

Study on Discern or Understanding to Choose

By

Yochanan Zaqantov

Is discerning or understanding the Tanakh something encouraged? How do we get to point of being able to discern or understand what is written? We desire understanding and discernment. Each of us seeks to understand and discern. Whether it is the Tanakh or our world around us, we want to know why things are the way they are. We even collect knowledge and put it in papers and books to convey understanding and discernment. King Solomon asked for understanding/discernment and was given more than the average man. Eventually, he was the wisest King of all of Israel.

What is the Hebrew word used for Discern when it is translated to English. **בֵּינ** biyn (Bet-Yod-Nun sofit) which is reference number 995. It is found in the Brown driver Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon (BDB) on pages 106-107 and in the New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance (NEHC) on pages 212-213.

Bereshit/Genesis 41:33, 39 (33-45)

33 So now, let Pharaoh select a **discerning (navon נָבוֹן)** and wise man

(**veChakham וְחָכָם**), and set him over the land of Egypt. 34 Let Pharaoh do this: let

him appoint appointed-overseers for the land, dividing the land of Egypt into five parts during the seven years of abundance. 35 Let them collect all kinds of food from these good years that are coming, and let them pile up grain under Pharaoh's hand as food-provisions in the cities, and keep it under guard. 36 So the provisions will be an appointed-reserve for the land for the seven years of famine that will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not be cut off by the famine. 37 The words seemed good in Pharaoh's eyes and in the eyes of all his servants, 38 and Pharaoh said to his servants: Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of a Elohim? 39 Pharaoh said to Yosef: Since a Elohim has made you know all this, there is none **as wise and**

discerning (eyn-navon veChakham אֵין-נָבוֹן וְחָכָם) as you; 40 you shall be

the One Over My House! To your orders shall all my people submit; only by the throne will I be greater than you! 41 Pharaoh said further to Yosef: See, I place you over all the land of Egypt! 42 And Pharaoh removed his signet-ring from his hand and placed it on Yosef's hand, he had him clothed in linen garments and put the gold chain upon his neck; 43 he had him mount the chariot of his second-in-rank, and they called out before him: Avrekh!/Attention! Thus he placed him over all the land of Egypt. 44 Pharaoh said to

Yosef: I am Pharaoh, but without you, no man shall raise hand or foot in all the land of Egypt! 45 Pharaoh called Yosef's name: Tzafenat Pane'ah/The God Speaks and He Lives. He gave him Asenat, daughter of Poti Fera, priest of On, as a wife. And Yosef's (influence) went out over all the land of Egypt.

Here we see that what is listed as discernment is that he has an understanding and able to choose that most men did not have. Thus, he was perceived as a Hakham/Chakham. His use of the verb is in the Niphil thus the use of the nun as a prefix to the verb.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 1:13 (12-18)

12 How can I carry, I alone, your load, your burden, your quarreling? 13 Provide yourselves (with) **men, wise, understanding and knowledgeable (anashim**

Chakhamim unevonim viy'du'im וְנֹבְנִים חֲכָמִים וְאֲנָשִׁים

וְיֹדְעִים), for your tribes, and I will set them as heads-over-you. 14 And you answered me, you said: Good is the word that you have proposed to do! 15 So I took heads of your tribes, **men wise and knowledgeable (anashim Chakhamim viydu'im**

וְאֲנָשִׁים חֲכָמִים וְיֹדְעִים), and I placed them as heads over you, as rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens, and as officials for

your tribes. 16 Now I commanded **your judges (shofeteykhem שְׁפֵטֵיכֶם)** at that time, saying: hear-out (what is) between your brothers, **judge (bamish'pat**

בַּמִּשְׁפָּט) with equity between each-man and his brother or a sojourner. 17 You

are not to (specially-)recognize a face in **judgment (hamish'pat הַמִּשְׁפָּט)**, as the small, so the great, you are to hear-them-out; you are not to be-in-fear of any-man, for judgment-it is Elay! And (any) legal-matter too hard for you, bring-near to me, and I will hear-it-out. 18 So I commanded you at that time concerning all the matters that you should do.

In this section of Torah, we see that Moshe had the knowledge/discernment and so all of Israel came to him. Yithro advised him if his El approved that he should choose others with knowledge (yada), Discernment/Understanding how to choose (biyn), and wise (Chakham). Here Moshe expresses how he did this. The point here is that we must first have some knowledge and that leads to us discerning or understanding how to choose and that is when we are perceived to have wisdom.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 4:6 (1-6)

1 And now, O Israel, hearken to the laws and the regulations that I am teaching you to observe, in order that you may live and enter and take-possession of the land that Yehovah, Elohey of your fathers, is giving to you. 2 You are not to add to the word that I am commanding you, and you are not to subtract from it, in keeping the commandments of Yehovah Eloheykhem that I am commanding you. 3 Your eyes (it is) that have seen what Yehovah did at Baal Pe'or: indeed, every man that walked after Baal Pe'or-Yehovah Eloheykha destroyed him from among you! 4 But you, the ones clinging to Yehovah Eloheykhem, are alive, all of you, today! 5 See, I am teaching you laws and regulations as Yehovah Elohay has commanded me, to do thus, amid the land that you are entering to possess. 6 You are to keep (them), you are to observe (them), for that (will

be) **wisdom-for-you** (Chakh'mat'khem חַכְמַתְּכֶם) and **understanding-for-**

you (ubiynat'khem 998 וּבִינַתְּכֶם) in the eyes of the peoples who, when they hear all these laws, will say: Only **a wise and understanding people** (**am-chakham**

venavon עַם-חַכְמִים וְנָבוֹן) is this great nation!

Here we see that all the chuqqim and mish'patim Moshe conveyed to us were to give us understanding to choose right and discernment. Thus, making us understanding ones, Biynat (plural feminine noun form of biyn). In practicing all the chuqqim and mish'patim would make us wise ones Chakh'mat (plural feminine noun form of Chakham). Other nations would see us as discerning and understand to choose.

Melekhim Aleph/I Kings 3:8-12 (especially 9,11,12)

⁸Your servant finds himself in the midst of the people You have chosen, a people too numerous to be numbered or counted. ⁹Grant, then, Your servant **an understanding mind**

to judge (lev shomea lis'pot לֵב שׁוֹמֵעַ לְשַׁפֵּט) Your people, to

distinguish between good and bad (bein-tov le'ra בֵּין-טוֹב לְרָע); for who

can judge this vast people of Yours?"¹⁰ Yehovah was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹And Elohim Elayv said to him, "Because you asked for this—you did not ask for long life, you did not ask for riches, you did not ask for the life of your enemies, **but you asked for discernment in dispensing justice** (vesha'al'ta lekha habiyn lish'moa

mish'pat (וְשִׂאֵלְתָּ לְךָ הַבֵּינָה לְשִׁמְעַת מִשְׁפָּט: ¹²I now do as you have spoken. I grant you a wise and discerning mind (lekha lev chakham venavon

לְךָ לֵב חָכָם וְנָבוֹן); there has never been anyone like you before, nor will anyone like you arise again.

Here we see that Melekh Shlomo asks for a discerning heart or a ability to choose between good and bad. Biyn in a noun form is also Beyn which is often translated as between. For instance, in the verses of Tanakh that speaks of Beyn Erevim or between the evenings. Therefore, we see here to discern is to have such knowledge and be able to use it.

Proverbs starts with advice to gain understanding and wisdom.

Mishlei/Proverbs 1:2-6

²For learning wisdom and discipline (lada'at chakh'mah umusar לְדַעַת

חֲכָמָה וּמוֹסֵר); For understanding words of discernment (lehabiyn im'rei

biynah: לְהַבִּינָה אִמְרֵי בִינָה: ³For acquiring the discipline for success,

Righteousness, justice, and equity; ⁴For endowing the simple with shrewdness, The young with knowledge and foresight. ⁵The wise man, hearing them, will gain more wisdom; The discerning man will learn to be adroit;(yis'ma chakham veyosef leqach

venavon tach'bulot yiq'neh וְיִשְׁמַע חָכָם וְיִוְסֵף לְקַח וְנָבוֹן

יְקַנְהוּ: (תַּחְבֻּלוֹת יְקַנְהוּ: לְהַבִּינָה) ⁶For understanding (lehabiyn תַּחְבֻּלוֹת יְקַנְהוּ: proverb and

epigram, The words of the wise and their riddles.

Verse 2 – literally stating for “for understandings wisdom and discipline, for the discernment in speaking discerning.”

Verse 3 – we acquire discipline.

Verse 5 – literally stating “he will hear, Chakham and he increase learning and discernment he receives cunning counsel he will attain it.”

Thus, we acquire knowledge through the disciplining ourselves through his rules. That allows us to develop an understanding and able to choose or discern the right way. In having discernment we develop wisdom.

Yeshayahu/Isaiah 6:9-10

⁹And He said, “Go, say to that people: ‘Hear, indeed, **but do not understand** (ve’al-**tabiynu** וְאַל-תְּבִינּוּ); See, indeed, but do not grasp.’ ¹⁰Dull that people’s mind, Stop its ears, And seal its eyes— Lest, seeing with its eyes And hearing with its ears, It **also grasp with its mind** (ulevavo yabiyn וּלְבַבּוֹ יִבִּין), And repent and save itself.”

Here we see it used to show while hearing they don’t discern properly. Their eyes and ears are closed. If they could see it and hear it they would open their hearts (minds) and discern or choose properly.

Yeshayahu/Isaiah 44:18

¹⁸**They have no wit or judgment:** (lo yad’u velo yavinu לֹא יָדְעוּ וְלֹא יִבִּינּוּ) Their eyes are besmeared, and they see not; Their minds, and they cannot think.

Literally, no they will understand, and no they will discern. This shows that without understanding there can be no discernment or ability to choose. Therefore, if a person speaks with out knowledge he cannot properly discern.

Hosea 14:10

¹⁰**He who is wise will consider these words, He who is prudent will take note of them.**

(miy Chakham vetaben eleh navon veyeda’em מִי חָכָם וַיִּבֶן אֱלֹהִים)

(נְבוֹן וַיִּדְעֵם) For the paths of Yehovah are smooth; The righteous can walk on them (ki-yesharim darekhey Yehovah vetzadiqim yelekhu bam

כִּי-יִשְׁרִים דְּרָכֵי יְהוָה וְצַדִּיקִים יִלְכוּ בָם), While sinners stumble on them.

The wise person will discern and understand. The Righteous walk in the right way of Yehovah. This shows us that we must choose rightly on the path we walk.

Shemu'el Aleph/I Samuel 3:8

⁸Yehovah called Samuel again, a third time, and he rose and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” **Then Eli understood that Yehovah was calling (vayaben Eliy kiy**

Yehovah qore וַיִּבֶן עֲלָי כִּי יְהוָה קָרָא) the boy.

Yaben a defective form in Hebrew for Yabeyn in which the yod is dropped which means he discerns. It carries a idea that when you understand you then discern.

Shemu'el Bet/II Samuel 12:19

¹⁹When David saw his servants talking in whispers, **David understood (vayaben david**

וַיִּבֶן דָּוִד) that the child was dead; David asked his servants, “Is the child dead?”

“Yes,” they replied.

This is like the previous verse but differently. It shows he understood.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 32:7

7 Regard the days of ages-past, understand the years of generation and generation

(ago); (zekhor yemot olam biynu shenot dor-vador **זְכוֹר יְמוֹת עוֹלָם**

בֵּינוּ שְׁנוֹת דוֹר-וְדוֹר) ask your father, he will tell you, your elders, they will declare it to you:

In the future, the Children we to ask their fathers and elders what happened before for they will have the discernment of the past events.

Ecclesiastes 9:11

¹¹I have further observed under the sun that The race is not won by the swift, Nor the battle by the valiant; Nor is bread won by the wise, **Nor wealth by the intelligent**

(vegam lo lanevonim osher **וְגַם לֹא לַנְּבֹנִים עֲשֶׂר**), Nor favor by the learned. For the time of mischance comes to all.

Here we see that Koholet stating that in most cases this might be true but in the case of time and chance these do not follow the normal pattern.

I Chronicles 15:22

22 And Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, was over the song; he was master in the song,

because he was **skilful (mebiyn מְבִיין)**.

He we see Khenan'yahu as who who discerned music. He understood in order to choose the right notes to make a pleasing sound.

Psalm 119:100

100 **I understand more (et'bonan אֶתְבוֹנֵן)** than mine elders, because I have keep your precepts.

By keeping what you come to understand means you are able to discern or choose.

Psalm 119:104

104 From your precepts I get **understanding (et'bonan אֶתְבוֹנֵן)**; therefore I hate every false way.

He tells us today as he did to the Israelites what is his ways that we should learn and follow. We should become discerning after follow his precepts.

Deuteronomy 30: 11-20

¹¹Surely, this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. ¹²It is not in the heavens, that you should say, "Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" ¹³Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" ¹⁴No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it. ¹⁵See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶For I command you this day, to love Yehovah Eloheykha, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His laws, and His rules, that you may thrive and increase, and that Yehovah Eloheykha may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods, ¹⁸I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish; you shall not long endure on the soil that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹I call heaven and earth to witness against you

this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live—²⁰by loving Yehovah Eloheykha, heeding His commands, and holding fast to Him.

King Solomon asked for it and it was granted to him. We need discernment in order to understand and choose between those ways that lead to life and those ways that lead to death. We too should ask Yehovah for this too. We also need to seek out knowledge, and come to understanding and eventually be wise in the keeping of Torah.