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

בס"ד

Wonders

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of HaRav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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שַׁבָּת נֹחַ ❁ ה-ו חֶשְׁוָן תשפ"ז

"Then those [who fought] on Israel's side said to Gideon, "Rule over us—you, your son, and your grandson as well; for you have saved us from the Midianites." But Gideon replied, "I will not rule over you myself, nor shall my son rule over you; God alone shall rule over you."

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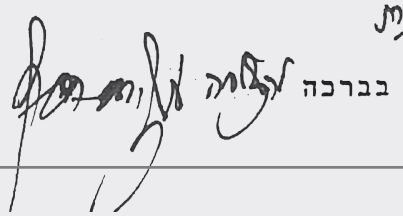
The Lubavitcher Rebbe to Rav Ginsburgh, Elul 5741

"…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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WONDERS OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

PARASHAT NOACH: NOACH'S DOUBLE MEANING

THE MEANING OF THE NAME NOAH

When Noach was born, his father Lemech prophetically exclaimed: "This one will bring us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands, from the ground which God has cursed."[1] The name "Noach" (נֹחַ) is cognate to the word meaning "solace" (נֶחָמָה) and to the word meaning rest (מְנוּחָה). Rashi then quotes the Sages who identify Noach as the individual who invented the plow. With it, mankind would now be able to more easily work the earth,[2] which had been cursed since Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Furthermore, once the plow was invented, the earth itself rested from the curse that had been in effect during Adam's lifetime.[3] rested from the curse the plow, making agriculture far easier. As a result of these two events, people had a sense of respite from their unproductive and backbreaking labor.

NOAH AND THE REST OF SHABBAT

Given the meaning of his name and the rest he brought mankind, it is no surprise that the *Zohar* links Noach to Shabbat, the day of rest.[4] In Kabbalah and Chasidut a *tzaddik*, an exceptionally righteous person, is commonly called "Shabbat," as his or her state of consciousness even during the week continually draws from and is connected to Shabbat. Noach in fact is the first person referred to in the Torah as a *tzaddik*.

Noach and his family's experiences in the ark, riding upon the turbulent waves of the Flood, mirror the reality of Shabbat. After a week of navigating the sometimes chaotic and unpredictable realities of this world, the Shabbat provides a refuge and welcome rest from the difficulties of making a living and dealing with the trials and tribulations of day-to-day life.

But in fact, the opening verse of this week's *parashah* mentions Noach's name twice, one immediately after the other, "These are the generations of *Noach*, *Noach* was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noah walked with God."[5] Because of this, the *Zohar* speaks of a "higher rest" and a "lower rest" on Shabbat.[6] The lower rest is attained by observing the Shabbat's prohibitions, whereas the higher rest is attained by connecting to the elevated state of consciousness available on Shabbat. Establishing this connection allows a Jew to experience the awesome joy, spirituality, and peace that the Shabbat holds.

1. Genesis 5:29.
2. *Rashi* on Genesis 5:29.
3. Genesis 3:17-19.
4. *Tikkunei Zohar* 54a.
5. Genesis 6:9.
6. *Zohar Chadash* 3:94a.

A Jew can observe all the laws of Shabbat but by thinking and speaking about mundane matters, remain totally out of sync with the Shabbat's essential spirit. The lower and higher states of rest on Shabbat can only be experienced together when a Jew's thoughts, speech, and actions all reflect the peace and tranquility of the holy Shabbat.

MAKING YOUR WORDS SHINE

When God told Noach to build an ark to save himself and his family from the impending flood, the ark is described in the following way: "A window you will make for the ark and to a cubit finish it above. Put the entrance of the ark in its side, make it with a bottom, second, and third floor."[7] Two of the Ba'al Shem Tov's most importance teachings are based on this verse.[8]

His first teaching is based on the beginning of the verse, "A window you will make for the ark." The Hebrew word for "window" (צֹהַר), pronounced *tzohar*, which literally means "shining," and the Hebrew word for "ark" (תֵּבָה) also means "word."[9] The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that when we recite words of prayer or Torah, we have to make them "shine," infusing them with all of our intent. By doing so, we enable the words to connect to all the physical and spiritual worlds and ultimately to God Himself and to simultaneously illuminate the deepest recesses of our souls. The ark becomes a metaphor for how prayer saves us from the raging waters of the world, offering us shelter and comfort in times of trouble by keeping us constantly connected to God.

The Ba'al Shem Tov, based on his predecessors' teachings, especially those of the Arizal, emphasized the unique opportunity prayer offers to directly connect to God. Reintroducing joy, song, and profound *kavanah* (deep intent) as integral elements of prayer, he transformed the Jewish people's prayer experience. What had become for many a somewhat mechanical experience was transformed into a joyous, deeply personal, and spiritual one. A great deal of Chasidic thought and custom regarding prayer derive originally from the Ba'al Shem Tov's teachings on this matter. He forged a renewed sense of how to make the words of prayer truly shine.

THE ARK'S THREE STORIES

The Ba'al Shem Tov's second teaching derives from the ark's division into three distinct levels. The ark's three stories symbolize the three levels of consciousness that encompass all human experience and physical and spiritual reality: Worlds (*Olamot*), Souls (*Neshamot*), and Divinity (*Elokut*). The middle floor, symbolizing the dimension of Souls, links the bottom floor—the physical and spiritual worlds with their myriad creatures, from animals to angels—to the top floor, the Divinity that permeates every point in space and time.[10]

Our own experience as human beings can be divided into these three types: On the level of "Worlds," man searches for

7. Genesis 6:16.
8. *Degel Machaneh Efrayim*, *Noach*.
9. For more perspectives on the word "window," see *Sha'ashuim Yom Yom*, *Noach*.
10. *Degel Machaneh Efrayim*, *loc. cit.*

God; on the level of "Souls," man attempts to serve God; and on the highest rung of "Divinity," man longs to unite with God.[11] In the realm of "Worlds," man's task is to uplift all of reality, enabling ascension above the limited mundane dimensions—physical and spiritual. In the "Souls" realm, souls are drawn to connect with other souls in intimacy and shared friendship. On the level of Divinity, the soul passionately wishes to unite with God, foregoing any sense of individuation.[12] The three levels of Worlds, Souls, and Divinity and the interaction between them are reflected in our constant processing of our internal experiences and in our daily encounters with external reality.

Level	Service	Experience
Worlds	searching	to uplift
Souls	serving	to connect
Divinity	uniting	to unite

The Ba'al Shem Tov united these two insights of how to approach prayer and Torah learning with the three levels of experiencing reality by explaining that every Hebrew letter in our prayers contains the three dimensions of: Worlds, Souls, and Divinity.[13] He concluded his famous letter to his brother-in-law, Rabbi Gershon of Kitov, with the following thoughts:

> With every word of your lips intends to unite: for in every letter there are Worlds, Souls, and Divinity and they ascend and connect and unify with each other and afterwards the letters connect and unify to become a word and then unify in true unification in Divinity. Include your soul with them [words of prayer and Torah] in each and every state. And all the worlds unify as one and ascend to produce an infinitely great joy and pleasure, as you may comprehend from the joy of the bride and groom in miniature, in the physical realm; how much more so [is the joy and pleasure experienced] on such an exalted level as this. Surely God will be your aid and wherever you turn you will succeed and reach greater awareness. "Give to the wise and he will become wiser."[14]

11. *The Hebrew Letters*, pp. 14-19.
12. *Ibid*.

13. *Degel Machaneh Efrayim*, *loc. cit.* HaRav Ginsburgh's classic work, *The Hebrew Letters*, is based on this teaching from the Ba'al Shem Tov. Along with explaining how each letter manifests in Worlds, Souls and Divinity, the book shows how each letter is also expressed according to its form, name and number. Thus, each letter has nine levels: Worlds, Souls and Divinity in its form, and the same in name and number.
14. From a letter by the Ba'al Shem Tov to his brother-in-law, Rabbi Gershon of Kitov.

STORY

REBBE AVRAHAM WEINBERG OF SLONIM: TORAH FOR ITS OWN SAKE

Rabbi Avraham Weinberg of Slonim, who departed this world on the 11th of Marcheshvan, 5644 (1883), was known eponymously as the "Yesod HaAvodah" after his book. He was the founder of the Slonim chasidic dynasty. He was born in the year 5564 (1804) to Rebbe Yitzchak Matisyahu, who was close to Rebbe Asher the First of Stolin. In his youth he was close to Rebbe Noach of Lechovitch, and afterward to Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin, who continued his path. After Rebbe Moshe's passing, he led a congregation in Slonim. He authored many works, and his important book Yesod HaAvodah is among the rare chasidic works not written as a commentary on the weekly Torah portions, but rather as a systematic exposition setting forth the fundamental principles of Chasidic thought. Like his predecessors in the Lechovitch-Kobrin-Slonim lineage, he was known for his singular bond with the Land of Israel and its settlement, and served as head of Kollel Reissin, which supported the Jewish community in the Holy Land. He likewise encouraged many of his chasidim to make aliyah to the Land of Israel and even sent three of his young grandsons to make aliyah to the Land at the age of thirteen. When those close to him expressed wonder at this step, he said that "a time of terrible concealment will come... and I wish that a remnant of our fellowship be established in the Land of Israel so that there may be a nucleus around which to gather." In time it became clear that through this act he had indeed ensured the continuation of his legacy, for from those very roots, the Slonim Chasidic dynasty was rebuilt after the Holocaust.

When the *Nefesh HaChaim* of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin was published on the matter of Torah study *lishmah* (for its own sake), the *Yesod HaAvodah* said: "What shall I do? Whichever book of the Sages I open, whether the Talmud, the *Zohar*, or a Midrash, the meaning of Torah study does not appear to me to agree with what Rebbe Chaim wrote." He then composed the holy book *Yesod HaAvodah*, saying in Yiddish: "Ich hob tzibrochen meine alle beiner oif dem," "I have broken all my bones over this." The difficulty was in ensuring that he would have no personal stake in the matter whatsoever, and that all he wrote that differed from the *Nefesh HaChaim* would be strictly for the sake of Heaven.

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Rabbi Berel Avigel's was a great Torah scholar and rabbinic judge in the city of Slonim, and would travel to the holy Rebbe Noach of Lechovitch, of blessed memory.

Once, one of his fellow rabbinic judges raised a formidable difficulty in a certain matter. When Rabbi Berel returned home, a wondrous resolution to the colleague's question came to his mind. As he was walking, he met the *Yesod HaAvodah*. Rabbi Berel said to him: "It is good that I have met you, for my thoughts are troubling me greatly. A certain rabbinic judge posed a weighty difficulty, and now, thank God, a wonderful resolution has occurred to me. I do not know what approach to take: should I go to his home and relate the resolution to him so that he will know that among the *chasidim* there are scholars as well, or should I not go, since this would merely be following the evil inclination, which always seeks to cause me to falter due to pride." The *Yesod HaAvodah* told him to continue on his way home and not to share the resolution. Rabbi Berel acknowledged to him that he had felt within himself that this was indeed the truth.

***

The *Yesod HaAvodah* once said to Rabbi Yehudah Leib, the father of Rebbe Mordechai Chaim of Slonim, that he should review a tractate until he knew it by heart, so that he would be able to fulfill the commandment to speak words of Torah, "when you travel on a path" (Deuteronomy 6:7). And if he was concerned that such study might involve an element of Torah study not for its own sake, he could repent for that afterward. But in the meantime, he would gain the knowledge of a tractate firmly in hand.

A DISPUTE FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN

The matter of Torah study for its own sake was absolutely central to the teaching of the *Yesod HaAvodah*. He once said of the verse, "those who understand Torah do not know Me" (Jeremiah 2:8) that this refers to those who study Torah with the aim of possessing it, abusing it to suit their needs. When the true intention of learning—namely, cleaving to God—is absent, the Torah becomes a captive, limited and unable to perform its true purpose.

Herein lies the essential dispute between the *Yesod HaAvodah* and the *Nefesh HaChaim*: does the adjective "for its own sake" (*lishmah*) refer to learning Torah, "for the sake of *knowing* the Torah," as the *Nefesh HaChaim* understands, or does it mean learning Torah "for the sake of *cleaving* to God," as the *Yesod HaAvodah* maintains? According to

the latter view, the Torah serves as an intermediary—a connecting link between the Jewish people and the Holy blessed One. The dispute was so fundamental that the *chasidim* of Slonim relate that in the first edition—or in the manuscript—of the *Yesod HaAvodah*, the phrase "and not like the *Nefesh HaChaim*" appeared repeatedly.

This does not mean, heaven forbid, that the Rebbe of Slonim diminished the importance of knowing Torah; his own instruction to learn a tractate by heart (even if the pride one would feel for having achieved this would require repentance) challenges such a conclusion.

Still, we would like to look at these two opinions regarding what learning Torah for its own sake means. What is the relationship between these two interpretations: knowing Torah and cleaving to God?

Let us begin with a numerical analysis: the sum of "knowing" (יְדִיעָה) and "cleaving" (דְּבֵקוּת) is 611, the value of "Torah" (תּוֹרָה)! This immediately indicates that to a degree, both interpretations are true. There is indeed a *mitzvah* to know the Torah, as explained at length in the Laws of Talmud Torah by the Alter Rebbe. To this purpose, the Lubavitcher Rebbe instituted the campaign of daily Rambam study. Yet while performing the mitzvah of learning Torah to know it, there is a real proclivity to seek to recognition as a scholar, or even for the sake of being honored for the Torah one has learnt. This extraneous motive disqualifies the *lishmah* of fulfilling the *mitzvah* of knowing the Torah for the sake of knowing Torah alone. The Tanya treats this extraneous motive as requiring rectification, and until that rectification is made, the Torah one has learnt remains "earth-bound."

Below this is the level of learning Torah for an ulterior motive, such as to be appointed a rabbi and the like. This would be an example of learning Torah not for its own sake at all and corresponds to the three impure husks. Learning for the sake of knowing which includes extraneous motives such as honor corresponds to the realm of the intermediate husk, *kelipat nogah*, which can be redeemed in the future by changing one's attitude. This level is the secret of the verse "the path of the righteous is as the light of *nogah*, growing ever brighter until the full light of day" (Proverbs 4:18), describing the movement from learning for the sake of knowing the Torah to learning for the sake of cleaving to God through the learning—from the imperfect *lishmah* (which is nonetheless a *mitzvah* of God) to the true *lishmah*.

The desired union of knowing and cleaving is the understanding that knowledge itself is the vessel for cleaving to God. In this union, the Chasidic energy of learning described as "chaotic lights" are united with the "vessels of rectification" associated with the non-Chasidic diligence in learning.

So far, we have surveyed three levels of *lishmah*. To add our fourth level, let us consider the following additional story from the Rebbe Avraham of Slonim:

"ESTABLISH FOR YOUR SERVANT YOUR WORD, WHICH IS FOR YOUR AWE"

Once, a young man approached the *Yesod HaAvodah* and asked for his blessing that he might become a great Torah scholar. The *tzaddik* replied that King David had asked: "Establish for Your servant Your word, which is for Your awe" (Psalms 119:38). He then explained that the Torah, which is God's word, is given to one in accordance with his *yirat shamayim*, his awe of Heaven.

If so, everything begins with pure awe of Heaven, just as it is written that the giving of the Torah at Sinai was accompanied by "awe in the mind, fear in the heart, trembling in the inner limbs, and shuddering in the body," so too here. Awe is an essential rectification of the heart, and Torah learning depends on one's heart. This dependence is hinted to in the letter *lamed* (למוד), whose meaning is "learning" (לימוד) and the initials of whose name spell the phrase, "fill your heart with knowledge" (לבָּךָ מְלֵא דַעַת) or alternately, "a heart that understands knowledge" (לֵב מֵבִין דַעַת). This is the secret of "my heart has seen much wisdom" (Ecclesiastes 1:16).

"Awe" (**יִרְאָה**) is an anagram of "seeing" (**רְאִיָּה**). Seeing with awe is akin to the Sages' instruction that when repeating a statement, one should envision the originator of the statement, its source, before him. Likewise, seeing that God is the Master of the Torah we learn, we should be learning with the recognition that God is, as it were, standing right before us, teaching us. This should fill one with the awe of embarrassment (יִרְאַת בֹּשֶׁת) and awe of God's exaltedness.

KNOWLEDGE IN FIVE STAGES

To the foundational pair of knowing and cleaving, then, awe has now been added. But is this all that a Torah scholar requires? There is also the need to delve deeply into the Torah and to study it with penetrating analysis! And indeed, the word "knowing" (**יִדִּיעָה**) itself may be interpreted as an acronym for "awe" (יִרְאָה), "cleaving" (דְּבַקוּת), "knowing" (יְדִיעָה), "reflection" (**ע**יּוּן), and "immersion" (**ה**עֲמָקָה).

A complete process thus emerges: From the pure awe of "gazing upon the glory of the Giver of the Torah," the student comes to cleave to Him—the secret of the crown of the letter yud. Then the light of cleaving illuminates within the vessel of knowing, and the knowing ascends from one elevation to the next through reflection (*iyun*) and deep immersion (*ha'amakah*). The ultimate purpose of these two last stages is to expand and broaden the vessel of knowing so it can receive ever greater measures of the essential light of cleaving to God.

CLEAVING AND KNOWING — SPEAKING AND INTERNALIZATION

Study from within supernal awe is study from a state of self-nullification, or *bittul*, in Hebrew. In this state, one has no sense of oneself whatsoever. This is the inner experience of the *sefirah* of wisdom in the intellectual soul, which controls the external aspects of wisdom associated

with knowing and comprehension. The manner in which the inner experience, self-nullification, controls the external faculties of wisdom is described as "the heart's interior governs the mind's exterior" (פְּנִימִיּוּת הַלֵּב שַׁלִּיט עַל הַמֹּחַ).

With regards to learning Torah, there are two distinct *mitzvot*: the *mitzvah* to know the Torah, which is fulfilled in the mind and the heart, and the *mitzvah* of engaging in the learning itself, which is fulfilled specifically by the mouth, by uttering the words of Torah vocally. The Sages learn this from the verse, "for they give life to those who find them," which is read as "for those who utter them through the mouth." Though awe is experienced in the heart, we identify the cleaving that it creates with what is uttered by the mouth, not with the words as they are subsequently engraved in the mind and on the heart. In fact, only after one has repeated one's learning orally, with awe, with cleaving, and out of a state of selflessness, can one remember the teaching in the mind and grasp it in his heart allowing for true acquisition of the Torah.

Why is cleaving related to words uttered by the mouth. As explained in the Tanya, cleaving to God is the secret of "He will kiss me with the kisses of His mouth" (Song of Songs 1:2), referring to spoken words of Torah which mingle the Divine spirit with the learner's breath creating a type of "union of kisses" (זִוּג נְשִׁיקִין). This is the spiritual version of the Divine injunction that "they shall be one flesh," a unification of Torah remembered in the mind (coupling) and grasped in the heart (creating new life).

Symbolically, the one learning Torah is a mother, who bears the child within her, the product of the union between the student and God during the learning. This is hinted to in the verse, "For it is pleasant when you guard them within yourself, [after] they are established together upon your lips" (Proverbs 22:18).

The *Tanya* (ch. 5) teaches that learning Torah allows for a unification with God that is unlike any other. For not only does God's wisdom penetrate the individual's mind, he is also immersed and grasped by it. In light of what we have said here, within the person's intention, the desire to be grasped by Torah (and God) must precede the desire to grasp. This dynamic of being grasped by Torah and grasping it are a form of "run and return." The greater the run, the greater the return: the greater the desire to be absorbed in the Torah, the greater the subsequent knowing will be.

Amazingly, the gematria of "11th of Cheshvan" (**יא חֶשְׁוָן**)—the day of passing of both the *Yesod HaAvodah* and of our matriarch Rachel—is precisely that of "for its own sake" (**לִשְׁמָהּ**)! Our matriarch Rachel, the secret of the lower *hei* in God's essential Name, *Havayah*, rises from exile and is united with *Ze'er Anpin* her husband through Torah study for its own sake—for the sake of elevating the lower *hei*, the Divine Presence—the Shechinah, and with her elevation all of reality is rectified fulfilling the verse, "and you who cleave to *Havayah* your God are all alive today" (Deuteronomy 4:4).

THE MONTH OF CHESHVAN
EVIL KINGS AND THEIR MESSIANIC SPARKS

This and the next two articles are excerpted from the October 2017 monthly English broadcast, which centered on the figure of three non-Jewish kings, Nimrod (who is first mentioned in this week's parashah), Nebuchadnezzar, and the Roman emperor Nero. In the original class, HaRav Ginsburgh explained how the darkness dished out by the worst of our enemies will in the end become part of the light of Mashiach through the new, deeper understanding of Torah that he will reveal.

THE LETTER AND THE SENSE OF THE MONTH OF CHESHVAN

Sefer Yetzirah or "The Book of Formation," is the oldest Kabbalistic text. It focuses on the letters of the Hebrew letters and provides a wealth of information on them and their connection to time and space. One of the foundational analyses is that the 22 letters divide into 12, 7, and 3. Each of the 12 letters, known as simple letters, creates one month of the year starting from the month of *Nissan*. The order is הוזחטילנסעצק. Being that we are now in the month of *Cheshvan*, which is the eighth month from Nissan, the letter that creates *Cheshvan* is *nun* (נ). Each month is also associated with a particular sense. Twelve senses are more than just the usual five physical senses in our bodies; they include an expanded set of senses based on spiritual faculties as well. The 12 months also correspond to the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

The tribe of the month of *Cheshvan* is Menasheh, and its sense is smell. The prophet Isaiah associated the sense of smell with the Mashiach, so much so that the Sages say that Mashiach can be identified by his ability to judge or guide every individual with the aid of his own inner, spiritual sense of smell alone.

If the letter is *nun* and the sense is smell, what is the connection between them? We will understand this through understanding the meaning of the letter *nun*.

"YINON IS HIS NAME"

Hebrew letters have names, and the name of the letter *nun* (נ) is explained by *Rashi* to mean "king" or "kingship," most notably in the Psalm 72, which begins, "For Solomon: O' God, give Your judgments to the king, and Your righteousness to the king's son,"[1] but which many of the commentators say describes the figure of Mashiach. In that psalm, we find the verse, "may his name endure forever; before the sun, may his name reign."[2] The Hebrew word for "reign" or "rule" is pronounced *yinnon* and written: יִנּוֹן. But this verse can also mean that the king, i.e., the Mashiach's name will be *Yinnon*,[3] a name derived from the letter *nun*.

The verse concludes, "and all nations

1. Psalms 72:1.
2. V. 17.
3. Interestingly, in reduced numbering, the nun's value is 5, and if we apply this to the name *Yinnon*, we end up with God's essential Name, *Havayah* (י-הוה). The written form of this name is Yinnin (ינין). Performing the same substitution, we arrive at the future essential Name of God (יִהְיֶה).

shall bless themselves by him; they shall call him fortunate [praise him and be joyful and fortunate through him]." When God told Avraham to leave his land, his birthplace, and his father's house, He promised him, "and you shall be a blessing… and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you."[4] Just as the first Jew is the source of blessing for all humanity, so Mashiach will be the source of blessing for all humanity. In short, *Yinnon* is the king's name connecting the letter *nun* (and the month of *Cheshvan*) with kingship.

NISSAN AND CHESHVAN: THE EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR OF KINGSHIP

Without consulting *Sefer Yetzirah*, the month that Torah explicitly connects with kingship is *Nissan*. As the *mishnah* states, "There are four beginnings to the year… the first of *Nissan* is the New Year for kings."[5] Furthermore, since we have identified the letter *nun* with kingship, it is telling that the name of the month of *Nissan* (נִיסָן) begins and ends with the letter *nun*. As a bonus, the tribe associated with the month of Nissan is Judah, the tribe of King David and the eternal Davidic house of kings.

What is the difference between the kingship of *Nissan* and the kingship of *Cheshvan* (חֶשְׁוָן), in which the letter *nun* appears only once at the end of the month's name? *Nissan* is the revealed, external manifestation of kingship and the king, but the king's inner soul, the interior aspect of kingship, which is tied to the sense of smell, the spiritual dimension of Mashiach's leadership, is in *Cheshvan*. The physical side of the king—his body, which comes from King David and the tribe of Judah belongs to *Nissan*, while his inner, spiritual side belongs to *Cheshvan*. Thus, we can begin to appreciate the essence of the month of *Cheshvan*, which encapsulates the inner spiritual faculties of kingship and of the Mashiach.

4. Genesis 12:2-3.
5. Mishnah *Rosh HaShanah* 1:1.

KINGS OF THE LETTER NUN
NIMROD, NEBUCHADNEZZAR, AND NERO

NIMROD: THE FIRST KING

The month of Cheshvan relates to the inner faculties of the kingship.[6] It is very fitting that in our public reading of the Torah, we read about the first king in the month of *Cheshvan*, specifically in *parashat Noach*.

There is a principle in Torah (and in general) that "everything follows the inception." When one wants to know anything in the Torah—a person, a concept, a story—one must find its first appearance in the Torah, or in history,[7] upon which all the similar concepts and events that follow are

6. See the previous article in this issue.

7 Sometimes the order of the Torah is not the order of history—"there is no chronological order in the Torah"—and then the main thing is the order of events described in the Torah.

based. Kingship begins from a certain point, from a certain place. Adam, the first man, was not a king (over a nation); his son Seth was also not a king, nor was his grandson Enosh. Who was the first king? How many generations must one wait, from the creation of Adam until the first king?

The answer 13 generations—three generations after Noach, who was the tenth generation from Adam, the tenth generation of humanity. Noach had three sons. One of them was Ham, who had a son named Kush (Ethiopia), and Kush gave birth to Nimrod—the first king in history, as documented in the Torah,

> And Kush begot Nimrod; the first man who was mighty in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before God.... And his kingdom began with Babylon, and with Erech, and Akkad, and Kalneh, in the land of Shinar.[8]

If kingship begins with Nimrod, one must become acquainted with this soul. He was not a *tzaddik*; he was wicked. We know his wickedness through Abraham, the first Jew and our first patriarch, whom he persecuted on account of his faith in one God. After Abraham broke the idols in his father's shop, Nimrod tried to kill him by throwing him into the fiery furnace, but Abraham was miraculously saved when God Himself saved him.[9]

Nimrod was the king of Babylon, and he was behind the building of the Tower of Babylon. In the story of the Tower of Babylon itself, the name Nimrod does not appear, but in the account of the generations of Noach it is written of him, "and the beginning of his kingdom was Bavel"—so it is very clear that he is the one who led the story of building the city and erecting the tower. It is written that the idolatry of Babylon, which began with Nimrod and ended with Nebuchadnezzar was called Bel, like Babel, somewhat reminiscent of the Ba'al, the chief idolatry in the Land of Israel during Biblical times. Nimrod built the capital city of Babylon, and everything connected to Babylon[10] comes from him. Even good things connected to Babylon like the Babylonian Talmud.

The way we live today as Jews is in large measure derived from the Babylonian Talmud and not, as one might suppose, according to the later Jerusalem Talmud. As a result, to this day, there is something very foundational in our lives still connected to Babylon.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR: NIMROD'S REINCARNATION

What do we know in Kabbalah about Nimrod? The first thing that is clear is that his name begins with the letter *nun*, the letter of this month, Cheshvan, whose meaning we said is king.

The Arizal, the greatest of the Kabbalists, teaches us that Nimrod returned in reincarnation a second time as Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylonian empire, like Nimrod, and he is the king who destroyed the First Temple. In Nebuchadnezzar (נְבֻכַדְנֶאצַּר), the letter *nun* appears twice. Nebuchadnezzar is understood to be composed of two words—Nebuchad-nezzar. The second part, nezzar means emperor or king. So essentially, both parts of his name begin with the letter *nun*.

Again, according to the Arizal, Nebuchadnezzar was a reincarnation of Nimrod. According to the Talmud—the Torah's revealed dimension—he was a physical descendant of Nimrod. But the Talmud adds another astonishing fact: that he was also a descendant of King Solomon, who built the

8. Genesis 10:8-10.

9 See *Pesachim* 118a:

10 See also the essay "*Mapelet Bavel*" in our Hebrew volume, *Rucho Shel Mashiach*.

First Temple that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed. How could this be?

Scripture recounts that the Queen of Sheba came to witness Solomon's wisdom and the greatness of his kingdom. When in Jerusalem, she asked him for something (which is not mentioned explicitly in Scripture. The Sages reveal that she asked to bear a child from Solomon, and that he granted her request.[11] The child that was born from this union was Nebuchadnezzar, which might mean that Nebuchadnezzar was a descendant of this child a few generations later.

NERO CAESAR

There is one more important non-Jewish king whose name begins with nun and who was connected with the destruction of the Temple, this time the Second Temple. This was Nero, the Roman emperor, who in the Talmud is known as Neron Caesar (**נֵירוֹן קֵיסָר**). His name begins with *nun* and ends with *nun* and contains all the letters of the name of the letter nun (נון), which means "king," as above.

The most famous *gematria* in the non-Jewish tradition is 666. For many non-Jews this is a frightening number, associated with what they call the "Antichrist." The true significance of this number is that it is the value of Nero's name when written in a particular manner (**נרון קסר**). Clearly, the connection is vague because both words are written with defective spelling. Nero is considered the Antichrist according to the false non-Jewish tradition—so much so that they believe he will return to fight against the Mashiach.[12]

There is a little grain of truth behind these fantastic tales. In the Babylonian Talmud, our true tradition, it is written that at the end of his life, Nero converted to Judaism, and that Rabbi Meir, the great disciple of Rabbi Akiva, was among his descendants. According to some non-Jewish Roman historians, Nero committed suicide at a young age, but according to others, he simply disappeared. There are even gentiles who think that he never died, that he is still wandering about—the "anti-" of their messiah. For us it is very simple that he is the father of a messianic figure, that Mashiach is among his descendants—this is an astonishing lineage. Of all the Sages of the Mishnah, Rabbi Meir was the only one who regarded himself as having the potential to be Mashiach. The fact that the only messianic figure in the Mishnah is Rabbi Meir and that he is a descendant of Nero, about whom there is an entire story in the Talmud of what led him to convert at the end of his days.

THE RETURN OF THE SPARKS OF THE WICKED

We have seen the rectification of Nero, who converted at the end of his days. Is there a rectification for Nebuchadnezzar? Could there also be some rectification for him? According to the Sages, Nero has a rectification—what about the two before him, Nimrod and Nebuchadnezzar? The point we are trying to reach, the salient headline from this entire discussion is that even the most wicked kings in history—those who destroyed the Temples, the Jewish values and culture, and killed millions of Jews—even they have

11. This is hinted to in the verse (1 Kings 10:13), "and King Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba all she desired, all that she requested."

12 Using the correct Hebrew spelling, the value of "Nero" (**נֵירוֹן**) is the same as "that man" (**הָאִישׁ**) referring to Jesus" (**יֵשׁוּ**). This is as it turns out is an even better allusion to Nero being an anti-Messianic figure than the whole idea about 666. According to Christian history, Nero was the one who killed the two chief apostles, Peter and Paul. It is said that when he returns, he will also defeat "that man," the reason that he is feared as an anti-Christ.

some type of rectification. Not only is there some rectification for them, but there is within them a spark of Mashiach. Within these wicked people there are messianic sparks that must be redeemed and when we succeed in redeeming them, the true Mashiach will be able to appear and redeem us all.

What we have just said fits perfectly with what we have been discussing in recent years about the Fourth Revolution in Torah learning, which is about permitting and even requiring us to teach Torah to the entire world. Torah has the special quality that it can draw out of these kings, like a magnet pulling metal filings, the lost sparks of holiness that are concealed within them. As we explain in length regarding the Fourth Revolution, we are now in the final stages of our long exile, a stage that is meant to redeem sparks of holiness from among the nations of the world. These sparks are redeemed when non-Jewish convert to Judaism. Until all the sparks lost among the nations return to Judaism and are rectified, the final redemption will not come; Mashiach cannot come.

According to the Sages, all the well-known wicked people had descendants who studied Torah—not only Nimrod and Nebuchadnezzar, but also Sancheriv, Pharaoh, and the like. There is a discussion in the Talmud whose conclusion is that all the wicked kings who destroyed and killed Jews and even those who only plotted against us, like Haman, had descendants who converted and studied Torah.

TORAH PRINCIPLES
FIRST DARKNESS THEN LIGHT

FROM NIMROD TO GIDEON

The first appearance of kingship is in our parashah. The Torah describes Nimrod, the king of Babylon, who was utterly wicked. Kingship is a central concept in Torah and the fact that its inception is one of the worst examples illustrates the principle that many concepts follow the order of, "darkness precedes light."[13] Creation too began with a state of "the earth was chaotic and void," a shattered reality, and then man was created to pick up the pieces and put reality back together again. In fact, there are innumerable examples of how chaos precedes order and darkness precedes light in the Torah. When the first appearance of a concept is negative, it will usually be followed by someone who is tasked with remedying the situation and transforming the darkness into light.

Specifically regarding Nimrod, the who was the king of Babylon, the sum of his name (**נִמְרֹד**) and the name of his kingdom (**בָּבֶל**) is "darkness" (**חֹשֶׁךְ**).

Let's continue with a bit more numerical analysis. One of the ways to calculate the value of a word is to use "primordial numbering" (מִסְפַּר קִדְמִי), which means that the value of each letter is set to the sum of all the letters up to and including that letter. The value of *alef* remains 1, but the value of *yud* (**אבגדהוזחטי**) becomes 55, and so on. The primordial value of both Nimrod (**אבגדהוזחטיכלמנ אבגדהוזחטיכלמ אבגדהוזחטיכלמנסעפצקר אבגד**) and Babylon (**אב אב אבגדהוזחטיכל**) is 1256, which means that the primordial part (1256 minus 328,

13. *Shabbat* 77b.

the normative value of Nimrod and Babylon, as above) is 928, which is the value of "A new Torah" (תּוֹרָה חֲדָשָׁה), "A new Torah shall issue forth from Me"; revealing that sequestered within their darkness is a great and innovative light waiting to be revealed. This principle is described by the verse, "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light," and demonstrates that there is a special advantage and superiority to light that comes out of darkness.

A NATION OF PRIESTS DOES NOT NEED A KING

Let us give one more introduction on this matter: one of the most righteous of the Judges, if not the most righteous, is Gideon. After he was victorious, through miracles and abundant Divine assistance, over Midian, the Israelites wanted to crown him as their king. This was the era of the Judges that came before the time of Saul and David and is a story of the pre-request for a king made by the people. In the period of the Judges, the people were ripening toward a king, and one of the main milestones in this process is the story of Gideon. Gideon himself refused to be crowned, but his wicked son Avimelech seized upon the opportunity, and something quite bad came out of it. When something that is not ripe yet is called upon, the result is entirely spoiled. The next attempt at crowning a king was with Saul, who despite being described as innocent as a "one year old, when Saul began to reign," and despite being at root a tzaddik, he collapsed, another example of "first darkness."

It was only when David was anointed king—David who came dragging a "box of vermin" behind him, symbolizing his flaws and failures—that something successful and positive was born from kingship.

The first attempt was with Gideon, and he refused—not I shall rule over you, and not my son shall rule over you; *Havayah* shall rule over you. What does this teach us in general? There are commentators who explain that as a first-principle, the Jewish people are not supposed to need the institution of the king at all. It is supposed to be, as God says at the Giving of the Torah, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," meaning a kingdom led by priests. If the people accept the priesthood—that is, the teachers of the spirit—as their leadership, they can become "a holy nation." That is God's original intent.

The *mitzvah* of appointing a king applies only when "and you shall say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations." With Saul it was even worse for the people's request led to God telling Samuel, "it is not you they have rejected, but Me they have rejected." It is said that the mitzvah of appointing a king is, like the law of the beautiful captive woman, "only in deference to the evil inclination."

God yields to the evil inclination when the nation is not holy causing everything to deteriorates. This might be because of corruption among the priests or among the rabbis, or because the people are not willing to yield to authority. This leads to a negative form of anarchy. But our real goal is that when Mashiach comes, we will ultimately merit a rectified form of anarchy, which will not require guardians of the law, only advisers. For us, this ideal state is called natural consciousness. The moment the first-principle desire for "a kingdom of priests" fails, it turns into anarchy, and God prefers the rule of a king to destructive anarchy. Thus, appointing a king is a non-ideal situation, one that is necessitated by reality.