

Every month has its own letter of the aleph bet, its corresponding tribe, and its specific fixing. According to the Ishbitzer, the letter of Iyar is Vav, the tribe Is Issachar and what we have to fix is “hirhur” - “thinking”. In Hebrew there are two words for thinking - “machshava” and then “hirhur”.

Machshava means what I’m thinking with my head. Hirur the Gemara always says, is what king in my heart.

In my head, my thoughts change every split second, and even if I think the same thing, I don’t think of it the same way. Then there’s “hirhur be libo” - you know I can walk around with one thought in my heart my whole life, and the more real I am, the less it changes. And this is so deep, like the Gemara says; my heart is only telling my heart.

Now let’s talk about the tribe of Issachar - they know what to do in the moment. This is very important. A lot of people know what they have to do always - but what do you have to do in this moment? We were learning it at Purim - why is the megillah called a book and a letter? If I love someone very much, do I send them my book? A book is for the whole world ... but a letter - this is from my heart.

Remember what Amalek said to us just after we left Egypt. His vibrations made us so cold; only 40 days since the miracles of Egypt and we were so cut off that we made the golden calf. Amalek says to you, “Yeah, religions beautiful, G-ds beautiful, the ‘always’ you have, but the moment...” I know what G-d is telling to all the Jews, to the whole world, but what is He saying to me?

The truth is the Ribbono Shel Olam is sending each of us a letter every moment but you’ve got to know how to read it. And this is Issachar. Somebody says, “I don’t know what to do.” Watch the signs. How do you know how you are to somebody? It’s how well they read your signs.

The Izbitzer asks, “What’s the letter Vav?” Most of the letters need other letters to pronounce it - aleph is aleph lamed pe, gimmel is gimmel mem lamed. Vav is the one letter that I only need the same word to pronounce it. This means that nothing foreign gets to the inside of my heart. The two Vavs represent Emet and Tiferet. The Vav starts up in heaven and comes straight down, non-stop because the truth is non-stop. We have to know the truth in our heart and know the beauty in our hearts. But did you ever see anything uglier than someone talking about their own beauty? How do you make somebody else beautiful, by giving them honor, right? Kavod knows no words, it comes from the heart. When the students of Rabbi Akiva couldn’t make each other beautiful, so to speak, the month itself couldn’t bear it. This month, Nature is mamish us how beautiful the world can be.

We have to work our whole life on this one letter - the Vav - truth and beauty. When Moshe Rabbenu came down from Mt. Sinai he knew Am Yisroel’s neshamahs were very high, but their heads were in the wrong place, so he had to break the tablets. But what did the Golden Calf teach us? It was the end, and Moshe Rabbenu went right back up the Mount, back to the beginning. Gevalt, Hashem, I don’t want to learn from the Golden Calf this year; teach me how to learn right from the beginning.

Pesach and the redemption from Mitzrayim is G-d’s revelation. Sefiras ha- Omer means, what am I doing with it? Everybody has to count in order to fix his own neshamah. In one ways waiting for G-d’s , His revelation, and in another I have to search and trust my own heart in the deepest way. Iyar is the fixing of the heart. Nissan is the fixing of the head - a slave is listening only to his head.

What does it mean to be in exile? It's being so petty. Every year we are fixing again leaving Egypt until we receive the Torah. But this year I want to receive the Torah without making a golden calf.

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Numbers Chapter 25

א וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּשֵׁטִים;

י וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר.

10 And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying:

יֵאָמֵר פִּינְחָס בֶּן-אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן-אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן, הֵשִׁיב אֶת-חַמְתִּי מֵעַל בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּקַנְאוֹ אֶת-קַנְאַתִּי, בְּתוֹכָם; וְלֹא-כָלִיתִי. אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּקַנְאַתִּי

11 Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, in that he was very jealous for My sake among them, so that I consumed not the children of Israel in My jealousy.

יב לָכֵן, אֵמַר: הִנְנִי נֹתֵן לוֹ אֶת-בְּרִיתִי, שְׁלוֹם

12 Wherefore say: Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace;

יג וְהִיְתָה לוֹ וּלְזֶרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו, בְּרִית כְּהֵנָּה עוֹלָם--תַּחַת, אֲשֶׁר קָנָא לֵאלֹהֵיו, וַיִּכַּפֵּר, עַל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

13 and it shall be unto him, and to his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.'

יד וְשֵׁם אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמְּכָה, אֲשֶׁר הִכָּה אֶת-הַמְּדִינִית--זִמְרִי, בֶּן-סְלוּא: נָשִׂיא בֵּית-אָב, לְשִׁמְעֹנִי

The midrashic interpretation of lettering rather than words or sentences lies well within the earliest strata of this discourse. Take for example the equivalence of Pinchas with Eliyahu.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 82b) relates some of the miracles, that took place for Pinchas while carrying out the kanaut, (zeal) that protected him from the mob who wanted to avenge the killing of Zimri. Moshe and Aharon, obviously, do not condone zealotry to such a degree. They did not believe that one may kill one person to save another. This zeal is not characteristic of important leaders.

Indeed, the Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 9:7 states that Pinchas acted against the wishes of the sages. If so, why did he merit such great reward, and directly from HaShem? The Medrash Shir HaShirim Rabbah even says that "Pinchas zeh Eliyahu," the same Eliyahu HaNavi who will herald the coming of the Mashiach and universal peace.

Therefore, I give him My Covenant of Peace (Shalom). (Bamidbar 25:12)

...Another explanation of the severed 'vav' (the letter 'vav' if 'shalom' is cut) is that Pinchas is Eliyahu. Likewise, we find that 'Eliyahu' is written without the 'vav'(Aleph-lamed- yud-heh) and 'Ya'akov' is written with its 'vav' (Yud-ayin- kuf-VAV-bais), which is said to have been taken from Eliyahu as a surety until Moshiach comes and redeems his sons. This is what it says, "Ya'akov will exult, Israel will rejoice (yismach)" (Tehillim 14:7), the letters of 'yismach' being that of 'Moshiach,'

for there will be rejoicing in the Days of Moshiach when the 'vav' will be returned to Eliyahu making it complete.

(Ba'al HaTurim)

The Bal HaTurim points out that the word Shalom is written with a "cutoff" ("ketiya") letter Vav which looks like the letter Yud... making the word "Shlim" meaning "Shaleim" which means whole or complete. The talmud interprets this to mean that the promise of eternal Priesthood or Kehuna will only be applicable if the Kohen is complete and not blemished. In fact the priest cannot perform the rituals if he is blemished.

The Talmud interprets the very orthographic details of a single letter in such a dramatic way. the fact of this letter being disconnected in its stem with a break or cleavage signifies the Torah's demand for "shleimus" or perfection in anatomy. The very brokenness of the vav is paradoxically re-interpreted to mean wholeness in the covenantal relationship.

The great lamdan Rabbi Bechoffer commented once that the answer may be that there are times when completion... or perfection... can only come about through a diminution. The best example of that is a Bris Milah. Before a male child undergoes the removal of the foreskin he is considered like a Bal Mum. An Arel ... an uncircumcised Kohen... is forbidden to serve in the Beis HaMikdash. It is the Milah, that completes him... and makes him a Shalem. As the Mishna in Nedarim (31b) says: Gedolah Milah SheKol HaMitzvos SheAsah Avraham Avinu Lo Nikra Shalem Ad SheMal... SheNe-emar HisHalech Lofanai V'Hayah Tamim. Go before me and be complete.

Targum Yonosan comments on the words "Hininee Nosein Lo Es Brisi Shalom" according to those who say that Pinchas is really Eliyahu HaNavi. Pirkei D'Rab Elazar tells us that Eliyahu HaNavi is the Malach HaBris. It is therefore appropriate that we learn out the Din of Shleimus from a Vav Ketiya... a cutoff Vav. Because in this way Eliyahu testifies that the Shleimus of Klal Yisroel comes Davka through Milah...the cutting of the Orlah.

But I would like to stretch this motif a little by suggesting that the vav has deeper implications as it does in kabbalah. In the Zohar we learn that the vav is the very connection between the divine world and our lives, the only connection.

"The upper vav (vav elyona) is Tiferet midway between the six joints of the upper limbs. And as a result the vav represents the torso and the bris connected as one. The second lower vav is represented by the zaddik the foundation (yesod) of the world."

(Zohar Pinchas 236a)

If God gave Pinchas the gift of the Bris Shalom then why might the very word shalom be imperfect? Why might the vav be disconnected in its stem? If the stem represents the connection not only within the torso and bris but between the lower and upper worlds surely the flawed vav signifies a deeper fracture than initially implied. The Tetragrammaton has as its third character the letter vav connecting the yud and he (upper world) with the lower heh or this world of action and physicality.

The Tetragrammaton is the ineffable Name that signifies the Spirit that incarnates all reality but is split between the upper and lower worlds with the last letter representing the divine in exile requiring the suffering of man and the rituals of Torah and Mitzvot to "rescue it" and reconnect it/Her to

the divine above. It is represented by the sefira of malchus or Schechina; the ecclesia of the Am Yisrael. The vav then is the single access line between the Schechina and The Almighty. This connection known as "hamschacha" implies either the illusion of splitting (according the Chabad masters) or the incarnation of the divine in the world as yet to be fulfilled (Breslov).

By fracturing the vav in this paradoxical gift to Pinchas the written Torah maybe informing us in its earliest possible code, the undermining of the plain meaning of the narrative. Before the very midrashic tradition of interpretation, within the very core of the corpus of the text itself, the Sofer or scribe has already embedded a tradition (albeit differing between the Yemenite scribes and Ashkenazic as to where the disconnecting point of the stem should lie along the axis of the vav) that will demand explanation by later aggadic authorities in the talmud and midrash.

How ironic this fracture seems! Shalom means whole, perfect, integrated and peace. It has a positive connotation everywhere it is used in the Hebrew Bible which makes this orthographic oddity even more dramatic. The written text of the Torah has a shape, it has pauses, openings and ending markers by the careful use of space, larger and smaller lettering (cf the use of the small yud in the very name Pinchas!) so this unique marking is all the more startling.

Deeper still is the very connection between vav and yud. The Zohar discusses the small yud of his name as follows:

Come and see: The secret of the holy covenant is the letter Yud that adorns itself with a Supreme heavenly impression, NAMELY THE DIADEM OF YESOD OF ZEIR ANPIN and this is recorded forever in the everlasting covenant. And because Pinchas was zealous for the covenant, that letter Yud was inserted into the spelling of his name. The Yud in the spelling of 'Pinchas' is a small one, WHICH IS THE SECRET OF MALCHUT, THE SECRET OF DIADEM OF YESOD, FOR 'PINCHAS' HERE IS SPELLED WITH YUD, which is definitely the covenant, which emanated from the upper holy Yud BECAUSE MALCHUT EMANATED FROM THE YUD OF THE YUD HEI VAV HEI IN THE SECRET OF THE FATHER ESTABLISHING HIS DAUGHTER. And this is why PINCHAS has a perfect existence before the Holy King and shall never perish from the world. And because of this he was without guilt at Peor. For he never lost himself from the world's holiness. "or where were the upright cut off?" (Iyov 4:7): this refers to Nadab and Abihu, who did not totally perish from the world BECAUSE THEIR SOULS INCARNATED IN PINCHAS, WHO CORRECTED THEM.

It seems that there is deeper connection between the anomaly of the yud in Pinchas and the vav of shalom! In both interpretations the notion of Pinchas as the upright one who was never cut off from God and the reward of the Brish Shalom all point to the yesod the bris as the connecting signifier. Yet the vav is flawed! Yud is both representative of Bris/yesod as well as the letter of the Tetragrammaton, so we are working at upper and lower levels of meaning in this hierarchy. Pinchas seems to have perfected the Bris (Tikkun Habris) as Eliyahu who is present at every bris which accomplishes the fixing of the perfection of the Tetragrammaton or the fracture within the divine.

“Lachein Emor Hineni Nosain Lo Es Brisi Shalom” - “Therefore, say: behold, I give him My covenant of peace” (25:12)

Why was Pinchas rewarded with peace? The Munkatcher Rebbe answers that when a person sins, it creates a rift between him and Hashem. The sin of the Jewish people with Baal Peor created a tremendous break from Hashem in the very area of Pgam Habris. However, Pinchas restored the peace between the Bnei Yisrael and Hashem. Therefore, it was only fitting that he be rewarded in

kind with peace. Pinchasm by restoring the yesod.bris within, down here, also restored the harmony up there within the divine which warranted his eternal reward of Bris Shalom.

What remains perplexing is the imperfect vav in this reward; that unrepentant vav remains broken as well so what kind of peace is it that is flawed?

Rav Frand explains: The "vav" can sometimes be a "vav haChibur" -- a vav that connects [the vav used as a conjunctive "and"] and sometimes the "vav" can be used for distinction as a letter which divides, a vav of "machlokes", of division. That is why he considers the "vav" of Shalom to be split. When pursuing the cause of Shalom, a person must remember that there are two vavs. Sometimes the "vav haChibur" is appropriate and he should say, "Yes, here it is worthwhile to compromise". However, sometimes the "vav of chiluk" -- of separation -- is appropriate. Sometimes in the name of Shalom, a person must say "No, machlokes is better than Shalom at any price". Whereas this compelling homily deserves mention it does little justice to the irony and paradox inherent in the orthography of this mysterious unique fracture. I like his split characterization of this vav. At times a point of discontinuity may signify acceptance and blessing, at other times it demands separation.

If the deeper strata of narrative are to have meaning for us in an age of horror genocide and meaninglessness we must attempt to read or mis-read these sacred texts to keep their meaning as ultimate reflections of our deepest spirituality. For me the broken vav has a strangely modern tenor. In a world where black and white, good and evil are forever blurred, where my own spirituality lies between a wasteland and rare moments of divine inspiration and sense of wonder, I must read this brokenness as essential to my own self image and recovery/teshuva. The Pinchas internalized in all of us must confront the Zimri and the whoring nation, and the Tikkun of the Bris and its shleimus, its wholeness, ironically depends upon its awareness of brokenness and fracture. It is as if the earliest soferim has encoded this deep secret in the very text, the vav of shalom, left for a millenium until we midrashically unpack it in this dark age. What secret? What hidden message?

Maybe, just maybe, the healing text of brokenness. The refuge in knowing our sacred text, the Torah, understands the broken heart, the very fragmentation of our lives, the impossibility of anything but surrender, the unmanageability of the scale of things, the overpowering nature of the violence within. And despite this our sacred text claims there can be shalom, albeit fractured, but nevertheless integrated. Accepting the dark side of our selves we split the vav yet maintain the two halves within the full spelling. And it is this that gives hope. No moralistic pietistic perfection, rather brokenness and fragmentation.

We too are split in so many ways, so many selves, so many roles. We find little time for wholeness. In this unique vav I find a third grammatical description than "chibur" the so-called conjunctive versus distinctive, that of integrative, maintaining the integrity of separate disparate selves yet holding them, albeit in tension. This unique integrative vav must be split orthographically. Some (Yemenite soferim) place the disconnection close to the yud, feeling possibly the disconnection so close to the Father (chochma), the intellect, whereas others place it further down along the vav, "hamshacha", the connectivity to this world, in the spiritual torso of Tiferet at the level of the heart. In either tradition of soferim/scribes there is agreement in the very notion of the split into two separate small halves of the vav.

At the deepest level where we project textual meaning and archetypes onto the divine, this broken vav implies for me that the connection between upper and lower worlds remains fractured even within the divine (shevirat hakeilim is alive and well!). That all our human attempts and

crossing this divide despite all the mesiras nefesh and martyrdom, despite all the learning fasting and devekut, remains elusive. The chlal hapanui the vacated space remains real and unbridgeable. The divine remains infinite in its pleroma and we remain human and powerless. Although this sounds pessimistic (and it is!) the vav ketiya the paradoxical vav also promises the possibility of re-union, it remains aligned with its lower counterpart, begging for the scribe to one day fill in the gap, the zaddik to force that drop of ink (maybe the one Moses had saved by not filling in the yud of his description as anav, humble "ve-haish Moshe haya anav mikol adam" that extra drop of ink he placed on his forehead which then projected out like a horn (midrash).) The zaddik has the possibility of filling in this gap in the vav by using the yud of Moshe or the yud of Pinchas, just a drop.

Reb Nachman teaches us in Likutei Mehoran 64, that the chlal hapanui that vacated space apparently absent of the divine, is a paradox. That in truth there is no place devoid of the Infinite One by definition, and that the so called tzimtzum, (unlike Chabad for which it is an illusion) although real, is filled with Him. Our task then is to see Him in His absence. The zaddik has perfected this and has already "crossed over (ivri), the vacated space to the divine pleroma. The zaddik has already bridged the gap in the vav.

This holds out hope for me in this most sacred of texts, in that the original plain meaning of perfection, which had been subverted once by the soferim, and had been internalized as brokenness and fracture, now has the chance for healing and shleimus. In my connecting to the zaddik I hold out the hope for recovery from the splitting and fracturing of the soul and for all of us.