



This is the first and last time that the letter *Tav* appears in *Boruch Shem*. It corresponds to the number four hundred, a number made famous by the following:

He (God) said to Avram, "You must know that your children will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and oppress them for four hundred years." (Bereishis 15:13)

Being a multiple of four (*Dalet*) and forty (*Mem*), we already know that four hundred was not a random number, but an indication that the oppression was part of a development process. After all, commentators go to great length to find a logical reason for the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov having to endure so much, and not

with much success.

That's because the answer is not obvious, but *kabbalistic*. In fact, it is primordial, going back to events that pre-dated Creation such as the 974 "Generations" that existed briefly on the way to making our world:

Who were snatched away before their time, whose foundation was poured out as a stream. (Iyov 22:16)

It is taught: Rebi Shimon *HaChassid* said: "These refer to the 974 generations who, before Creation, were snatched away before they could be created. . . The Holy One, Blessed Is He, places them in every generation, and they are the most brazen of each generation. (*Chagigah* 13b)

It would take pages to properly explain this idea. The important point here is that the 974 Generations were created, destroyed, and returned throughout history to allow Creation to achieve its ultimate goal. The creation of the Jewish people and all they go through is part of the rectification process of these souls to facilitate this process.

It is also pointed out that *Aleph* is the first letter of the *Aleph-Bais*, *Mem* is the middle one, and *Tav* is the last. Together they spell *emes*—truth, the seal of God.¹ This is

¹ *Yoma* 69b.

more than just a nice idea, because God used the *Aleph-Bais* to make Creation, and whatever is true about the *Aleph-Bais* must be true about Creation.

This is the reason for the following story:

[At the time of the destruction of the First Temple] The Holy One, Blessed is He, told Gavriel, “Go and put an ink [letter] *Tav* upon the foreheads of the righteous so that the damaging angel cannot harm them, and a blood [letter] *Tav* on the foreheads of the evil so that the damaging angel can overpower them.” (*Shabbos* 55a)

It is interesting that the same letter is used for both the righteous and the evil, the only difference being the color, ink black for the righteous and blood red for the evil. One might have thought to use the *Tav*, which stands for truth, for the righteous, and *Shin*, the first letter of *sheker*—falsehood—for the evil.

The color black in many cultures often represents mystery or, even worse, evil. The bad guys always seem to dress in black because colors are upbeat and tend to inspire the opposite in people of what evil tries to push onto others.

Yet, the primal Divine warning against errant spiritual behavior and possible Divine punishment is the rainbow.²

² *Bereishis* 9:13.

In *Mishnaic* times, it was a *good* sign if a rainbow did not appear in a generation.³ Rainbows are definitely a spectacle to behold, a wonder of Creation, but one that also comes with a stern message.

On the other hand, when the Torah was given, it was said to be black fire on white fire⁴ which *Kabbalah*, of course, explains. But more to the point is that *tefillin*, extra kabbalistic and symbolic of binding ourselves with heart and soul to God, *must* be black, especially the straps. Why black?

Because, unlike all the other colors, black does not accept other colors.⁵ If you put color onto a black surface, it won't show up (at least not like it does on light colors). Black absorbs light, which is why it is usually better to wear lighter colors on hot days that reflect the light instead.

For this reason, the color black symbolizes God's absolute unity, and our need to have unwavering loyalty to it. For this reason, a black *Tav* was put onto the heads of the tzaddikim who live their lives in this manner.

Blood, however, symbolizes man's materialistic nature, the main reason for pursuing matters of this world over spiritual accomplishments. The *yetzer hara* that the

³ *Kesuvos* 77b.

⁴ *Rashi, Devarim* 33:2.

⁵ See Rabbi Eliyahu *ben* Avraham (1659–1729), *Semuchim la-Ad, Parsbas Bo*; Rabbi Chaim Palaggi, *Yafeh LaLev, Orach Chaim* 25:13; Rabbi Yosef Nissim *ibn* Adhan, *Ma'aseh Bereishis*, Vol. 3, *Mitzvah* 421.

tzaddik battles and the *rasba* (evil person) follows is in the body symbolized by blood. It is what causes them to distort truth to their liking, so their *Tav* was red.

Thus, the letter *Tav* is the symbol of *Emes*, and when it is “black” then it has been faithfully represented. When it is “red,” it has been distorted. As the (adapted) expression goes, “When the going gets *Tav*, the *Tav* gets going.” That is, truthful people remain people of truth, no matter how black (-and-white) it might seem to others.

