



Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community

Tevet: Finding the Good in the Bad

Elianna Goldish

The holiday of Chanukah and the month of Tevet offer a series of excellent lessons for us in how to view things in a positive light - literally and figuratively.

Every Hebrew month has a letter of the *aleph-bet* that represents it; for the month of Tevet, it's the letter *ayin*, which also means 'eye'. One of the *shorashim* of the name of the month of Tevet [טבת] is *טוב* [טב], or good. We are tasked with rectifying the *ayin hara* (evil eye) and looking at everything with an *ayin tov*, a "good eye."

Tevet includes a number of sad events in Jewish history. We fast on *Asarah B'Tevet* to commemorate the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia. Queen Esther was brought to Achashveirosh on the first of Tevet, and he chose her to be Queen on *Asarah B'Tevet* as well. Ezra, who helped maintain and reestablish Judaism upon the building of the second *Beit Hamikdash*, died during the month of Tevet, as did Nechemiah. The Septuagint (translation of Torah into Greek) was commissioned during Tevet.

But Tevet is not all sadness. When Adam HaRishon saw the days were starting to get shorter and the nights longer, he thought the world was coming to an end, at which point he fasted for eight days, ending at the beginning of Tevet. However, when those eight days passed, Adam realized the days were starting to lengthen and the world was returning to how it was before. For eight days he celebrated, and the following year, he made a 16-day holiday - the first eight of which correspond to the eight days of Chanukah, and the last eight of which end on *Asarah B'Tevet*.

On each of the eight days of Chanukah, we light a *menorah* consisting of eight branches, to help us remember the miracle of the oil and how Hashem is always there for us even in the darkest of times. They increase each night and help us build this positive

outlook within ourselves. (In the times of Mashiach, when recognizing the positives will be easier, we will light according to Beit Shammai - decreasing nightly - as this reminder will not be necessary.)

The *mazel* for the month of Tevet is Capricorn, or the *Gedi* (goat). Midrash Kohelet teaches us that at the age of ten (Tevet is the tenth month), a child 'jumps like a goat,' an important stage in the maturing process. It is a transition from a state of immaturity to a state of maturity, to looking at what occurs simplistically to understanding there are greater levels.

Our sages say that the month of Tevet will be a happy and joyful month in the future. Even now, we can look at all the bad things that have occurred and try to see the good that came out of them. For example, Esther's being chosen as Queen was seemingly tragic, but ultimately led to her saving the Jewish people. We need to take this lesson and learn to look for the good in things, and when we do so, we will notice how Hashem is always there for us and doing what is best for us in the long run.

We can look at the month of Tevet as a month of continued joy and happiness. In the words of Albus Dumbledore, "Happiness can be found even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn the light on." We can make this month a positive and happy month, starting with the end of Chanukah, by carrying that light all the way through to the end of the month of Tevet.

Sources:

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3922340/jewish/About-the-Month-of-Tevet.htm

https://www.ou.org/holidays/rosh_chodesh_tevet/

[The Month of Tevet According to Sefer Yetzirah](#)

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (movie version)

Elianna Goldish is in 9th grade at Chaviva High School.

The Book for Your Soul

Rabbi Arieh Friedner

One of the best parts of living in and near the Old City of Jerusalem was having a constant stream of minyanim available at the Kotel. It was sometimes a crutch to know I could wake up late and still find a minyan at the holiest place in the world. But in the more meaningful moments, sudden inspiration to pray at the Kotel could be met by near-instant availability.

On my way to the Kotel one morning, a group of 9 praying men invited me to be their tenth before I could make it down the stairs. This minyan overlooked the Kotel, so it was close enough!

While I davened with them, I noticed something was different about this group. They were focused and intense. I caught a glimpse at a siddur that one of the men was using and I saw words I had never seen. Names of angels? All I knew was that these people were on a plane of connection and elevation that I had never even considered.

It bothered me that there was a level of Torah wisdom that I knew nothing about, so I brought the issue with me to that week's Shabbos lunch at the house of one of my Rabbis, Rav Yoel

Racovsky. I asked Rav Yoel how I could perhaps one day be able to use a siddur like that and understand it. He told me that as long as I have a book that I'm learning now that is challenging and inspiring, I was doing just fine. One day, he said, that book might become a little too easy and predictable. At that point, I should find another book that digs a little deeper. One book will lead to another, and maybe one day that mysterious siddur would be next.

His answer was simple and empowering. I could remain focused, for now, on what was in front of me. Meanwhile, I could maintain hope that there would eventually be new understanding when the next book comes along.

Whenever I would see a new book on the table in Yeshiva that looked intriguing, I would pick it up. When someone referenced an author that interested me, I would try it out. In numerous circumstances, books that had proved incomprehensible to me would later become stalwarts of my studies.

One such book was *Aish Kodesh*, by Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, known as the Piaseczna Rebbe. This book, "Holy Fire," was written by the Rebbe amidst the fires of the Holocaust in the Warsaw Ghetto until its liquidation in 1943. This manuscript holds the precious words of spiritual resistance infused by Rav Shapira into his followers. Inspired by many people who had been moved by this work, I purchased it and opened it many times. And yet, the words never seemed to make sense to me. The language was too poetic. He jumped from treasured sources I didn't recognize to parables I couldn't understand. But I was determined to one day break through.

In 2015 I was able to staff a trip to Poland with students from Ohio. Being in Poland for my first time and walking on the streets of our past was eye opening. Feeling the disturbing aura of the camps was heart-breaking. Our group stayed in Warsaw for Shabbos. In the afternoon we went on a tour and approached the ghetto where the Rebbe had left his legacy. I nervously appreciated the opportunity to walk on the same stones where our dear grandparents were forced to stay until their demise. I gazed upon the buildings, looking hopelessly for the room where the Rebbe had pondered how to lift up the multitudes of downtrodden souls.

When we returned to our hotel, I reached into my bag and pulled out the *Aish Kodesh*. With two students by my side, I began to read the words. My eyes grew wide as, suddenly, the meaning of the entry leapt off the paper and dove directly into my heart. "The holiness of the Torah," the Rebbe wrote, "reflects the holiness of the Jewish people." The Rebbe explains that while the Torah can be perceived as a physical text made of ink and animal skins, in reality it is infused with Divine energy. It contains within it spirituality beyond its physical bounds. So too, a Jew may seem like a physical entity alone. But because of the soul within us, we cannot be limited or held down. That's how we know we were meant to be wound up with the Torah. Two objects with power and beauty beyond their physically observable features.

Perhaps my soul needed to experience Poland. Perhaps I needed to walk the streets that the Piaseczna Rebbe once walked. Perhaps I needed to help guide young people learning to deal with the challenges of the Holocaust. I can't be sure. But the book was unlocked.

Week after week, I couldn't put the *Aish Kodesh* down. Every entry changed my life, taking me deeper and deeper into the realm of emunah and resilience. Just like that first lesson I read, I had experienced my own perceived limitations miraculously open through comprehending the holy words on those pages.

In December of 2018, I sat at a Shabbaton in front of a new book. In the weeks and months prior, I had been ingesting *Yichud Hisbodedus* by Rav Avraham Tzvi Kluger (*One* in English.) A student from one of my Israel trips sat next to me and asked me if I had a favorite Jewish book. I took a long moment to gather my thoughts.

"My favorite book," I told her, "is whichever book is talking to my soul at any given moment. Our souls are deep and vast and larger than we can comprehend. If you're lucky enough, Hashem will help you find a book that challenges you, inspires you and unlocks the next layer of your soul."

Look for your book. When you find it, don't read it. Don't learn it. Breathe it. Use it as a key to unlock the next level of discovering who you are and what you can become.

**Sponsored for a *refuah sheleimah* for those in need
in the Young Israel and greater Cleveland community and beyond.**

Rabbi Moshe Berger
Scholar in Residence
(216) 533-5233
moshe@mmberger.com

Sarah Rudolph
Editor
(216) 291-8918
schrudolph@gmail.com

Ronnie Shulman
Sponsorships
(614) 507-3855
rshulman1@gmail.com

YOUNG ISRAEL OF GREATER CLEVELAND

Rabbi Naphtali Burnstein, *Rabbi*
Rabbi Aharon Lebovics, *Associate Rabbi (Hebrew Academy)*
Yank Gecovich, *President*

Beachwood Branch
2463 S. Green Road
Beachwood, Ohio 44122

Hebrew Academy Branch
1860 S. Taylor Road
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

