



The Eight Days of Chanukah Correspond to the Midah of Binah the Eighth Midah

In honor of Shabbas Chanukah, parshas Mikeitz, we will explore the exalted song **Maoz Tzur**, which is sung by Jews all around the world on Chanukah. In its fifth stanza, the song relates to the miracle of Chanukah: **”וְיָנִים נִקְבְּצוּ עָלַי אֲזֵי בֵימֵי חֲשֹׁמוֹנִים, וּפְרָצוּ חוֹמוֹת מוֹגְדְלֵי וְטָמְאוּ כָּל הַשְּׁמוֹנִים, וּמְנוֹתַי קִנְקְנִים נִעְשְׂהָ נֶס לְשׁוֹשְׁנִים, בְּגִי בֵינָה”**—**the Greeks gathered around me in the days of the Chashmonaim. They breached the walls of my towers and defiled all the oils. But from the last remaining flask a miracle was wrought for Your beloved. Therefore, the sages ordained these eight days for song and jubilation.**

It is worth noting that the songwriter depicts the sages of that generation as **”כְּנֵי בִינָה”** rather than as **”כְּנֵי חִכְמָה”**—men of **”binah”** rather than as men of **”chochmah.”** Additionally, we will endeavor to explain why HKB”H chose to have the miracle of the Chanukah lights last precisely eight days, no more no less. Lastly, we will examine the formula established by our blessed sages in Ahl HaNissim: **”כְּשֶׁעֲמַדָּה מַלְכוּת יוֹן הִרְשִׁיעָה עַל עַמָּךְ: יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהִשְׁכִּיחֵם תּוֹרַתְךָ וְלֹהֲעִבְרִים מִחֻקֵּי רִצּוֹנְךָ”**—**when the evil Greek regime rose against Your people Yisrael attempting to make them forget Your Torah and to compel them to abandon the statutes of Your will.** The commentaries ask an obvious question: How is it possible to make someone forget the Torah? After all, memory exists within a person.

The Greeks Aimed to Make Yisrael Forget Torah She’b’al Peh

To answer all of these questions, we will begin by introducing what the Bnei Yissaschar (Kisleiv-Teves 2, 8) presents in the name of the Rokeiach (225), one of the Tosafists. Our blessed

sages instituted that we light 36 candles over the eight nights of Chanukah to commemorate the 36 hours that the original light of creation served Adam HaRishon. As we know, this light was subsequently stored away and is referred to as the **”ohr haganuz.”** This is described in the Yerushalmi as follows (Berachos 8, 5): **”שְׁלֹשִׁים וּשְׁשׁ שָׁעוֹת שִׁימְשָׂה אוֹתָהּ הָאוֹרָה שֶׁנִּבְרְאָת בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן, שְׁתַּיִם עֶשְׂרֵה בְּעֶרְבַת שַׁבָּת וּשְׁתַּיִם עֶשְׂרֵה בַּשַּׁבָּת, וְהָיָה אִדָּם הָרִאשׁוֹן מְכִיט בּוֹ מִסוּף הָעוֹלָם וְעַד סוּפוֹ.”** It explains that this original, magnificent light served Adam HaRishon for twelve hours on Erev Shabbas, 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.

Further on, the Bnei Yissaschar (ibid. 12) elaborates in the name of the great Rabbi Pinchas of Koritz, zy”a. After sequestering the brilliant, primeval light that served Adam HaRishon for 36 hours, HKB”H stored it in the 36 masechtos of Torah she’b’al peh. The Bnei Yissaschar explains the connection to Chanukah by explaining why the Greeks strove to defile all of the oils in the Heichal. What difference did it make to them if the Jews lit the menorah with pure oil?

To explain the matter, he refers to the Gemara (B.B. 25b): **”הַרוֹצֵה שִׁיחֲכִים יֵדְרִים וְשִׁיעֵשִׁיר יִצְפִּין וְסִימְנִיךְ שֶׁלַּחַן בְּצַפּוֹן וּמְנוֹרָה בְּדָרוֹם.”** **One who wants to become wise should face south** (Rashi: He should face south while praying), **while one who wants to become wealthy should face north** (he should face north while praying); **and your mnemonic is: The Shulchan stood in the north, while the Menorah stood in the south.** This teaches us that the lighting of the Menorah symbolizes the

awesome light of Torah she'b'al peh that enriches and enlightens those who study it. We learn from the Gemara (Gittin 60b) that HKB"H entered into a covenant with Yisrael on account of the study of Torah she'b'al peh: **לא כרת הקב"ה ברית עם ישראל אלא בשביל דברים שבעל פה, שנאמר כי על פי הדברים האלה כרתי אתך ברית ואת "HKB"H only entered into a covenant with Yisrael on account of the Oral Law, as it states (Shemos 34, 27): "For on account of these words have I entered a covenant with you and with Yisrael."**

Now, the Greeks intended to make Yisrael forget and abandon Torah she'b'al peh, as we mention in our tefilos: **"When the evil Greek regime rose against Your people Yisrael attempting to make them forget Your Torah and to compel them to abandon the statutes of Your will."** Therefore, when the Greeks entered the Heichal, they proceeded to defile all of the oil they found. They wished to prevent the kohanim from kindling the Menorah in purity, since they understood that Torah-study in purity portends that the Torah and its precepts will endure forever, as it is written (Tehillim 19, 10): **"יראת ה' טהורה עומדת: לעד—the fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever.** Thus, the Greeks figured that if Yisrael were prevented from kindling the Menorah in purity, they would eventually forget and abandon Torah she'b'al peh.

This is emphasized by the Midrash (B.R. 2, 4): **"והושך, זה גלות: יון, שהחשיכה עיניהם של ישראל בגזירותיהן, שהיתה אומרת להם, כתבו על קרן "darkness" alludes to the galus of Yavan, whose decrees blinded Yisrael (creating a spiritual darkness). They (the Greeks) would order them (Yisrael) to write on the horn of an ox that they have no association with the G-d of Yisrael.** They aimed to extinguish the light of Torah she'b'al peh in the eyes of Yisrael for which we pray in the Berachos of Krias Shema in Shacharis: **"זהאר עינינו בתורתך—illuminate our eyes with Your Torah.** Therefore, when HKB"H performed the miracle of the flask of pure oil—that lasted for eight days—He provided them light from the concealed light—the "ohr haganuz"—that served Adam HaRishon for 36 hours and was subsequently concealed in the 36 masechtos of Torah she'b'al peh.

The Greeks Wanted Yisrael to Rely Solely on Their Intellect

So, how did the Greeks plan to accomplish this feat—to cause Yisrael to forget Torah she'b'al peh? Let us refer to the Gemara (Megillah 6b): **אם יאמר לך אדם, יגעתי ולא מצאתי אל תאמן, לא**

—if someone tells you, "I labored in my Torah-study but did not succeed," do not believe him. "I have not labored, yet I have succeeded," do not believe him. "I have labored, and I have succeeded," you may believe him. However, this seems to contradict a teaching in the Mishnah (Mishlei 3, 5): **"זאל בינתך אל תישען"—and do not rely on your own understanding.** This implies that even if a person has labored in his Torah-study, he should not rely on his own understanding.

Notwithstanding, the answer is clear. Without a doubt, it is impossible to attain Torah knowledge and insights without exerting oneself and studying with devotion, in keeping with the claim: **"I have labored, and I have succeeded," you may believe him.** However, in addition to studying diligently, one must also pray to HKB"H to impart to him the "chochmah" of the Torah. The divine Tanna Rabbi Yehoshua says as much to the people of Alexandria who inquire (Niddah 70b): **"מה יעשה אדם ויחכם, אמר להו... יבקשו רחמים ממי שהחכמה שלו, שנאמר כי ה' יתן חכמה מפיו דעת ותבונה."** **What should a person do to become wise? (He answered them: He should spend more time in a yeshivah and spend less time in business. They responded: But many have done so and yet this has not helped them.) He said to them: They should plead for mercy from Him to whom wisdom ("chochmah") belongs, as it states (Mishlei 2, 6): "For Hashem grants wisdom; from His mouth comes wisdom and understanding."** With this in mind, we can comprehend the formula they instituted in Shemoneh Esrei: **"אתה חונן לאדם דעת ומלמד לאנוש בינה"—You favor a person with knowledge and teach mankind understanding.** This berachah specifically addresses the acquisition of Torah-knowledge, as Rashi advises: **אם היה משכח תלמודו מאריך בחונן הדעת—if a person should forget what he has learned, he should dwell (linger) on the berachah of "חונן הדעת."**

This explains very nicely how the Greeks intended to make Yisrael forget the Torah. Among the Greeks were the two famous philosophers Plato and Aristotle. They inculcated in the people of their generation the notion that a person should only believe in that which can be understood and perceived with one's intellect. Hence, the formula we recite: **"When the evil Greek regime rose against Your people Yisrael attempting to make them forget Your Torah"—specifies "Your Torah,"** the Torah that Hashem gave Yisrael at Har Sinai; **"and to compel them to abandon the statutes of Your will"—**that they would cease to believe blindly in the statutes of the Torah, the **"chukim"** whose rationales are unknown and unclear to

us. Rather, according to the Greek philosophers, people should only believe that which can be comprehended and makes sense to the human intellect.

In essence, their goal was to infect Yisrael with the klipah of “ga’avah”—pride and vanity—believing that everything should be dictated by one’s own understanding. Now, we know that this philosophy is diametrically opposed to the principle that to acquire Torah one must possess “anavah”—humility. As we are taught in the Gemara (Sotah 5a): **“לעולם ילמד אדם מדעת קונו שהרי: A person should always learn from the good sense of his Creator—for behold, when HKB”H gave the Torah, He abandoned all the imposing mountains and hills and instead rested His Shechinah on Har Sinai.** Rashi comments that we are being taught to value modesty and humility from the fact that HKB”H passed over taller and more majestic mountains, such as Har Savor and Har Carmel, in order to give the Torah on the lowly Har Sinai.

This is especially true of Torah she’b’al peh that explains for us all of the things that are not explicit in Torah she’b’chsav. To acquire the knowledge and wisdom of Torah she’b’al peh requires humility. As we have learned in the Gemara (Ta’anis 7a): **“למה: נמשלו דברי תורה למים, דכתיב (ישעיה נה-א) הוי כל צמא לכו למים, לומר לך, מה מים מניחין מקום גבוה והולכין למקום נמוך, אף דברי תורה אין מתקיימין אלא במי שדעתו שפלה.”** **Why are words of Torah compared to water? . . . To teach us that just as water flows from higher ground to lower ground, so, too, words of Torah are only retained by someone who possesses a lowly self-image (humility).** Conversely, we learn in the Gemara (Pesachim 66b): **“כל המתיהר: anyone who becomes haughty, if he is a wise man, his wisdom abandons him.** Hence, the Greeks planned to cause Yisrael to forget the Torah by infecting them with “ga’avah.”

“From the last remaining flask a miracle was wrought for Your beloved”

With this understanding, we will proceed to explain why HKB”H arranged for the miracle of Chanukah to transpire over the course of eight days. We will rely on a fascinating interpretation of the divine poet’s words: **“ומנותר קנקנים נעשה נס: and from the last remaining flask, a miracle was wrought for Your beloved.** One of the earliest sources for this interpretation appears in the sefer Igeres HaTiyul, authored by the great Rabeinu Chaim, the son Rabbi Betzalel, the brother of the Maharal of Prague:

“אל תסתכל בקנקן אלא במה שיש בו. פירוש אל תחשוב כי מה שאמר הכתוב ונקא לא ינקה, שהוא כולו פורעניות ומדת הדין, אלא הוי מסתכל בשאר האותיות שיש עמהן, דהיינו ו”ה מן ונק”ה י”ה מן ינק”ה, הרי השם של ד’ והנותר קנק”ן. וזהו גם כן ומנותר קנקנים נעשה נס.”

“Do not focus on the container, but, rather, on its contents.” This means that you should not think when the passuk says: “And Who absolves but does not absolve completely,” it is entirely punishment and enforcement of midas hadin. Instead, you should look at the other letters that are with them—namely the “vav-hei” from ונק”ה and the “yud-hei” from ינק”ה. Behold, you have the tetragrammaton (the sacred four-letter name); the letters that remain spell קנק”ן (jar/container/flask). This is also the meaning of “and from the remnants of the flasks (plural of קנק”ן) a miracle was wrought” (from the four-letter name Havaya).

Let us elaborate. The teaching: **“Do not focus on the container, but, rather, on its contents”**—is found in a Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (4, 20). In Likutei HaShas (Avos ibid.), the Arizal explains that the Tanna of this Mishnah is referring to the conclusion of the 13 Midos HaRachamim (Shemos 34, 7): **“ונקה לא ינקה”**. He dispels the notion that the lack of complete absolution relates to midas hadin.

Note that the words ונק”ה and ינק”ה contain the letters ק”נ – the letters of the word for flask—in addition to the letters of the four-letter name **Havaya**—a “yud,” a “hei,” a “vav” and a “hei.” The lesson here is that one should not think mistakenly that HKB”H does not absolve a person of his iniquities completely if he performs teshuvah. On the contrary, if one focuses on the letters of the name **Havaya** concealed within the phrase ונק”ה לא ינקה, he will realize that HKB”H, in His infinite mercy, expressed by the name **Havaya**, absolves penitents (those who perform sincere teshuvah) completely. This is the lesson of the Mishnah: **Do not focus on the letters קנק”ן of the phrase ונק”ה לא ינקה but rather on the four letters of the name Havaya (the name of divine mercy) associated with them**—indicating that a person can achieve a tikun by means of teshuvah. This concludes the explanation of the Arizal.

It seems apparent that the Arizal intended to explain the words of Rabbi Eliezer who addresses the apparent contradiction in the passuk under discussion (Yoma 86a): **“רבי אליעזר אומר, אי אפשר לומר נקה שכבר נאמר לא ינקה, ואי אפשר לומר לא ינקה Rabbi שכבר נאמר נקה, הא כיצד, מנקה הוא לשבין ואינו מנקה לשאינן שבין.”**

Eliezer says: It is impossible to say that the phrase “He will absolve” applies in all cases, since it already says, “He will not absolve.” And, conversely, it is impossible to say that the phrase “He will not absolve” applies in all cases, since it already says, “He will absolve.” So, how do we reconcile these phrases? They teach us that Hashem absolves those who perform teshuvah for their sins, but He does not absolve those who fail to repent. Thus, the Arizal asserts that this is alluded to by the four letters of the name **Havaya**—the name of “rachamim”—in this seemingly contradictory phrase. It is due to “rachamim” that HKB”H accepts a sinner’s teshuvah.

Now, let us return to the interpretation of the Igeres HaTiyul of the poetic words: **”ומותר קנקנים נעשה נס לשושנים”**. HKB”H performed the miracle of Chanukah, because the kohanim from the Chashmonaim family inspired the people of Yisrael, even those that had been Hellenized and corrupted by the Greeks, to perform sincere teshuvah. Thus, they invoked the name of “rachamim”—**Havaya**—that remained from the two sets of **”ק”נ** in the phrase **”ונק”ה לא ינק”ה**. In that merit, a miracle was performed for His beloved people.

The Methodology of Scholars of “Binah”

Following this sublime path, we will now focus on the continuation of that stanza in Maoz Tzur: **”בני בינה ימי שמונה קבעו—שיר ורגנים—therefore, the sages (“men of binah”) ordained these eight days for song and jubilation.** Let us refer to a teaching in the Zohar hakadosh (Yisro 85a). Two opinions are presented as to the origins of the Torah. According to the first opinion: **”אורייתא מחכמה דלעילא נפקת”—the Torah emanated from divine “chochmah” (wisdom).** According to the second opinion: **”אורייתא מבינה נפקת”—the Torah emanated from “binah” (intuition).** The Zohar concludes that both opinions are correct. As the Kehillas Yaakov explains: Torah she’b’chsav emanated from “chochmah,” whereas Torah she’b’al peh emanated from “binah.”

Let us embellish this thought. HKB”H transmitted Torah she’b’chsav word for word; we are not permitted to add or omit even a single letter from it. He transmitted each of its letters with esoteric, hidden meanings concealed within their crowns and adornments. Clearly, this Torah emanated from the supreme wisdom of HKB”H. Torah she’b’al peh, on the other hand, which fills in the gaps and explains all of the details omitted from Torah she’b’chsav, emanated from “binah.” “Binah” is the intuition and

insight that allows us to learn one thing from another, to learn that which is not apparent from that which is explicit. That is precisely the nature of Torah she’b’al peh; its sages clarify everything that is obscure and not explicit in Torah she’b’chsav by means of intuiting and deducing one thing from another.

This then is the significance of Rabbi Yehoshua’s response to the people of Alexandria’s inquiry: **“What should a person do to become wise?”** In other words, they wanted to know how to attain the divine wisdom of the Torah. To which he responded: **“They should plead for mercy from Him to whom wisdom (‘chochmah’) belongs.”** In other words, they should pray to HKB”H, Who concealed everything within the “chochmah” of Torah she’b’chsav, that He should reveal those things to them in Torah she’b’al peh through “binah”—the ability to intuit and deduce the true meaning of things.

It should now be quite clear why the divine poet referred to the sages of that generation as **“men of binah.”** It is because they were able to access and attain the knowledge of Torah she’b’al peh which is based on “binah,” by studying the Torah diligently and arduously, deducing one thing from another by applying the thirteen hermeneutic principles. Thus, they arrived at the true meaning of the Torah. The reason they are usually referred to as **“chachamim”** is because they succeeded in revealing the true meaning of everything that is not explicit in Torah she’b’chsav emanating from the supreme “chochmah” by studying Torah she’b’al peh.

This explains very nicely the following statement in the Midrash (Tanna D’Vei Eliyahu Rabbah, Chapter 5): **”לעולם יתפוס—אדם ענוה ואחר כך ישאל בינה מלפני הקב”ה”—a person should always adopt an attitude of humility and then request “binah” from HKB”H.** Chazal are teaching us that it is impossible to attain the knowledge and wisdom of Torah she’b’al peh, which is rooted in “binah,” based on deducing one fact from another, without the midah of “anavah.” For, HKB”H only grants the “binah” necessary to illuminate and decipher Torah she’b’al peh to a humble person.

The Eight Days of Chanukah Reflect the Eight Multiples of the Name Havaya

In honor of Shabbas Chanukah, it gives me great pleasure to provide my brothers with an intriguing interpretation of the last line of the stanza of Maoz Tzur we have focused on: **בני”**

“**בִּינָה יְמֵי שְׁמוֹנָה קָבְעוּ שִׁיר וְרִנָּנִים—therefore, the sages (“men of binah”) ordained these eight days for song and jubilation.** We will refer to a passuk related to Matan Torah (Shemos 19, 20): “וַיֵּרַד ה' עַל הַר סִינַי”—**Hashem descended upon Har Sinai.** The commentaries teach us that HKB”H wished to set an example demonstrating that it is impossible to acquire the Torah without the midah of “anavah”—humility. As indicated by the passuk, HKB”H descended upon Har Sinai with the name **Havaya** to demonstrate that His greatness and His humility go hand in hand, as we shall explain.

In the sefer Eretz HaChaim on Tehillim, we find a wonderful insight related to the passuk (Tehillim 6, 1): “לְמַנְצַח בְּנִגְיֹת עַל” --**To Him Who grants victory through the power of music, on the instrument with eight strings, a psalm to David.** He presents a fascinating mathematical phenomenon regarding the blessed name **Havaya**. With each greater multiple, the “mispar katan” diminishes. Symbolically, this indicates that the greater He is, the more humble He is. Let us demonstrate:

The gematria of **Havaya** is **26**; so, the “mispar katan” of one **Havaya**=2+6=8.

The gematria of two times **Havaya** equals **52**; so, its “mispar katan”=5+2=7.

The gematria of three times **Havaya** equals **78**; so, its “mispar katan”=7+8=15, whose “mispar katan”=6.

The gematria of four times **Havaya** equals **104**; so, its “mispar katan”=5.

The gematria of five times **Havaya** equals **130**; so, its “mispar katan”=4.

The gematria of six times **Havaya** equals **156**; so, its “mispar katan”=12, whose “mispar katan”=3.

The gematria of seven times **Havaya** equals **182**; so, its “mispar katan”=11, whose “mispar katan”=2.

The gematria of eight times **Havaya** equals **208**; so, its “mispar katan”=10, whose “mispar katan”=1.

Note the progressively decreasing “mispar katan” for each of these eight multiples of **Havaya**. (This pattern repeats itself ad infinitum for every subsequent set of nine multiples. For

example: Nine multiples of **Havaya** equals **234**, whose “mispar katan” equals **9**; while seventeen multiples of **Havaya** equals **442**, whose “mispar katan” equals **1**.)

Based on this phenomenon, we can propose a wonderful allusion in Chazal’s statement (Sotah 5a): “תַּלְמִיד חָכָם צָרִיךְ שִׁיחָא” --**a Torah scholar must have one eighth of an eighth.** Just as the “mispar katan” of multiples of **Havaya** decreases until the “mispar katan” of the **eighth** multiple is **1**, a talmid-chacham should emulate this pattern; the greater he is, the humbler he should be, striving to achieve the humility of the **eighth** multiple; he should strive to be like the “**one of the eighth.**” Recognizing this phenomenon, David HaMelech sang the praises of the Almighty’s humility alluded to by the number eight: “לְמַנְצַח בְּנִגְיֹת עַל הַשְּׁמִינִית מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד”.

The Eighth Midah Is “Binah”

To be honest, I always found this mathematical phenomenon extremely curious. Why did HKB”H choose the name **Havaya** whose “mispar katan” decreases as its multiples increase specifically in the first set of eight? In keeping with our current discussion, the answer is fascinating. Torah she’b’al peh that HKB”H gifted to mankind is rooted in the midah of “binah.” If we count the midos from the bottom up, “binah” is the eighth midah. Hence, to reach this midah, a person must ascend eight levels from the bottom up.

The first level is the name **Havaya**, with a “mispar katan” of **8**, corresponding to the midah of “malchus” (the first midah counting from the bottom up). The second level, two times **Havaya**, with a “mispar katan” of **7**, corresponds to the midah of “yesod.” In this manner, we ascend from one level to the next with each additional multiple of **Havaya**; as we ascend, the “mispar katan” gets progressively smaller. This teaches us that it is impossible to climb Hashem’s mountain without the quality of “anavah.” This process continues until we reach the eighth level corresponding to the midah of “binah.” That is the root of Torah she’b’al peh, the ability to deduce one fact from another. The eighth level, eight times **Havaya**, has a gematria of 208 and a “mispar katan” of **1**. This represents the highest degree of humility and is the prerequisite for learning and comprehending Torah she’b’al peh.

This coincides magnificently with a teaching in the Gemara regarding the letters of the “aleph-Beis” (Shabbas 104a): “אֵלֶּף”

