

SEASONS OF THE MOON

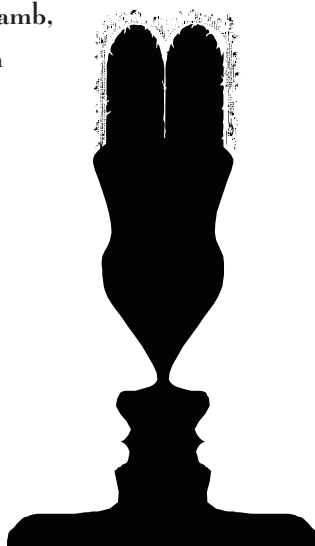
The Month of Sivan

Sivan / 5757 June 6, 1997 - July 6, 1997

The first two months of the year are both symbolized by animals: *Taleh* (Aries) the lamb, and *Shor* (Taurus) the bull. It is only with the sign of *Te'omim* (Gemini) the Twins, that we find a sign which is symbolized by Man.

The Torah was given under the sign of the Twins to indicate that only with the giving of the Torah does man fulfill his potential, being raised above the level of an animal. On Wednesday, June 11th this year, we will celebrate Shavuot — the festival of the giving of the Torah.

THIS MONTH'S SIGN TE'OMIM / TWINS



When the Jewish People camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai in preparation to receive the Torah, they achieved a harmony and unity which was unparalleled before or since. Israel was united in heart and mind like a single person. It was only in this state of unity, of being one, that they could receive the Torah which is one. For the Torah is the 'mind' of the Creator, who is One.

The sign of *Te'omim* (Gemini) — identical twins — symbolizes different people, physically separate, joined in a spiritual kinship in which they resemble each other to the point that they are identical.

When you say you're going to stay up all night, people might think you're doing the disco round, and partying the night away.

Staying up all night doesn't sound very religious. But there are several times during the Jewish Year that there is a custom to burn the midnight oil until the sun peeps through the blinds.

Many people stay up after the Seder on Pesach until the time of the morning prayer to recount and analyze the great miracles of the Exodus. As the Hagḡada itself says: Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah and Rabbi Akiva stayed up all night talking about the Exodus until their *talmidim* (students) came to tell them that it was time to recite the morning *Shema Yisrael*.

On Yom Kippur, those with sufficient strength stay up all night in prayer and supplication atoning for their sins. On

ALL-NIGHTER

Hoshana Rabba, the time when the decrees of Yom Kippur are given over to those Heavenly agents who will carry them out, there is a tradition to learn all night.

On the night of Shavuot too, there is a widely observed custom to stay up all night. The sages of the *Kabbala* formulated an order of study call a *tikun* (lit. 'fixing') for the night of Shavuot. This includes passages from the written Torah, the oral Torah, the mystical Zohar, as well as a list of all 613 *mitzvos*.

The Zohar commends those who stay awake in anticipation of receiving the Torah. The giving of the Torah was, as it were, the wedding of the Jewish People and the Torah, and so it is fitting that we should be engaged in preparing the ornaments of the bride the previous night.

Another reason: On that first Shavuot morning, there were some who overslept and had to be awakened to receive the Torah. In order to rectify this, we stay up.

But there is a deeper reason that we don't sleep on the night of Shavuot.

Sleep is the taste of death.

If fact, the Talmud tells us that sleep is 1/60th part of death. One part in 60 is the threshold of perception. Similarly, Shabbat is a 'taste' of the World-to-Come. It's precisely 1/60th of the World-to-Come.

Sleep is the taste of death in this world. King David died on Shavuot. But before he died, he never even tasted the taste of death, because he never fell into a deep sleep. Thus on the occasion of his *yahrtzeit* (the anniversary of his death) we avoid the 'taste of death' by staying up all night.

The angel of death came to King David to try and take his life. But it had no power over him for he was immersed in learning Torah and Torah is the essence of the life-force in this world. The only way that the angel of death could take King David's life from him was through cunning: He managed to distract King David from his learning, and in that split second, he was able to take his life from him. So on this night of Shavuot, which is both the anniversary of the giving of the Torah and the end of King David's life, we stay awake all night and immerse ourselves in Torah study.

THE DOORS OF PERCEPTION

Torah breathes life into Man. But it was not always this way. When Hashem first created Man, he

was animated by God's utterance: 'Let Us make Man.' The power of these words, spoken by the Creator, gave Man the ability to live, breath, think and act.

However, this was only until the Jewish People stood at the foot of Sinai. When Hashem said "I am Hashem,

your God..." — the first commandment — the life-force that animated Man parted from the body and the entire Jewish People died. Miraculously, their souls were put back into their bodies; but what animated them now was a different utterance. No longer did their life-force derive from "Let Us make Man." Now they were like new creations. Their inner essence was powered by "I am Hashem, your God..." From this moment, the Torah became the animating dynamic of the Jewish Soul.

And when the *Mashiach*, the scion of King David, arrives to herald the era of the resurrection of the dead, it will be the Torah, the dew of life, which will be the mechanism to awaken the body from its long sleep.

Then we will finally understand the words we have sung for so long:

"David, Melech Yisrael, *chai v'kayam!*"

"David, king of Israel, *lives and exists!*"

SLUMBER LAND

*This is a world of slumber.
Some sleep the sleep of centuries,
Some sleep their lives awake,
Some sleep with hollow
frightened eyes
that see no Reason,
no Hand, no Fate.*

*But one man never slumbers —
The Sweet 'n' Singing King.
When the midnight Northern
Winds caress the harp-strings,
He will rouse his tired limbs,
and coax the song
that will awaken Eternity.*

SOURCES:

This Month's Sign - Rabbi M. Glazerson; *All-Nighter* - Tehillim 73:5, Yalkut Shimoni; Talmud Berachot 3b; Tehillim 19:9; *Book of Our Heritage*, Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, translated by Rabbi Nachman Bulman; *Time Pieces*, Rabbi Aaron Lopianski
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