

SEASONS OF THE MOON

THE MONTH OF TAMMUZ

No. 11 VOL. 2

Although the early history of the cinema is far from clear, around the year 1900 film evolved from a penny arcade amusement into a sophisticated language capable of narrative and emotion. Little more than a century later, that language is so ubiquitous that books are in danger of becoming a niche market.

According to a 2004 National Endowment for the Arts survey¹, a dramatic and increasing decline in literary reading in the United States leaves fewer than half of America's adults reading literature.

Film and videos' great attraction and its strength is its ability to harness the immediacy of sight – seeing is believing – and though we may not exactly believe what our eyes tell us, more than any other medium, film makes it comfortable for us to suspend our disbelief.

Film's immediacy, however, is also its weakness; everything in a film takes place in a constant "present tense." Film has no "was" or "will be"². To

THE LANGUAGE OF THE AGE

depict the past or the future, film has to resort to the flashback or flash-forward, an inelegant device: The image begins to blur, the dialogue echoes until the picture resolves into a past or future scene.

However the new scene we are now watching is once again in the present. In a film, everything takes place in a perpetual state of "is."

Not only does film speak in a continuous present, but that present tense has become increasingly abbreviated and compressed.

Between the 1930's and the 1950's the average length of a shot in a typical A-picture was between eight and 11 seconds. After 1960, the pulse of editing quickened until MTV and TV advertising have accelerated cutting rates to the near-subliminal.

How do these idiosyncrasies of the language of the age,

reflect the weltanschauung of our age?

Our age is unique in its inability to concentrate on anything for very long; we even have a medical name for it – ADD and ADHD.



THE LANGUAGE OF THE AGE *continued*

Whether these conditions have always existed or whether they are specific to our age is debatable, however there is an unmistakable synchronicity between the acceleration of cutting rates in film and television and the upsurge of ADD syndrome.

Basic to Jewish thought is the concept of Olam Habah – the World to Come.

The Rambam points out that if this world is called Olam Hazeh – “this” world, logically the next world should be called Olam Hahoo – “that” world. Rather, the name, “the World to Come” is to remind us there is no “this” world and “that” world – they are not different entities – but everything we do in this world is revealed as it really is in the World to Come. It is, quite literally, the world that comes after this world for it is built entirely on this world.

In the cave of Machpelah at Chevron are buried Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka, Yaakov and Leah. The word machpelah means “doubling,” not in the sense of

one thing added to another, but rather the thing itself doubled. The defining trait of those who are buried in Machpelah is that everything they did in this world was transformed into a parallel existence, a doppelganger in the World to Come. They doubled their entire present into their future; the entire transcript of their lives was transmuted into an eternal existence because their lives contained zero wastage.

A person can relate to the present in one of two ways: as the most fleeting thing in existence, a will-o-the-wisp, an uncatchable frame in the movie of one’s life; or one can see the present as an unpolished diamond waiting to be turned into eternity.

The syntax of film, the language of our age, encourages the perception that the future and the past are not realities; all that exists is a constant stream of “now.”

From the Jewish view, however, success in life is measured by how much of the present we can turn into the future before it becomes the past.

THE CERTAINTY
OF DOUBT

*between the words,
the breath's caress
the silent parting
of the lips
to allow the doubt
that completes certainty*

1 *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*

2 “Novels into Film” George Bluestone 1957

This issue is dedicated to the refuah sheleima of Chaya Esther bas Rochma

NOW ON-LINE AT WWW.SEASOFSOFTHEMOON.COM

THE SEASONS OF THE MOON PORTFOLIO OF FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHS

SEASONS OF THE MOON is written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair and edited by Rabbi Moshe Newman • Design: Eliezer Shapiro

Published by OHR SOMAYACH/TANENBAUM COLLEGE, 22 Shimon HaTzadik Street, Jerusalem, Israel
tel: 972-2-581-0315 • fax: 972-2-581-2890 • e-mail: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

© 2008 All Rights Reserved • This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect.