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כסלו תשפ"ג | December 2022

Holidays and Occasions – חגים ומועדים

חג האורים

The Festival of Lights



“The Festival of Lights,” another name for Hanukkah, aptly reflects the holiday’s hallmark ritual – candle-lighting, a practice referred to already in the Mishna (Bava Kama 6:6). Our earliest record of this name appears in Flavius Josephus’ history from 93 CE, *Antiquities of the Jews* (Book 12, ch. 7, par. 7, §325). Writing in Greek, he says that Judah (the Maccabee) held eight days of sumptuous festivities celebrating the resumption of the Temple sacrifices and that, overjoyed at the unexpected restoration of their customs, they set in law for posterity to celebrate for eight days, “and from then to this day we observe the holiday and call it **φῶτα** (*fota*, ‘lights’ [a relative of English “photo-” words]).” Strangely, his description of the holiday and his explanation for its name (roughly: “because this freedom [of worship] beyond our hopes appeared”) make no mention of lights!

The name **חג האורים** (*Hag Ha'Urim*), the contemporary Hebrew parallel to “the Festival of Lights,” apparently comes from the name **φῶτα** in Josephus. However, the word **אור** (*ur*, singular of **אורים**) means ‘fire,’ whereas ‘light’ is **אור** (*or*). Why ‘the festival of fire(s)’ and not **חג האורות** (*Hag Ha'Orot*, ‘the festival of lights’), as one might expect?

Actually, the Hebrew name likely *did* originally mean ‘the festival of lights’ – read **חג האורים**, from **אור**. Today Hebrew has effectively abandoned the plural form **אורים** in favor of the form **אורות**, but in the Bible, the Dead Sea scrolls, and medieval Hebrew poetry we find the plural form **אורים**, as in Ps. 136:7 (the lone Biblical occurrence), which calls for giving thanks **לְעֵשָׂה אֲוִרִים גְּדֹלִים** (‘to the One who made the great lights’ – i.e., the sun and the moon). The plural form **אורים** persisted into the 20th century in the works of writers such as Bialik and Brenner. The name **חג האורים** became popular at the end of the 19th century, before the plural form **אורים** fell out of use.

The plural form **אורות** does appear twice in the Bible, but not necessarily in the sense ‘lights.’ In 2 Kings 4:39, it denotes herbs: **וַיֵּצֵא אֶחָד אֶל־הַשָּׂדֶה לְלֶקֶט אֹרֹת** (‘one went out into the field to gather herbs’). In Isa. 26:19 (**טַל אֲרוֹת טֹלֵף**, which inspired the phrase **טללי אורות** found in the liturgical poem **שיר הכבוד**), its sense is uncertain: some explain it as ‘lights’ (plural of **אור** or **אורה**), while others read

'herbs.' At any rate, the bulk of written evidence for the use of אורות for 'lights' begins only with early medieval poetry.

As for the word אור ('fire'): the midrash *Psikta DeRav Kahana* (beginning of ch. 21, קומי אורי) explains the word אורים in the obscure clause ה' באורים כבדו ה' (Isa. 24:15) as פנסיא (candles or candelabra), and the halakhic literature adopted this interpretation (*Tur Orah Hayyim* 610). This understanding of אורים – as well as the relevance of fire to Hanukka, of course – may have facilitated the transition of the holiday's name from חג האורים to חג האורות when the form אורות replaced אורים for 'lights.'

[להרחבה באתר האקדמיה](#)

חדשות וארועים – News and Events

הכּוּנוּ לְיוֹם הָעֵבְרִית תּשפ"ג!

Get Ready for
Hebrew Language Day!



This year the week of Hebrew Language Day will open with a special event at the Jerusalem Theater on Sunday, January 8, starting at 16:30. The first part will offer a plethora of workshops, lectures, and panel discussions on a wide range of topics – e.g., gender equality in Hebrew, culinary culture and the Hebrew language, and what Eliezer Ben-Yehuda would think of today's Hebrew – as well as programs for children of different ages. The evening will conclude with a musical performance by Rami Kleinstein in conversation with lyricist Tsruya Lahav, followed by a Hebrew-focused stand-up fest featuring multiple comedians. See the full program [here](#); buy tickets [here](#).

The Academy's [webpage for Hebrew Day 5783](#) provides a rich array of resources – educational materials, videos, and more, most of them at no charge – and information about planned events. Expect updates to the page as the day approaches.

Since the establishment of Hebrew Language Day by the Israeli government in 2012, the Academy has spearheaded the annual celebration with a variety of activities and initiatives. This year's programs highlight Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, who passed away a century ago this Hanukka; his birthday, 21 Tevet, was chosen as the date for Hebrew Language Day in recognition of his singular contribution to the revival of Hebrew. (This year 21 Tevet falls on Shabbat, so Hebrew Language Day will be observed instead on Thursday, 19 Tevet 5783, January 12, 2023.)

[לעמוד האקדמיה על יום העברית תשפ"ג](#)

נשיא חדש לאקדמיה ללשון העברית:
פרופסור אהרן ממן
AHL Welcomes New President,
Prof. Aharon Maman



Prof. Aharon Maman
(Credit: Muki Schwartz)

The Academy congratulates its new president, Prof. Aharon Maman, a member of the Academy since 1998 and its vice president since 2010. A professor emeritus in the department of Hebrew Language at the Hebrew University and the 2019 Israel Prize laureate in the field of Jewish languages and literatures and folk culture, Prof. Maman has also headed the Hebrew University's Institute for Jewish Studies and the Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East. He takes the reins from the fourth president, Prof. Moshe Bar-Asher, who retired recently after a tenure of almost 30 years. AHL welcomes Prof. Maman into his new role and thanks Prof. Bar-Asher for his tireless service and enormous, multifaceted contribution to the Academy.

[קראו עוד כאן.](#)

האקדמיה השתתפה בקונס ב'נאי ברית ואונסק"ו
על העברית
AHL Participates in B'nai B'rith-UNESCO
Conference on Hebrew



Several members of the Academy, including the new president and his predecessor, spoke at the conference "Hebrew as a Treasure of Human Heritage: Past, Present and Future," held on Nov. 15, 2022, at UNESCO's Paris headquarters. Organized by B'nai B'rith International in cooperation with UNESCO, the conference examined aspects of Hebrew's unique story, including its revival as a modern spoken language. The Academy, by sharing its members' expert knowledge about Hebrew's journey from ancient to modern times, contributed both to academic discourse on this topic and to global initiatives to preserve and revive native languages.

[View the conference program](#)

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