

The Month of Tevet:

The Month of Tevet: Rectifying the Sense of Agitation

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Introduction

The month of Tevet is about taking the light of Kislev and bringing it into the very lowest most physical place of our being. The shape of the letter *ayin* points toward this concept, for it is a letter that has a strong base below the line. The *ayin* is leaning backward while simultaneously directed forward. It is as if the upper right of the *ayin* receives from the past (Kislev), whereas it extends its leg into the opposite direction of the future (Tevet). The cold winds of Tevet makes me want to retreat inward – inside of my cozy home, and focus more on doing inner work, fixing my *midot* – character, and making good judgments for the direction of my life. The organ associated with the month of Tevet is the liver, which is known to control the lowest most physical part of our being including digestion and sexuality. The light of Chanukah extended into the cold month of Tevet gives us the opportunity to enlighten even those dark places. At this time of winter, when we feel like eating and sleeping more, we have the ability to transform our bodily enjoyments into holiness. The character trait of anger is one of the worst emotions possible. Yet, when its energy is channeled towards becoming angry at evil only, it can turn us towards all the good, as the name Tevet indicates, for *טבת*/Tevet derives from the Hebrew word *טוב*/*tov* – good. Becoming good and doing good in the world is only possible through developing a good eye in Hebrew – *עיין* – *ayin* – the letter of this month. The letter *ayin* which has the numerical value of seventy also represents the ability to convey the Torah into the seventy languages. Translating the Torah from the holy Hebrew language, moreover, represents infusing the dark places of the languages of the Nations with the light of Chanukah. According to how much we expel evil through rectified anger, can we transform the darkest places to the holiest light. How do we know the difference between good and bad judgment? What do we allow to influence us? What do we allow to blur our vision? What do we use to clear our eyes, our hearts, and our minds to turn back to the right path? These are the questions we are called to answer during the month of Tevet, associated with the Tribe of Dan.

Read on to learn more about the spiritual attributes of this month, and how the weekly Torah portions fit in to the themes of the month...

The Spiritual Attributes of Tevet

המליך אות ע' ברוגז וקשר לו כתר וצרפן זה בזה וצר בהם גדי בעולם, וטבת בשנה, ווכבד בנפש זכר ונקבה (ספר יצירה פרק ה משנה י).

“He made the letter *ayin* king over **agitation**, and He tied a crown to it and He combined one with another and with them He formed **Capricorn** in the Universe and **Tevet** in the year, and the **liver** in the soul male and female.”¹

¹ *Sefer Yetzira* 5:10.

illuminating the Dark Month of Tevet

Rosh Chodesh is always the nuclear or the seed of the entire month. For the whole month is dependent on its head. Whatever takes place on Rosh Chodesh is connected to and influencing the entire month. Therefore, since Rosh Chodesh Tevet takes place during Chanukah, the light of Chanukah gets dispersed into the entire month of Tevet. It is possible that the thirty-six candles that we light during holiday of Chanukah enlighten the thirty-six days from the beginning of Chanukah until the end of the month of Tevet.

The three months of Tevet, Tamuz and Av are said to be months under evil influence.² After Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, the light of day started becoming shorter and the nights grew longer. Adam then feared he had brought darkness into the world. When he noticed the days stopped getting shorter, Adam rejoiced and feasted for eight days. Since this happened during Tevet – Esav’s month, Adam’s feast was taken over by Brother Esav – Edom’s top man, the Pope in Rome.

The word *הטבת*/Tebet is also from the languages of preparing *הטבת/hatavat* the candles. Since the days of Tevet are hidden, therefore Hashem preceded the healing to the wound,³ by means of the candles we illuminate these days of darkness.⁴ It is good to keep in mind when we gaze at the Chanukah candles during the last days of Chanukah that this light will infuse the entire month of Tevet.

When we extend the meaning of the word *הטבה/hatava*, it means not only ‘making good’ or ‘preparing of the wicks’ of the candles, but it also refers to self-betterment and preparation for illumination. This process continues during the month of Shevat whose letter is *tzadik*, which also means righteous.

The Weekly Torah Portions during Tevet

Parashat Vayigash – the first *parasha* we read during the month of Tevet – unites our inner flame ignited from the Chanukah experience with the exterior material including the darkest exile of Egypt. *Parashat Vayigash* is, moreover, about the unification between Yosef’s and his brothers. The power of Yosef, the righteous, corresponds on the side of Holiness to the power of Esav, and through the power of Yosef we can overcome the evil power of Esav.⁵ Yosef “sent his brothers away, and they departed: and he said to them, do not become agitated on the way.”⁶ With these words Yosef cautioned his brothers not to get angry at one another on account of selling him into slavery.⁷ Thus, in this *parasha* inner feelings are revealed and expressed in a highly emotional charged way. This fits in with the character of the month *רוגז/rogez* – agitation.

² Zohar part 2, p. 12a.

³ Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 13b.

⁴ Sfat Emet on Chanukah, Year 5650, 1890.

⁵ Ovadia 1:18.

⁶ Bereishit 45:24.

⁷ Ibn Ezra, ad loc.

In the second *parasha* read during Tevet, **Parashat Vayechi**, we learn that Yosef didn't get angry at his brothers for having sold him even after their father had passed away.

Parashat Shemot, about the slavery in Egypt, highlights how Moshe scolded two Jewish men who were fighting. "When he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together, and he said to him that was in the wrong, 'Why do you smite your fellow?'"⁸

Parashat Va'era is about the first seven plagues of anger, where Hashem judged Pharaoh and Egypt. "But Pharaoh shall not hearken to you, that I may lay my hand upon Mitzrayim, and bring out my armies, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments."⁹

Parashat Shemot and *Va'era* are the first two *parshiot* of the series called *Shovevim tat*,¹⁰ during which the righteous fast every Monday and Thursday. This time is especially suited for correcting sins connected with sexuality and the holy covenant which Yosef kept so meticulously despite strong temptations.

The Growing up of the Constellation of Capricorn (Mountain Goat)

The constellation of this month – the גדי/*Gedi* – Capricorn is also connected with the word אגד/*egged* which means to bind. Tevet is binding the light of Chanukah into the whole year. Each of the nations also have a corresponding constellation, the Capricorn is the constellation of the Philistine nation.¹¹ For this reason Shimshon from the tribe of Dan gave his Philistine wife a goat as a gift. He wanted to purify the evil influence of the Philistine at the root. The power of stern judgment within the Philistines is indicated in the numerical value of their name, פלישתים/*Pelishtim*, 860, which is ten times the Divine Name Elokim (86), the name that denotes judgment. Corresponding to this stands the tribe of Dan, with Shimshon at its head, who wanted to put an end to their evil influence. Perhaps the problems that Israel has currently with the 'Palestinians' are a carryover of the previous problems with the Philistines. (It is interesting to note that the PLO was founded during the month of Tevet).

The constellation of the month of *Tevet*, Capricorn or mountain goat, relates to the growing-up process, from a state of immaturity to a state of maturity. At the age of ten (an allusion to the tenth month, the level of ten in general) a child jumps like a goat.¹² The playful nature of jumping up and down like a goat reflects an important stage in the growing-up process. The mountain goat has the ability to climb even in extremely difficult terrain; likewise does the month of Tevet stir us to learn how to hang on during difficult times. The numerical value of Capricorn – גדי/*Gedi* = 17 = טוב/*tov* – 'good' One must play (and jump up and down like a goat) in order to rectify and sweeten the anger latent in one's animal soul.

⁸ *Shemot* 2:13.

⁹ *Shemot* 7:4

¹⁰ The name *Shovevim Tat* is constructed from the initials of the following Torah portions: **S**hemot, **Va'**era, **Bo**, **B'**shalach, **Y**itro, **M**ispatim, **T**erumah, **T**etzaveh.

¹¹ *Rabbeinu Bachaya, Devarim* 31:16.

¹² *Midrash Rabbah, Kohelet* 1:3.

Letter עין/ayin – Developing a Goodly Eye

The letter עין/ayin associated with the month of Tevet means 'eye.' Therefore, the month of *Tevet* is the month of the rectification and nullification of the evil eye.

This rectification begins with gazing at the *Chanukah* candles, especially when they are complete on the eighth day. The word *Tevet* itself comes from *tov*, "good," referring to עין טובה/ayin *tohav* – the goodly eye (the source of the power of blessing, as it is said: "the goodly eye shall bless"). "Whoever has a good eye shall be blessed, for he gave from his bread to the poor."¹³ All destructive process begins with the "evil eye" of hatred. From hatred comes anger, the fire of destruction. Therefore, this month is the time to work on overcoming jealousy and evil eye, and work on looking at others with good eyes of love and blessings.

The Tribe of Dan – Turning the Snake of Evil to Good

The tribe of the month, דן/Dan, the son of Ya'acov and Rachel, through her maidservant Bilhah, symbolizes the power of severe Judgment (*din*). Both in the desert encampments, and in his allotment in the Land of Israel, the tribe of Dan was in the north from whence issue darkness and judgment.¹⁴ The north is also associated with the amassing of material wealth.¹⁵ The name Dan embodies the *teshuvah* process that Rachel went through overcoming her jealousy of Leah, mother of many children. When Rachel named Bilhah's first son Dan, she exclaimed "G-d has judged me, and also listened to my voice."¹⁶ G-d has judged me – and found me guilty, He judged me again and found me guiltless.¹⁷ First she was found guilty by Hashem and also by herself. Then she rectified herself and was judged favorable by G-d. The tribe of Dan represents the initial state of immaturity in the soul that "grows-up" during the month of *Tevet*. Initially, Dan judges reality and others critically, with severe judgment (the "evil eye"). This is the nature of one who is spiritually immature. Dan is likened to a snake, who bites with the venom of anger. The "evil eye" is the eye of the snake.

The rectification of Dan is his engaging in the battle of holy anger against evil anger. Our sages teach us that only one from the soul-root of Dan can spontaneously jump up and kill the evil snake – "one like him, killed him." The numerical value of נחש/*Nachash* – snake = 358 = משיח/*Mashiach*. In the *Zohar* we are taught that the commander-in-chief of the army of *Mashiach* will come from the tribe of Dan.¹⁸

The Tribe of Dan – Elevating Judgment

How do we know the choices and judgments we make are the right ones and where do we cross the line between right and wrong? There is a fine line between carving golden calves, (one of which was place in the territory of Dan) and crafting vessels for the Jewish Temple including the golden cherubs. What makes the former the gravest sin and the latter the greatest mitzvah?

¹³ *Mishlei* 22:9.

¹⁴ *Yirmeyahu* 1:14.

¹⁵ *Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei* part 3:534, *Zohar* part 2, 26b.

¹⁶ *Bereishit* 30:6.

¹⁷ Rashi ad loc.

¹⁸ Rav Yitzchak Ginsburg, Gal Einai <<http://www.inner.org/times/tevet/tevet.htm>>.

The difference is very simple, the former is forbidden by G-d, whereas the latter is a mitzvah from G-d. The tribe of Dan was repeatedly chosen to fashion holy vessels for the Mikdash,¹⁹ to teach us that through the power of judgment, which he represents, we can learn to draw the fine line of judgment between the forbidden and the commanded. Rather than being tempted by the evil eye towards anger, we need to see with clear and good eyes accessible for us during the month of Tevet.

In Tevet, Dan challenges us to look at the decisions we make for ourselves that impact both ourselves and others. If we are angry is it because we are immature and don't really understand, or are we growing to learn to battle "evil anger"? Are we mature enough to know the difference between them?

¹⁹ See *Shemot* 31:6-11 And I, behold, I have appointed with him Oholiav, the son of Achisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee: the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the ark-cover that is thereupon, and all the furniture of the Tent... and the anointing oil, and the incense of sweet spices for the holy place; according to all that I have commanded you shall they do. See also *Divrei HaYamim* II 2:12-13, 4:11-22 where Chirum from the tribe of Dan is appointed craftsman of King Shlomo's Temple.