

# SEASONS OF THE MOON

THE MONTHS OF IYAR - SIVAN

VOL. 5 NO. 9

Some 3302 years ago, a little-known Middle Eastern people gathered around a small mountain in a trackless wilderness and underwent an experience which changed the history of the world.

For the first time since the beginning of the universe, the Creator spoke to an entire nation. The nation was called Israel. The mountain was called Sinai. At Sinai, G-d gave the Jewish People the Torah, the mystical blueprint of the Creation. Why did G-d choose a desert as the site for this encounter?

## THE LANDSCAPE OF TIME

We tend to think of the Jewish festivals as remembrances to remind us of critical events in Jewish history, and that these events recede further into the past every year. This is not so. Time is circular. Every year we revisit the same place in time, the same reality. Every Pesach or Shavuot or Succot we revisit the original event. We do not merely remember what took place on these days, we re-experience them. The word for festival in Hebrew is *mo'ed*. *Mo'ed* means "an appointed time and place of meeting." Every year, we return to that same meeting place in time, be it Pesach, Shavuot or Succot. We return to that same spiritual landscape.

## THE EMPTY LANDSCAPE



There's something very unusual, however, about the landscape of Shavuot. It's a meeting place devoid of distinguishing features. It is an empty landscape. A desert. Our other meetings with the Creator all have much more visible scenery: At Pesach we experience the spiritual vista of *matza*, the *Seder*, the four cups of wine, "*Ma nishtana...*" At Succot we return to the landscape of the Four Species and the *succah*. Shavuot, however, has no single identifying *leitmotif*, no recognizable landmark in its scenery. Shavuot is an "empty landscape." Why?

## AN OFFER YOU CAN'T REFUSE?

Let us try and delve deeper into the essence of Shavuot. The Talmud describes the scene at the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai: G-d said to Israel. "*If you accept the Torah, well and good. If not, right there will be your burial place.*" This seems strange to us. Could it be that G-d coerced the Jewish People into accepting the Torah?

Was the Torah the original "*offer you can't refuse?*" This is both unpalatable and contradictory, for we know that it was Israel alone among the nations that was prepared to accept the Torah "sight unseen." When the Creator offered the Jewish People the Torah they said "*We will do and we will hear,*" meaning that

*Continued over*

THE EMPTY LANDSCAPE *continued*

we will accept the Torah before we know all of what it requires of us. If they were prepared to accept Torah voluntarily, why should coercion be necessary?

## THE SIXTH DAY

At the beginning of the book of Genesis it says “*Yom hashishi — the sixth day.*” When speaking of the other days of Creation, the Torah does not use the definite article “*the.*” It says “*second day... third day... etc.*” Translators add the word “*the*” to make the English more idiomatic, but in Hebrew, only the sixth day is referred to as “*the sixth day.*” Why?

The stylistic anomaly of the addition of the word “*the*” teaches us that on that first sixth day, at the very moment of the completion of the physical world, G-d placed a condition into Creation. G-d made a condition that the universe would remain in a state of flux and impermanence until the Jewish People accepted the Torah at Sinai. And that was to be on another “*sixth day.*” The sixth of Sivan — Shavuot — the day of the giving of the Torah.

It’s an amazing fact to ponder: The very fabric of existence hung in the balance for two and a half thousand years from the Creation of Man until Israel’s acceptance of the Torah. In other words, the continuation of the entire Creation was predicated on Israel agreeing to accept the Torah. If they had refused, the entire world would have returned to primordial chaos.

## WHO’S RUNNING THE SHOW?

There’s a problem here. How could the whole future of the world depend on the choice of the Jewish People? How can existence itself — reality — be dependent on a created being? A creation cannot dictate the terms of existence, it can only be subject to them. Only one Existence can dictate existence — He who is Existence itself.

G-d held a mountain over the Jewish People, not because

they needed a little encouragement, but because Existence cannot depend on Man’s volition. Man cannot govern what must be. Existence depends on G-d alone.

It was for this reason that the Torah had to be given through coercion. For even though Israel was prepared to accept it voluntarily, the Torah, the Will of the Creator, cannot be subject to the will of His creations. Just as G-d *must* be, so too the Torah *must* be.<sup>1</sup> Just as the Torah must be, so must it be given in a way which must be.

IS

*It seemed that out of the world  
I had fallen, into a sea of holes  
which lashed against  
a melting shore of faith  
They threw me a ring of cork  
And I thought  
another hole  
in a sea of holes  
a straw to a drowning man  
There is no life preserver  
There is no life  
This is no  
There is  
Is.*

## THE JIGSAW OF EXISTENCE

Shavuot is the day which completes Creation. It is the day on which the landscape of existence becomes whole. When G-d gives the Torah to the Jewish People the last piece in the jigsaw puzzle of Creation falls into place. Instantly all the lines between the separate pieces of the jigsaw of existence vanish, revealing a complete and perfect whole.

Shavuot is the day of the completion of existence itself. The landscape looks empty because it contains everything. We can determine features in a landscape only when we see one thing as being separate from another. It is only the difference between things that allows us to see things at all. If we were to look at everything, we would see nothing. For “*this*” is discernible because it is not “*that.*” It’s *not* being everything allows us to perceive its separate existence. But if we were able to see “*everything,*” we would see nothing.

Shavuot is the empty landscape which is full with all of Creation.

<sup>1</sup> At the deepest level, G-d and the Torah are One. The Torah is the Will of G-d. Someone’s will is who they are. If you want to know who someone is, ask them what they want. What you want is who you are. They are the same thing.

The publication of Seasons Of The Moon is made possible by the generosity of Jill Sinclair and Trevor Horn

Sources: Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 88a; Maharal; Rabbi E. E. Dessler

SEASONS OF THE MOON is written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair and edited by Rabbi Moshe Newman.  
Designed and Produced by the Office of Communications - Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro, Director  
Published by OHR SOMAYACH/TANENBAUM COLLEGE, 22 Shimon HaTzadik Street, Jerusalem, Israel.  
tel: 972-2-581-0315; fax: 972-2-581-2890; e-mail: ohr@virtual.co.il WWW: <http://www.ohrnet.org>  
© 2000 All Rights Reserved • This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect.