

Cantor's Corner July 2024 | Tammuz 5784

You may not know that according to Jewish mystical teachings, each month brings down the energy of a particular Hebrew letter and a special talent or one of the five senses. The Book of Formation (*Sefer Yetzirah*) associates this month, Tammuz, with the sense of sight and the letter *chet*. These are spiritual tools provided by God to help us repair the world. But how do we crack their code? A good place to begin is with their first mention in the Torah. Where does the letter *chet* first appear, and what is the first mention of sight? Both appear within the first four verses of [Genesis \(1:2-4\)](#).

And the earth was chaos and void, and *darkness* (*choshech*, which begins with the letter *chet*) was upon the face of the deep ... God said let there be light, and there was light. God **saw** the light that it was good ...

Here is a paradox; *Seeing* is something that generally requires light. It is no coincidence that its first mention in the Torah is in relation to seeing light: ("God **saw** the **light** that it was good"). In contrast, the first appearance of the letter *chet* is in the word "darkness." Our sages teach, "Everything follows after its first appearance," so, the essence of the letter *chet* must associate with darkness. The *Sefer Yetzirah* presents us then with a riddle, and a challenge: The energy of repairing for this month requires that we learn to see in the *dark*. As we find ourselves mid-summer in the lightest time of the year, what can we learn about sight and light through darkness? What is the riddle here?

Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh offers the following teaching on light concerning the prayer recited before the morning *Shema* – the *Yotzer Or*. In that prayer which is meant to be said as the sun rises, we thank God for the luminaries that shower warmth, gladness, healing and light upon creation. One sentence appears both in the first paragraph of this prayer and again in the last, but with a slight change in its wording. It reads at first as follows:

In God's goodness God renews, in each instant, constantly, the work of creation.

Meaning that in each instant of time, creation reverts to chaos and is born anew by God's reaffirmed will for its existence. In each moment, we are dissolved and reconstituted, faster than the blink of an eye. Like a movie appears continuous even though there is space between each frame, so does our existence appear continuous even though it dissolves and reconstitutes within each second. Wow!! What an opportunity in each moment to refresh and begin anew!

And yet, our reconstituted universe is not identical to the one that dissolved. Something has changed. Progress has occurred. In general, [Kabbalah](#) explains that more of God's surrounding light has entered our world. The new universe, the reconstituted one, is slightly more expanded than its predecessor, which means it can hold more light. The

new universe is always one step more enlightened, literally. This idea of holding more light always reminds me of summer.

This fact of progress is also hinted to by the subtle shift in the wording of the verse when it appears again at the end of the prayer. There it reads:

God renews, in God's goodness, at each instant, constantly, the work of creation.

Rabbi Ginsburgh explains this subtle reordering of words: At first, the *good* precedes the renewal and stands, as it were, outside the process. In the second verse it has slipped inside the bounds of creation and has now become an actual part of the world. The difference between the first verse and the second is that the world has stretched so that some increment of *good* that before couldn't fit within our world, has now found the space to slip inside. Thus, more light = greater goodness.

And so we have two yardsticks for measuring the progress of creation. One is that in each moment more light enters our universe, and one is that in each instant more good comes through. In fact these are really identical statements as our original verse proves.

God saw the light, that it was good.

May this month of Tammuz and the longer, more carefree days of summer fill you with light and goodness. May you drink deeply of all the warmth they bring and inhale fully a sense of relaxation and peace, secure in the knowledge that as the wheel of the year brings us more light and more goodness, we can soak it in truly, and nurture it so that when time requires, we can return it out into the world with same compassion, hope and intention with which we were blessed by God in receiving it...