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Introduction

The Sages state that each of the twelve months of the year contains a unique spiritual concept (power).^[1] No month is exactly the same in concept as the month before it or after it. Therefore, each of the months contains a certain renewal, a new facet, which the other months do not have.

The power of the month of Cheshvan is called the sense of smell (*rei'ach*).

Mar-Cheshvan: "Bitter" Cheshvan

The month of Cheshvan, as is well known, is called "*Mar-Cheshvan*" ("bitter" Cheshvan). Rochel Imeinu passed on in the month of Cheshvan^[2], and the *Midrash* states that she weeps bitterly for her children in exile, as it is written, "*Wailing, bitter weeping, Rachel weeps for her children*".^[3] The word "bitter" in Hebrew is "*mar*", hence the connection between Rochel Imeinu and *Mar-Cheshvan*.

Bitterness is usually associated as a bad thing. The waters of the *Mei Merivah* were bitter, and our people in the desert could not drink it.

The bitterness associated with the month of Cheshvan, however, is only one side of the coin. The holy power found in Cheshvan is that the future *Beis HaMikdash* will be built in this month. The Sages state that in the month of Cheshvan, Amalek will be destroyed, and then Hashem's Name will be complete, which will allow for the third *Beis HaMikdash*. Additionally, it is the month which comes directly after the holy month of Tishrei.

Therefore, the month of Cheshvan is double-sided. It is "*Mar-Cheshvan*", so it has bitterness in it, but it is also the month when the future *Beis HaMikdash* will be rebuilt, and then it will be turned from a bitter month into a month of rebuilding the *Beis HaMikdash*, may it come speedily. It will be turned from *Mar-Cheshvan*, "bitter" Cheshvan, into the opposite of *mar*\bitterness - for it will be turned into "*Rom*"-Cheshvan, which means "elevated" Cheshvan.

The bitterness in Cheshvan is symbolized by the bitter waters of the *Mei Merivah*, which were bitter waters that miraculously turned sweet. Since the month of Cheshvan contains the spiritual concept of *rei'ach*\smell, this means that the bitterness of Cheshvan is coming from a foul-smelling odor, which is called *rei'ach ra*. It is like a carcass that gives off a foul smell, and like a tanner who works in a foul-smelling place.

From a spiritual viewpoint, a sin also emits a foul-smelling odor. Sin is described as a foul, rotting, and

bitter smell. This is the implication of *Mar-Cheshvan* - the bitterness of this month stems from the foul smell of sin. (In the future, this bitterness will be turned to sweetness, where instead the good smell of Cheshvan will be revealed.)

The only sense which the *neshamah* (the Divine soul) enjoys is the sense of smell, as our Rabbis revealed regarding smelling the *besamim* on Motzei Shabbos, which gives enjoyment to our soul.^[4] Scent is experienced through the nose, which is called *af*, and the term *af* can also mean *charon af*, the wrath of Hashem. This further implies that the bitterness in the month of Cheshvan is because of the *charon af* of Hashem that is still present in our times.

Although there is bitterness in Cheshvan, there is also the revelation of the sense of smell in Cheshvan - the sense that the *neshamah* enjoys. So there is both a 'bad smell' and a 'good smell' of Cheshvan. The 'bad smell' in Cheshvan is like the foul-smelling odor [of sin], like the odor which is emitted from a tannery, where animal hides are burned.

Animal hides are called *ohr* (עור) spelled with the letter *ayin*. In contrast to this, the good smell of Cheshvan comes from *ohr* (אור) spelled with an *aleph*, as in the original *kosnos ohr* which Adam and Chavah wore, which the Torah first spells with the letter *aleph*, before the sin of Adam and Chavah. The blessing over a good smell (*birkas harei'ach*) which is recited over fresh *hadassim* corresponds to this original smell of before the sin, which comes from *ohr* spelled with an *aleph* (אור).

An imprint, a "*roishem*", is also known as a *rei'ach*, the "smell" of something. When something isn't here and only a mark of it remains, this is called its *rei'ach*, its smell - or its *roishem*, its imprint. It is also described as the concept of *achor*, "indirect" - when we only sense a matter in an indirect manner, from behind it, and not its actual essence, just a mark of it.

In contrast to this, good smell is also called *rei'ach*, such as the *rei'ach nichoach l'Hashem* (a pleasant smell to Hashem) which emanated from the burning of the *korbonos*. When something has been elevated, such as an animal that has been offered as a *korbon*, it leaves behind a *rei'ach*, a good spiritual smell. To understand this deeper: When something becomes elevated, its essence is revealed. Thus, a *rei'ach* reveals the essence of something. When the *korbon* is elevated to Hashem, its true essence is revealed, which is to give a *rei'ach nichoach to Hashem*. It is when the physical is transformed into the spiritual, into *ruach* - which is also from the word *rei'ach*.

The word *Cheshvan* contains the letters of the word *nachash* (Serpent), which is equal in value in Hebrew to the word *Mashiach* (the Messiah). In the side of evil, the *Nachash* (Serpent) is associated with the *kosnos ohr* spelled with an *ayin*, the animal hides worn by Adam and Chavah after the sin. It represents the foul smell, the *rei'ach ra*, of sin. On the other hand, we also find that *Mashiach* is associated with the sense of smell, more than with any of the other senses. The verse says, "*Ruach apeinu, Mashiach Hashem*" - "The breath of our nostrils, is the messenger of Hashem."^[5] This is the good smell, the *rei'ach* associated with the *ruach apeinu* that is *Mashiach*. This is the *rei'ach* that is associated with the spiritual term *ruach*, which is from the word *rachamim* (mercy), and also from the words "*ruach Elokim*", the spirit of G-d that hovered over the face of the water before Creation.

Evil Smell and Good Smell In Creation

We find that there is both evil smell and good smell.

When people in previous times would practice idol worship, they would inhale the scent of the fires by the idol worship. This was an evil, sinful use of smell.

There is also the "good smell" of Shabbos, for Shabbos is the day when the *neshamah* is more revealed - which means that the *neshamah* soul enjoys the "good smell" of Shabbos. How does

Shabbos reveal the holy sense of smell? Shabbos is the revelation of the root of everything, and when the root is revealed, there is *menuchah*, serenity, because there is *menuchah* whenever the root has been found. That is where the “good smell” of Shabbos comes from: the *menuchah* of Shabbos. Hence, Shabbos is a time when the evil smell in Creation is removed, which is the smell of sin, and instead the good smell becomes revealed - the scent of Mashiach.

The Sages state, “I created an evil inclination, and I created the Torah as its *tavlin* (remedy).”^[6] A *tavlin* is a pleasant smelling spice. The *yetzer hora* is foul-smelling, whereas the *tavlin*, the pleasant smelling spice, is the Torah, which is the remedy for the *yetzer hora*. The good smell, of “the Torah given on Shabbos”,^[7] is what counters the foul smell of sin. The *tavlin* of Shabbos and Torah, together, remove the foul odor of the original sin, and reveal a holy light (and everyone agrees that the Torah was given on Shabbos...). This is the “good smell” of Creation.

The first time the Torah mentions smell (*rei'ach*) is by Noach, when he offered a *korbon* after the *Mabul*, and he gave a *reiach nochach* to Hashem, and then Hashem promised that He would never bring a *Mabul* again. In other words, the promise was that He wouldn't return Creation to any “bad smell” again. Once the good smell was revealed, there would be no more bad-smelling Creation.

When Creation “smelled” bad, Hashem had to destroy it. The entire Creation exists due to the Torah, which gives off a pleasant smell, a *reiach nichoach*, to Hashem. The *charon af* of Hashem comes when there is bad smell of sin, and it destroys Creation. *Charon af* cannot come when there is a good smell in Creation. When Hashem promised He won't bring the *Mabul* again, on a deeper level this was a promise that He wouldn't return the Creation to its ‘bad smell’ again.

The study of Torah protects a person from the *charon af*, because the Torah is the “good smell” in Creation that protects Creation from Hashem's wrath. This is also the depth behind smelling the *besamim* - it represents the good smell of the Torah, the good smell in the Creation, which protects from *charon af*.

We also find that Mordechai and Esther are both called “good smelling spices” [Mordechai's name is from the word *mor dror* (myrrh), and Esther's name was “Hadassah”, from the word *hadas* (myrtle). In the merit of these two “good-smelling spices”, Mordechai and Esther, the Jewish people were saved from destruction [They were like the good smell of the Torah that protects from *charon af*].

The Month of Cheshvan Corresponds To The Tribes of Levi, Yosef, and Yissocher

The 12 months also parallel the 12 tribes. The month of Cheshvan, according to the *Raavad* and *Vilna Gaon*, is parallel to three of the 12 tribes.

According to one approach, the month of Cheshvan corresponds to the tribe of Levi, who bring the *Ketores* (the incense offering), and specifically the *Kohanim* who come from Levi, since they bring the good smell of the *korbonos*.

Another approach is that Cheshvan corresponds to Yosef HaTzaddik. When he ran away from Potiphar, a “good smell” came upon him, and due to this action, a good smell came upon the world as well.

According to a third approach, Cheshvan corresponds to Yissocher, because Yissocher was born as a result of the *dudaim*, the pleasant-smelling flowers, which Reuven brought to his father Yaakov, and therefore Yissocher is a result of this good smell.

Clearly, these are three different kinds of “good smell”. There is the “good smell” of Levi, a “good smell” of Yosef, and a “good smell” of Yissocher. Let's try to understand each of these.

The Good Smell of Levi: The Rectification of Sin

There are two kinds of good smell we find in the *Beis HaMikdash*. There was the good smell of the *Ketores* (the incense offering) and the good smell of the *korbonos* (sacrifices). These scents served to rectify evil.

The Sages state that the *Ketores* comes to rectify the foul-smelling spice called *chelbanah* (galbanum). The whole concept of *Ketores* is to turn a foul smell into a good smell. This represents the idea of how the bad smell of Cheshvan is turned into a good smell. There are eleven spices in the *Ketores*, and the main spice is the *levonah* (frankincense), which has the most pleasant smell, and the lowliest of the spices is the *chelbanah*, which has a foul smell. In the *Ketores*, the foul spice of *chelbanah* becomes connected with all the other good spices and thereby receives its *tikkun* (rectification). This symbolizes the rectification of all evil [including Amalek, the root of all evil, who is called “rom”, “haughty”, and also a rearrangement of the letters of the word “mar”, bitter].

Korbonos come to rectify sin. Sin produces a bad smell, hence, the good smell of the *korbonos* also rectifies the bad smell of sin. This is the “good smell” of Levi, who has the *Kohanim* and who bring the *Ketores* and *korbonos*. When Noach brought a *korbon*, this gave a *rei’ach nichoach* to Hashem, and this was the good smell brought by the *Kohanim* and *Leviim*, who came from Levi. This rectifies the “*achor*” aspect of *rei’ach*, turning it into *rei’ach tov*, a good smell - it turns the “bad smell” of Cheshvan into a “good smell” of Cheshvan.

The Good Smell of Yosef: The Prevention of Sin

The “good smell” of Yosef came from withstanding the test of the wife of Potiphar. Here the evil didn’t get a chance to become actualized. Before he could sin with her, he ran away from her. This is a different rectification for evil – it causes that the evil shouldn’t be actualized in the first place. He almost fell to the sin, but he ran away at the end, and this produced a good smell. This is Yosef’s good smell.

The Good Smell of Yissocher: The Totally Pure Mind

The “good smell” of Yissocher is, as the Vilna Gaon explains, because Yissocher has the power of *hirhur*, thinking, to think in Torah, also known as the power of *binah*, contemplation. Yissocher reveals the good smell which comes from *dudaim*, and the Sages state that the *dudaim* correspond to the *bochurei Yisrael* who never sinned yet.^[8] This is a level where even the thoughts aren’t tainted by evil.

Yosef HaTzaddik fell to impure thoughts, but he ran away before committing the action of sinning. In contrast to this, Yissocher represents a level where a person doesn’t even have sinful thoughts. That is Yissocher’s power of *hirhur*, of *binah*, and this is his good smell, the good smell of the *dudaim*, which correspond to *bochurei Yisrael* who didn’t sin.

Those are the three levels of “good smell”: Levi, Yosef, and Yissocher.

The Smell of the Esrog: The Smell of Before Sin

We find another dimension to the good smell. These are the good smell of *hadassim*, which come from a tree. There is also a good smell that is higher than this level: the smell of an *esrog*, which are the fruit of a tree.

The *esrog* is unique in that it is a fruit which tastes like the bark of its tree.^[9] The holy sense of smell is represented by the tree which produces fruit that taste like it, which was how trees were before the

sin of Adam. The sin of Adam ruined the sense of smell.

There is the foul sin which is emitted from actual sins, and there is also the foul smell of conceitedness, as in the well-known story with Eliyahu HaNavi (where he met a conceited person, who had a foul smell to Eliyahu HaNavi, because of his spiritual malady of conceitedness). Good smell, the *rei'ach nichoach*, is where there is *Shechinah*. Foul smell is where there is conceitedness. Hashem says of a conceited person "I and him cannot dwell under the same roof."^[10] Before the sin, and by the *Beis HaMikdash*, there was a good smell. A conceited person cannot dwell with Hashem because he has a bad smell coming from his conceitedness. The good smell is rooted in the trees and fruit of before the sin, where the bark tasted like the fruits. Barren trees which do not produce fruit are a result of the sin.

Therefore, *hadassim* and *besamim* contain holy smell, and one recites the blessing of *atzei besamim* on *hadassim*, for it has a good smell. This is in spite of the fact that the *hadassim* grow from a barren tree which does not bear fruit, which is a result of sin. In the future, smell will be on a level that is above the "barren trees" in our current era. In the future, there will be a smell in both the fruit and the tree. All scents in Creation, even the loveliest scents, are not equal to the tree's taste. They are on a level after the sin. The only true scent in Creation is when the tree and fruit smell and taste the same, and this is only with the *esrog*.

Therefore, even Yissocher's smell is incomplete, because only the scent of the *esrog* remains as it is from before Creation: a fruit that tastes like its bark.

The Scent of Mashiach: The Neshamah's Sense

This perfect kind of smell is also called *ruach shel Mashiach*, the spirit of Mashiach^[11], which is also called *reicho shel Mashiach*, the scent of Mashiach. What is the "scent" of Mashiach? It is the smell that comes from "a fruit which tastes the same as the bark of the tree" - the same scent as the *esrog*. This is also the judgment of Mashiach: he will judge each person based on how he "smells" [spiritually]. This is the essence of the person, his root, as opposed to his branches. The smell of something is determined by its essence.

Mashiach is anointed with oil, and he is also anointed with the *rei'ach shel shemen*, the smell of good oil, an entirely good smell. The Gemara says that the *Kohen Gadol* is anointed first on his head, then his face, and further downward. Thus, the *rei'ach* smell of the oil begins from the highest point of the head, the hair, which is the part of the body that begins from the outside of a person. The *shemen hamishchah* is first placed above the hair, meaning that all the rectification begins from outside of the person, from outside of the senses, from above the senses. Mashiach will judge through his scent of smell, meaning that he will judge from the *neshamah's* sense, and this is above all the senses and above the hair.

The sense which the *neshamah* enjoys, which is the revelation of Shabbos, is smell. The depth of the sense of smell is the inner essence which is above all the senses, above even the hairs which represents the inside that goes to the outside.

This is the depth of how *Mar-Cheshvan* will be turned into *Rom Cheshvan*, an "elevated" Cheshvan, which is when Mashiach will come. The sense of smell enables a person to sense that which he cannot see or hear. **When the world will be filled with the future "besamim", the 'good-smelling spices' of the future, one will be able to sense that which he cannot see or hear.** The sense of smell enables a person to feel the intangible. Whereas the rest of the senses can only feel that which is tangible, through the sense of smell a person can sense the intangible.

The Soul's Sense of Smell Can Sense The Spiritual

The depth of this is, that **although Hashem is hidden from all creations, and we have no grasp or understanding of Him, we still have the sense of smell, an imprint left of the state before the sin, which enables us to sense the intangible presence of Hashem.**

The *Beis HaMikdash* is destroyed - it is not here - but through our soul's sense of smell, we can sense it. We cannot see it, but through our soul's sense of smell, we can sense it even though it is not tangibly in front of us. For through [the soul's] sense of smell, we can sense that which exists which is currently hidden, concealed, and intangible. **Through [the soul's] smell, we can sense that which is the subtlest and most hidden in Creation. Through [the soul's] smell, we can smell the state of before Creation.**

This is the "scent of Mashiach", the *ruach* (spirit) and *reiach* (scent) of Mashiach: **to smell the inner point which hasn't yet gone outward into our external dimension.** It is to smell something which we cannot intellectually comprehend.[\[12\]](#)

The revelation of *Mar-Cheshvan* comes after the month of Tishrei, the month when the moon is covered, whereas Cheshvan is a month of revelation. The moon dims and comes back into light, in a cycle. That is the *Beis HaMikdash*: we can keep returning to it, even after it has become concealed. Through smell, a person can connect to anything. **One can connect to anything hidden, through the soul's sense of smell, and thereby live it, and he can even connect to the state of before Creation. Through [the soul's sense of] smell, we can sense how "Hashem will Be One and His Name will one"**, even though currently His Name is incomplete and His Throne is incomplete due to the presence of Amalek.

This is the depth of why the sense of smell is also called "good from the start" (*tov m'ikara*). The sense of smell became damaged from the sin, and therefore there is *Mar-Cheshvan*, bitter Cheshvan, because now that the original good smell of Creation is no longer here, this is the root of all bitterness. But when smell connects me to that which used to be here - to the state of before the sin, when the sense of smell was undamaged - this is the "good smell" of Cheshvan, where it was good from the start.

In Conclusion

May we merit from the Creator that the month of *Mar-Cheshvan* (bitter Cheshvan) be turned into *Rom-Cheshvan* (elevated Cheshvan), and may we merit the complete revelation, speedily in our days. Amen.

[\[1\]](#) Sefer Yetzirah 5:4

[\[2\]](#) The *yahrtzeit* of Rachel Imeinu is 11 Cheshvan

[\[3\]](#) Yirmiyahu 31:14. See *Rus Rabbah* 7:13

[\[4\]](#) *Berachos* 43b

[\[5\]](#)Eichah 4:20

[\[6\]](#)Kiddushin 30b

[\[7\]](#)

[\[8\]](#)Eruvin 21b

[\[9\]](#)Eruvin 35a

[\[10\]](#) Sotah 5b

[\[11\]](#)Beraishis 2:4

[\[12\]](#) Editor's Note: The Rav explains more about the "scent of Mashiach" in **Torah Way To Enlightenment chapter 017: Bonding With The Creator Through Scent-Movement**

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