

SEASONS OF THE MOON

The Month of Shvat

SHVAT / 5758 Jan. 28, 1998 - Feb. 26, 1998

The sign of the Jewish People is Aquarius. The Pitcher. What is the connection between the Jewish People and a pitcher? Just as the only purpose of a pitcher is to be a vessel to carry water, so the only purpose of the Jewish People is to be the "Water Carrier" — the vessel of the living waters of the Torah.

Just as a person cannot live without water, so too the Jewish

THIS MONTH'S SIGN AQUARIUS / THE PITCHER

People cannot survive without the Torah.

When we look at our history, it is clear that what has kept us a nation during 2,000 years of Diaspora has been our devotion to the Torah and our precise observance of it.

And just as water always finds the lowest place, also the Torah can only be absorbed by someone who is truly humble.

If you take a reel of movie film and unwind it, you'll find that it consists of hundreds and thousands of still pictures, like the negatives you get back with your photos from the film processor.

The whole magic of the cinema is based on a peculiarity of the human brain. When presented with separate images in rapid succession, the brain ceases to discern them as separate images; rather it links them all together. This is called the "persistence of vision." The result is the illusion of movement — motion pictures. Your eye and brain retain a visual impression for about 1/30th of a second (the exact time depends on the brightness of the image).

Persistence of vision accounts for our failure to notice that a motion picture screen is dark about half the time, and that a television image is just one bright, fast, little dot sweeping the screen. Motion pictures show one new frame every 1/24th of a second. Each frame is shown three times during this period. The eye retains the image of each frame long enough to give us the illusion of smooth motion.

In other words, the reality of the movie does not exist in the film itself, for the film itself consists merely of hundreds

of different images, not a continuous actuality. The reality of the film exists in one place only: In the mind of the beholder. It exists in the human brain that connects all these separate realities into to one flowing existence.

What's the difference between a young child and a grown person?

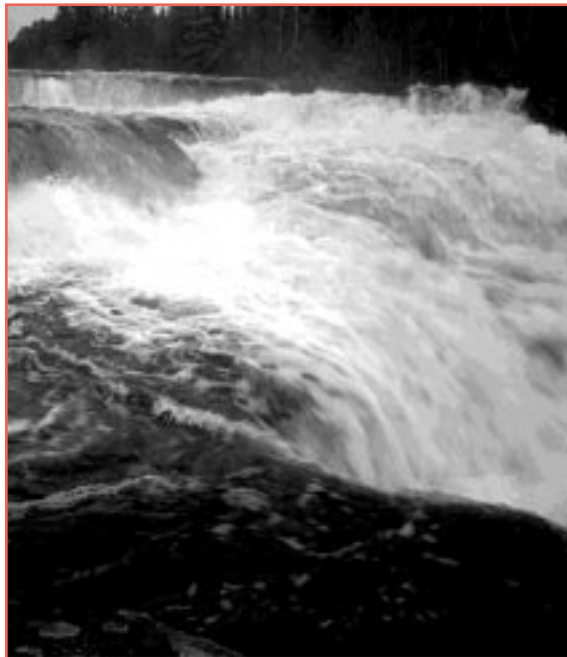
To a young child, every moment is a different world, a different existence. There is no direction in things, no assembly leading towards an overall reality. First *this* moment happens, then *this* moment, then *this*. That's the nature of someone who is small. In Hebrew the word for small is "katan." Katan comes from the word "katua" which means "cut." For someone young, *katan*, every second is a separate reality, *katua*. There is no connection between them. Thus, a child has no sense of direction in his life.

When a person gets a little bit bigger, he has a direction, but it's not straight. It twists this way and that. He is easily swayed from his path by distraction and

irrelevance.

The definition of maturity is that our entire life is focused in a single direction. We take all the disparate events of life — all life's byways — and we unify them into

PERSISTENCE OF VISION



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PERSISTENCE OF VISION *continued*

a single cogent direction. Every frame of existence is joined together into the film of our life.

This is the minimum definition of maturity — that we view life as a single connected thread and not be distracted into taking each moment as a discrete reality. We see everything in life as part of the whole, not as separate journeys.

A child is impatient for this exact reason. Nothing seems to be going anywhere. Every moment is *katua*, cut and separated from the next. His attention span is measured in seconds. The definition of adulthood is the ability to weld all of these snapshots of reality into a single cinematic flow. The Hebrew word for adult — “*gadol*” — comes from the root meaning “that which continues.” Being an adult means that we perceive everything in life is a single system,

a single route-map, a single film. Being an adult means having *persistence of vision*.

THE BIRTH OF A NATION

This month’s sign is the *D’lee/Aquarius*. The Torah is often compared to water. The nature of water is to flow. Water is “that which continues.” The true greatness that the Torah has given the Jewish People is the ability to connect every part of life, to make it “that which continues.” The Torah has given the Jewish People a persistence of vision which connects the cradle to the grave and beyond.

It is the Torah alone which has allowed the Jewish People to flow, to continue from one generation to the next, to play its central role in the great movie of world history. That’s called connecting. That’s Jewish continuity. That’s *persistence of vision*.

WINTER
WONDERLAND

Question: When is *Rosh Hashana* in the middle of winter? **A**nswer: When it’s the *Rosh Hashana* of the trees.

Tu B’Shevat, the 15th of Shevat, is the New Year for trees. On this day, it is customary to eat from the seven species for which the land of Israel is praised: “...a land of **wheat** and **barley** and (**grape**) vines and **fig** trees and **pomegranates**, a land of **olive** trees and (**date**) honey.” (*Deuteronomy* 8)

Tu B’Shevat is the day when new sap starts to rise in the tree, when new life is starting to emerge. Even though we are still in the middle of winter and all looks bleak, cold and lifeless, **Tu B’Shevat** comes — a day of new life with the promise of rejuvenation.

That’s why **Tu B’Shevat** can be compared to the coming of the **Mashiach** and the final redemption of mankind. Everything looks bleak and there seems to be no sign of life; we are threatened by increasing assimilation and the loss of Jewish identity; Jewish life seems frozen and moribund. **But even at that very moment, the sap is rising.** On the surface, you can see no change whatsoever, but precisely at that moment, life secretly and inexorably starts to burgeon anew.

SPRING
HOPES

*Spring hopes eternal,
Buried in a frozen waste.
In the heart of hearts
Hope springs eternal —
A bud blossoming in a field of ice
seems to wither before its time
unlikely, unfriended, accused of every crime.
The birds are singing terribly afar
In the lost lands
And all the world is teaching stars to dance
But you and I —
We were promised — weren’t we? —
the end of winter’s bitter romance.*

Sources:

THIS MONTH’S SIGN - Bnei Yisasschar, Ruach HaChaim

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