

SEASONS OF THE MOON

The Month of Tishrei

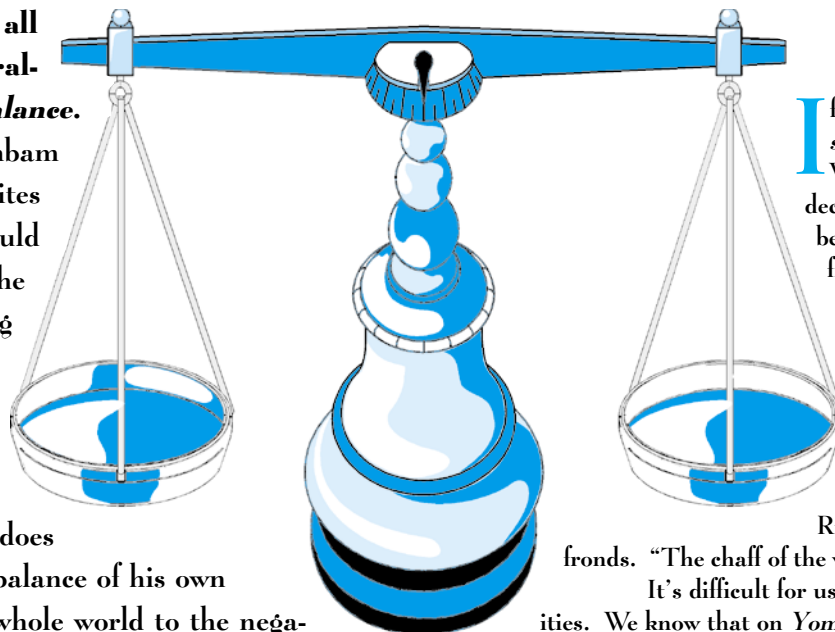
Tishrei / 5757 September 14 - October 13, 1996

THIS MONTH'S SIGN LIBRA / THE SCALES

The seventh is always holy. The seventh day is Shabbat, the seventh year is *Shemitta*, the Sabbatical Year. So too, the seventh month — Tishrei — is sanctified with more commands and festivals than any other month.

The sign of the month of Tishrei — Libra — is called in Hebrew “*Moznaim*” which literally means “balances”. It’s not difficult to see the connection between the symbol of the balances and the month of Tishrei, for the first day of Tishrei is Rosh Hashana — a day when the future of the world and all its inhabitants literally hangs in the balance.

The Rambam (Maimonides) writes that a person should see himself, and the whole world, as being on a knife edge, precisely and exquisitely balanced — half meritorious and half culpable. If he does one sin, he tips the balance of his own life and that of the whole world to the negative side. However, with just one mitzvah, he can alter the balance of his life and that of the whole world to the side of blessing and life!



Hanging in the Balance

A 49 HOUR FAST!

Can you imagine what it must be like for *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, to last two days? For most of us 25 hours of fasting is quite enough. But during the Second World War, there were people who fasted for 49 hours — two days of *Yom Kippur*!

When the Germans invaded Eastern Europe during the Second World War, the Mir Yeshiva made a miraculous escape across Europe and Asia to Kobe in Japan. However, when the *Yamim Noraim* (Days of Awe) approached, they were faced with a dilemma...

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ANY OLD RUBBISH

If you think about it, the *succah* is a peculiar thing. We take great pains to deck out the *succah* so that it becomes our home away from home. We take into it our finest tableware and furnishings. We bedeck it like a princess with all manner of jewelry and decoration. And yet look up at the roof and what do you see?

Rubbish. Dead palm fronds. “The chaff of the vineyard and the granary.” It’s difficult for us to visualize spiritual realities. We know that on *Yom Kippur*, if we merit it, all our sins have been forgiven. We emerge from shul as white as snow (and not from lack of food!)

In the four days between *Yom Kippur* and Succot, we rush around building our *succot* and getting our *arba minim* (four

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Up till the time of Hillel II, the date of the festivals, Pesach, Shavuot, Succot and Rosh Hashana were established via testimony based on the sighting of the new moon. The new month was declared in Jerusalem, and it would take many days for the news to reach the furthest outposts of Jewish settlement. Those outlying communities would observe two days of Pesach and Succot etc., and thus they would be sure of observing the festival on the correct day, no matter which day had been sanctified in Jerusalem as the new moon.

Until the era of the two great Talmudic sages Abaye and Rava, the months were still established by sighting. However, from their time onward, the date of the New Moon was established by calculations alone. These computations were given to Moses at Sinai, and provided for the fixing of the beginning of each month throughout the possible span of world history. Thus all the lengths of all future months in exile were now fixed.

So why is then that if you're in New York or London or Paris, you're still keeping two days of Yom Tov? If the calendar is fixed and we know exactly which day is Yom Tov and which isn't, why can't

ANY OLD RUBBISH...

species). Our involvement in these activities guards us from sin. We know that Hashem has forgiven us, that the slate has been wiped clean...but where are all our *mitzvot*?

Our negative actions have been erased, but that just leaves us with a blank white sheet of paper. Where are all the *mitzvot* that should have been written on our report cards?

When a person does *teshuva*, when he returns to Hashem out of love, not only are his sins forgiven, **but they are turned into *mitzvot*!**

we all keep just one day?

The answer is that our Sages made a law that we should continue to observe the two days of Yom Tov as was the custom of our forefathers.

However, when our Sages mandated the continued observance of the two-day Yom Tov in the Diaspora as a continuation of the traditions of our forebears, **they deliberately omitted a two-day Yom Kippur** because it would be dangerous for some people to fast for such a long period.

However, the Mir Yeshiva in Kobe was faced with a different situation: The omission of the Sages' decree to fast two days of Yom Kippur was because we are certain on which day Yom Kippur occurs. **However, Japan is close to the International Date Line, (a longitudinal line which lies 180° from Greenwich) and thus there was a real doubt as to which day it was.** For this reason, there were those of the Mir Yeshiva who felt compelled to fast for two days. And even others who were less strong, while they could not observe the fast itself, commemorated all the other aspects of this holiest day(s) of the year.

VIEW FROM THE BOOTH

Eyes,
looking upward
The sky,
wheeling above my head
Stars,
winking through fronds of palm
The wind
rustling the night-time silence.

Tomorrow — with the dawn
Tomorrow — they will be together

Tomorrow.

The four corners of the world
will be One.

Lulav. Etrog. Hadass. Arava.

This is a very difficult concept for us to grasp, and maybe even as we sit in our *succot*, we may feel a twinge of sadness. Where are all my *mitzvot*?

It is at that moment we can look up and see a perfect visual-aid representation of sins being turned into *mitzvot*. The *schach* — the rubbish which is the ceiling of our *succah* — is the *succah's* essential

part. **Waste and rubbish has been turned into a *mitzvah* of incomparable spiritual beauty, outshining by far the brightest decoration and adornment.** Now we can understand. Through *teshuva* that comes from love, we have turned our 'rubbish', our sins, into *mitzvot*.

SOURCES: THIS MONTH'S SIGN - Aruch Hashulchan; Rambam — Hilchot Teshuva
A 49 HOUR FAST! - Rambam, Hilchot Yom Tov, ch. 1; Hilchot Kiddush Hachodesh, ch. 5; "ESCAPE TO SHANGHAI"; Rabbi Mordechai Becher
• ANY OLD RUBBISH? - Rabbi Yissochar Dov Turnheim

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Designed and Produced by the Office of Communications-Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro, Director
Published by OHR SOMAYACH/TANENBAUM COLLEGE, 22 Shimon HaTzadik Street, Jerusalem, Israel.
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