

The Month of Sivan According to Sefer Yetzirah

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According to Sefer Yetzirah, to each month of the Jewish calendar there corresponds a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, a zodiac sign, one of the twelve tribes of Israel, a sense, and a controlling limb of the body.

The Third Month

Sivan is the third of the twelve months of the Jewish calendar. It is the month in which God descended on Mt. Sinai and gave the Torah to the Jewish people. As noted elsewhere, there are only three months that are referred to ordinally in the Torah in conjunction with the exodus from Egypt: Nisan, Iyar, and Sivan,¹

In the third month of the exodus from Egypt, they came to the Sinai desert.²

A recurring theme is that the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai is intrinsically linked with the number 3. For instance, the sages state,³

Blessed is the Merciful one who gave a threefold Torah⁴ to a threefold people,⁵ by the third,⁶ on the third day,⁷ in the third month.

In this quote, God is referred to as the “Merciful one.” God’s attribute of mercy is itself related to the number 3, for it is the third of the seven emotive attributes of the soul (corresponding in Kabbalah to Jacob, the third of the three patriarchs, “the pillar of the Torah”).

Letter: Zayin (ז)

Though Sivan is itself the third month of the year, the letter associated with it in Sefer Yetzirah (the letter by which God created the month of Sivan in time) is the letter *zayin* (ז), whose numerical value is 7. Both numbers, 3 and 7, are referred to by the sages as “beloved.” About the third, the sages state, “Forever, the third is beloved”⁸ and about the seventh they state, “All sevenths are beloved.” Indeed, the numbers 3 and 7 are



strongly related to one another in Kabbalah, as 3 represents the intellectual realm and 7 the lower, emotive realm.⁹

The connection between 3 and 7 is especially seen in regard to the giving of the Torah.¹⁰ The Torah, given in Sivan (the third month), was given on Shabbat, the seventh day of the week. According to Rabbi Yossi,¹¹ that Shabbat was also the seventh day of Sivan. According to the Arizal, the tribe of *Zebulun* corresponds to the month of Sivan. The name *Zebulun* (זְבוּלֹן) begins with the letter *zayin* (ז). It is the only *zayin* in the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

In terms of its shape, the letter *zayin* is made up of a letter *vav* with a crown attached to its head.



This represents the crown that every Jewish soul received at the giving of the Torah.¹² The value of the word “crown” (כִּתְרוֹ) is 620, and the text of the Ten Commandments¹³ given at Sinai contains exactly 620 letters.

The sages associate the letter *zayin* with the word “this” (זֶה). This word alludes to the unique nature of Moses’ prophecy,

All the prophets begin their prophecies with the word “So [says the Almighty...]” above and beyond them is Moses who begins with the word “This [is what the Almighty says].”¹⁴

The difference between the prophecies of Moses and all other prophets is compared to the difference between looking through a transparent pane of glass and looking through an opaque pane of glass.¹⁵ Moses was born and passed away on the 7th day of the month of Adar, the 12th month of the year, where 12 is the *gematria* of “this” (זֶה).

The number 7 is also connected with the Torah readings of the month of Sivan. Every year during Sivan we read *parshat Beha’alotcha*, the third portion of the Book of Numbers. In this *parshah*, there are two verses that are separated from the rest of the text by two upside down letters *nun* (נ).

When the Ark traveled, Moses would say, “Rise God, and Your enemies shall scatter before You, and those who hate You shall flee from You.” And when it [the Ark] came to rest, he would say, “Return God to the multitude of thousands of Israel.”¹⁶

The sages explain that in effect these two verses are an entirely separate book of the Torah. According to this reckoning, the text of the Book of Numbers actually contains three separate books of the Torah: the text before these two verses, the two verses, and the text following the two verses. Thus, the total number of books of the Torah (i.e., the

Pentateuch, because it is usually divided into only 5 books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) is 7! This division of the Torah is alluded to in the verse, “She carved her pillars, seven.”¹⁷ Note also that the division of the Torah into 5 books alludes to the letter *hei* (ה) and the division into 7 books alludes to the letter *zayin* (ז). And, together, these two letters spell the word “this” (הַז), as above.

Mazal: Gemini (Twins)

The Zodiac sign of the twins first and foremost alludes to the two identical Tablets of the Covenant given to Moses at Mt. Sinai.

When a bride and groom attain the highest degree of connection, they are described as twins. The day on which God gave the Torah to the Jewish people is described as a wedding between the two. In the Song of Songs,¹⁸ God refers to His bride, the Jewish people, as perfect (תַּמְתִּי). The sages read this word as “twin” (תְּאוֹמֵתִי).

The archetypal twins in the Torah are Jacob and Esau. Far from being identical, Jacob and Esau represent spiritual opposites. In every Jew, Jacob represents the good inclination while Esau represents the evil inclination. Nonetheless, through the power of the Torah, given on the month of Sivan, even the relationship between these diametrically opposed twins can be rectified and the two can unite. For this reason, the Torah commands us, “You shall love God with all of your heart.”¹⁹ The sages explain that “all of your heart” refers to both inclinations. Likewise, between the two Tablets of the Covenant, the right tablet—which contains the first 5 commandments—primarily addresses the good inclination (symbolized by Jacob) and the left tablet—containing the final 5 commandments, beginning with “You shall not murder,” “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not steal”—primarily addresses the evil inclination (symbolized by Esau).

Tribe: Zebulun

The tribe of Zebulun shared a special bond with the tribe of Isaachar. They were born one after another to their mother, Leah. In the Land of Israel, they inherited lands that were adjacent, and temporally, they correspond to the two months Iyar and Sivan that follow one another. But, the heart of their bond was in their agreement to support one another. Isaachar was a tribe of scholars who excelled in Torah study. Zebulun was a tribe of successful merchants and seafarers. They agreed to split their material and spiritual wealth equally.

As such, we might expect that Isaachar would correspond to the month of Sivan, in which the Torah was given and Zebulun to the month of Iyar. But, one of the analytic

principles of Kabbalah is that the cause is inherently higher than the effect which it causes. Since, at the basic level, Zebulun's willingness to split their material wealth allowed Isaachar to devote themselves to the Torah, it is Zebulun that corresponds to Sivan and the giving of the Torah. Zebulun's material sacrifices are what sustain the Torah and therefore, in the end the Torah is in their merit.

Indeed, the Arizal explains that the origin of the soul of Zebulun is in the *sefirah* of crown, above the *sefirah* of wisdom, which is the origin of Isaachar's soul.

This fact further ties the tribe of Zebulun with the month of Sivan. In spite of their bond with their brethren in Issachar, the Jews of the tribe of Zebulun had to study Torah for themselves too. Since their soul-root is in crown, the Torah that they were particularly connected to is also at the level of crown. This is especially relevant to the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, because the particular level revealed then, the Ten Commandments, is related to the *sefirah* of crown. As noted, the *gematria* of crown (כתר) is 620, the number of letters in the Ten Commandments.

Sense: Walking

When the Book of Formation describes walking as the sense of the month of Sivan it is referring not only to physical walking but to the spiritual sense of progress or development. An individual who possesses a sense of walking has a particular keenness in moving forward and always striving for more. The Torah was given so that mankind could progress, and as such the Torah is the ultimate instrument of progress. Without it, we would be relegated to walking around in circles, unable to discern progress from merely passing time.

Each of the many laws that are learnt from the 613 commandments of the Torah is called a *halachah* (הלכה) in Hebrew, a word that stems from the same root as "walking" (הילוך). The final state of rectification that progress is leading us towards is the new reality called the World to Come. In that fast approaching reality, we will be free of all physical necessities and will be able to devote ourselves to studying the Torah and deepening our connection with the Creator, all in peace and perfect harmony. The prophet describes God as the ultimate source of all that occurs in the world with the words, "The walkings of the world are His."²⁰ Since the word "walkings" (הליכות) is almost identical to the word for laws of the Torah, *halachot* (הלכות), the sages explain that one who studies the laws of the Torah, "the world is his," referring to the World to Come.²¹

The Torah gives us the power to progress, to move forward, by healing our psyches and by directing us in how to find and elevate the fallen sparks of Divinity that are

scattered throughout our present reality. Collecting and elevating the sparks locked in our material reality was the special trademark of the tribe of Zebulun, whom Moses blessed with the words, “Be happy Zebulun as you go out...”²² to seek the fallen sparks.

Even though angels are higher spiritual beings, they lack the sense of progress and therefore are called “standers,” indicating their relatively static stance. In comparison, the Jewish people, who possess souls that received the Torah at Mt. Sinai are called “walkers.”²³ The sense of walking, or progress, ensures that a person is always increasing his or her commitment to the Torah and to the Almighty, the Giver of the Torah. In merit of this ever-increasing sense of advancement the sages explain that the righteous never rest, neither in this world nor in the World to Come. Even though the World to Come is a state of eternal rest (an eternal day of Shabbat) and reward for the good that one accomplished in this world, nonetheless one continues advancing “from strength to strength,” experiencing an eternity of infinite progress.

Controller: Left Foot

In every pair that contains a left side and a right side, the left is considered relatively physical and mundane while the right, relatively spiritual and heavenly. In the words of the sages, this duality is expressed in the saying, “He [God] stretched out His right hand and created the heavens; He stretched out His left hand and created the earth.”

In respect to the controller, the month that compliments Sivan is Nisan. The sense of Nisan is speech and its controller is the right foot. As explained in the article on Nisan, speech is the instrument by which leadership is exercised. Clearly speech and walking are both related to the ability to lead, but speech leads others,²⁴ while walking leads one’s own body. Thus, we see that in this pair too, speech is relatively more spiritual, thus relating to the right foot while walking is more physical, thus relating to the left foot.

Moreover, a sense of progress and oratorical skills come together in the best leaders. The connection between walking and talking is found in the verse, “He who walks with sincerity shall walk with confidence.”²⁵ Sincerity and confidence are the inner experiential aspect of the two *sefirot*, acknowledgment and victory, respectively. In the human form, victory and acknowledgment correspond to the two feet. Confidence gives one the ability to speak clearly without stuttering, the oratorical equivalent of stumbling while walking. Indeed, the verse implies that to lead with confidence, one must first be a sincere individual, possessing an earnest approach to life and to one’s duties, always ready to move forward.

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1. The average value of the names of these three months is 169, or 13^2 .
 2. Exodus 19:1.
 3. *Shabbat* 88a.
 4. The Bible comprises three divisions, the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Writings.
 5. The Jewish people are ritually divided in three: priests, Levites, and Israelites.
 6. Moses was the third of the three siblings, Miriam, Aaron, Moses.
 7. The Torah was given on the third day of the people's abstinence from marital relations in order to receive the Torah in purity. See Exodus 19:16.
 8. *Tanchuma*, *Yitro* 10.
 9. 3 and 7 are also part of the same series of covenant numbers. 3 is the second and 7 is the third. They correspond to the covenant God made with the Jewish people on the Torah and the covenant with Noah, respectively.
 10. As mentioned above, mercy is the inner experiential motivator of the *sefirah* of beauty, the third emotive attribute of the heart (corresponding to the third patriarch, Jacob), But, when counting from the first *sefirah*, crown, the source of God's 13 Principles of Mercy (and including knowledge), beauty, the attribute of mercy, is the seventh *sefirah*.
 11. *Shabbat* 87b.
 12. *Ibid.* 88a. The sages explain that 600,000 angels descended upon the 600,000 souls, each carrying with it two crowns, in merit of the two words spoken by the Jewish people, "We shall do and we shall hear." Thus, though there were 2 crowns, they were carried together, as one, by a single angel.
 13. Exodus
 14. *Sifrei*, beginning of parshat *Matot*
 15. *Yevamot* 49b.
 16. Numbers 10:35-6.
 17. Proverbs 9:1.
 18. Song of Songs 5:2.
 19. Deuteronomy 6:5.
 20. Habakuk 3:4.
 21. The *gematrias* of the verse "The walkings of the world are His" (הַלְּיָכוּת עוֹלָם לוֹ) and the value of the idiom based on it, "*Halachot*—the world is his" (הַלְּכוּת עוֹלָם לוֹ) together equal $1296 = 36^2$. When two words or groups of words together equal a perfect square, this indicates that they complement one another and indeed go together. But, 36 is the value of the final word of the verse, "his" (לוֹ), implying that the reward of the World to Come is that indeed in a sense the world is the *tzadik's*, as he is given the Divine power to direct the world towards its ultimate goal of becoming one with the Creator.
 22. Deuteronomy 33:18.
 23. Zachariah 3:7.
 24. In the Bible, the tongue is idiomatically connected with walking, as in the prohibition to refrain from gossip, where the verb used is "Do not walk to gossip..." (Leviticus 19:16).
 25. Proverbs 10:9.