What is the Origin of the Word מחילה?

By: MITCHELL FIRST

Introduction

The concept of מחילה is commonly assumed to be integral to our yamim noraim. Yet surprisingly, neither the word מחילה nor the verb מחילה appears in Tanakh.1

1 I would like to thank Rabbi Avrohom Lieberman, Sam Borodach, and my son Shaya First for reviewing the draft and for their valuable insights. I would also like to thank R. Moshe Yasgur for many helpful conversations on this topic, and Allen Friedman for providing many useful references. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the article by J. Abraham, “A Literary Solution to the Name Variations of Esau’s Wives,” The Torah U-Madda Journal 7 (1997), pp. 1–14, which also provided many useful references.

2 There are people in Tanakh with names built around the letters מחילה. These are: מחול (I Kings 5:11, but see Rashi), מחילה (daughter of Tzelafhad, referred to several times, and a male referred to at I Ch. 7:18), מחילה (son of Elimelekh), מחלי (two different individuals, referred to a few times), and מחילה (a wife of Esau; later, a wife of Rehoboam). The Tanakh also refers to a place called מחילה (Judges 7:22, and I Kings 4:12 and 19:16; see also I Sam. 18:19 and II Sam. 21:8). Based on all of this, it can be argued that the verb מחילה and a concept of מחילה did exist in Biblical times. This will be discussed further in Part III.

The Tanakh also includes words like מחילה (musical instrument) and מחילה (musical instrument, dancing). But almost certainly the initial mem in these is not a root letter and these derive from חלל or חול.

That the verb מחילה is not found in Tanakh explains many instances in our tefilot where a citation to a verse about מחילה might be expected and yet none is provided. See, for example, the zekhor lanu section of our selihot. See Siddur Kol Yaakov: The Complete ArtScroll Siddur (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 3rd ed., Hakirah 18 © 2014).
When do the terms מחילה and מחל first appear and in what contexts? What is their precise meaning? Can we differentiate between the meaning of the verb מחל and the meaning of the verb סלח? (The latter appears 50 times in Tanakh.) This article will attempt to deal with these issues.

I. The First Appearances

Although the noun מחילה and the verb מחל do not appear in Tanakh, the noun מחילה (in the form מחילת) and various forms of the verb מחל do appear in the mishnayot of Bava Kamma, Terumot, Sotah, Yoma, and Avot. Similarly, the noun מחילה (in the form מחילה) and various forms of the verb מחל also appear in the Tosefta.

The fact that the root מחל does not appear in Tanakh and then appears in Mishnaic Hebrew is surprising. But it is not unusual. This is the case with many other roots as well.

The word מחול with the meaning “waive” or “forgive” also appears once in a very fragmentary passage in a text from the Dead Sea.

II. What are the Origin and Meaning of the Root מחל?

I will now present three suggestions for the origin and meaning of the root.

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5 See M. Moreshet, Leksikon Ha-Poal She-Nithadesh Bi-Leshon Ha-Tannaim (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan Univ., 1980). (His discussion of מחל is on pp. 86 and 209.) Admittedly, many of the new Tannaitic roots can be easily connected to earlier Hebrew or Aramaic roots, or to earlier roots in other Semitic languages. But in the case of מחל, this is not the case.

6 See 4Q267 4:4 (Discoveries in the Judaean Desert XVIII, p. 99): מחל לא יבוא. The surrounding words have not survived, so the context is unknown. The handwriting is an “early Herodian formal hand” (ibid., p. 96).
First Suggestion: The root derives from the noun מַחֲלָה, and its meaning of “open space” or “emptiness.”

There is a noun in Mishnaic Hebrew מַחֲלָה, which seems to have “open space” or “emptiness” as its fundamental meaning. It is fairly clear that this word lies behind Biblical words such as מַחַל (flute), מַחֲלָה (caves, hollows), and מַחֲלָה (opening, window). Probably, the Hebrew word for bread מַחֲלָה derives from מַחֲלָה as well. Ancient Middle Eastern bread probably looked like pita, i.e., had a hollow center.

Perhaps the verb מָכַל originated in the form מַחֲלָל, the הפעל (causative) of מַחֲלָה, meaning “to turn something into a void.” Subsequently, the second לamed dropped.

Second Suggestion: The root derives from the verb מָכַל, and its meaning “release, make loose, untie.”

A root מָכַל with the meaning of “release, make loose, untie” is found in Arabic. There is no such root in Hebrew, and our sources for מַחֲלָה in

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7 See, e.g., Bava Batra 3:8, Uktzin 2:8, and Ma’aser Sheni 3:7. This word is also known to us from the blessing asher yatzar shalloli.
8 I Sam. 10:5 and elsewhere.
9 Gen. 8:6 and many other places. See, e.g., S. D. Luzzatto, comm. to Gen. 8:6.
11 In a different context, R. Shlomo Riskin writes: “The word הַלוּ, as in הַלוּ הָ-בָּרוּאֶד, means ‘empty’; it does not mean ‘profane.’ There exist the holy and the still-empty-of holiness, the holy, and the not-yet-holy, which is waiting for us to express its inherent sanctity.” See his The Passover Haggadah (New York: Krav, 1983), p. 25. Although his idea is a profound one, almost certainly הַלוּ does not mean “empty” in the expression הַלוּ הָ-בָּרוּאֶד; it means “low/profane.” See similarly the meaning of the term הַלְוָ at Lev. 10:10 (bein ha-kodesh u-vein ha-pol, u-vein ha-tame u-vein ha-tahor).
12 See, e.g., Y. Steinberg, Mail-Jewish, vol. 50, number 31 (2005).
13 The dropping of the second of two lameds is not an infrequent occurrence.
14 See A. Even Shoshan, Millon Even Shoshan (Israel: Ha-Millon Ha-Hadash, 2003), vol. 2, p. 565, entry מַחֲלָה. (Klein, p. 219, lists the Arabic word as having the meaning “united, undid.” But “united” is surely a typographical error for “untied.”)
15 It is possible to argue that מַחֲלָה means “release” in the Tanakh, Mishnah and Tosefta any time the term is used to describe an object going from a holy state to a
Arabic with this meaning are many centuries after the period of Mishnaic Hebrew. But the root in Arabic raises the possibility that Hebrew may once have had such a root and that this underlies the word מחל. If the verb חלל was one that was conjugated in the piel construct, the present tense would have had an initial mem (מחל). Over time, this mem could have become part of the root, and the second lamed could have dropped.

That מחל arose from חלל is supported by the fact that there is a root חלל in Aramaic with the meaning of “forgive” or “relinquish.”

Profane state. But much more likely, the meaning of חלל in this context is “profane/lower,” and not “release.”

Alternatively, perhaps the verb חלל originated in the form מחלל as the hiphil of חלל, meaning “to cause something to be released, made loose, or untied.” Subsequently, the second lamed dropped. Or the verb חלל generated a noun מחל, an object that was released, and this noun later generated the verb חלל. Such a development occurred in the case of the verb תרח. The original verb רה (raise) led to the creation of the noun, תרח. This noun later generated the verb תרח. Sokoloff seems to believe that there was a root מחל in the Palestinian Aramaic of the Amoraic period, but not in the Babylonian Aramaic of this period. His Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, entry חלל, lists only Geonic usages of the root. (For the references, see Sokoloff’s above dictionary, entry חלל, and his A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period, entry חלל.) But many scholars believe that the initial mems here are not root letters. See, e.g., Kutscher, vol. 1, pp. 5, 66, and Moreshet, p. 209, n. 8**. If the initial mem is a root letter, the Aramaic root מחל may derive from the Hebrew root חלל. Sokoloff seems to believe that there was a root חלל in the Palestinian Aramaic of the Amoraic period, but not in the Babylonian Aramaic of this period. His Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, entry חלל, lists only Geonic usages of the root. The words in the Babylonian Talmud with the initial mem are categorized in the entry חלל. But in his Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, he categorizes the words in the Jerusalem Talmud with the initial mem in an entry חלל. Similarly, L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, in The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Leiden-New York-Köln: Brill, 1994), entry חלל, take the position that Palestinian Aramaic had a root חלל with the meaning “forgive.”
**Third Suggestion:** The root **מחל** is related to the root **מחה**.

The root **מחה** is attested to many times in *Tanakh*.

Supporting this is the possibility that, in the earliest stages, Hebrew roots had only two letters. There may have been an original two-letter root **מח**, which had some meaning related to “erase, blot out, remove,” and both **מחל** and **מחה** ultimately derive from this root.

Interestingly, an anonymous passage in *Midrash Tanhuma* seems to assume a close relationship, and perhaps an identity of meaning, between **מחל** and **מחה**. The passage makes a statement about God being **מוחל**, but then cites a verse referring to **מחה**:

**אמר המקרש בורך יהוה: בקשת יהוה סכומר לוד וידי קרבן ועולם הבא אני **מוחל** פשעיך בלא קרבן שנאמר ענין הוא **מחה** פשעיך...**

Admittedly, our first and second suggestions are difficult because they have to postulate that an initial **mem** eventually became part of the root. Although we have suggested scenarios in which this could have occurred, these scenarios are farfetched.

Therefore, of our three suggestions, the third seems most likely: a connection between **מחה** and **מחל** based on an original two-letter **מח** root.

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20  For example, it is the verb used in connection with the commandment to remember Amalek. See Ex. 17:14, and Deut. 25:19.

21  See, e.g., R. Jacob Emden, *Siddur Beit Yaakov* (Lemberg, 1904), p. 68. **מחה** seems to believe there is a relation between them as well.

22  See, e.g., E.Y. Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Jerusalem: Magnes and Hebrew Univ., 1984), p. 6. The one example that Kutscher provides are the several verbs whose first two root letters are **פר**. They all seem to have an underlying notion of “divide.” Another example may be **נג**. These all relate to “coming close to something.” **מחה** and **מחה** are related as well. In the two-letter root model, the third letter acts as a semantic modifier, distinguishing between the different types of the verb.

23  *Midrash Tanhuma*, *Shemini*, section 10. The verse cited is Is. 43:25.
But it may just be coincidence that מחה and מחול begin with the same two letters; there may be no relationship between the two at all. After all, the Biblical verbs מחא and מחץ (both meaning “strike”) are probably not related to the verb מחה.

III. Light Shed by Archaeology

It has long been observed that there are people and places in Tanakh with the names מחול, מחילה, מחולן, מחלי, מחלת, מחולה, מחול, and מחצר. These can support an argument that the root מחול and the concept of מחילה existed in Biblical times. But one can easily respond that these names were much

24 With regard to the Biblical verb מחק, it appears only once in Tanakh, at Judges 5:26 (mahakah rosho). From the context, its meaning seems to be “hit,” “crushed,” “split,” or “destroyed.” In Mishnaic Hebrew, the root מחק means “rub out,” “blot out,” “scrape,” or “smooth.” It is possible to interpret Judges 5:26 using the Mishnaic meaning, but such an interpretation seems farfetched in the context. Most likely, the מחק of Judges 5:26 is related to the Biblical מחא. See, e.g., Moreshet, p. 209, n. 13*.

25 It is noteworthy that theAvinu Malkeinu prayer includes the lines for מחול, מחילה and מחוק in direct succession. (The first of these begins ומחול סלח.)

26 For example, J. Talmud, Bikkurim 3:3 and Genesis Rabbah 67:13 read into the name מחלת (Gen. 28:9) an allusion that God forgave Esau’s sins. See also Rashi to Gen. 36:3. The Sages have found other ways to read the concept of mehilah into Tanakh. For example:

- The Talmud, at Shabbat 118b, includes a statement that reads the term homiletically into Is. 56:2 (מחלל). A passage in Midrash Tehillim (88:1) interprets the mehilah (musical instrument) of Psalms 88:1 as an allusion that God forgave David’s sins.

- Sifrei, Parshat Haazinu, sec. 319, records a view that לחול here refers to God as a forgiver of sins. But the parallel לחול in the same verse (Deut. 32:18) indicates clearly that here means “the one who gave birth to you.” לחול and לחול are parallel many times in Tanakh. See Ps. 90:2 and Is. 23:4, 54:1, and 66:8. (Some suggest that the root of לחול in its “birth” meaning is לחול, due to the trembling of the birth mother. Others suggest that the root is לחול and point to the whirling and writhing of the birth mother. Others suggest that the root is לחול, alluding to the womb.) P. Peli, in setting forth the view of R. Soloveitchik, writes that the term mehilah is not found anywhere in Tanakh except “perhaps” at Deut. 32:18, and cites to this Sifrei. See Al Ha-Teshuvah, p. 265.
What is the Origin of the Word מחילה?:

more likely founded upon the “musical instrument,” “dancing,” or “joy” meanings of the letters מחל.

But archaeology has now provided us with a name from the late Biblical period that is likely related to a “forgiveness” or “relinquish” meaning of מחל. An incense altar from Lachish has been discovered that names מחליה בן יאש as its owner. The altar dates from the 5th century B.C.E. and most likely, this owner was a Jew. The name מחליה is undoubtedly meant to provide a description of God, and God is much more likely to be described as a “forgiver” or “relinquisher (of punishment)” than as a “musician” or “dancer,” or described with some meaning related to “sickness.” Thus, the meaning of the name מחליה is almost certainly: “God has forgiven/relinquished.” We now have a reasonable basis to infer that the root מחל with a meaning relating to “forgive” or “relinquish” existed at least in late Biblical times.

27 The “musical instrument” and “dancing” meanings derive from חל or חל. Very likely, מחל eventually took on the meaning “joy.” See Ps. 30:12 and Lam. 5:15. If so, the birth name can be seen as a commemoration of the joy that the parents felt at the time of the birth. See Encyclopedia Mikrait, entry מחל, p. 788.

28 See Y. Aharoni, Investigations at Lachish (Tel Aviv: Gateway, 1975), pp. 6-7.

29 Aharoni considers the inscription to be Hebrew and its owner to be a Jew. He points out that Neh. 11:30 refers to a Jewish community at Lachish. There are scholars who argue that the owner of the altar was an Arab, or an Edomite, or a Canaanite. But the last two letters of the name מחליה point strongly to its Jewishness; non-Jews probably did not utilize such name endings in this period.

30 “Joy” seems unlikely here as well. Also, it would require a spelling of מחליה.

31 I had initially thought it possible that מחל originated as a contraction of מחל and the prefix ה. In the Mishnah and the Tosefta, מחל is often followed by the prefix ה. But the Biblical verb מחל, used in connection with an object, is typically followed by אח. See, e.g., the commandment to remember Amalek at Ex. 17:14 and Deut. 25:19. Sometimes the Biblical verb מחל is not followed by אח and one time it is followed by ב, but it is never followed by the prefix ה. If מחל with a meaning related to “forgive” or “relinquish” already existed as a verb in Biblical times, it would seem extremely unlikely that its origin was as a contraction of מחל.
IV. Can we differentiate between סלה and מחילה?

Over the centuries, many rabbinic authorities have attempted to differentiate between סלה and מחילה.32 For example, R. David Abudarham writes that סלה is more efficacious, since with סלה, there will not remain a bakpadah muetet (=lingering minor ill-feeling).33 R.

32 The difference between them is not just relevant to the yamim noraim. For example, in the prevalent version of the daily Amidah, both סלה and מחילה are found in the sixth berakhabah. (But from the Cairo Genizah, we learn that the Palestinian version of the Amidah did not include מחילה here. After the initial phrase beginning with סלה, the next phrase began with מחילה in the Palestinian version. See U. Ehrlich, “Tefillat ha-Amidah Shel Yemot ha-Hol [Jerusalem, 2013], pp. 99-104.)

There are passages in classical rabbinic literature where the roots סלה and מחילה are found together. For example, at Ta'anit 30b and Bava Batra 121a, an anonymous passage describes Yom Kippur as a day of both סלה and מחילה. At Ber. 32a, the Palestinian amora R. Abbahu describes Moses as declaring that he is not going to let go of God ad she-timh ימי hol ve-tislah ימי hol. See also J. Talmud, Yoma 45c (last page of the tractate). (Here, a possible distinction is implied: מחילה is requested from עון, while סלה is requested from חטא. But compare Leviticus Rabbah 3:3. See further Isaac Baer, Avodat Yisrael (Rödelheim, 1868), p. 416, notes.)

There are many passages in the Yom Kippur and yearly liturgies in which both סלה and מחילה are included and a possible distinction between the roots could be implied (as in the above passages from the Jerusalem Talmud and Leviticus Rabbah). But it is doubtful that these passages are Tannaitic in origin, and the original distinction between סלה and מחילה was most likely lost by the time these passages were composed. Moreover, the original distinction between סלה and מחילה may have been lost even in the Tannaitic period.

33 Sefer Abudarham Ha-Shalem (Jerusalem: Even Yisrael, 1995), pp. 110-111 (shaharit shel hol). Interestingly, the earliest edition of Siddur Kol Yaakov: The Complete Artscroll Siddur cites Abudarham as saying the exact opposite! This error was corrected in subsequent editions. See the comm. to Amidah of daily shaharit, p. 103. (But the language in the corrected passage remains awkward.)

Also, Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik has expressed the view that מחילה is more efficacious. See Peli, p. 265. R. Soloveitchik takes the position that even after מחילה (which is described as mehikat ba-aron), one still needs סלה to purify the soul and return it to its former status. R. Soloveitchik takes the position that מחילה is the equivalent of כפרה, and סלה is the equivalent of טהרה. See also I. Wohlgemuth, A Guide to Jewish Prayer (Brookline, MA: J. Robinson, 1999), p. 165:

Slach involves divine grace. If we sin, we have done something wrong… But God in His divine grace can elevate us above our sins and treat us as though they never occurred. It is a complete forgiveness by divine grace. Mchal,
Jonathan Eybeschuetz writes that מחילה is personal forgiveness granted so that the transgression that was committed may not permanently blight the relationship of the transgressor to the one against whom he has sinned. מחילה is objective pardon, the waiver of the punishment which the transgressor would have deserved (emphasis added.)

This suggestion is attractive because it clearly delineates two different concepts, each deserving of its own root. One is the psychological forgiveness granted so that the relationship between the transgressor and the other party can be maintained. The other is the waiver/relinquishment of the objective punishment or financial penalty.

The problem with this suggestion is that by the time the root מחילה appears in the Mishnah and Tosefta, it appears in the contexts of both waiver of objective punishment/financial penalty and psychological forgiveness. Most probably, the name in the altar from Lachish from the

however, means canceling the debt. It means that you really did sin, but God will not collect the “payment” for the sin by punishing you.

34 See his Yearot Devash, cited in Siddur Otzar Ha-Tefillot: Nusah Ashkenaz (New York: A. I. Friedman), vol. 1, p. 326 (comm. of Etz Yosef). On the other hand, an argument can be made from Num. 14:20–23 that סליחה does not preclude punishment.

35 See his Siddur Otzar Ha-Tefillot, vol. 1, p. 385, Etz Yosef comm.

36 According to R. Judah He-Hasid (d. 1217), commenting on Num. 14:20–23, סליחה means additional time is given for repentance that will lead to complete forgiveness. מחילה means the forgiveness is total. See Perushei Ha-Torah Le-R. YeHUDAb He-Hasid, ed. I. S. Lange (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 174-75.


38 From now on, for the sake of simplicity, I will use the term “waiver,” instead of “waiver/relinquishment.”

39 For מחילה as psychological forgiveness in the Mishnah, see Bava Kamma 8:7 (af-al-phant shet ha-avon lo, eino nimhal lo ad she-yerakehs mimenu) and Avot 6:1 (a-moteh al elbom). In the case of mephila ha-aron (Yoma 7:1, Sotah 7:7 and 7:8), it is unclear if the
fifth century B.C.E. also alludes to the psychological forgiveness aspect of הסליחה.40 But it is at least possible that originally the root מחל had only the meaning of waiver of an objective punishment and/or financial penalty, and that סליחה had only the meaning of psychological forgiveness, and over time the root מחל expanded to include psychological forgiveness.

An alternative suggestion can be made, based on the fact that the root מחל appears in Tanakh only in the context of the Divine.41

סלח was the root used for Divine forgiveness or waiver of an objective punishment/financial penalty, while מחל arose as the root for human beings, whether they were giving out psychological forgiveness or waiving an objective punishment/financial penalty. Over time, מחל also began to be used in the context of Divine, as evidenced by the altar from Lachish from the fifth century B.C.E.42

reference is to Divine waiver of punishment or to Divine psychological forgiveness.

For מחל as Divine psychological forgiveness in the Tosefta, see Shevu'ot 3:2-3, Yoma 3:13, 4:9 and 4:12, Sukkah 4:2, and Sanhedrin 9:3. But admittedly one could interpret all of these as referring to Divine waiver of punishment.

The context of מחל in the Dead Sea text 4Q267 is unknown. The passage is too fragmentary.

40 Since God both forgives us and imposes punishments or financial penalties, the allusion in the name מחליה could be to either aspect. But probably the psychological forgiveness aspect is primary and is what would be emphasized in the name.

41 The root never appears in Tanakh as something given by, or requested from, a human being. See Reif, p. 87, and J. Hausmann, entry סלח, The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), vol. 10, pp. 258–265. (Interestingly, in Akkadian, סלח occurs in non-Divine contexts as well. Hausmann, ibid.)

In Akkadian, the root has the meaning “sprinkle.” Some believe that this was the original meaning of the root. (Words normally have concrete meanings before they develop abstract meanings.) See, e.g., Hausmann, p. 259 and Encyclopaedia Judaica 6:1433. The Aramaic root סלח, “sprinkle” (see, e.g., Jastrow, p. 401), is also perhaps related to סלח. A relationship between סלח and סלק (go up, go away) has also been suggested. See, e.g., Mandelkern, p. 799.

Malbim had pointed out that the root מחל appears in Tanakh only in the context of the Divine. See his comm. to Ps.130:4. He suggests that מחל treaties the sin as if it had never occurred and only God is capable of doing this. He suggests that this may be the meaning of ki imkhah ha-selihah at Ps. 130:4.

42 Also, over time, the root מחל began to recede from common use, since it was a word used only in Divine contexts. The root מחל is never found in the Mishnah and is found only twice in the Tosefta (both times at Nazir 3:6). In both Talmuds, its use is limited to discussions of forgiveness by God, and quotations from
Summary and Conclusion

We provided three suggestions to connect מחילה to otherwise known roots of חלל and מחווה. Of these, the third is most likely: a connection between מחילה and מחווה based on an original two-letter מח root. But it is possible that there was an original Hebrew root מחילה and that it had no connection to the root חלל.

We suggested that מחילה originally meant waiver of an objective punishment or financial penalty, while חלל had the meaning of psychological forgiveness. We suggested alternatively that מחילה originally arose as the root applicable to human beings, whether they were giving out psychological forgiveness or a waiver of an objective punishment/financial penalty.

But admittedly, all of this is mere speculation. מחילה in the context of the Divine, and probably in the context of psychological forgiveness, is already found in the altar from Lachish from the fifth century B.C.E.

If מחילה was not originally synonymous with חלל, this makes it more of a possibility that מחילה existed as a root in the early Biblical period, even though our earliest clear evidence for it is only from the fifth century B.C.E. altar from Lachish. The Tanakh may simply have not had the occasion to use the root.43 The possibility that the root existed in the early Biblical verses and nusah ba-tefillah. It is never used in either Talmud to describe forgiveness by an individual. It is very ironic that the expression in modern Hebrew for “excuse me” is סלח.

If we follow the suggestion of R. Hirsch, there is little reason for מחילה to have appeared in Tanakh. When the Tanakh sets forth legal provisions affecting the rights of individuals, it is concerned with setting forth fundamental principles. The concept of someone waiving his entitlement is just a side matter, not a subject that we should expect mention of. If we follow our alternative suggestion, there is also perhaps little reason for מחילה to have appeared in Tanakh. Tanakh is a work much more concerned with Divine forgiveness and waiver than forgiveness and waiver by human beings.

In his entry חלות (p. 734), Mandelkern was willing to suggest that Ex. 34:9, *resalahta la-avoneinu u-le-hatoteinu u-nehaltanu* originally read *resalahta la-avoneinu u-le-hatoteinu u-mehaltanu*. Then the root מחילה would be found in Tanakh! Even though mem and nun do look somewhat similar in Old Hebrew, there is no reason to take Mandelkern’s speculation seriously. On the other hand, it has been suggested that the root חלות once had a meaning of “forgive” and that this was its meaning here. See Z. Ben-Ḥayyim, *Ivrit Ve-Anamit Nusah Shomron*, vol. 3, part II (Jerusalem: Ha-Akademyah Le-Lashon Ha-Ivrit, 1967), pp. 358-359. (If this is correct, perhaps מחילה derives from חלות?)
Biblical period encourages us to look again at all the people and places in Tanakh with names based on the letters מחל. That a concept of מחילה may be reflected in some of these names becomes more of a possibility.

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I will close on a homiletical note. The yamim noraim are a time when God has a special relationship with the Jewish people. Since the concept of מחילה is not found explicitly in Tanakh, it can be considered a special Divine gift, appropriate to this unique period.

Ben-Ḥayyim suggested that מחל is related to the Arabic root מחל, which has the meaning of “acting kindly or patiently.”

44 For some humorous material in connection with the terms מחל and מחילה, see M. Wex, *Just Say Nu* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007), pp. 24-25.

45 See Is. 55:6 and Rosh ha-Shanah 18a.