



National Symbols

Israel has several national symbols. In a previous issue, we discussed the word *degel*. Now, let's take a look at the word for some of the other symbols.

HaTikva | Israel's national anthem (הַתִּקְוָה, cognate with "hymn") is HaTikvah, written by Naftali Herz Imber in 1878. *Tikva* means "hope," and the song reflects the Jewish people's hope to return to freedom in the Land of Israel. The root of *tikva*, קוה, means "to hope for, to wait for." The linguist Ernest Klein says that the original meaning of the root was probably "to twist, to stretch," which developed into "to be stretched, be strained," and from there to "await tensely." This root is also the source of the homonym *tikva* meaning "cord," like the one Rachav used to signify her house in Yericho: "she tied the crimson cord to the window" (Yehoshua 2:21). It is also the source of the word *kav*, meaning "line."

Even though they look similar, the words *tikva* and *mikveh* aren't related. *Mikveh* means "a collection of water," and derives from a different root – also קוה, but this time meaning "to collect (water)." It may be cognate with the volume unit קב, which comes from the root קבב – "to hollow out."

Shekel | The national coin of Israel is the shekel. Originally, a shekel was a measure of weight, about 10 grams. Coins only began to be used as a means of payment in the post-biblical period, so all mentions of the shekel in the Bible are referring to an amount of that weight, usually silver.

The word shekel comes from the root שקל, which also developed from "to weigh" to the sense "to pay." Just as in



English, where "to weigh" something also means "to consider" it, so too does the verb לשקול mean "to consider" or "to assess."

For the first several decades of the State of Israel, Israel's currency was the *lira* – the equivalent of "the pound." *Lira* is a foreign word (related to "liter") and is (or was) the currency unit in many countries around the Mediterranean, like Italy, Turkey and Syria. Israel adopted the Hebrew name "shekel" in 1980. However, due to massive inflation in the early 1980s, a new currency was introduced in 1985 – the "*shekel chadash*" – the New Israeli Shekel (NIS). Its abbreviation, ש"ח, has entered the vernacular, and even though the old shekel was only around for five years, people still use *shach* when referring to money.

Duchifat | In honor of the 60th anniversary of Israel, a competition was held to name the national bird of Israel, which had not previously been determined. The winner was the *duchifat*, or "hoopoe" in English. It is listed as one of the non-kosher birds in Vayikra 11:19 and Devarim 14:18. Since it was a popular vote, it can't be said with certainty why the *duchifat* was chosen, but presumably due to its unique appearance, with an impressive crown on its head.

The Talmud (Chullin 63a) says the bird's name derives from the phrase שְׁהוּדוֹ כְּפֹת – "whose comb seems bent," referring to its crown. Modern linguists differ as to the etymology of the word. Some say it comes from an ancient Egyptian word that meant a type of hat (which would refer to its crown). Others have found possible cognates in languages in India or in Arabic. And some, like Klein, say the name is imitative of its cry.

The *duchifat* might appear in one more Biblical book, although not with that name. In the book of Iyov, we find an unusual and unique word – לשְׁכִי.

"Who put wisdom in the hidden parts? Who gave understanding to the mind [*sechvi*]?"

This phrase is the source of our morning blessing – אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְשִׁכּוֹי בִּינְהוּ לְהַבְחִין בֵּין יוֹם וּבֵין לַיְלָה.

While the translation "mind" (or "heart") for *sechvi* is common, another popular translation is "rooster." The rooster, at daybreak, begins to crow, signaling the transition from night to day.

However, this has some difficulties. It doesn't actually take much wisdom to see the difference between night and day. In light of this, some say the *sechvi* was a hawk or an eagle. But the scholar Yehuda Feliks suggested that the *sechvi* was actually the *duchifat*. The *duchifat* was known for its wisdom, and according to Jewish tradition even revealed secrets to King Shlomo.

So perhaps it was a good choice for Israel's national bird after all!

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