְׁכֹּן בְּאָהֳלֵי שֵׁם**), which is explained here as the secret of Chanukah and mainly in relation to the number sixty.

34 Chanukah and priests (**חֲנֻכָּה כֹּהֲנִים**) together equal 208, or 8 times *Havayah* (**הוי'**), alluding to the eight candles of Chanukah, with each candle described as "the candle of *Havayah* is the soul of man" (Proverbs 20:27)! It is written in the intentions of the Arizal (*Pri Etz Chayim*, *Sha'ar HaSelichot*, ch. 8) that the eight candles correspond to the eight garments of the High Priest—eight rectifications from "abundant in kindness" (רב חסד) until "and He cleanses" (ונקה).

35 Mishnah *Yadayim* 3:5.

36 Song of Songs 6:8. "Sixty men around it" (**שִׁשִּׁים גִּבֹּרִים סָבִיב לָהּ**) equals 1014, or *Havayah* (הוי') times "*Havayah* is one" (**י-הוה אחד**); "Sixty are the queens" (**שִׁשִּׁים הֵמָּה מְלָכוֹת**) equals 1196, or *Havayah* times *Elokai* (**אֲ-לֹהַי**). Together they equal 2,210, or 85 times *Havayah*. The word "sixty" (**שִׁשִּׁים**) alone

tractates of the Oral Torah,[37] whose main development was in the days of the Second Temple, in the period of the kingdom of the Hasmonean priests that won against the Greeks. This verse contains the holy root of the base of Greek arithmetic, sixty, which was inherited by the greatest scientist and astronomer of antiquity, Ptolemy (**תַּלְמִי**), whose name in Hebrew equals 8 times 60.[38]

According to the Book of Formation, God created the month of *Kislev* with the letter samech (**ס**),[39] which also appears in its name. The value of the *samech* is 60. The letter of the month of *Cheshvan*, the month that precedes *Kislev*, is *nun* (**נ**). Together, the letters of *Cheshvan* and *Kislev* form the word for "miracle" (**נֵס**), alluding to the great miracle of *Kislev*, the miracle of *Chanukah*, which as we now understand, really begins in *Cheshvan*, who sign is *Scorpio*, which relates to 60, and ends in Chanukah.

All year long, a Jew sees individual Divine Providence, in the form of the renewal of Creation, something from nothing—unlike the Greeks. To the extent that one experiences the renewal of Creation, so too he sees in every step in his life individual Divine Providence. In the month of *Tishrei*, the year's first month, the experience of Providence is still in potential and in the month of Cheshvan it is revealed in actuality. This is also connected to the falling of the rains: the expression of "the eyes of *Havayah* your God," are in the Land of Israel—and the culmination of the revelation of Providence is on the sixtieth day, the scorpion that completes the Libra.

Rosh HaShanah then is the "beginning (*reishit*) of the year to the end of the year." The beginning of the revelation of individual Divine Providence in the world[40]—the Providence of "the eyes of *Havayah* your God," as written in the same verse. It is written[41] that the Third Temple will be built in the month of Cheshvan, the rectification of the festival that King Yeravam invented from his own heart in Cheshvan.[42] There is deep meaning in the idea that Mashiach will set Cheshvan for the dedication of the Third Temple. Of course, this too is connected to Chanukah ("dedication")—the dedication of the House in the future will be in Cheshvan.

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equals 650, 25 (**כה**) times *Havayah*, and twice "sixty" equals 50 times *Havayah*, and the remainder equals 910, 35 (**לה**) times *Havayah* (half of 1820, or Jacob (יעקב), front and back, **י יע יעק יעקב יעקב עקב קב ב**).

37 *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 6:9. See *Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:21.

38 In primordial numbering (*meespar keedmee*), Ptolemy (**תַּלְמִי**) equals 1800 or 60 times 30 (half of 60 squared).

39 *Sefer Yetzirah* 5:9.

40 See also *Teshuvat HaShanah*, *s.v.* "Personal Divine Providence." See *Tom VeDa'at*, "Personal Divine Providence."

41 *Bnei Yissachar*, *Marcheshvan*, *ma'amar* 1, sec. 2 (based on *Yalkut Shimoni* on Kings); *Tishrei*, *ma'amar* 5 (*Chinuch HaMikdash*), discourse 4, in the gloss. And see *Ibid.*, *Kislev-Tevet*, *ma'amar* 2, sec. 48.

42 Based on 1 Kings 12:33.



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