

SEASONS OF THE MOON

The Month of Cheshvan

Cheshvan 5759 / Oct. 21, 1998 - Nov. 19, 1998

Akrav is a water sign. It's the time of year when rain is plentiful. The connection to water is also clear in Cheshvan's association with the great flood, when water destroyed the earth. For this reason, this month is also called MarCheshvan, or *bitter* Cheshvan.

Another reason for the bitterness of Cheshvan: Cheshvan is the only month of the year that 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.

THIS MONTH'S SIGN AkraV / Scorpio

However, G-d did not command its inauguration until the following Tishrei — some twelve months later.

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

In a way, Cheshvan is a parable for the 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 into the greatest sweetness, when all the nations will come to realize who the Jewish People are and who they have always been.

If you want someone to be quiet, if you want them to listen, you raise your finger to your lips and say "shh!" This sound of air flowing over the lips is the universal sign to be still, to be quiet. The English word "hush" is connected with this sound. Strikingly, the same sound appears in the name of our month — Cheshvan. The root of the word Cheshvan is *chash* — which in Hebrew means *quiet*. The very name of the month commands us to be still, to be quiet. What is this *stillness* that is Cheshvan?

It is two months since the beginning of Elul. The shofar blast which begins the month of Elul signals the onset of the gathering storm. A cataclysm is about to be unleashed. And on Rosh Hashana, the entire world stands at attention in front of the Master. The storm has broken; a storm in the cosmos and a storm

in the inner world of the heart. In the cosmos, world shattering events are taking place.

THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE

All the dwellers of earth pass before the Divine Throne like sheep. Nations are judged. Fortunes are made and lost. Earthquakes and hurricanes are prepared and canceled. And in the inner world, the heart of man is pierced to the very quick and examined in all-penetrating detail. The inquiry is total. In the end it hinges on a single question: Whose side are we on? Are we like the goat in the Yom Kippur service who is offered up on the altar of the living G-d? Or are we the goat that is sent to *Azazel*? — the goat which represents the forces of denial that lurk in the heart. This goat watches his near-twin offered on the holy altar



and thinks "That idiot! Look at him now! Offered up on the altar, his life-blood daubed on its corners! But

Continued over

THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE *continued*

I'm getting away! I'm getting out of here!" His elation, however, is short-lived. In just a short while, he is ignominiously pushed over a cliff, and his body is torn limb from limb on the jagged rocks.

Someone once said about Life: "No one gets out of here alive." The question is: "How will we use the time that we have?" Will we "offer" to dedicate our lives to G-d's eternal Torah, or will we try and fool ourselves into thinking that we can escape mortality and live forever? Will we recognize that life has been given to us to strive for eternity by following in the path of G-d, or will we fritter our time away trying to immortalize ourselves through fame or cryogenics? Whichever choice we make, no one gets out of here alive.

After the great storm-tossed moments of Truth that we experience during the Days of Awe, we leave the trappings of our false security and dwell in the *suc-cah* under the shade of faith. In the times of the Holy Temple all of Israel would gather in Jerusalem, living as one nation under G-d. After G-d keeps us close to Him for one more day on *Shemini Atzeres*, we return to our normal lives. The great storm is over. Israel

returns to the solitude of its homes.

The month of Cheshvan says to us "Hush! Be still and listen to your heart! Listen to the quiet after the storm. Listen to the still small voice of the soul washed pure by the great storm of Tishrei!"

In Hebrew the word for "the senses" is *chushim*, which is connected to the word *chash* — "silence." For the senses operate in silence. They are the silent recorders of reality. They record in silence and they play back their message in silence. And to decode what our senses tell us when they replay the soul's diary of the month of Tishrei, we must listen to the sounds of their silence.

Thus, even though Cheshvan is devoid of festivals, it is in a sense one of the most important times of the year. It is a period when we can reflect on what we have learned during the Days of Awe. In the tranquility of our homes, in the hush of Cheshvan, we can reflect on what those days taught us. We can look at our lives through the wistful eyes of autumn. As the leaves fall, we reflect how transitory is our brief walk on this planet. How much have we made of that most precious gift called time?

TEASER

*Autumn is a beautiful evening,
Falling like yards of ochre tulle,
All that is left of the train of Summer
As she rounds the bend and is no more.
The Golden Hour darkens to a deep flame red.
The time of dwelling together is passed.
And each of us must take our leave
back to a winter solitude.*

*Every Jew is a stone-mason
Hewing his heart
To build a universal space
Out of time, timelessly,
Where G-d and Man
Will meet on un-equal
un-ending terms.*

Sources: Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch