

SEASONS OF THE MOON

The Month of Cheshvan

Cheshvan / 5758 November 1, 1997 - November 30, 1997

Akrav/Scorpio is a water sign. It's the time of year when rain is plentiful: The month of Cheshvan is associated with the great flood, when water destroyed the earth.

THIS MONTH'S SIGN AkraV / Scorpio

For this reason, it is called "MarCheshvan," or "bitter Cheshvan." Another reason for the "bitterness" of Cheshvan: It has no Yom Tov, no festival of its own.

Really, there should have been a festival to inaugurate the First Temple, which Shlomo Hamelech (King Solomon) completed during Cheshvan after seven years of building. However, Hashem did not command its inauguration until the following Tishrei —

twelve months later.

But Mar-Cheshvan will eventually lose its bitterness, because it is in the month of Cheshvan that the third, and final, *Beis Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) will be inaugurated.

In a way, Cheshvan is a parable for the entire history of the Jewish People. When we look at our history, it seems fraught with bitterness, rejection and hardship. But in the end, the bitter sting of the scorpion will be transformed to the greatest sweetness when all the nations will come to realize who the Jewish People are and who they have always been.

Louis XIV once asked Pascal for one single piece of evidence for the existence of G-d. Pascal replied with four words: "The Jews, Your Majesty."

It doesn't take the vision of a prophet to recognize that the continued existence of the Jewish people in a hostile world — "a lamb amongst seventy wolves" — is a unique puzzle that demands a solution.

Historians find themselves at a loss to explain Jewish continuity. Why should a small tribe from the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea have survived and prospered through two thousand years of both oppression and assimilation?

No historical theory has given a satisfactory explanation why only the Jewish People have outlived the Persian, the Babylonian, the Greek and the Roman nations. As Mark Twain once wrote "*The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and he is today what he was then...Everyone is mortal in this world, except the Jew...What is the secret of his eternity?*"

Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) called the Jewish People "the fossils of history." Toynbee perhaps believed that he could, like the proverbial monkey covering his eyes, commit the Jewish People to a historical "Jurassic Park."

Paul Johnson, at the end of his "A History of the Jews," fares little better. Johnson comes within a hairsbreadth of admitting that the "non-historical history" of the Jews bespeaks a Divine Historian. However, with his professional credibility on the line, he retreats, writing: "The Jews believed they were a special people with such unanimity and passion, and over so long a span, that

DUNNO MUCH ABOUT HISTORY

they became one."

Didn't the British, the Nazis, the Parthians, the Babylonians *et al.* also believe they were "the Chosen People?" You can believe what you like, but that won't change reality. You can believe with all your heart you're a Martian, but I doubt that you will turn green and sprout antennae.



ZION

How was the world created?

When Hashem created the world, He didn't create it as a vast expanse of existence all at once. Rather, He created a single point, and from there, He drew out the entire universe.

We know where that place, that first point, is. It's about a mile from where I'm writing this. Behind the *Kotel*, the "Western/Wailing Wall," on a hill where now sits a Mosque, there is a stone. That stone is called the *Even Shesia* — literally the *Foundation*

Stone.

From that stone the entire Universe was drawn out. In other words, when Hashem created the world, there was a single point of contact between the world above and this world.

The site of that stone was the place where Hashem tested Abraham by commanding him to bring up his son Isaac as a sacrifice; that stone is the site where Jacob dreamed of a ladder connecting Heaven and Earth and angels going up and down on it.

Around that stone stood the two Holy Temples. In the first Temple, the Holy Ark sat on top of that Foundation Stone, and around it was the Holy of Holies; around the Holy of Holies was the Sanctuary; around the Sanctuary was the Courtyard of the

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DUNNO MUCH ABOUT HISTORY *continued*

Temple; around that was Jerusalem; and around Jerusalem — the universe.

And it is around that stone that we long to see the Third and final Temple inaugurated in the month of Cheshvan.

CONNECTING WORLDS

In Psalm 50, *Mizmor L'Assaf*, it says: “Out of Zion, consummation of beauty, G-d appeared.” What does it mean that G-d “appeared” in this world out of Zion? It means that there is a place called “Zion” that connects the world above to this world. **Zion is the place of the foundation stone. They are one and the same — the gateway to that which is beyond this world.**

The word “Zion” is an interesting word. It is related to the word “*l'tzayein*” — meaning “to mark,” “to indicate,” “to show something.”

When we say that the world was *founded* on that point called Zion, it means that the whole world stands on the principle that its very existence is to be “*mitzayain*” — to indicate something.

When you found a nation, a club or a company, you make a declaration of its goals. When the American Colonies seceded, they drew up a “Declaration of Independence.” That was the **foundation** of the United States. The foundation of something necessarily includes the aspirations and the ultimate purpose of that which has been founded. In other words, when we say that the world is *founded* on the point called Zion, not only is Zion its point of departure — the place from which it emanates and spreads out — but it is also **its purpose**.

The purpose of Zion is to mark. To mark that there is something which protrudes above the vast trackless expanse of nothingness; to indicate that there is a world above this one.

As we said before, Zion is where the site of the Temple was revealed to Yaakov. How was the Holy Temple revealed to Yaakov?

By a ladder.

Nothing in the Torah is coincidental. What is the idea of a ladder? A ladder is that which connects one place to another. Jacob's ladder tells us that there is a place — a place called Zion — that reveals that there is a connection between the upper and the lower.

SYMPHONY FOR THE DEAF

On Tisha B'Av — the ninth of Av — we fast for twenty-five hours (as long as Yom Kippur) to mourn the destruction of the two

Holy Temples.

You can never describe a beautiful sunset to a person who has been sightless all his life. You can never describe Brahms' First Symphony to someone who has always been deaf. And we can never imagine the majesty and the awesomeness of the Holy Temple since we live in a world without it.

When the Holy Temple was destroyed, the connection between Heaven and Earth was severed. From then on, **we perceive Heaven and Earth as totally separate entities**. There is nothing left to show us the connection. Jacob's ladder is no longer.

The Physical world seems to exist on the one hand and the Spiritual on the other. “And never the twain will meet.” Or so it seems...

RESTORING THE CROWN
TO ITS FORMER GLORY

In the Torah, Moshe called Hashem “the Great, the Mighty, and the **Awesome**.”

When the prophet Yirmiyahu witnessed the destruction of the Holy Temple by the Babylonians he said “Foreigners are cavorting in Hashem's Sanctuary — Where is His **Awesomeness**? Don't call Hashem ‘Awesome’ anymore.”

Yirmiyahu was saying that we cannot relate to Hashem as “Awesome” anymore. We don't see His Awesomeness since foreigners were profaning the holiest place on this earth.

Although the prophet said that Hashem's “Awesomeness” was no longer visible in the world, some seventy years later, when Ezra came back from the Babylonian exile, he saw things from a different vantage point.

Ezra and the Men of the Great Assembly who returned with him saw that the Jewish People were “a lamb surrounded by seventy wolves,” and yet the lamb had survived.

The very survival of the Jewish People was “Awesome.” This was how Hashem's Awesomeness would be revealed in a world without a Holy Temple.

This perception “*returned the crown to its former glory*.” It was again possible to perceive Hashem as “Awesome.”

When Pascal said “The Jews, Your Majesty” he was recognizing that the miraculous survival of the Jews is a “Zion,” a “declaration” that there is a G-d in the world; that there is a connection between the upper world and this world.

The task of Zion is to stand with a finger pointing upward saying, “There is a higher world. And our very existence proves it.”

