

# SEASONS OF THE MOON

The Month of Kislev

Kislev / 5758 November 29, 1997 - December 29, 1997

**K**islev's sign is the Bow (*Keshet*, in Hebrew). At the beginning of Kislev the first rainbow was seen after the Flood. The rainbow symbolizes the pact that G-d made with Noah never again to destroy the world with water. The symbolism of the bow also echoes the military victory of Chanukah —

## THIS MONTH'S SIGN KESHET / SAGITTARIUS

the bow of the purity of Israel vanquishing the bow of the impurity of Greece.

Mystically, the bow symbolizes the power of prayer: The closer the bow-string is drawn downward, the higher the arrow soars skyward; so too, the deeper the source of a prayer, the higher it reaches into the Heavens.

**F**ire consists of two powers — the power to burn, and the power to illuminate. In the days of Chanukah, the *Chashmonaim* used both of these powers. Fire to sear and eradicate the impurity of the Greeks, and the fire of the Torah to light up the *Beis Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) once it had been re-sanctified.

## ELIMINATION OR ILLUMINATION?

it is totally eradicated, for then Good will blaze out and shine.

A fire to burn out Evil, and a fire to illuminate Good.

There is a famous dispute between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel as to how to light the Chanukah candles: Beis Shammai says that you start with eight candles on the first night and work down to one on the last. Beis Hillel says you start with one and work up to eight.

The power to burn always starts with much and reduces it to nothing, to ashes. That's the idea of starting with eight candles and reducing them to nothing: Beis Shammai held that the essential aspect of Chanukah to be communicated to future generations was that you can't leave even the tiniest part of evil in the world. It must be burned until

The power of light, however, is always something which grows stronger and stronger: Beis Hillel considered that the lighting of the *chanukia* should stress the triumph of the light — for where there is light, the darkness must flee. So Beis Hillel holds we should light one candle on the first night, and then that light grows and grows until it fills the world and there is no place left for the darkness.

Yosef's two sons, Ephraim and Menashe, are these two powers of fire and light rooted in all of Israel. Menashe is the "negative" power, the power to burn and destroy evil, with the result that the light will shine. And Ephraim is the "positive" power; the power to illuminate, so that darkness can have no place to rule.

Just as ultimately the Jewish People will be called by the name Ephraim, the power of illumination, similarly, the *halacha* follows Beis Hillel, to start with one candle and add more light every night



ELIMINATION OR ILLUMINATION? *continued*

until the darkness disappears.

**THE CHILDREN OF UNDERSTANDING**

When you close your eyes and think of Chanukah, what comes into your mind?

The lights of the *chanukia*. The *dreidel* spinning. The aroma of *latkes* and doughnuts. And of course — the sound of “*Maoz Tzur*.”

In that beautiful stirring Chanukah song, we sing of the “Children of Understanding.” Who were these “Children of Understanding” and what is their connection to Chanukah?

Another question.

The sign of Kislev is the bow or the rainbow — *keshet*. On the festival of Lag B’Omer there is a custom to shoot arrows from a bow and arrow. Is there a connection between the bow of Lag B’Omer and the bow of the Kislev, the month of Chanukah?

Lag B’Omer is the day of the passing of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. The day on which he left this world, Rabbi Shimon revealed many of the hidden secrets of the Torah, the hidden light.

**The revelation of the hidden light is like the revelation of the colors in the rainbow.**

A rainbow reveals the anatomy of white light. White light seems indivisible. No detail can be discerned in its pure whiteness. The rainbow reveals the secret of the white light. It shows us how the white light is really composed of all the colors.

Rabbi Shimon told his son Rabbi Elazar “My son, do not expect the coming of Mashiach until you see the self-

*illuminated rainbow.*”

Just as the coming of Mashiach is compared to the revelation of the hidden light, so too Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, is a symbol of the revelation of the hidden light, the hidden Torah.

This is the connection between the bow — the sign of the month of Kislev — in which the hidden light is revealed on Chanukah, and the rainbow which reveals the hidden colors within it.

Of all Yaakov Avinu’s sons, the one most closely associated with Torah study is Yissaschar. Yissaschar was born on Shavuot, the festival of the Torah’s giving. His conception, however, was on Chanukah.

Thus, Yissaschar himself, his very entrance into this world, connects Chanukah to Shavuot. Just as the conception of life is hidden from us, manifest only after the fact, so too Chanukah symbolizes the hidden light of the Torah.

Birth represents the ultimate revelation of that which is hidden. Shavuot too, is the ultimate revelation — the Torah revealed in light and sound on Mount Sinai. Shavuot is the Torah’s “birthday” and the birth of the Jewish Nation.

The “Children of Understanding” that we sing of in *Maoz Tzur* are the children who inherited this connection — the connection of Chanukah to Shavuot. They are the children of Yissaschar who symbolize the connection between the hidden and the revealed Torah. As the Book of Chronicles says, the children of Yissaschar are “*the knowers of understanding of the times.*”

# SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES

*If I close my eyes  
I can see it now:  
A suburban hearth  
with a smokeless fire.  
A lounge with two ends as far  
as east from west;  
In this corner — a chanukia  
In this, the West’s bequest.*

*In this corner, a tree  
with lights flashing,  
so appealing, so concealing.  
And in this,  
a small light singing  
above the static  
of a frozen world  
going nowhere  
fast.*

*And a young child’s eyes  
darting,  
smarting  
from the smoke  
that gets in your eyes.*

Sources: *Elimination Or Illumination* - Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in *L'Torah Ul'Moadim*; *The Children Of Understanding* - *Divrei Hayanim* 1 12:33, Bnei Yissaschar