hline

The Significance Of The [Number](nchart.html) Twenty

By Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben [David](fathers.html) (Greg Killian)

hline

In this [study](study.html) I would like to understand the significance and meaning of the [number](nchart.html) twenty (2). The [number](nchart.html) twenty is the value of the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) [letter](letters.html) כ - kof.[[1]](#footnote-1)

כ = Twenty

The [Hebrew](hebrew.html) word, ‘Kof’,means [*monkey*](mashal.html). The [letter](letters.html) Kof as compared to the [letter](letters.html) Heh (ה) is like a Kof ([monkey](mashal.html)) to a man; no more than a caricature.

The [Talmud](orallaw.html) says that the [number](nchart.html) “twenty” represents [spiritual](physical.html) blindness, which is why the veil over the opening to the Chatzer, the courtyard, was twenty amot wide. Anyone who walked by this veil was reminded that the [world](worlds.html) outside the “Chatzer” was a completely “natural” [one](one.html), [one](one.html) that “veiled” the [hand](fourteen.html) of [HaShem](hashem.html), and gave us the free-will to choose to see past it.

# [Shechem](city.html)

[Shechem](city.html) is written: שכם *shin, chof, mem*. If the *shin* and the *mem* are joined together, they spell the word *shem* which means “[name](name.html),” a common pseudo [name](name.html) for G-d Himself. Unfortunately, in the word [*shechem*](city.html), the “[Name](name.html)“ is divided: the *shin* and the *mem* are separated by the [letter](letters.html) ***chof***.

This might not have seemed significant, had the [letter](letters.html) *chof* not represented the [number](nchart.html) *twenty*, and had **the** [**number**](nchart.html) **twenty not been so closely related to vision, or rather, *the lack of it***. And as we will soon see, the problem with [Shechem](city.html), and all that occurred there had *everything* to do with a *lack* of vision.

On the other [hand](fourteen.html), the [number](nchart.html) twenty is represented by the [letter](letters.html) Chof, and perhaps that is really the point. In other words, **the** [**number**](nchart.html) **twenty alludes to more than a limitation of** [**physical**](physical.html) **vision; it speaks of a limitation of mental vision,** [**one**](one.html) **that blinds a person to the** [**hand**](fourteen.html) **of** [**HaShem**](hashem.html) **in everyday life**.

[***Shabbat***](sabbath.html) ***22a*** *Rav Kahana said: Rav Nachman bar Munyumi elucidated in the* [*name*](name.html) *of Rebi Tanchum: A* [*Chanukah*](chanukah.html) *light placed higher than twenty amot (*[*thirty*](thirty.html) *to* [*forty*](forty.html)[*feet*](heel.html)*) is unfit . . .*

Rashi, commenting on the [Talmud](orallaw.html), says that the eye does not see higher than twentyamot and therefore there is no proclamation of the miracle.

The [Talmud](orallaw.html) tells us that there are [three](three.html) things that cannot be higher than twenty *amot:*

**An Eruv**,[[2]](#footnote-2)

**A** [**Succah**](succoth.html),[[3]](#footnote-3)

**The Chanukiah**.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Why can’t these [three](three.html) things be higher than twentyamot? The [Talmud](orallaw.html) answers: *the eye cannot see well past twenty amot*. Since each of these [three](three.html) [*mitzvot*](cmds613.html) must be visible, they must be kept within that [eyes](body.html)’ optimum range.[[5]](#footnote-5) Therefore, the [letter](letters.html) *chof* and the [number](nchart.html) *twenty* represent the point at which vision fails.

However, what if [one](one.html)’s eyesight can’t even reach *twenty amot*? What if the eruv is built larger, and therefore recognizable from a greater distance? What if the roof of the [succah](succoth.html) is visible even twenty-[one](one.html) amot high? What if a larger Chanukiah is used? Can all of these then be higher than twenty amot?

The answer, of course, is *no,* the [halacha](walking.html) is the [*halacha*](walking.html). However, perhaps in the case of the twenty-*amot* it is so for *conceptual* reasons as well as [physical](physical.html) reasons. Perhaps, though the [physical](physical.html) eye can operate past the twenty amah limit, the *mental* eye cannot. After all, is this not what [Amalek](amalek.html) tries to do, to blind the *mind’s* eye?

The point of the [thirty-six](thirtysix.html) candles that we light throughout the [eight](eight.html) days of [Chanukah](chanukah.html), explains *Rashi*, is to proclaim the miracle that happened for the Chashmoniam when they conquered the Greek army (in the [thirty-six](thirtysix.html)th century from [creation](bara.html)) against all odds. As well, it reminds us of how the miracle extended to the [Temple](temple.html) Menorah, which burned for [eight](eight.html) days using oil that should have become consumed after only [one](one.html) day. To remember this, [one](one.html) has to see the [Chanukah](chanukah.html) [lights](lights.html) burning, which is difficult to do from a distance of twenty *amot* or more.

The question is, why not just use a larger flame? Or, what happens for a person whose vision is not good past [ten](ten.html) *amot*?

For this reason and others, the [number](nchart.html) twenty represents more than just a [physical](physical.html) limitation. In fact, it refers to a [spiritual](physical.html) limitation, perhaps the same kind that prevented [Yosef](joseph.html)’s brothers from recognizing the Divine [hand](fourteen.html) in [Yosef](joseph.html)’s [redemption](redemption.html). For, the miracles did not stop once [Yosef](joseph.html) was drawn from the pit:

***Bereshit 37:25*** *They (the brothers) sat down to* [*eat*](eating.html) *bread when they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites* [*coming*](coming.html) *from Gilead. Their camels were carrying spices, balsam and lotus on their way* [*down to Egypt*](thebirth.html)*.*

Why did thepasuk make [known](daat.html) what they (the Arabs) were transporting? To show you the reward of the righteous; for, normally the Arabs transported tar and naphtha whose smells are bad; for this [one](one.html) ([Yosef](joseph.html)), spices were arranged, to [save](salvation.html) him from the bad smell. (*Rashi*)

Another miracle, albeit a subtle [one](one.html), but a miracle nevertheless, and another indication that [Heaven](heaven.html) was on [Yosef](joseph.html)’s side. Nevertheless, the brothers did not see it that way, and even imposed an oath on [HaShem](hashem.html), so-to-[speak](mashal.html), to prevent Him from revealing to [Yaaqov](jacob.html) what they had done to his favorite son.[[6]](#footnote-6) Fascinatingly enough, the verse says:

***Bereshit 37:28*** *Midianite traders passed by; they pulled* [*Yosef*](joseph.html) *out from the pit. They sold* [*Yosef*](joseph.html) *to the Ishmaelites for* ***TWENTY*** *[pieces of] silver.*

Seemingly, this provided yet another allusion to the intellectual and [spiritual](physical.html) blindness that prevented [Yosef](joseph.html)’s brothers from seeing his true greatness, and the depth of the mistake they were making in selling him.

# Miscellaneous Twenties

Twentyplanks on both the north and south sides of the [*Mishkan*](mikdash.html);

Twentyis the [number](nchart.html) at which people began to be counted for military service.

Twentyis the age at which a person suffers heavenly punishment.

*Pirke Avot* says that twentyis the age at which [one](one.html) begins to pursue (a career).

The half=shekel equals twentygeras.

Chazal tech that it is twenty days from the end of a woman’s period until the beginning of her next period.

\* \* \*

This [study](study.html) was written by

Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben [David](fathers.html)

(Greg Killian).

Comments may be submitted to:

Rabbi Dr. Greg Killian

12210 Luckey Summit

San Antonio, TX 78252

Internet address: gkilli@aol.com

Web page: http://www.betemunah.org/

(360) 918-2905

Return to The WATCHMAN home page

Send comments to Greg Killian at his email address: gkilli@aol.com

1. Much of this study I learned from Rabbi Pinchas Winston in his work titled “Redemption to Redemption”. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Eiruvin 3a [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Succah 2a [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Shabbat 22a. A Chanukiah is the menorah lit in Jewish homes during Chanukah. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The *eruv* informs the [Jews](file:///D:\Word\Numbers\gen-jew.html) at which point the Private Domain ends and the Public Domain begins, at which point carrying on Shabbat becomes forbidden; the roof of the *Succah* must be visible to remind us of the Clouds of Glory; the *Chanukiah* is meant to publicize the miracle of Chanukah, and therefore it must be visible to the public. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Rashi, Bereshit 37:33 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)