

SEASONS OF THE MOON

THE MONTH OF IYAR

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The computing power inside your skull vastly exceeds any super-computer. However, for the past half century, neuroscientists

A STRAIGHT LINE

have suggested that the brain achieves its phenomenal performance in a way fundamentally similar to electronic computers. Thinking takes place through the aggregate action of billions of simple elements — cells called neurons — that are connected in an extremely complicated way.

Thinking Is Connecting

Neuroscience understands that the physical process of thought is connectivity. Neurons conduct signals in the form of tiny electrical impulses. Messages travel from one neuron to another as pulses of chemicals that are released at specialized junctions, or synapses. There are trillions of such junctions in the human brain. The whole process is one of connecting.

Everything in this physical world has a metaphysical counterpart — a doppelganger in the world of the spirit: Just as connectivity is the *modus operandi* of the physical process of thought — the “body” of thought, if you will — so too is connectivity the heart of cognition, the “soul” of thought. We think and understand by connecting one thing to another. Whether this process takes place by comparing or by extrapolating, essentially we are connecting.

What if we were to concretize the process of thinking, of connectivity, into a word? What would this elemental word of connection be? What is the basic unit of connectivity in language?

I think that word is *and*. *And* is the basic building block of language. *And* is to language what the neuron is to thought.

And if we were to conjecture what the word *and* would look like if we were to give it a shape, if we wanted to draw a picture of

and — we would probably draw a straight line. For a straight line is the elemental symbol of connection. It connects “here” with “there.”

Iyar And The Letter Vav — Thought And The Straight Line

Every month in the Jewish Year represents a certain characteristic. The essential characteristic of the month of *Iyar* is *thought*. We know that the Hebrew alphabet is the DNA of Creation. Each of the months was brought into being through one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The formation of the month of *Iyar* was through the letter *vav* which represents *thought*.

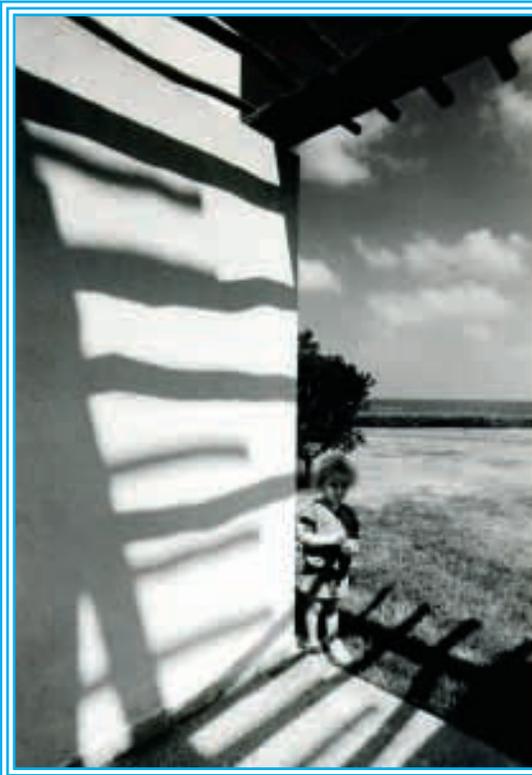
The meaning of the letter *vav* in Hebrew is “and.” Interestingly, if you look at the way we write the letter *vav*, you’ll see that it is written as a straight line. The *vav* is a pictogram of connection. The line which is the letter *vav* connects one word to another, one thought to another, one world to another.

The Line Which Connects

If you think about it, the month of *Iyar* is itself like a line — a straight line connecting two thoughts into a single idea. That idea is called Pesach in Nissan and Shavuot in Sivan. These two festivals represent the beginning and the conclusion of the birth of the nation. This line is most visible when it surfaces in the nightly ritual of the counting of the *omer* (the majority of which is done in the month of *Iyar*). Every night for forty-nine nights, from the second night of Pesach until the night before Shavuot, the Jewish People plug into a line of spiritual energy, counting one

day at a time, until we reach that supernal moment of contact with the Eternal.

The counting of the *omer* is like the *vav*, a line crossing a spiri-



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A STRAIGHT LINE... *continued*

tual map; like neurons connecting, communicating a thought across the synapse to the next neuron. Days connecting to days. Communicating a single idea until it is complete and concrete, like a fetus developing in the womb until it emerges into the world.

Gate 49

When the Jewish People left Egypt, they were hovering over the precipice of spiritual annihilation. They were at the last gate. 49 gates of *tuma* (spiritual impurity) exist in this world and the Jewish People were at the threshold of oblivion.

49 is 7 times 7. When you square a number, it reaches its ultimate expression. It is the thing times itself; nothing can be a greater revelation of essence than that. Thus, 49 is the furthest reach of seven-ness in this world. And seven is this world: There are seven notes in the scale, seven days in the week and seven colors in the rainbow. Seven in Sound. Seven in Time. Seven in Space.

The End Of The World

The 49 days of the *omer* represent the 49 steps by which the Jews ascended from their spiritual nadir in Egypt to be the worthy recipients of the Torah. The Torah was given on the fiftieth day because it is both beyond, and circumscribes, this world. Its presence here is an anomaly — it is beyond the world. Thus, it was given on the 50th day, because 50 is a number which cannot be counted in this world. This world is seven. Count seven times seven. And that's it. Forty-nine. You reached the end of the world. Even though there is a number called fifty, what fifty represents is really beyond this world.

Basic Arithmetic

The Jewish People in Egypt were spiritually on level -49. And by the time they received the Torah, they had reached level +49. I don't know about you, but when I was at school, the difference between -49 and +49 wasn't 49, it was 98. So why then are there only forty-nine days between the second night of Pesach and Shavuot? Really, we should count 98 days, and Shavuot should be on the 25th of Tammuz. Why isn't it? Why do we need only seven weeks, and not fourteen, to rise from the pits to the heights?

There are two ways to destroy evil. You can nullify it or you can transform it. You can eradicate it or you can reverse its polarity from negative to positive. The Jewish People only needed forty-nine days to reach the heights of Sinai because they took the impurity that had encrusted them in Egypt and turned it into a positive force. They literally turned it on its head. In other words, each day was not an eradication of a certain aspect of evil; rather it was the transformation of that evil into its positive equivalent.

Thinking Straight

The power of thought is that it can be instantly reversed. If you throw a car into reverse, you'll break the gearbox, but you can change your mind in a second. The power of *teshuva* — the power of return — lies in this capability of the mind to instantly reverse itself. Thought is a straight line. A straight line connects two opposite ends of the same possibility. The polarity can be instantly reversed. Maybe this is the secret power of the month of *Iyar*, the month of the *vav*, the month of the straight line. The straight line parallels the power of thought to instantly reverse itself. And that was the very essence of the process by which the Jewish People made it to Sinai in 49 days.

The Grammar Of Eternity

Biblical grammar has a very unusual feature: By merely adding "and" to a verb, you can change the tense from the future to the past and vice versa. As we mentioned before, the word "and" in Hebrew is created by using the letter *vav* as a prefix. The mere addition of the letter *vav* to a verb changes the future into the past and the past into the future. What does this mean?

Time is a creation. To G-d, there is no past, present and future. G-d doesn't exist in time. He creates time. The letter *vav*, the straight line which means "and", is the letter that connects. The *vav* tells us that the past is connected to future, the future to the past. It tells us that ultimately the past is the future and the future is the past.

According to the *Zohar*, *vav* symbolizes truth. The essence of truth is that things are not random, that everything is connected — the future to the past, the past to the future. For everything is connected in He Who is One.

MESSAGE
from
BEYOND

(A shadow, playing truant on his face,
fades, like a distant memory, to black.)

You always used to ask me
what happens after the lights go out
and now i can tell you
when the lights go out
you can see the world as it really is:
a great cinema where doctors
are helping everyone whose face
was glued to the screen.