

# ❖ SEASONS OF THE MOON ❖

*The Month of Iyar*

*Iyar 5756 / 20th April 1996 - 18th May 1996*

## *THIS MONTH'S SIGN* *S H O R / T A U R U S*

## *THE HIDDEN LIGHT*

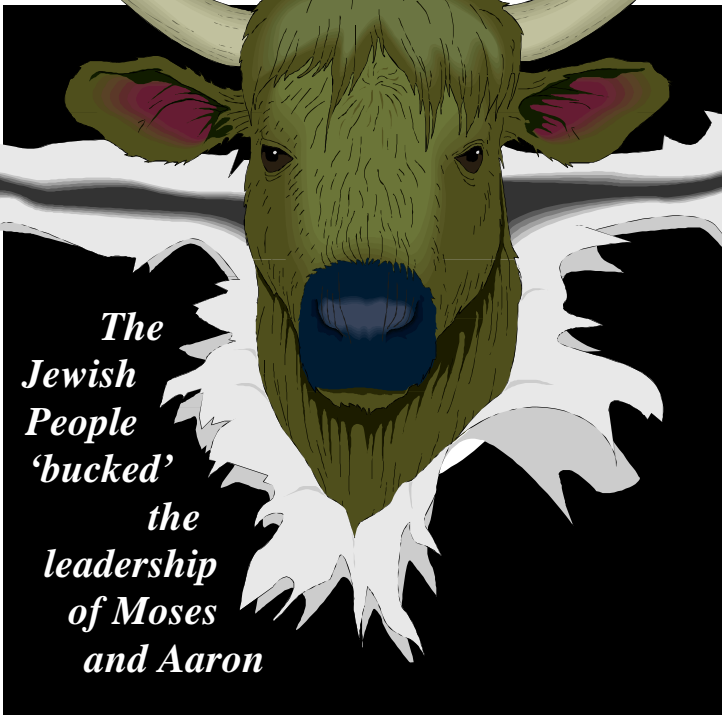
**T**he formation of the Jewish People started on the eve of the Exodus in the first month, *Nissan*, and culminated with the giving of the Torah at Sinai in the third month of *Sivan*. This is symbolized in the first three astrological symbols: *Aries*, the lamb, symbolizes the unity of the group - In a flock the lamb feels itself identical to its neighbor. Also, just as sheep follow a shepherd, the Jewish People accepted the leadership of Moses.

Our month, the month of *Iyar*, is symbolized by the *Shor*, the bull, which desires to dwell in isolation. *Iyar* is therefore a time of introspection and self-development, a time of preparation for receiving the Torah in *Sivan*. However, there were times when the Jewish People also exhibited the rebellious qualities of the bull and 'bucked' the leadership of Moses of Aaron when they rebelled in the desert during this month.

This process of individual growth is connected to the counting of the Omer - which takes place mostly in *Iyar*. But when the individual is over-emphasized this can lead to disaster, as happened when the students of Rabbi Akiva all died because they failed to give each other enough respect.

**I**f you're flying over Israel on the night of Monday 6th of May this year, and you look down out of your plane, you will see thousands of bonfires dotting the landscape as far as the eye can see. For that night will be Lag B'Omer - the 33rd day of the Omer: The 33rd day of counting the seven weeks between Pesach and Shavuot.

Throughout history, the period of the Omer has been fraught with tragedy for  
*(Continued over)*



*The Jewish People 'bucked' the leadership of Moses and Aaron*

## *THE 49 STEPS*

**W**hen you look forward to something very much, when you fix your gaze on a special moment in the future, you count the days to that event. When the Jewish People left Egypt, even though their new-

found freedom was very sweet to them, their gaze was fixed on a moment that Moshe told them would arrive seven weeks later - the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

From the second night of Pesach, every night for seven weeks, we count the days that have passed on this spiritual journey from Egypt to Sinai. We call

*(Continued over)*

## THE HIDDEN LIGHT

(Continued from other side)

the Jewish People: Some 1,900 years ago, all 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva died during the Omer because they failed to give each other enough respect. Exactly 900 years ago, whole Jewish communities were obliterated in Germany during the First Crusade. Men, women and children were slaughtered, and Torah scholars burned alive. 250 years ago, Ukrainian peasants under the leadership of a petty aristocrat called Bogdan Chmielnicki (y"s), aided by Dneiper Cossacks and Tartars from the Crimea unleashed a terrible massacre: In the synagogue in Nemirov, the Cossacks used ritual knives to slaughter the inhabitants. In this town alone, 6,000 men, women and children were butchered.

In remembrance of Rabbi Akiva's students and the other tragedies, it is the custom to abstain from things that bring joy to the heart: Weddings are not held; We refrain from cutting our hair as is the custom of a mourner.

But why do we light bonfires on the 33rd day of the Omer?

### THE 49 STEPS

(Continued from other side)

this process 'The counting of the Omer.'

The emergence from Egyptian slavery marked the beginning of the physical freedom of the Jewish People. On the spiritual plane, however, we were still sunk in the morass of Egyptian immorality and spiritual pollution. 210 years of Egyptian slavery had brought us very low - down to the 49th level of spiritual corruption. We were standing at the door to the 50th level. Before the giving of the Torah, no-one who passed through that door, returned. **In seven short weeks, Hashem brought us from the brink of spiritual abyss to the highest level of all the generations - the Generation of Knowledge, the generation who were fit to receive the Torah.**

When all 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's students had died, the world was desolate. The Torah had been forgotten - there were no pupils to go out and teach and disseminate the light of Torah. Rabbi Akiva traveled to the rabbis of the South and taught them. On Lag B'Omer, he layed his hands on the heads of these, his last five disciples, giving them *smicha* (rabbinical ordination). And from that day, the world began to brighten from these five points of light. As the day of their ordination was the 33rd day of the Omer, we light bonfires in Israel to symbolize the great light that the Torah represents.

One of those last five disciples of Rabbi Akiva was the great Talmudic sage Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. His departure from this world also occurred on Lag B'Omer. On the day of Rabbi Shimon's passing, a great light was revealed to his students when he uncovered many of the hidden secrets of the Torah. This was written down in the *Zohar* (lit. 'shining'). The bonfires symbolize the light of the hidden wisdom that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai revealed on Lag B'Omer.

# O Jerusalem!

O Jerusalem

I have forgotten you!

I have forgotten The One  
that won you.

I put my trust in princes,  
in the strength of my own hand -  
tied now behind my back.

With soldiers  
standing, guarding,  
behind the bus-stops.

O Jerusalem!

Will the day of our return  
return to mock us?

Like some head-waiter's  
parting smile -

*Jerusalem Day, the 29th anniversary of the capture  
of Jerusalem in the Six Day War is on the 28th of  
Iyar / 17th May*

Sometimes, when we think of spiritual greatness, it seems so far away from us - another galaxy. We think to ourselves that we could never be really spiritual. It's all too difficult. We're too enmeshed in the physical world and its baubles and its lures. **All it took was seven short weeks for the Jewish People to rise from the pits of pollution to the heights of closeness to the Creator.** But the key to their success was that their gaze was

Heavenward. As Oscar Wilde put it "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."

**When we fix our eyes on the stars of spiritual greatness, when we turn our heads Heavenwards, Hashem draws us close to Him and the distance between Heaven and earth is a mere seven weeks.**

#### SOURCES:

THIS MONTH'S SIGN - Avnei Nezer, Shem MiShmuel, Rabbi M. Glazerson

THE HIDDEN LIGHT - Sefer HaToda'ah - Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov translated by Rabbi Nachman Bulman,  
Simchas Yitzhak, Kol ArieH in Chagim u'Zmanim - Lag B'Omer, Paul Johnson - A History of the Jews  
SEASONS OF THE MOON is written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair and edited by Rabbi Moshe Newman.

Designed by Y.A. Sinclair and Michael Treblow.

Published by Ohr Somayach/Tanenbaum College,  
22 Shimon HaTzadik Street, Jerusalem, Israel.

tel: 972-2-810-315; fax: 972-2-812-890; E-mail: ohr@jer1.co.il WWW <http://www.jer1.co.il/orgs/ohr>

This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect.