

Open Miracles

While reading the *laining* (Torah portion) of the first day of Rosh Hashana I noticed the word *תשת* (*Keshet*) a few times. The parsha discusses Hagar and sitting away from Ishmael some distance of a few *bowshots* away. *Keshet* means a bow or bowshot like an archer uses with an arrow. It also means a rainbow which I presume is because it shares the same arc of an arrow traveling through the air from its starting point to landing point over the earth.

What I realized looking at the word *תשת* (*Keshet*) is that the actual letterforms appear to be a graphical display of its meaning. The *kuf* (ק) resembles a bow and arrow. The *shin* (ש) looks like grass or the field the arrow is shot over. And the *tav* (ת) is the arc of the arrow and its landing point.



I started thinking about other words and over the last few days and came up with the following. Please note that these are just my ideas and may or may not resonate with you. I ask that you consider the following with an open mind:

עץ (*Etz* – tree): The *ayin* (ע) looks like a small bush with roots and short branches. The *tzadik sofit* (ץ) looks like a tall tree with branches.



יין (*Yayin* – wine): Wine comes from grapes and the letters look like grapes on a vine.

ירך (*Yareach* – moon): The *yud* (י) is like the first sliver of the new moon. The *reish* (ר) is the beginning crescent of the moon which always starts on the right and fills right to left as the days progress. The *chet* with the *patach* vowel (ח) represents the full moon, but it's temporary as indicated with the vowel line of *patach*. It closes the *chet* (ח) temporarily, as it's an addition to the letter as opposed to the letters *samach* or *mem sofit* which are totally enclosed. Then if you reverse the letters, the *reish* (ר) is the waning moon as it shrinks, and then the *yud* (י) is the final sliver of the moon as it diminishes.



While on the subject of the moon I realized that a beautiful and practical reason why Sukkos always comes out on the 15th of Tishrei is that is when the moon is at its fullest. So, while we're sitting out in our sukkas, Hashem gave us the most amount of natural light with a full moon.

יום (*Yom* – day): The *yud* (י) represents daybreak which begins with the first appearance of rays of light before the sun comes up. The *vav* (ו) represents the length of the day – it's the connecting letter that connects day to night. And the *mem sofit* (ם) represents the repeating transition of day to night to day around the world, the globe.



מגן (*Magen* – shield): The middle letter *gimel* (ג) looks like a person (soldier) holding a shield, the letter *mem* (מ), and a staff/sword with the letter *nun sofit* (ן).



זקן (*Zaken* – elderly): The *zayin* (ז) with its curve looks like a hunched over person. The *kuf* (ק) looks like a bent over person using a cane. The *nun sofit* (ן) which is a letter that continues extending down represents the length of time – the fact that this person has lived a long life.



דור (*Dor* – generation): The *daled* (ד) looks like it's putting its hand on the *reish* (ר) as if a grandfather is putting his hand on his son or grandson. The difference between the *daled* and *reish* is the little bit at the top of the *daled* that points backwards as if indicating prior generations.



טלית (*Tallis*): The *tet* (ט) looks like the tallis that is wrapped around the body represented by the *lamed* (ל), the tallest letter in the aleph bet, from the head, the *yud* (י), to the legs, the *tav* (ת), the last letter of the aleph bet.

חכם (*Chacham* – wise man): The Chacham first builds for himself a structure, a framework, with the letter *chet* (ח). The *chet* looks like a table representing something that is solid and also the table, the *shtender*, on which the chacham studies. Once the Chacham has his foundation he is selectively open to learning more, the right things. It is not a fully open letter like the English letter “U”, like a soup pot where anything can be poured in. Rather there is a guard at the top of the *chaf* (כ), yet it is still open to learning with the open side. Once the foundation is set, and the right things are being learned, the Chacham then closes himself off to negative influence and repeats the positive cycle with the closed *mem sofit* (ם).

בלבל (*Bilbul* – confused): I am including this word not because of its letterform representation, but rather because I am fascinated by the arrangement of the letters. This word is the Hebrew word לב (*lev* - heart) written backwards twice. When someone is confused it is because they have conflicting thoughts or emotions. If one has “2 hearts” they are interested in 2 different things – confusion. Further, the word לב is spelled backwards also indicating confusion.

Ok, so what does any of this have to do with Sukkos?

I go through the above illustrations for two points. The first is that I am fascinated by the Hebrew letters and as you know by now I have a particular interest in the numerical values of the letters and words – gematria.

It is taught that the letters teach through their shape, sound, number – gematria. This was my brief exploration of the letter shapes as they relate to their corresponding words.

The second reason to share these ideas with you is that my hope is that it touches, even in the smallest way, the infinite wisdom and depth of our Torah, language and Judaism. Perhaps it will prompt you to look at our words a little more closely or from a different vantage point.

To tie this message to Sukkos here are two more words to consider:

בית (*Bayit* – house): The letters *bet* (ב) and *tav* (ת) look like structures, homes. The *bet* with a doorway and the *tav* with a front porch or step. However, the structures are not what protect us. What protects us is Hashem, the *yud* in the center of it all. Without Hashem’s direct involvement, no structure in the world would even exist, let alone protect us.

סוכה (*Sukkah*): The actual word Sukkah represents how many walls we need to have a kosher sukkah, our temporary home, *bayit*, over the next week. We either can have 4 walls like the *samach* (ס), 3 walls like the *chaf* (כ), or 2 walls and a *tefach*, a little bit like the *heh* (ה).

Rabbi David Ashear teaches in his Living Emunah email [#153](#) that the Zohar calls the holiday of Sukkot *The Shade of Emunah*. What’s the explanation?

The Torah commands us to sit in a sukkah to remind ourselves how Hashem protected our ancestors with Sukkot. But it’s not just a commemoration, it’s to teach us that Hashem protects us now the same way.

Rabbi Yitzchak Sher explains we are remembering that Hashem provided wood for every single individual family in the middle of the desert. It wasn’t just a general miracle for all of B’nai Yisrael, rather Hashem helped everyone separately. Every family had a house. Everyone was given exactly what they needed for their individual family to be protected from the elements.

This shows the love Hashem has for us individually. The Maharal writes similarly that on Sukkot we are celebrating that Hashem protects us as individuals. Every moment of the day we are sitting in his shelter. And while we’re sitting in the sukkah we should have in mind the *Clouds of Glory* as well as Hashem’s individual supervision.

As discussed above, the sukkah needs to be made up of at least two walls and a *tefach*, which is a little bit. The Arizal says this represents the image of an arm embracing us. From the shoulder to the elbow is one wall. From the elbow to the wrist is the second wall. And the hand with the curl of the fingers is the *tefach*, the little bit making up the third wall.

When we are sitting in the sukkah we are in the embrace of Hashem.

We also know that the *sechach* has to provide more shade than sun. Rabbi Ashear explains that he learned that the *sechach* represents emunah being in the shade of Hashem. While the sun, the light represents knowledge and understanding.

Rabbi Ashear says that the emunah has to overpower the *seichel*. We don't have to understand everything, but we have to know that Hashem is watching over us and protecting each of us.

Hashem is always looking out for us as individuals. Sometimes we just have to believe and sometimes Hashem actually shows us. The sukkah reminds us that we are always in the embrace of Hashem and whether we see it or not Hashem is always looking out for us.

Rabbi David Ashear teaches further in his Living Emunah email [#411](#) that the mitzvah of Sukkah is to live in a temporary dwelling for seven days.

The *Sefer Bayam Derech* explains Hashem wants us to realize that just like it's obvious now that Hashem is protecting and taking care of us in the absence of our sturdy homes and comprehensive alarm systems. It has to be just as clear that even when we do live in our strong, protected houses, Hashem is really the one protecting us.

Hashem surrounded and protected millions of people in the desert with *Clouds of Glory* (Ananei HaKavod) for 40 years. They had *maan* fall from *shamayim*. They had a moving well to give them water.

Those miracles were not just for them. They were for us to know that our protection comes from Hashem. Our sustenance comes from Hashem. Everything comes from Hashem.

The Ramban writes at the end of parshas Bo that the purpose of Hashem doing open miracles is for us to learn to thank Hashem for the hidden miracles.

Imagine a poor man sitting in his home on Friday morning with no money to buy food for shabbos. He cries out to Hashem for help and a few minutes later someone knocks on his door and asks him for a small favor. When he agrees that man hands him enough money to buy everything he needs for his family for shabbos.

No doubt that struggling man will be singing the praises of Hashem telling his friends of the open miracle that just took place.

But what happens on the following Friday when that man receives his regular bi-weekly paycheck from work and he has enough money on his own to buy the food? Does he sing Hashem's praises for that? Probably not.

Why? Because last week the money came through a miracle and this week it came naturally.

He didn't get the message. The point of the open miracle was not just to provide him with food, it was to teach him that just like it was clear that your money then came from Hashem it has to be clear that your money always comes from Hashem.

The one open miracle is supposed to teach us to appreciate all the hidden miracles.

Every time a person walks into his house he should feel Hashem You're so kind. You're surrounding me with *Clouds of Glory*. I'm protected from the heat and the rain. The temperature is just right. With the push of a button I can raise it or lower it.

When you go to your sink you should think Hashem you're providing me with the *Be'er Shel Miriam* – I have running water whenever I need it.

You open the refrigerator and there's food. That's Hashem providing you with *maan*.

Hashem does everything for us. He doesn't send *maan* down from *shamayim* anymore, but He gives us work that pays us money and He allows us to go and buy the food on our own. And it appears that we have something to do with it, but it's really all the *chesed* (kindness) of Hashem.

When we train ourselves to think like this we will gain a new appreciation for Hashem and it will lead to such joy because we will realize how much He is doing for us all the time and then we'll feel His love.

When we say the brachas in the morning we have to internalize them.

We say *she'asa li kol tzorki* – we should think about and thank Hashem for the shoes that He gives us.

When we say *malbish arumim* – think about all the clothing you have and thank Hashem for every single outfit.

The same goes for all the other brachas. This is the idea of Sukkos. Hashem shows us now that He's really the one protecting us while we're living in these rickety huts. But we have to take that message and apply it the whole year, so that we can constantly appreciate all that He does.

As we sit in the sukkah with our families, let us use this opportunity to remind ourselves of our vulnerability, that we are totally dependent on Hashem. This will help ensure that throughout the rest of the year we will live with the proper focus recognizing our responsibilities to Hashem and trying our best to fulfill them each and every day.

My friend sent me the following beautiful ideal:

If you spell out the letters of ברכה (*Bracha* - blessing):

Beis ב* ת

Reish ר* ש

Kof כ* פ

Hei ה* א

The last letters spell out the year 5781 תשפא - this year.

May we all have a year of revealed nissim, mazel, refuah and bracha.

Rabbi Asher Brander shared that Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller zt"l (1930-2020) who recently passed away from Corona at the age of 90 said the following about bracha:

A bracha is like having a car with a full tank of gas – you still need to drive the car.

Meaning, you need to take action. A car full of gas, but no driver won't go anywhere. Sukkos is a time of action.

We build sukkas, buy and shake the *arba minim*, we're busy hosting (during normal years) and cooking and going to shul and coming and going.

Imagine a year ahead of action for Hashem - doing things with Hashem on our minds. Seeing Him in our natural, everyday lives. How would that feel?

We wake up – Hello Hashem.

We get dressed – thank you Hashem.

We put on our glasses – I see you Hashem.

We speak to our family – I'm grateful Hashem for my loved ones around me.

We go out into the world – Hashem, you're everywhere.

What is one thing in our regular everyday lives where we can look for Hashem and see Him in the hidden miracles as if they are open miracles?