



The Lucky Sevens (Yud Shevat)

So much of Judaism has the number seven. What is its significance, and how is it relevant to our generation?

The Seventh Finger

Everyone loves weddings. And, of course, if you've ever been to a Jewish wedding, the most important part of a Jewish wedding is the chuppah, the wedding ceremony. At the chuppah, that is the very moment that two separate people become husband and wife—specifically, at the very moment that the groom puts the ring on the finger of the bride.

Now, on what finger is the groom supposed to adorn the bride with the ring, exactly? In Hebrew, a finger is called an etzbah—and the groom is supposed to put the ring on the etzbah.

But which of the five fingers is called in Jewish law the etzbah? And why that finger?

The answer is that the etzbah is the pointer finger (or, if you wish, the index finger). But again, why that finger? Why the index? Why not the ring finger?

One of the reasons put forth by our Sages is that when the groom is standing under the chuppah opposite the bride (to her left, actually), the finger upon which he puts the ring is supposed to be the seventh finger to his right. But why specifically the seventh finger? Because, as

a general rule, everything at a Jewish wedding goes in sevens: The sheva brachos, the seven blessings recited under the chuppah, the seven times the bride circles the groom, the seven days of meals after the wedding, and so on.

So now we have another question: Why seven? What's the significance of seven?

The Rebbe explains in a letter that every young couple getting married is building a new world, as the verse states, "As your Creator gladdened you in the Garden of Eden of old"—and so, just like G-d created the universe in seven days, so too every young couple creating a new universe also does so in seven days and with seven blessings, etc.

Thus we find that the number seven is a very important and central number—and not just when it comes to weddings but in a lot of other places in Judaism.

Does anybody know where else we find seven in Judaism?

Seven All Over

We also have the Seven Noahide Laws, the Seven Rabbinical Mitzvos, the seven-day holidays of Passover and Sukkos, and the seven major holidays of the Jewish calendar: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkos, Chanukah, Purim, Passover and Shavuos.

Shabbos, let's not forget, is the seventh day of the week—and on Shabbos itself, when we read the Torah, there seven aliyos, or seven individuals called to the Torah. (There are actually eight, but the eighth only hears a repeat of part of the seventh.)

When a close relative passes away, one mourns for seven days. The menorah in the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple, had seven branches. And so on and so forth.

And this isn't just in the Torah but also in the very nature of Creation—there are many things in the world that come in sets of seven. Anybody know what comes in seven in the world?

There are seven continents. Historically, the world's great bodies of water have been divided into seven seas. We also find the number seven in music: There are seven notes on the Western musical scale—and for those of you who've visited Las Vegas, you're surely familiar with the "lucky sevens."

So why, indeed, are so many things associated with the number seven? Simple: Because this number reminds us of the creation of the universe—that G-d created the universe in seven days.

When G-d Retreated Sevenfold

But there's something else about the number seven.

We've all heard the expression, "I feel like I'm in seventh heaven." And Judaism believes in the concept that there are seven layers to heaven.

Along comes the Midrash and says something very interesting: When G-d created the universe, He was found in this lowest of worlds—meaning that it was here, at this physical level of existence, that it was felt that there is a Creator to the universe.

And then along came Adam and Eve and ate from the Tree of Knowledge, and this sin pushed away G-d—meaning that now this physical universe was less aware that there is a Creator to the universe. The very fact that they had sinned proved that they weren't thinking about G-d, and so the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, retreated up from the physical universe to the first heaven.

What was mankind's next sin? Cain killing Abel. This, too, distanced G-d from the universe, pushing Him even further away, so to speak.

Now, the Shechinah rose up to the second heaven—meaning that people knew even less that there was a Creator to the universe.

Then came the sin of Enosh and his generation. That was the generation which began worshipping idols, pushing G-d even further out to the third heaven.

The next sin, which we're all familiar with, was the Dor HaMabul, the Generation of the Flood. These people not only worshipped idols but also sinned among themselves. Stealing, kidnapping and murder were things they excelled at— meaning that they forgot that there was a Creator to the universe even further. And so, the Shechinah retreated to the fourth heaven.

And so the matter continued on to the next generation, the "Generation of the Tower." And everyone's heard that story—how an entire society got together to build the legendary Tower of Babel to "make a name for themselves," to become gods. For these people, idol worship wasn't enough—they wanted to be the idols themselves. They wanted to be gods. And so they pushed the Shechinah to the fifth heaven.

And then came the people of Sodom, where giving charity was not only not in vogue, but even against the law. Anybody caught giving charity was sentenced to death—a new low in moral corruption. Not only did they consider themselves gods and do whatever they wished, but more so—they forbade anyone to commit any moral act and forced others to act with corruption and evil. This pushed the Shechinah to the sixth heaven.

Finally, along came the ancient Egyptians in the time of Avraham Avinu, a group of people who had no problem snatching away his wife Sarah for the king without any questions. They didn't ask her and they certainly didn't ask Avraham. And they succeeded in pushing G-d back to the seventh heaven.

And so, as the Rambam (Maimonides) tells us, the word “G-d” was “forgotten from the lips of all beings and from their minds, and they did not perceive Him until there was born the Pillar of the Universe, he being our Patriarch Abraham.”

The Seven Righteous

Avraham Avinu thus came along and began teaching people that there is a Creator of the universe and began battling idol worshippers and all those who committed immoral acts.

And Avraham succeeded in bringing back awareness of G-d to the universe. As the Midrash puts it, he brought the Shechinah back down from the seventh to the sixth heaven. His son Yitzchak continued in his ways and also taught the universe that there is a G-d, and he brought down the Shechinah a bit further—from the sixth to the fifth heaven.

Yaakov, Yitzchak’s son, took it further. He moved to Charan where he spread the idea that there is a Creator of the Universe, thus bringing the Shechinah a little closer to the universe. He brought it down to the fourth heaven.

In the following generation, it was Yaakov’s son Levi, who had been appointed as a “rosh yeshivah,” a dean of a school of higher learning, “to teach the way of G-d and to safe-keep Avraham’s instructions, and he instructed his sons that there never cease from the sons of Levi appointee after appointee so that the learning never be forgotten” (Maimonides, Laws of Idol Worship). It was Levi who brought down the Shechinah to the third heaven.

Levi had a son by the name of Kehos who continued his father’s way, bringing down the Shechinah to the second heaven.

Kehos, in turn, had a son by the name of Amram. He was the leader of the entire Nation of Israel in Egypt, and he brought the Shechinah

down to the first heaven— meaning that he further strengthened the knowledge among the Jews in Egypt that there was a Creator of the universe.

And then came the seventh generation, Moshe Rabbeinu, and he “brought down the Shechina to earth”—he succeeded to bring things to the point that G-d Himself, so to speak, descended and revealed Himself on Mt. Sinai. And then everyone not only believed that there was a G-d, but saw and heard with physical eyes and ears that “I am the L-rd Your G-d.”

And the Midrash adds something very interesting: “All the sevens are beloved.” This means that not only is the number seven special, but the seventh in every set of seven is the most special of all. For example, Shabbos, the seventh day of the week, is the most beloved day of the week. King David, for example, was the seventh son of his father Yishai. And the same thing with the Patriarchs— Moshe Rabbeinu was the most beloved of them all.

We Are the Seventh Generation

In the first maamar, or Chasidic discourse, that the Rebbe delivered upon accepting the leadership of the Chabad Chasidic movement on the tenth of Shvat, 5711, the Rebbe made a connection between the seven generations preceding the Giving of the Torah and explained that before the coming of Moshiach, too, there would be seven generations which would prepare the world for the coming of Moshiach.

The Rebbe explained that the seven generations of Chabad leaders, beginning with the Alter Rebbe, prepared the world and popularized the awareness that there is a G-d everywhere in the world.

And our generation, my friends—the seventh generation of Chasidism, is the one that needs to bring the Shechinah finally down to this earth.

And, as the Midrash says, “all the sevens are beloved forever”—which means that we, my friends, are the real lucky sevens.