

THE JEWISH YEAR SEEN THROUGH ITS MONTHS

SEASONS OF THE MOON

The Month of Shevat

Shevat / 5757 January 9, 1997 - February 6, 1997

THIS MONTH'S SIGN 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 too 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 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.

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



“**I**f I'd seen the parting of the Red Sea, then I'd also believe in G-d! If G-d wants me to believe in Him, why doesn't He reveal Himself to me like He did to the Children of Israel at the Red Sea?” Sounds familiar?

After the Six Day War, you couldn't get a pair of tefillin in Israel. Boxes of second-hand tefillin were sent from the States. Everywhere there was a sense of a miraculous delivery.

After the Gulf War we rushed to tear the plastic sheeting from the windows of our 'sealed rooms.' It was *Shushan Purim*, and the 'coincidence' was striking:

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Your body is designed to be the servant of your soul. It is the intermediary between the inner and the outer worlds. Naturally, a servant can be willing and pliant, or coarse and obstructive.

Just as a craftsman needs the best tools to produce fine work, likewise the human soul requires a pure body to execute its appointed task. Food which is not *kosher* (lit. 'fit') contaminates the soul so that holiness will not flow through the body. It renders the body obtuse and insensitive to spirituality.

The food that the Torah permits heightens Man's awareness of the Divine, and his desire and ability to serve his Creator.

Everything physical owes its existence to a holy

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SEEING AND BELIEVING

Haman and Saddam, defeated on the same day!

Taxi drivers quoted verses from the Prophets about sealed rooms. Everyone saw the Hand of G-d. And yet... Two or three weeks later, the glow had faded and what had been an unforgettable encounter with Divine Providence had been replaced with the usual bickering in the supermarket.

At the Red Sea the humblest member of the Jewish people — a maid-servant — had a greater vision of the Divine than the prophecy of the prophet Yechezkel. And Yechezkel saw the mystical workings of how Hashem runs the world.

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YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

spark within it. When you eat, your body extracts the physical nutrients from the food. But there is something else that is actually keeping you alive, because “*Man does not live by bread alone, but by that which emanates from the mouth of Hashem.*” Hashem has placed Divine life-sustaining sparks into food. It is these sparks that keep us alive.

On Tu B’Shevat (15th Shevat/22-23 January) we rejoice over the fruits of the Land of Israel, which are filled with these Divine sparks.

There are seven species for which the Land of Israel is praised — food made from the wheat, barley, wine, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates.

After eating any of these we make a special blessing for the produce of the field, and the desirable, good and spacious Land that Hashem saw fit to give to our forefathers.

Even within the Land of Israel the fruit of some places is more filled with *kedusha* (holiness) than others. The locale with the greatest potential for holiness is the land around Tiberias. Just as a baby in the womb derives nourishment through its umbilical cord and its navel, so too the ‘navel’ of *Eretz Yisrael*, the place from which the

SEEING AND BELIEVING

And yet, a few short weeks later, these same Children of Israel had fallen prey to an idol.

How was this all possible?

A maid servant remains a maid servant, and a taxi driver a taxi driver, unless...

One of the lessons that we can learn from the incident of the golden calf is that **miracles by themselves don’t change you.**

Unless we take the inspiration of the moment **and turn into concrete changes in our behavior** we will stay

land derives its *kedusha*, is the province of the tribe of Naftali, the valley of *Ginnosar*, and the city of Tiberias. The name ‘Tiberias’ comes from the Hebrew word *tabur*, which means ‘navel.’ And the word *Ginnosar* means ‘Garden of Princes.’

Who were these princes that visited *Ginnosar*? They were the aristocracy of the Torah world — its Torah sages, who would journey there to partake of its fruits.

The Talmud relates that Rabbi Abahu ate of these fruits until a fly would slip off his forehead. Rashi explains that he became exhilarated when he ate, and his face shone to such an extent that a fly would slip off his smooth forehead.

The fly is a symbol of impurity and sin. It is repelled by someone of intense holiness. The prophet Elisha was recognized as a holy man “because no fly ever flew over his table.”

When Rabbi Abahu ate of the fruits of *Ginnosar*, quite possibly on Tu B’Shevat itself, he experienced a heightened spirituality which brought a spiritual sheen to his ‘forehead.’ His wisdom and holiness were so intense that they repelled the dark forces, symbolized by the fly.

who we are, with the same limited vision that we had before the miracle.

If we don’t work on who we are, we may experience the miraculous in our lives, we may experience great awakenings. But without the hard work of character improvement, we will not be able to hang on to the inspiration of the moment and we will return to the slumber of unawareness.

* *Shabbat Shira - The Sabbath of Song* - when we read the Song that the Children of Israel sang after crossing the Red Sea is on 17th Shevat /January 25th.