

# SEASONS OF THE MOON

The Month of Adar

Adar / 5758 • Feb. 27, 1998 - Mar. 27, 1998

2,354 years ago in Persia, Haman plotted the genocide of the Jewish People. Haman consulted the stars to see which month would be the most propitious for executing his murderous plan.

He found that the month of Adar, whose sign is *Dagim* (Pisces), which means “fish,” contained no special merit for the Jews. Thus, he surmised, that just like a fish, he could “swallow” his prey — the Jewish People. The fact that death had “swallowed” Moses on the seventh day of Adar lent support to his hypothesis.

## THIS MONTH'S SIGN DAGIM / PISCES

However, Haman had forgotten two small points: Moses was also born on the seventh of Adar; and it's true that fish can swallow up their prey — but they can also get swallowed up by bigger fish!

Which is exactly what happened to Haman and his crew. All their plans were turned upside down, and Haman and his family were hung on the exact same gallows which he had prepared for Mordechai.

This total turnabout of events is symbolized by the two fish, swimming in opposite directions, which is the sign of *Dagim*.

When Sir Donald Wolfit, the last of the great English actor/managers, was lying on his death bed, one of his young actors said to him: “Sir Donald, after a life so filled with success and fame, dying must be hard...”

To which Sir Donald replied: “Dying is easy ... Comedy is hard.”

They say a coward dies many times; the same must also be true for comedians.

Any actor who has stood in front of an audience and watched a line practiced for weeks clang helplessly to the floor to roars of silence will appreciate Sir Donald's sentiments.

Comedy is hard because we don't really understand what makes people laugh. We know what's funny because we laugh at it. But trying to distill the essence of comedy into a set of principles or laws is not so easy.

One of the basic elements of comedy is incongruity. A bank manager wearing a clown's red nose is funny. A clown wearing a red nose isn't.

Underlying this aspect of incongruity is a deeper idea — absurdity. We expect the world to have a certain natural order of events. When these events are suddenly turned upside down, the result is comic.

Which brings us to another element of comedy. Sudden reversal. Comedy depends on that mysterious quality of “tim-

## The Last Laugh

ing.” The information which will make the audience laugh has to be revealed in a certain time-frame. Too quickly, and the laugh is stifled before it's born. Too slowly, and the joke is telegraphed — people see it coming and it dies its own death.

### PERFECT TIMING

One of the most notable aspects of the Purim story is *hip-puch* — sudden reversal. Haman has his gallows ready to hang Mordechai. The letters decreeing the “final solution of the Jewish problem” have been sent out in all 127 languages to the far corners of the Persian Empire. In a split second, everything was turned upside down.

The only difference between tragedy and comedy is the ending.

The Purim story is a comedy in the classic sense. All seems set for disaster, and in an instant everything is turned on its head. This combination of total reversal and perfect timing gives Purim its special flavor of joy.

### COMEDY VERSUS RIDICULE

Most of what passes today for comedy is in fact ridicule. Where is the real comedy that fills our mouths with laughter?

It seems that in a world which accounts cynicism as wisdom, we have lost the genuine article of real comedy. Like some “invasion of the body-snatchers,” comedy has been abducted and in its place sits ridicule grinning like an imbecile.

Jews have always been known for their humor. It's as if the



Continued over

THE LAST LAUGH *continued*

world recognizes that there is something particularly Jewish about humor and that humor is part of the essence of Judaism. But how can something as serious as religion tolerate something as light as humor?

Humor doesn't have to be light. It doesn't have to lead to scoffing, to derision. Comedy is a serious business.

Jewish humor is about the absurd. It's about the human condition itself. It's about living in a world which seems to make no sense:

*Belorussia. Mid-winter. Temperature: -45° Fahrenheit. Moishe and Shloime are lying shivering in their tattered coats on two iron beds.*

*Moishe to Shloime: "Shloime, close the window, it's cold outside."*

*"Moishele, and if I close the window, it should be warm outside?"*

Behind every Jewish joke there's a Jewish tear. A wry bitter/sweet feeling of two thousand years of exile. Tears of sad-

ness. Tears of joy.

In the Psalm of *Shir Hama'alos* that we sing after a festive meal there is a line that yearns for the coming of *Mashiach*: "Then will our mouths be filled with laughter..." When *Mashiach* comes, he will come in a instant, and things will be totally turned upside down.

Just like Purim, he will come in crisis, in catastrophic reversal — *hippuch*. His coming will not be through gradual improvement. He will come in the darkest hour ... which is always just before the dawn.

The bitter/sweet humor of the Jewish People will then be transformed to a sweet/sweet humor. There will no longer be an elegiac quality to it. Ridicule will be deposed from its throne of idiocy. Our mouths will be **filled** with laughter. It will be a laughter of discovery, a laughter of total realization.

Then we will see how all the pieces in this Comedy of the Absurd called life fit into place.

Then we will laugh the last laugh.

## THE TWELVE AGES OF MAN

The cycle of the *mazalot* (astrological signs) is like the cycle of the life of a man: In the beginning, when he is born, Man is like a lamb (*Taleh/Aries*) — soft and delicate. As he grows, he becomes powerful like an ox (*Shor/Taurus*). Then he becomes like the twins (*Teumim/Gemini*): He sees himself as complete and perfect. Then his *yetzer hara* (negative impulse) starts to grow. At first it is as small as a crab (*Sartan/Cancer*), but if left unchecked, it becomes as strong as a lion (*Arieh/Leo*). If he sins, his *yetzer hara* puts on the mask of innocence, appearing as

## For Jacob Rose

*The rose subjected  
Its thorns neglected  
Its thoughts deflected  
To a wandering  
caravan of lights*

*The rose can change.  
It can shorten its name,  
Shorten its nose.  
To Ross or Roe  
or even R.*

*It can abbreviate  
till it no longer takes up any space at all,  
But the rose of Jacob  
joyful and happy  
(like the far-cry of Summer)  
forever Bloom*

pure as a maiden (*Betula/Virgo*). And if he continues to transgress, he is placed on the Scales (*Moznaim/Libra*), and his fate is weighed in the balance. If he persists in his rebellion, he is sent down to the depths, placed in a pit like a scorpion (*Akrav/Scorpio*). However, if he has a change of heart and returns to G-d, he is rocketed out of the pit like an arrow from the bow (*Keshet/Sagittarius*). Then he is transformed, returned to his former state of innocence, and becomes like a kid (*G'dee/Capricorn*) — purified by the waters of the water-carrier (*D'lee/Aquarius*). His life comes full-circle when like a fish (*Dagim/Pisces*), he luxuriates and basks in the water of eternity, his soul reposing in the higher world from which it came.

Sources: Midrash Tanchuma, Ha'azinu 1 in "The Constellations, Judaism and Me" by Rabbi Gad Erlanger

SEASONS OF THE MOON is written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair and edited by Rabbi Moshe Newman.

Designed and Produced by the Office of Communications - Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro, Director

Published by OHR SOMAYACH/TANENBAUM COLLEGE, 22 Shimon HaTzadik Street, Jerusalem, Israel.

tel: 972-2-581-0315; fax: 972-2-581-2890; E-mail: info@ohr.org.il WWW: http://www.ohr.org.il

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