

# OHR NET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

### SYMBIOSIS

*“And he will wash his clothes...” (19:7)*

The pure becomes defiled and the defiled become pure. Touching a corpse causes spiritual contamination. Purification from this contamination is achieved through the sprinkling of a mixture of water and the ashes of a red heifer. An anomaly of this process is that while the ashes purify the person who is contaminated, they sully those involved in its preparation.

The red heifer was atonement for the sin of the golden calf. The Talmud (*Tractate Avoda Zara 4*) explains that, in

truth, the people of the generation who sinned with the golden calf were on a high level that was not befitting this sin, but G-d allowed them to stumble so that their repentance would illuminate the path for those to come.

In other words, through this generation’s punishment, salvation emerged for generations to come.

The pure becomes defiled and the defiled become pure.

• Source: *Chatam Sofer*

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

The laws of the *Para Aduma* — the red heifer — are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death. After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam’s righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people’s welfare. G-d commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people’s lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of G-d’s mastery over the world, which would have resulted

had the rock produced water merely at Moshe’s word. Therefore, G-d tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land. *Bnei Yisrael* resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him for 30 days. Sichon the Amorite attacks *Bnei Yisrael* when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, *Bnei Yisrael* conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

BY RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN

## BAVA BATRA 158 - 164

*Rabbi Zeira said, "I see from this that the air of the Land of Israel makes one wise."*

After Rabbi Zeira "went up" from Bavel to the Land of Israel he did a 180-degree reversal in his halachic ruling that he had made regarding a case of inheritance. In Bavel he had ruled one way, and then he changed his ruling when he went to Israel. Because of his changed ruling he concluded that it was due to the "air of the Land of Israel making a person wise".

The Rashbam explains that Rabbi Zeira reached this conclusion about the special "power" of the air of Israel as follows: Rabbi Zeira said to himself, "Ever since I came up to the Land of Israel I have put my heart (i.e. made great effort and toil in my Torah study) to find fault with my earlier ruling, and to be certain that my conclusion is the pure truth of the matter." It appears that Rabbi Zeira had a small measure of doubt about his ruling from Bavel, possibly because another Sage, Rabbi Ila, ruled differently than him in Bavel. So when he left Bavel for Israel, he felt a renewal of will and wisdom in his search for truth, and, in fact, he reversed his earlier ruling and came to agree with the ruling of Rabbi Ila as being the true halacha.

The Maharsha cites a reason for the unique "wisdom power" of the air of the Land of Israel. Moshe was informed by G-d that he would not enter the Land of Israel, and he was told: "Go up this Mount Avarim to Mount Nevo, which is in the land of Moav that is facing Jericho, and see the Land of Canaan that I am giving to the children of Israel as a possession (Dev. 32:49)". When Moshe looked at the Land, his gaze infused the Land of Israel with a special capacity for extra wisdom for those who breathed its air.

Rabbi Ovadia Seforno writes a different reason: Since the waters of the Great Flood did not reach the Land of Israel its air was not affected for the worse, unlike the other lands of the world, where the air was affected in a negative manner. This appears to be a scientific explanation for the air of Israel being a potentially positive factor to help a person achieve greater wisdom in the Land of Israel than in other places.

On a lighter note, I recall a certain commercial product that was being sold in Israel a few decades ago (and perhaps today as well). Small, sealed cans of "Air from Israel" were being sold in stores throughout Israel for about a dollar or so each. At first I thought it was a joke, but then I saw a can that mentioned it being "Holy Air from the Holy Land", and the quotation of our *gemara* which states that the "air of the Land of Israel makes one wise". If I recall correctly, it also had a seal of Rabbinical supervision that it was "kosher" and authentic air from the Land of Israel. However, this all seemed somewhat "unusual" and "touristy" at the time, since – after all – air is air! The air in Eretz Yisrael is presumably identical to the rest of the world's air, and, if tested, it would show the identical molecular and chemical components as any other air. Nevertheless, I considered buying a can to send to a friend in the States to "inhale", since he said he was struggling with his studies at the time. I didn't, but perhaps I should have...

• *Bava Batra 158b*

## LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

## THE EAST BANK OF THE JORDAN

**W**ith all the talk about the future of the West Bank (Judea and Samaria), we sometimes forget the history of the *East Bank* of the Jordan.

When we read in the Torah we are reminded that the Tribes of Reuven and Gad negotiated with Moshe for receiving their share of the land promised to the Jewish nation on the eastern side of the Jordan River,



which was the first area to be conquered.

These two Tribes and half of the Tribe of Menashe eventually settled in this area that was called *Eiver Hayarden* ("across the Jordan River"). This explains why geography books of generations ago identified this as Transjordan, and today it is referred to as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. "Take a perfect *Para Aduma* (red heifer)." What does the word "perfect" — *temima* — mean in this context?
2. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a *Para Aduma*?
3. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
4. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the *Para Aduma*; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
5. Why was the *mitzvah* of the *Para Aduma* entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
6. Why does the Torah stress that *all* of the congregation came to *Midbar Tzin*?
7. Why is Miriam's death taught after the law of *Para Aduma*?
8. During their journey in the *midbar*, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
9. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
10. When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Jewish People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
11. The cloud that led the Jewish People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
12. Why did the *entire* congregation mourn Aharon's death?
13. What disappeared when Aharon died?
14. Which "inhabitant of the South" (21:1) attacked the Jews?
15. For what two reasons did G-d punish the people with snakes specifically?
16. Why did the Jewish People camp in Arnon rather than pass through Moav to enter *Eretz Canaan*?
17. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
18. What was the "strength" of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their Land?
19. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
20. Who killed Og?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to This Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 19:2 - Perfectly red.
2. 19:2 - Two.
3. 19:14, 15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
4. 19:21 - a) Remains *tahor*; b) He, but not his clothing, contracts *tumah*; c) He and his clothing contract *tumah*.
5. 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the Golden Calf.
6. 20:1 - To teach that they were *all* fit to enter the Land; everyone involved in the sin of the spies already died.
7. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
8. 20:2 - Miriam's.
9. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to *speak* to the rock.
10. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the *midbar*. This teaches that one who has adequate provisions should nevertheless purchase goods from his host in order to benefit the host.
11. 20:22 - *Har Sinai* for receiving the Torah, *Har Nevo* for Moshe's burial, and *Hor Hahar* for Aharon's burial.
12. 20:29 - Aharon made peace between contending parties and between spouses. Thus, everybody mourned him.
13. 20:29 - The clouds of glory disappeared, since they sheltered the Jews in Aharon's merit.
14. 21:1 - Amalek.
15. 21:6 - The original snake, who was punished for speaking evil, is fitting to punish those who spoke evil about G-d and about Moshe. And the snake, for whom everything tastes like dust, is fitting to punish those who complained about the manna which changed to any desired taste.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused them passage.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites hid in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jews. When the Jews approached, the mountain on the *Eretz Canaan* side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed.
18. 21:24 - G-d's command, "Do not harass them" (*Devarim* 2:19).
19. 21:34 - Og had once been of service to Avraham. Moshe was afraid that this merit would assist Og in battle.
20. 21:35 - Moshe.

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## WHY MOSHE AND AHARON DID NOT MERIT ENTERING THE LAND OF ISRAEL

In this week's *parsha* the nation cries out for water, and G-d instructs Moshe to speak to a particular rock so that it should miraculously bring forth water. Moshe, however, takes his staff and strikes the rock instead of just speaking to it. G-d then says to Moshe and Aharon: "Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you will not bring this congregation to the Land that I have given them."

Numerous commentators attempt to explain why Moshe's action resulted in the drastic punishment of being denied entry into the Land of Israel, the ultimate goal of the Exodus from Egypt. Abarbanel summarizes ten different answers to this question and rejects them all as insufficient reasons for such a drastic punishment. Instead, Abarbanel offers a novel solution to the problem.

He says that really they were being punished for two much more serious, previous transgressions. Aharon was punished for his role in the incident of the golden calf, and Moshe for his role in sending and instructing the men who spied out the Land of Israel. Even though Aharon himself certainly tried to prevent an act of idolatry by others, his own actions ultimately led to the tragedy of the death of thousands. Just as those individuals were prevented from entering the Land, Aharon too — following the principle of measure for measure — was prevented from entering the Land.

Moshe's transgression was that he essentially went beyond the simple request of the people to "send men ahead of us and let them spy out the Land, and bring word back to us; the road on which we should ascend and the cities to which we should come." Moshe, however, added his own instructions to their simple request, telling the spies to find out if the inhabitants were strong or weak, few or numerous, and if the cities were open or fortified. Even though Moshe's intention was to impress upon them G-d's ability to overcome any adversary,

no matter how strong, his words still gave them the opening to doubt their ability to conquer the Land. The result, of course, was mass panic, and once again G-d invoked the principle of measure for measure: Just as the nation no longer merited the Land of Israel, so too Moshe was denied the opportunity to lead it into the Land.

Although it appears that G-d is punishing them for hitting the rock instead of speaking to it, in reality they are being punished for their previous transgressions. However, in order to protect their honor, G-d covers up the real reasons. Abarbanel compares this to a father who, because of his love for his son, ignores his transgressions until a relatively minor incident causes him to come down hard. When asked, "Why such a drastic punishment for such a minor infraction?" he will answer that the punishment is for all the other serious transgressions he can no longer ignore as a result of this final, minor infraction. In the case of Moshe and Aharon the incident with the rock and the water was the catalyst to actualize the potential punishment.

Abarbanel brings numerous proofs to his interpretation. Included among them is the fact that in Sefer Devarim Moshe does not mention this incident at all, attesting to its relatively minor importance. Furthermore, in Sefer Devarim Moshe and Aharon's punishments are both mentioned in the context of the incidents of the golden calf and the spies. Also, since Aharon had no involvement in the incident of the water and the rock other than assisting Moshe in gathering the people, it is illogical to think that this would result in such a drastic punishment. Finally, when G-d declares that the generation of the wilderness would not enter the Land of Israel, He excludes only Calev and Yehoshua. Moshe and Aharon are included in the decree, even prior to the incident of the water and the rock.

## PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

*"Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon."*

## LAWS OF THE “SHEMA” — PART I

*Based on the verse, “You shall teach them to your children and you shall speak of them (the words of the Shema)... When you lie down and when you rise (Devarim 6:7),” the Rabbis explain that it is a positive commandment to recite each day, both morning and evening, the ‘Shema’.*

According to the Sefer HaChinuch it is only a Biblical command to recite the *first* verse, which begins with the word ‘Shema’ (Deverim 6:4). He writes that the remainder of the three *parshiot* that we say — “Ve’ahavta”, “Vehaya” and “Vayomer”— are of Rabbinical origin. Others maintain that the reciting of the entire first *parsha* is Biblical (Rabbeinu Yona, while others maintain that the first two *parshiot* are of Biblical origin (See Minchat Chinuch and Piskei Teshuvot).

The time of the evening *Shema* begins with the appearance of three small stars, and one should ideally say it at this time. The Rabbis said that one should recite the *Shema* before *chatzot* (midnight). However, if one delayed, he can say it until dawn since on a Biblical level its time extends until then. If one did not recite *Shema* before dawn he can no longer fulfill his obligation unless it was because of circumstances beyond his control — for example, if he was intoxicated, sick or the like (Shulchan Aruch 235:1,3,4).

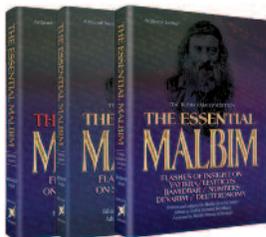
The time for the morning *Shema* begins from the time one can recognize someone with whom he is slightly familiar from a distance of four *amot* (about six feet). The Piskei Teshuvot explains this time as fifty minutes before sunrise. Its time extends until the end of the third hour, which is a fourth of the day. The best way to fulfill the mitzvah of the morning *Shema* is like the *Vatikin* (humble people who treasured the *mitzvot* — Rashi). They would complete the *Shema* together with its blessings just before sunrise, and pray the Shemoneh Esrei at sunrise. One who is able to accomplish this merits a great reward (Shulchan Aruch 58:1).

The purpose of the mitzvah of *Shema* is in order to accept upon oneself G-d’s kingship and unity. We are commanded to recite *Shema* both day and night in order to protect ourselves from being drawn after the empty and vain matters of this world, and to provide a constant reminder to not sin against G-d (Sefer HaChinuch).

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## SLITHERING SERPENTS AND SEA SNAKES — PART I

Besides the more famous word *nachash*, Avot d'Rabbi Natan teaches that there are seven different words in the Bible for snakes: *saraph*, *tanin*, *tzefa/tzifoni*, *efeh*, *achshuv*, *peten* and *shephiphon*. Avot d'Rabbi Natan itself offers explanations of these various terms, but unfortunately scribal errors and the like have crept into our editions of Avot d'Rabbi Natan, rendering its elaborate treatment of these synonyms unintelligible. Therefore, in the coming articles we will explore the differences between these seemingly synonymous words, basing ourselves on other sources and commentators.

Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) explains that *nachash* is an umbrella term which includes many different types of snakes. Alternatively he proposes that the word *nachash* is related to the word *lachash* (literally, “whisper”, but colloquially “an incantation”), and refers specifically to snakes whose dangers can be averted by charming them into submission. Indeed, Rashi (to Jeremiah 8:17) explains that a *nachash* after seventy years turns into a *tzefa* and can no longer be charmed, implying that the word *nachash* only applies to a snake which can be charmed. Similarly, Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) argues that *nachash* is derived from the root letters CHET-SHIN, which refer to *moving slowly* (like the word *rochesh* that means “creeping/crawling”) and *clandestinely* (like the word *lachash*).

What is a *saraph*? Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Parchon (a grammarian from the 12th century) explains that *saraph* is a poisonous snake because its venom “burns” (*soref*) like fire. Similarly, Rabbi Yonah ibn Janach (990-1050) explains that the fire-like breath of a *saraph* can burn whatever it comes in contact with (according to this, a *saraph* is somewhat akin to a mythical dragon). However, Rashi (to Isaiah 30:6) explicitly writes that a “flying *saraph*” does not actually have wings, but is a fire-breathing snake which can jump long distances. Rabbi Yosef Bechor Shor (a 12th century French commentator) explains that a *saraph* is a type of snake whose bite burns a person as if he fell into a large furnace, immediately morphing him into a pile of ashes. He explains that this was the type of snake that G-d sent to punish the Jews for complaining about the manna (Numbers 21:5-9). Interestingly, Mitchell First points out that the English word *serpent* bears a close resemblance to the Hebrew word *saraph*.

The Vilna Gaon writes that *nachash* is to land as *tanin* is to sea. This analogy suggests that the word *nachash* refers to a land snake, while *tanin* refers to a sea snake (possibly an eel or something similar). On the other hand, Rashi (to Genesis 1:21 and Niddah 22b) writes that a *tanin* is simply a big fish.

Contrary to popular belief, the word *akalaton* does not actually mean snake, but means “coiled”, and serves as a description of a type of sea serpent. The prophet Isaiah (27:1) refers to the “coiled snake” (*nachash akalaton*) and the “straight snake” (*nachash bariach*), which the Talmud (Bava Batra 74b) interprets as referring to the female and male Leviathans respectively.

The Malbim explains that *tzefa* is an especially poisonous snake because even its excrement is venomous (in Modern Hebrew it means “viper”). Rashi (to Isaiah 59:5) explains that *tzfoni* is an “evil snake”, while *efeh* is a “completely evil snake”, which can portend only bad. As mentioned earlier, Rashi understands that a *tzefa* is the type of snake which can no longer be charmed. Nonetheless, Radak (there) says that *tzfoni* and *efeh* are two words for the same thing.

When talking about the *efeh* (Isaiah 30:6; 59:5; Job 20:16), Rashi and Mahari Kara explain that there are only two of them in the world — a male and a female — and that they reproduce only once every seventy years. Ibn Parchon explains that *efeh* is the female *saraph-nachash*, which is shorter and thicker than its male counterpart, but its venom is more potent. Interestingly, Rabbi Shalom Buzaglo (1700-1780), a Moroccan Kabbalist, writes in *Hadrat Melech* (a commentary to the Zohar) that *efeh* is the male snake, while *nachash* is the female snake. Nonetheless, an earlier Polish Kabbalist named Rabbi Natan Nata Shapiro (1585-1633) writes in his work *Megaleh Amukot* that the two words for snake represent the male and female forces of evil, with *efeh* representing the female force of evil and *nachash* representing the male force of evil (in consonance with Ibn Parchon's understanding).

The Midrash says that an *efeh* is a snake called an *eches* (it is unclear in which language), which was believed to have the ability to kill a flying bird by just looking at its shadow. In Modern Hebrew *eches* is an adder or rattlesnake. Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) explains that the letters PEH-AYIN, which make up part of the root of the word *efeh*, always denotes consistency (in movement or sound). In the case of the *efeh*-snake, that consistency is expressed in the rattling sound emitted by the rattlesnake. Rabbi Avigdor the Frenchman (a 14th century commentator) writes that this is the type of snake which G-d sent to punish the Jews in the wilderness.

*To Be Continued...*

*Author's note:*

*Le'Zechut Refuah Shleimah for Bracha bat Chaya Rachel*

## TAMMUZ, AV AND DIVINE NAMES

**From: Rodney**

*Dear Rabbi,  
Since the months with holidays are considered “good months”, are the months of Tammuz and Av considered “bad months” since they have days that commemorate the destruction of the Temple?*

Dear Rodney,

Since you ask about multiple months, and since there is a lot to discuss, and since the discussion is apropos for the upcoming time period, I'll respond in multiple segments.

More than the months being either “good” or “bad” because of the holidays that occur in them, according to Jewish thought it is actually the inherent quality of the month which affects that time, and thus gives rise to the types of occurrences in that month.

Thus, for example, the Hebrew months of Adar and Nissan, which have inherent qualities of rejuvenation and redemption, are months whose influence engendered the holidays of Purim and Pesach. Likewise, the months of Tammuz and Av have qualities of restriction and stagnation which, at that time, were a catalyst for catastrophe.

For this reason the Sages taught (Ta'anit 29b) that actions which have potentially divergent outcomes for good or for bad should be initiated in Adar and avoided in Av.

Jewish mystical teachings correlate the qualities of the 12 months with 12 specific permutations of the Divine Name 'yud', 'heh', 'vav' and 'heh' (יהוה) as they appear in different verses throughout Tanach, where those verses also express the particular quality of that month. The permutation for Tammuz is יהוה which is formed by the last letters of four consecutive words uttered by the wicked Haman against the righteous Mordechai (Esther 5:13). The permutation for Av is יהוה which is derived from the verse describing the plague of pestilence (Ex. 9:3).

The fact that the letters of G-d's name of mercy are reversed for these months, as well as the threatening verses from which the names are derived, indicate that the quality of these months is the opposite of mercy, i.e. harsh judgment, as follows:

For Tammuz, the letters of G-d's name יהוה are completely reversed from beginning to end (יהוה) and emanate from a verse in which the enemy Haman threatens to completely annihilate the Jewish People. This indi-

cates that Tammuz has the quality of harsh judgment from beginning to end, and is the harbinger of evil to come even from the beginning of the month before the 17th of Tammuz.

This corresponds to the observation of the Sages (Ta'anit 29a) that the spies who returned after 40 days on the 9th of Av with their evil report of the Land actually departed on the eve of the first day of Tammuz. They thus went for the wrong reasons, departed under a bad influence, returned with dashed hopes and ended by destroying their connection to the Land — a misfortune we mourn each Tisha b'Av.

For Av, while the verse from which the permutation of G-d's name (יהוה) for this month is derived bespeaks of plague, the letters begin reversed (יהוה) but end in order (יהוה). This indicates that while the judgment over the first half of the month is harsh and strict, the month concludes with Divine mercy. In fact, the letters 'yud' and 'heh' are not only “in order” and connote mercy; their numerical equivalent is 15. This reveals that the second half of G-d's name for this month literally correlates to the last 15 days of Av, and corresponds to the teaching of the Talmud which states (Ta'anit 26b), “There are no greater days for the People of Israel like the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur”.

Accordingly, the 15th of Av (i.e. the 'yud'-'heh' of Av), corresponds to a restoration of Divine mercy in preparation for the 40-day penitential period which includes the month of Elul and the Ten Days of Repentance, culminating with the forgiveness of Yom Kippur. This rectifies the sin of the 40-day sojourn of the spies, and explains more deeply the above-mentioned connection of joy between the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur, which together return Divine mercy and love between G-d and the Jewish People.

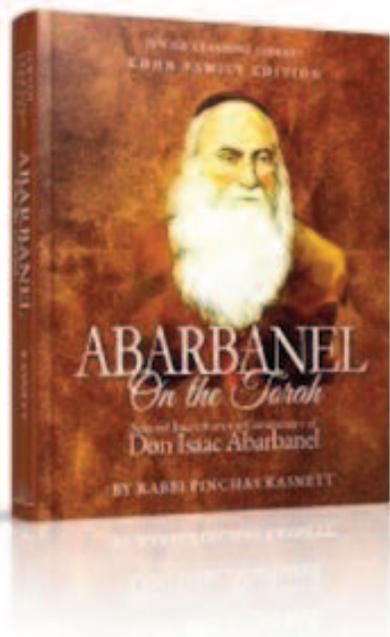
In the coming discussion we'll explore which of the zodiac signs, the Hebrew letters, the human senses and the Hebrew Tribes are related to and influence the quality of these months.

Sources:

- Bnei Yisaschar, on Tammuz and Av, section I, by Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Spira (c. 1783-1841) of Dinov, Galicia, Poland
- For the 12 permutations of G-d's name corresponding to the 12 months of the year based on the Tikunei Zohar and Arizal, see the end of the middle section of the musaf prayer for Rosh Chodesh as printed in most siddurim.

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