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## CULTURAL UNIT YELLOW IN THE BIBLE. LACK OF SIGN IS A SIGN

The word *mega* is appropriate for many reasons but mainly to avoid any confusion with the Berlin and Kay (B&K) tradition. To avoid confusion and scientific uncertainty, I will use the terms mega-black, mega-white, mega-red, etc., but not macro-black, macro-white, macro-red, etc. The method includes all four channels referring to color: basic color terms (BCT), prototype terms (PT), rival terms for prototypes (RT) and terms for basic features of prototypes (TBFP).

BCT, PT, RT and TBFP are element of a cultural unit, in the sense of Eco (1985). While the Berlin and Kay tradition focuses only on basic color terms (BCT). In the B&K tradition, BCCs are presented only by BCTs. However, anthropological data show that in different cultures BCCs are presented by PT or RT (see, for example, Borg 1999; Borg 2007). Mega Yellow is the verbal language of colors. The cultural unit (Eco 1985) combines both verbal and visual language of colors.

The concept mega yellow incorporates all kinds of words that can signify or inspire yellow – BCT, PT, RT, TBFP, i.e. Mega Yellow is the verbal language of colors. While the cultural unit (Eco 1985; Almalech 2017a) Yellow combines both verbal and visual colors.

The presence of yellow in comparison with other colors is distinguished by a degree of amorphousness. This has different dimensions and directions.

The yellow צהָב [tzahòv] frequency is low – in the Old Testament, only three uses translated into the vast array of translations *yellow*. It is of hair as a description of plague: Lev. 13:30; 32; 36.

Leviticus 13:30

the priest is to examine the sore, and if it appears to be more than skin deep and the hair in it is yellow צהָב [tzahòv] and thin, the priest shall pronounce that person unclean; it is an itch, an infectious disease of the head or chin (NIV).

καὶ ὄψεται ὁ ἱερεὺς τὴν ἀφήν καὶ ἰδοὺ ἢ ὄψις αὐτῆς ἐγκοιλοτέρα τοῦ δέρματος, ἐν αὐτῇ δὲ θριξὶ ξανθίζουσα λεπτὴ, καὶ μιανεῖ αὐτὸν ὁ ἱερεὺς· θραῦσμά ἐστιν, λέπρα τῆς κεφαλῆς ἢ λέπρα τοῦ πάγωνός ἐστιν (LXX).

Leviticus 13:32

And in the seventh day the priest shall look on the plague; and, behold, if the scall be not spread, and there be in it no yellow [tzahòv] hair, and the appearance of the scall be not deeper than the skin, (ASV).

καὶ ὄψεται ὁ ἱερεὺς τὴν ἀφὴν τῆ ἡμέρα τῆ ἐβδόμη, καὶ ἰδοὺ οὐ διεχύθη τὸ θραῦσμα, καὶ θριξὶ ζανθίζουσα οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῇ, καὶ ἡ ὄψις τοῦ θραύσματος οὐκ ἔστιν κοίλη ἀπὸ τοῦ δέρματος, (LXX).

Leviticus 13:36

then the priest shall look on him; and, behold, if the scall be spread in the skin, the priest shall not seek for the yellow [tzahòv] hair; he is unclean (ASV).

καὶ ὄψεται ὁ ἱερεὺς καὶ ἰδοὺ διακέχεται τὸ θραῦσμα ἐν τῷ δέρματι, οὐκ ἐπισκέπεται ὁ ἱερεὺς περὶ τῆς τριχὸς τῆς ζανθίης, ὅτι ἀκάθαρτός ἐστιν (LXX).

The term **צָהָב** [tzahòv] is translated as *yellow* or *blond*. They indicate skin and hair diseases, a gleaming polished surface, joy or anger (Brenner 1982: 8–9). The antonymous semanticizings of yellow ‘joy’ and ‘anger’ observed by Brenner (1982: 9) coincide with the meanings of yellow in the Norm for word-associations and correspond to the ability of all BCTs word-associations to acquire contextual antonymous meanings in the Norm for Free word-associations (Almalech 2001; Almalech 2011).

It is not clear whether the word **צָהָב** [tzahòv] is a derivative of the bilateral Tzadi-Het **צח**, Tzadi-He-He **צהה**, Tzadi-Het-Het **צחח** or Tzadi-Het-He **צחה** (Gesenius 1996: 885–890). Gesenius gave priority to *yellow of hair* **צָהָב** [tzahòv] (Lev. 13:30; 32; 36) originated from the root **צָהַח** [tzahàh] meaning “to shine”, “to glitter”, “as gold” (Gesenius 1996: 885).

Gesenius involved the root Tzadi-Het-Het **צחח** as a source root for *shine*, *glitter* **צָהַר** [zahàr], *clear*, *ritual pure* **צָהַר** [tahèr], *light* **צָהַר** [tzohàr], (pure) *oil* **צָהַר** [itzhàr], *to make or press out oil, with a press, from olives*, etc.: Job 24:11 [itzhàr]. Also to the *hapax* use of **צָהַר** [tzohàr] as *window* (Gen. 6:16). Hence the Hebrew worldview involves the word yellow **צָהָב** with the prototype, the sun at noon. Yellow is not involved with the semantic features ‘heat’ but with ‘light’ in the Hebrew worldview. “Entering” the paradigm of light and mega-white, yellow is in semiotic systemic competition with multiple types of light.

– Yellow is the chromatic iconic representative of the prototype, and the Hebrew worldview accepted the feature of the sun ‘to spread light’ ignoring the feature ‘hot’, ‘warm’: “Polished, glittering, like gold, Ezra 8:27 **צָהָב** [mutzahàv]” (Gesenus 1996: 885).

– Borg indicated “[...] the meanings of color terms elicited were determined primarily by reference to the hues of camels, sheep, goats, terrain and vegetation, and to those of garments, rugs, and household goods generally found in Bedouin tents” (Borg 1999: 125). There is no regular logic that the emerging Hebrew will

not be used in the matrix of nomadic Arabic dialects to derive color terms from the color of the fur of the breeding animals – camels, goats, sheep, cows. Old Testament intensely avoids this source.

– The sulfur is an appropriate candidate for the Rival Term of the prototype (RT). RT *sulfur, brimstone* can signify yellow but the Old and the New Testaments use it as a smell, not as a color. The uses are in contact sentences of fire, burning sulfur, Sodom, judgment, punishment and God's wrath and anger (Gen. 19:24; Deut. 29:23; Job 18:15; Isa. 34:9; Ps. 11:6; Ezek. 38:22; Luke 17:29; Rev. 9:17–18; 20:10; 21:20).

– Breastplate stones (as RTs) of the High Priest and the New Heavenly Jerusalem are excluded from our attention because of uncertainty about the exact color of the stones.

– There is another opinion about the origin of BCT yellow צָהָב [tzhahòv] (Borg 1999; Borg 2007; Bulakh 2006; Brenner 1982; Hartley 2010). They claim *yellow* was absorbed by the token of *green* יָרוֹק [iàrek]/יָרוֹק [iaròk] in Archaic Hebrew, e.g. Psalm 68:13 [H14] and the word צָהָב [tzhahòv] became BCT meaning *yellow* in Late Biblical Hebrew. But the reference of Hebrew BCT for *green* יָרוֹק [iaròk] is like the Greek χλωρός [hloròs] – from dark green to light-yellowish green as the colors of the olive oil. Thus, a derivative of יָרוֹק [iaròk] can signify *pale* יָרִיקוֹן [ierakòn] for the face, for feathers of a dove (Jer. 30:6), χλωρός [hloròs] for a horse (Rev. 6:8). There are no pigeons with yellow feathers. Rather, the emphasis is on shiny, gleaming greenish feathers. In Bulgarian, “His face is green with anger/malice/pain” is a normative phrasing. This is also the case in Hebrew. The claim that yellow is a derivative of יָרוֹק [iaròk] seems to have been influenced by the first version of the sequence according to Berlin and Kay (Berlin, Kay 1969), but has been refuted by the latest version (Kay, Maffi 1999).

– The lack of a sign is a sign.

The root Tzadi-Het-Het צַח found its place in the system of Hebrew for very special occasions. Such special occasions are: the window/the light of Noah's Ark (Gen. 6:16); the spiritually shining white she-donkeys pointed out by Deborah (Judg. 5:10) influenced the choice of King David for king's ritual animal and the Messiah's “son of a donkey”.

The absence of BCT yellow in the Bible is proof of the high intentionality of the Biblical text but not of color blindness as Gladstone's (Gladstone 1858) claimed the absence of blue BCT in Homer's poetry. Finally, the absence of yellow reconfirms the Jewishness of the New Testament keeping the tradition of the Old Testament. Ezra 8:27 uses of the same lexeme with the basic meaning in Biblical Hebrew *glitter, to shine, as gold, polished, gold-coloured, yellow, of hair*: “and twenty bowls of gold, of a thousand darics; and two vessels of fine bright מְצָהָב [mutzhàv] brass, precious as gold”.

The prototype of yellow, the sun at noon, also is presented without additional symbolism – only as a creation of God or as a physical source of heat. It is understandable such biblical presence of the sun because Israel’s pagan neighbors worshiped the sun as a separate important god. Prophetic Hebrew worldview gives preference to the yellow prototype, the sun at noon, as white, light developed over the root תַּחַץ [tzahàh] and the bilateral root תַּץ [tzàh]

בְּהִצָּץ glitter, to shine, as gold; Talm. id. Arab. to glitter, also to be reddish or yellowish, like the human hair. For the origin see תַּחַץ. HUPHAL (PUAL) participle בְּהִצָּץ [mutzahàv] polished, glittering, like gold, Ezra 8:27. Hence, בְּהִצָּץ [tzahàv] gold-colored, yellow, of hair, Lev 13:30; 32; 36 (Gesenius 1996: 890–891).

It is true to say that Judaism has the idea of a visual and semantic representative of gold. Gold as RT for yellow has never been used with the semantics of BCT “yellow”. Yellow is the chromatic representative of gold but the semantic representative of gold is white (Dana 1919) meaning ‘pure’. The connotative significance of the three appearances *yellow* בְּהִצָּץ [tzahòv] is a ‘disease’. It is far from the connotative significance ‘purity’ of gold and the connotative meanings of green.

I had doubts whether yellow could be called Mega Yellow for the Old Testament. The answer to these doubts can be found in the difference between the concept of Mega Yellow and the Cultural Unit Yellow. Mega yellow incorporates all kinds of words that can signify or inspire yellow – BCT, PT, RT, TBFP, i.e. Mega Yellow is the verbal language of colors. The cultural unit combines both verbal and visual language of colors. Thus, mega yellow and cultural unit yellow have incomplete (defective) paradigm in the Bible.

Non-color meanings of color are a semanticization of colors (verbal or visual), e.g. ‘joy’, ‘anger’. Brenner pointed out these meanings of biblical yellow describing it as “their syntagmatic relations in their contexts” (Brenner 1982: 8). The presence of the yellow differs dramatically from that of the other colors. I support Brenner’s opinion in two points.

The first one is “we cannot posit [tzahòv] as an exclusive Hebrew equivalent to ‘yellow’, which is the slot בְּהִצָּץ [tzahòv] belongs to in the “colour” system of modern Hebrew. In addition, the term has acquired a “non-colour” figurative sense through its colour denotation.” (Brenner 1982: 9). Second and more important, is “the referential scope of biblical בְּהִצָּץ [tzahòv] as a color term is basically unchanged in Masoretic Hebrew. Perhaps we should say that the wider application of the term, coupled with the appearance of secondary derived terms, point towards a possible restriction of it (although this is by no means certain)” (Brenner 1982: 9).

The super high prophetic intentionality of the Biblical text causes the restriction for use of BCT for yellow. It is obvious to me that in addition to the prophetic restrictions on the use of the BCT *yellow*, there are also prophetic restrictions on the use of the BCT *black* (only nine uses throughout the Old Testament) and *white* (less than forty throughout the Old Testament). “Surprisingly, ‘black’ and ‘dark’ are totally absent from the realm of the sacred and cultic, although they belong to the primary level of color distinction. Is it possible that this absence is intentional?” (Brenner 1999: 206). One of the many examples supplying the prophetic restrictions on BCTs are the twenty-two uses (from Gen. 24:29 to Gen. 30:36) of the proper name *Lavan* לָוָן [lavàn] (Jacob’s/Israel’s father-in-law) meaning *white* before the first appearance of BCT *white* לָוָן [lavàn] at Gen. 30:37.

The incomplete (defective) paradigm of biblical mega yellow and cultural unit yellow is a sign. This is a sign of prophetic intentionality. The intentionality includes use of the words, the place for the first appearance, and the restriction of the use of BCTs for yellow, black, white. The poor use of BCTs is at the expense of PTs’ wide presence for white (light) and black (darkness). The defectiveness of mega yellow is the strongest one due to the lack of compensatory use of PT, RT, or TBFP. Such compensatory presence exists for green, black, and white (Almalech 2017b; Almalech 2018).

Prophetic restriction is the only logical explanation for the defectiveness of mega yellow in the Old Testament. The defectiveness cannot be explained by color blindness or by lack of imagination. The New Testament follows the Old Testament practice of the absence of BCT yellow.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

B&K – Berlin and Kay

BCC – Basic color category

ASV – Holy Bible: American Standard Version, 1901

NIV – Holy Bible: New International Version, 1984 (US)

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*(Summary)*

From the perspective of color semiotics, Almalech traces the almost complete absence of basic terms for yellow (three uses) in the Old Testament and applies his original approach to color semiotics. The author follows different types of words – basic color terms (BCT), prototype terms (PT), rival terms for prototypes (RT), and terms for basic features of prototypes (TBFP). He calls these four cognitive channels mega color in the frame of cultural unit yellow. The author offers his hypothesis to the absence of mega yellow.

*Keywords:* color; Bible; semiotics; mega yellow; cultural unit.

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