



An Explanation of the Insights of the Shela HaKadosh and the Tzror HaMor The Name **מכב** Was Instrumental in the Victory of the Chashmonaim Its Gematria Equals **חס"ד** and It Is an Acronym for **מ'י כ'מוכה ב'א'לים י'**

This week we read parshas Vayeishev. At the beginning of the parsha, the Torah informs us that Yosef was seventeen years old when his father Yaakov sent him to check on his brothers, as it is written (Bereishis 37, 1): **“וישב יעקב בארץ מגורי: יושב יעקב בארץ כנען, אלה תולדות יעקב יוסף בן שבע עשרה שנה היה רועה את אביו בארץ כנען.”** **And Yaakov settled in the land of his father’s sojourning, in the land of Canaan. These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef, at the age of seventeen years, was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock.**

Thus, we learn that during the first seventeen years of Yosef’s life, Yaakov enjoyed the presence of his favorite son. Subsequently, however, after being sent to find his brothers, they plotted against him and ultimately sold him into slavery, which landed him in Mitzrayim. As it is written (ibid. 3): **“וישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בניו כי בן זקונים הוא לו ועשה לו כתונת פסים”**—**and Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age (wise); and he made him a “Kesonos passim” (a striped tunic).** Rashi comments: **Onkelos translates the phrase “כי בן זקונים הוא לו”** as indicating that Yosef was his wise son; therefore, **everything Yaakov learned from Shem and Eiver, he conveyed to Yosef.**

Twenty-two years would pass without Yaakov seeing his beloved son Yosef—from the time he was sold into slavery until Yosef reveals himself to his brothers as the viceroy of Mitzrayim. Yaakov did not even know that Yosef was still alive. Then Yosef invites his father and his entire household to come down to Mitzrayim, and we encounter another period of

seventeen years; Yaakov lived the last seventeen years of his life in the company of Yosef in Mitzrayim. This is recorded in the Torah at the beginning of parshas Vayechi (ibid. 47, 28): **“זיחי יעקב בארץ מצרים שבע עשרה שנה”**—**Yaakov lived in the land of Mitzrayim seventeen years.**

In the Zohar hakadosh (Vayechi 216b), the divine Tanna, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, explains the significance of this fact. Throughout the entire period of Yosef’s absence, Yaakov agonized and longed for those first seventeen years that he had enjoyed with his beloved son. HKB”H answered Yaakov’s tefilos and supplications by affording him the privilege of living out the last seventeen years of his life happily in the presence of Yosef in Mitzrayim.

Notwithstanding, since we are believers, the descendants of believers, we understand that this was not a mere coincidence; everything is orchestrated from above by divine providence. Hence, it behooves us to explore the connection between these two parallel periods of seventeen years—the first seventeen years of Yosef’s life in his father’s home and the last seventeen years they spent together reunited in Mitzrayim.

מ'י כ'מוכה ב'א'לים י' Is an Acronym for מכב

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by exploring the significance of the eight days of Chanukah, which we will celebrate auspiciously after this upcoming Shabbas. Now, we are familiar with the statement in the Zohar hakadosh (Yisro

88a): **“כל ברכאן דלעילא ותתא ביומא שביעאה תליין”**—**all heavenly and earthly Berachos depend on the seventh day.** This implies that on the Shabbas kodesh preceding Chanukah, HKB”H imbues the days of the upcoming festival with kedushah.

In Seder HaDoros (Year 3,622), we learn that Matityahu, the son of Yochanan, the Kohen Gadol, was the first king of the Chashmonean dynasty; he initiated the rebellion and war against the Greeks. The completion of the war and the victory, however, were accomplished by his son, Yehudah, the second king in that dynasty. He is known as **Yehudah the Maccabee**. It explains the reason for this moniker: **Some say that this was inscribed on his banner—“מכבי”**—**an acronym for מי כמוך באלים יי (Who is like You among the heavenly powers).** We find a source for this notion in the commentary of the siddur of the author of the Rokeiach (Shiras HaYam).

The Shela hakadosh (Maseches Tamid) provides an explanation based on a mystical approach. The gematria of the appellation **מכבי** equals **72**. This is the numerical equivalent of the milui of the name **Havaya** spelled **הי וי”ו ה”י**, which possesses the same gematria as **חס”ד**. This is the name that was instrumental in the victory over the Greeks. The Tzror HaMor writes something similar in parshas Vaeschanan (Devarim 5, 5). He asserts that the Chashmonaim were called Maccabees, because their victory was achieved with the force of this divine name, whose gematria is **72**, the same as the name **מכבי**.

We can suggest the following clarification. The Shela hakadosh and the Tzror HaMor based their explanations on the well-known fact that the kohanim are characterized by **“chesed,”** as taught in the Zohar hakadosh (Part 1, 256b): **“כהנים מסטרא דחסד אתו”**—**the kohanim emanate from the aspect of “chesed.”** Hence, the priestly Chashmonaim were able to defeat the Greeks with their midah of **“chesed.”** Notwithstanding, since it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated in seventy different ways, we will elaborate on this subject in a manner that appeals to everyone.

The “Ohr HaGanuz” Referred to as **“טוב”** Is Revealed on Chanukah

We will now introduce what the Tiferes Shlomo writes (Chanukah). He points out a wonderful allusion in the passuk (Tehillim 23, 6): **“אך טוב וחסד ירדפוני כל ימי חיי ושבת בבית ה' לאורך”**

“may only goodness (“tov”) and kindness (“chesed”) pursue me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the House of Hashem for long days. If we take the sum of the gematrias of **טוב”ב (17)** and **חס”ד (72)**, they add up to the gematria of **חנוכה”ה (89)**. This implies that the days of Chanukah are a propitious time for any Jew who wishes to draw closer to HKB”H by means of Torah and service. If someone so desires, Hashem will help him succeed, fulfilling the second clause of this passuk: **“And I shall dwell in the House of Hashem for long days.”** This **“remez”** can also be found in the Imrei No’am (Chanukah 2); he expands on the connection between **“tov”** and **“chesed”** in his own sacred, esoteric way.

To explain the matter further, let us refer to a teaching from the Bnei Yissaschar (Kislev-Teves 2, 8). He proves clearly that the Chanukah miracle was facilitated by the **“ohr haganuz”**—the magnificent light from the six days of creation that HKB”H concealed and will reveal again at the time of the future geulah. Here is a pertinent passage from the Gemara (Chagigah 12a):

“אור שברא הקב”ה ביום ראשון, אדם צופה בו מסוף העולם ועד סופו, כיון שנסתכל הקב”ה בדור המבול ובדור הפלגה, וראה שמעשיהם מקולקלים עמד וגזזו מהן שנאמר וימנע מרשעים אורם, ולמי גזזו לצדיקים לעתיד לבוא, שנאמר וירא אלקים את האור כי טוב.”

Regarding the light that HKB”H created on the first day, Adam could survey with it from one end of the world to the other end; however, when HKB”H looked at the generation of the mabul and the generation of the dispersion, and he saw that their deeds were perverse, He proceeded to conceal it from them, as it says (Iyov 38, 15): “And light was withheld from the wicked.” And for whom did he conceal it (the light)? For tzaddikim in the future, as it says (Bereishis 1, 4): “G-d saw that the light was good.”

The Bnei Yissaschar proves his point as follows: The author of the Rokeiach (225), one of the Tosafists, writes that our blessed sages instituted the lighting of 36 candles on Chanukah commemorating the original light of creation that functioned and served Adam HaRishon for 36 hours. This is explained in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Berachos 8, 5): **“שלשים” ושש שעות שימשה אותה האורה שנבראת ביום הראשון, שתים עשרה בערב שבת ושתיים עשרה כליל שבת ושתיים עשרה בשבת, והיה אדם הראשון מביט בו מסוף העולם ועד סופו.”** It explains that this original, magnificent,

spiritual light created on the first day served Adam HaRishon for twelve hours on Erev Shabbas (Friday morning and afternoon), twelve hours on the night of Shabbas and twelve hours on Shabbas day. With it, **“Adam HaRishon could see from one end of the world to the other”**—i.e., he perceived the truth and meaning of everything in creation.

The Bnei Yissaschar cites another “remez” in the name of the Rokeiach (ibid.) supporting the fact that the “ohr haganuz” served Adam HaRishon for 36 consecutive hours. In the narrative of the creation, the original light is described as **“tov”**: **“וירא אלקים את האור כי טוב”**. This prompted the elucidation in the Gemara above: **And for whom did he conceal it (the light)? For tzaddikim in the future, as it says: “G-d saw that the light was tov.”** Now, tradition dictates that when writing a sefer Torah, the letter **“tet”** of the word **“טוב”** in this passuk be adorned with four crowns. Thus, four times the gematria of the letter **“tet” (9)** equals 36, alluding to the 36 candles lit during the eight days of Chanukah, through which the supernal “ohr haganuz” is revealed.

Accordingly, the Bnei Yissaschar writes that **everything my close, holy friend says has been transmitted to him by Eliyahu z”l; and he says that the mitzvah of “ner Chanukah” emanates from the illumination of the “ohr haganuz.”** Then the Bnei Yissaschar (ibid. 9) embellishes the Rokeiach’s “remez” regarding the four crowns on the letter “tet.” He points out that the other two letters of the word **טוב** are a **“vav”** and a **“vet,”** whose gematria is **8**, alluding to the eight days of Chanukah during which **36** candles are lit. Furthermore, he asserts that these two letters signify that the eight days of Chanukah are divided up into two spiritual madreigot—the middle six days (“vav”) versus the first and eighth days (“vet”). In fact, the Maharil, z”l, writes that some have the custom of not working on the first and eighth days on account of their higher madreigah.

Based on this understanding, the Bnei Yissaschar (ibid. 13) proposes a solution to the famous question of the Beis Yosef (O.C. 670). He asks why our blessed sages established eight days of Chanukah. After all, the Chashmonaim found a flask of oil with enough oil to kindle the lamps for one day. Hence, the miracle was only for seven days. So, he proposes that the first day of Chanukah was established to commemorate the revelation of the supernal “ohr haganuz”—the original light of creation—that was revealed to Yisrael at that time.

The Difference between “Tov” and “Chesed”

I had a wonderful idea! I would like to explain why the “ohr haganuz” is called **“tov.”** We will refer to a teaching in the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 168b) related to the passuk in Tehillim cited above: **“אך טוב וחסד ירדמוני כל ימי חיי”**—**may only “tov” and “chesed” pursue me all the days of my life.** This passuk mentions both **“tov”** and **“chesed.”** What is the difference between them? As long as the good, abundant influence is still at its source in the heavens above, it is entirely spiritual, holy, and pure; it is devoid of any bad, negative elements. Hence, the Torah says: **“וירא אלקים את האור כי טוב”**—**Elokim saw that the light was “tov”!** They teach us in the Gemara that the “ohr haganuz” was called **“tov,”** because it could not be corrupted or misused by reshaim for evil purposes. However, as the abundant good descends step-by-step until it reaches Olam HaZeh, it takes on a material, physical character that can be used both for good and for bad. At that point, it can no longer be described as unadulterated **“tov.”** Instead, it is described as **“chesed,”** because it has been provided to all of creation as a form of divine kindness and favor—for their benefit.

With this understanding, we can comprehend what the Ohev Yisrael (Pinchas) writes concerning the letter **“tet.”** Its right arm curves inward at the top; this hints that good is stored and concealed within, even though it is not visible outwardly. Yet, when we are able to reveal that good completely, it is classified as **“chesed.”** This is the implication of our supplication (Tehillim 85, 8): **“הראנו ה' חסדך”**—**show us Your kindness (“chesed”) Hashem,** so that we will be privileged to reveal the concealed good, in keeping with the passuk: **“May only ‘tov’ and ‘chesed’ pursue me all the days of my life.”**

Now, we find the following passuk at the end of the narrative of the six days of creation (Bereishis 1, 31): **“וירא אלקים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד”**—**and G-d saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good.** In keeping with our current discussion, it appears that the Torah is teaching us that HKB”H saw everything that He created during the six days of creation as the foundation for all times—such that even things that may appear outwardly as bad or negative, actually contain pure good within that has yet to be revealed.

This, in fact, is the lesson taught by the Mishnah (Berachos 54a): **”חייב אדם לברך על הרעה כשם שמברך על הטובה, שנאמר ואהבת את ה'—a person is obligated to bless Hashem for the bad just as he blesses Hashem for the good, as it says: “And you shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, etc.”** After all, the passuk states explicitly: **”G-d saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good.”** This means that, in reality, there is nothing bad in the world. Some things only appear to be bad, because the good is still concealed within them.

Along these lines, we learn a fantastic lesson from the sacred teachings of the Toldos Yaakov Yosef (Noach). He presents a fundamental principle of “chassidut” in the name of his teacher and mentor, the Ba’al Shem Tov hakadosh, zy”a. If a person believes wholeheartedly that even in situations that appear to be characterized by “din,” “chesed” exists within; then he will merit sweetening and mitigating the force of the “din” and revealing the “chesed” present within.

In this manner, he explains the incident in the Gemara (Ta’anis 21a) involving Nachum Ish Gam Zu. No matter what his predicament, he would declare: **”גם זו לטובה”—this, too, is for the good.** For, he believed wholeheartedly that nothing bad comes from Hashem. Thus, he was able to tap into the “chesed” concealed within every decree or circumstance of “din.” Thus, he modified the “din” and transformed it into “chesed.” This then is the message of the Gemara (Berachos 60b): **”לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד”—one should always be in the habit of saying, “Everything the Merciful One does is for the best.”** With this sort of emunah, we are able to reveal the “chesed” inherent in the “din.”

“Give thanks to Hashem for He is good, for His chesed endures forever”

Continuing onward on this enlightening path, we will now endeavor to explain how the victory of the Chashmonaim over the Greeks was facilitated by the name **מנכ”י** inscribed on their banners. As explained above, this name is an acronym for **מני כ’מוכה ב’אלים יי**; its gematria equals **72**, which is the numerical equivalent of **חס”ד**. We will refer to the explanation of the Teshuos Chen regarding the passuk (Tehillim 136, 1): **”הודו לה’ כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו”—give thanks to Hashem for He is good, for His kindness endures forever.** We have

already presented the principle of the Ba’al Shem Tov that in order to mitigate and modify the force of “din,” it is necessary to believe wholeheartedly that even that which appears outwardly as absolute “din”—divine judgment—does, indeed, contain tremendous “chesed”—divine kindness. By means of this emunah, the “chesed” is revealed, and the “din” is ameliorated.

With this in mind, the Teshuos Chen presents a wonderful chiddush. Indeed, the name **Havaya** represents the midah of “rachamim.” But even when “din” prevails in the world, chas v’shalom, nevertheless, the name **Havaya** persists, albeit in its lesser form equaling **17**—the gematria of **טו”ב**—rather than its full gematria of **26**. (Translator’s note: When calculating a “mispar katan,” numbers are reduced to single digits (ones rather than tens or hundreds). Thus, the “yud” of the name Havaya is only figured as 1 rather than as 10. As a result, the “mispar katan” of Havaya is 17.) So, if a person believes strongly and wholeheartedly that even that which appears to be “din” conceals good and benevolence within, then the “din” is ameliorated and the full force of the name **Havaya** is realized. The sum of its four letters only equals 26; however, if we spell out each of its four letters as follows: **יוד ה”י וי”ו ה”ה**—then its gematria equals **72**—**חס”ד**. This signifies the full expansion and revelation of divine kindness and mercy.

This then is the message conveyed by Yisrael’s sweet psalmist, David HaMelech: **“Give thanks to Hashem, because He is ‘tov’”—take care to always thank Hashem, even in situations where His presence is concealed.** For, at those times, the “rachamim” emanating from the name **Havaya** is represented by its “mispar katan,” which has the same gematria as **טו”ב**. For, in the merit of this gratitude stemming from the emunah that even within the reality of “din” lies tremendous “chesed”: **”כי לעולם חסדו”—you will succeed in revealing the full expression of the name Havaya equaling חס”ד.**

This provides us with a more profound understanding of the “remez” inherent in the passuk above: **”הראנו הוי”ה חסדך”**. We beseech Hashem to show us His “chesed.” We do not want to suffice with the “mispar katan” of the name **Havaya**, which equals **טו”ב**. We want Him to reveal to us the full expression of the name **Havaya**, which equals **חס”ד**. This is also the meaning and message of the passuk: **”אך טוב וחסד ירדפוני כל ימי חיי”**. In other words, even in situations where “din” seems to prevail, I

pray that I will have strong enough emunah to believe that He is טוב—**טו"ב**—that His goodness and benevolence lie within. As a result, the “tov” will expand to reveal His **“chesed”** in the world.

The Chashmonaim Revealed the “Chesed” Concealed within the “Tov”

We now have cause to rejoice, for we have shed some light on the subject. We can now begin to comprehend the rationale of the holy Chashmonaim for inscribing the name **מכב"י**—having the same gematria as **חס"ד**—on their banners. When the Greeks reigned over Yisrael, invaded the Heichal, and defiled all of the oil, it was definitely a time of “hester panim”—divine supervision and presence were concealed (appeared to be absent). The Chashmonaim, however, did not despair; they believed wholeheartedly that even when “din” seemed to prevail, absolute “tov” lay within. As a result, they fulfilled the words of David HaMelech: **הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו**. The full expression of the name **Havaya** was revealed, with the gematria of **חס"ד**, the same as the gematria of **מכב"י**.

This explains beautifully the inference of the name **מכב"י**, which is an acronym for **מי כ'מוכה ב'אלים י'י**. Let us refer to what they expound on this passuk in the Gemara (Gittin 56b): **דבירבי: ישמעאל תנא, מי כמוכה באלים ה', מי כמוכה באלמים**—**in the Academy of Rabbi Yishmael, it was taught: The passuk says: “Who is like You among the mighty ones, Hashem?”** Interpret this to mean: **“Who is like You among the silent ones?”** For, You heard the blasphemy and contempt of the reshaim, and You remained silent. Let us explain. Even in times and situations of “hester panim,” when the reshaim blaspheme and denigrate the name of Hashem, notwithstanding: **“Who is like You among the mighty ones, Hashem?”** Even when He tolerates the blasphemy and insults in silence, the name **Havaya** is still present but in a concealed form, in its “mispar katan” of **“tov.”** On account of their emunah, the Chashmonaim merited the moniker **מכב"י**, entitling them to divine **חס"ד**.

With this understanding, we can begin to appreciate what the Bnei Yissaschar presented in the name of the Rokeiach—that on Chanukah, the “ohr haganuz” described as **“tov”** is revealed. For, the Chashmonaim demonstrated their firm, unwavering emunah that even in situations of “hester panim,” tremendous “chesed” exists within the external “din”; however, it is still only in the diminished form of **“tov,”** meaning that the

true good is stored and concealed within. On account of this strong emunah, they were able to reveal the “ohr haganuz” with its attendant **“chesed.”**

At this point, it is with great pleasure that we can revisit the sacred insight of the Tiferes Shlomo. He wrote that the miracle of Chanukah is alluded to by the passuk: **אך טוב וחסד ירדבוני כל ימי חי**. He based this assertion on the fact that the gematria of the sum of **טו"ב** and **חס"ד** (which are both mentioned in this passuk) equals **הנוכ"ה**. As we have learned, due to the unwavering emunah of the Chashmonaim, the **“tov”** concealed within the name **Havaya**—its “mispar katan”—was released and expanded to its full expression equaling **חס"ד**.

Yosef Being Seventeen Years Old Teaches Us that His Presence in Mitzrayim Was a Form of Concealed “Tov”

Following this royal, sublime path, we can now address the passuk at the beginning of this week’s parsha: **“These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef, at the age of seventeen years . . .”** The narrative informs us that Yosef was seventeen years old when he was sold into slavery and ended up in Mitzrayim. Let us now introduce a pertinent Midrash (V.R. 32, 5): **Yosef descended to Egypt and safeguarded himself from immorality; in his merit, Yisrael also safeguarded themselves from immorality. Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said: The guarding against immorality alone was sufficient cause for Yisrael to be redeemed.**

This means that the presence of Yosef HaTzaddik in Mitzrayim was a semblance of the “ohr haganuz.” He was a focus of “tov” concealed within the darkness and tumah of Mitzrayim. In the merit of maintaining his kedushah in Mitzrayim, all of Yisrael were able to subsequently maintain their kedushah. This is the implication of Yosef being seventeen years old, the gematria of **“tov,”** when he was sold into slavery. This teaches us that HKB”H orchestrated that Yosef would end up in Mitzrayim, so that he would be a type of “ohr haganuz,” illuminating the way for Yisrael to remain good and moral.

Furthermore, this enlightens us as to why HKB”H arranged for Yaakov to spend another seventeen years at the end of his life with Yosef. For, when Yosef was sold, Yaakov was misled into thinking that he had been devoured by a wild animal.

Thus, he had no way of knowing that his beloved son was a form of “ohr haganuz,” and that he was indeed “tov.” So, when Yaakov learned that Yosef was still alive and maintaining his kedushah in Mitzrayim, HKB”H arranged for him to spend another period of “tov”—seventeen years—with Yosef. Thus, he realized ultimately that Yosef had been sold into slavery and appointed Viceroy of Mitzrayim to function as an “ohr haganuz”—a beacon that would illuminate the way for Yisrael to maintain their kedushah in Mitzrayim.

This explains very nicely the wonderful words of encouragement HKB”H offered Yaakov immediately after Yosef sent wagons to transport him to Mitzrayim (Bereishis 46, 3): **וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי הָאֵל אֱלֹקֵי אֲבִיךָ אֵל תִּירָא מִרְדֵּה מִצְרַיִם כִּי לְגוֹי גָדוֹל אֲשִׁימְךָ שָׁם, אֲנֹכִי אֲרַד עִמָּךְ מִצְרַיִם וְאֲנֹכִי אֶעֱלֶךָ גַּם עִלָּה, וְיוֹסֵף יִשִּׁית יָדוֹ עַל עֵינֶיךָ.** **And He said, “I am G-d, the G-d of your father. Do not be afraid of descending to Mitzrayim, for I shall establish you as a great nation there. I shall descend with**

you Mitzrayim, and I shall also surely bring you up, and Yosef shall place his hand on your eyes.” The commentaries struggle to make sense of the remark: **“And Yosef shall place his hand on your eyes.”**

In light of this discussion, we can suggest that HKB”H was inferring the following to Yaakov Avinu: **“I shall descend with you to Mitzrayim”** to safeguard the kedushah of Yisrael in this galus. **“And I shall also surely bring you up.”** Then HKB”H explains to Yaakov how He will accomplish this: **“Yosef shall place his hand on your eyes”**—the wonderful relationship you had with Yosef for seventeen years— equivalent to ט”ז— before he was sold, you will enjoy once again during the final seventeen years of your life. This is the significance of Yosef placing his hands on Yaakov’s eyes. He would enable him to see with his spiritual foresight that Yisrael would be able to sanctify themselves in Mitzrayim on account of his beloved Yosef.



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