

Ha'Chazarah - החזרה



Rosh Chodesh Tammuz

May it be Your will, O LORD, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, that You inaugurate this month of *Tammuz* upon us for goodness and for blessing.

Abba, Father, may You give us long life,

a life of peace – *Shalom*

a life of goodness – *Tovah*

a life of blessing – *Bracha*

a life of sustenance - *Parnassa*

a life of physical health – *Hilutz Atzamat*

a life in which there is a fear of heaven and fear of sin - *Yirat Shamayim ve' Yirat Chet*

a life in which there is no humiliation – *Ein Busha u'Chlimah*

a life of wealth and honor – *Osher ve'Kavod*

a life in which we will have love of Torah and awe and reverence of G-d

- *Ahavat Torah ve'Yirat HaShem*

a life walked more fully for Your glory in *Adoneinu Yeshua*, our Messiah and Lord.

Amen. *Selah*.

¹ Baruch Nachshon

In the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was among the exiles by the K'var River, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of G-d... I looked and saw a windy storm approaching from the north and a huge cloud with flashing fire, glowing brightly all around with the color of gleaming amber from within the fire.²

Rabbi Levi said: to show the praise and might of the Holy One, that in Tammuz they were blemished and in Tammuz the Holy One's kindness returned to them.³

On this day of the year Ezekiel, an exiled prophet, received his mysterious vision ... A midrash above wonders why Ezekiel receives this vision in *Tammuz*, a month of "ill omen" when the walls of Jerusalem were breached. The answer is that the holy One chooses to send compassion to the people at the same season they were exiled. Tammuz contains both suffering and it's remedy, *chesed*.⁴

Tammuz brings together loss (and all loss contains - grief, anger, pain... brokenness) and the potential for *chesed*, with *chesed's* potential for healing and rejoicing.

The book of Ezekiel, which begins in the month of Tammuz, is especially noted for showing G-d's saving purposes in the history of the world and His future work in history.

This month is a perfect time to ask the question, "How does G-d's *chesed* play a saving purpose in the world and how can I partner with Him in His healing work?"

A. Season of Chesed

I will sing of the lovingkindness [*chesed*] of the LORD forever ... For I have said, 'Lovingkindness shall be built up forever.'" (Psalm 89:1-2).

² Ezekiel 1:1-5, CJB

³ *Batei Midrashot* 2, 13:2 - Jill Hammer, *The Jewish Book of Days*

⁴ Jill Hammer, *The Jewish Book of Days*, 5 *Tammuz*

Psalm 89:2 reads in Hebrew, *Olam chesed Yibaneh* and the sages translated this as, the world is built up on *chesed* (on acts of kindness). Shimon haTzaddik in *Avot* 1:2⁵ helps us to see that the *chesed* being spoken of is both G-d's and our own.

For many of us the month of Tammuz falls in the heat of summer, days of light and joy and enjoying the outdoors. But historically, Tammuz is a time of mourning for loss. Beginning on the 17th, three weeks of reflective sorrow mark the month of Tammuz.⁶ It is a time to remember past losses in sorrow and to recognize the present reality of imperfection and the fact that we still await full redemption. At the same time, however, we look forward in faith and joyous hope in the promises of G-d.

During this time, the sins of our forefathers are remembered and Israel examines their own sins.

The name Tammuz serves as a reminder of our dark past as a people. We do not weep over idols, but we do weep over our sins and the present exile. Yet we do not weep as those without hope. Tammuz is also a reminder of G-d's wonderful grace. By the sacrifice of our Lord Yeshua, we have the hope of redemption. We live in the paradox of hopeful sorrow. We've been redeemed by Yeshua, yet we still wait for the restoration of all things.⁷

"You have turned for me my mourning into dancing, you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness."⁸

These three weeks of sorrow are a unique opportunity to reflect on how the Living Water is the embodiment of a Father who abounds in *chesed*. It is also a time that we can

⁵ "The world depends on three things: on Torah study, on the service [or worship, of God] and on kind deeds [*mitzvoif*]." - It is considered that verse 2 describes the three things for which man was created – to come to know God in intimate relationship through the Revelation and study of His Word and in loving and serving Him and one another in kindness.

⁶ A three week period of semi-mourning for the destruction of both Temples.

⁷ FFOZ, *The Sorrow of Tammuz*

⁸ Psalm 30:11

reflect on how that Living Water may flow through our acts of lovingkindness to ‘quench one another’s thirst for comfort’⁹.

Pause and Reflect 1

When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and stars that You set in place,
What is man that You are mindful of him,
Mortal man that You take note of him?
Yet You have made him little less than the angels
And adorned him with glory and majesty.¹⁰

More than any previous generation in history, we have come to see the individual as the sole source of meaning. The gossamer filaments of connection between us and others, that once held families communities, and societies, have become attenuated. We have become lonely selves in search of purely personal fulfillment...¹¹

1. How do acts of *chesed* move us beyond our natural boundaries and that of our culture?
2. How can *chesed* create relationship?

Doing good is not painful, a matter of dour duty and chastising conscience. There is a Hebrew word, a key term of the Bible, for which there is no precise English translation: *simchah*, usually translated as ‘joy’. What it really means is *the happiness we share*, or better still, *the happiness we make by sharing*.¹²

⁹ Jill Hammer, *Jewish Book of Days*

¹⁰ Psalm 8:3-5

¹¹ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, 3

¹² Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, 5

3. How is *chesed* a form of *simchah*?
4. Nowadays we live anonymously among strangers whose religious, cultural and moral codes are different from ours. By what duty or right do we share a responsibility for their fate?¹³

You are to love ADONAI your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. This is the greatest and most important *mitzvah*. And a second is similar to it, You are to love your neighbor as yourself.¹⁴

5. How is loving G-d and loving man inseparably linked?
6. Is genuine *chesed* always linked to G-d?
7. Where in the Word do we see *chesed* and truth joined together?
8. How do our acts of *chesed* honor G-d's name?
9. Why is it important to realize that our relationship with God is built on a foundation of *chesed*?



B. The Tribe of Reuben

The tribes of Israel journeyed through the wilderness in a specific formation. When they camped, the Tabernacle was erected in the center with the priestly tribe of Levi situated around it. The other tribes were divided into four groups of three that encamped on each

¹³ *ibid*, 7

¹⁴ Matthew 22:36-40

side. As we have seen, when examining the order of the tribes in connection with the twelve months of the year, the group that led the formation each time they set out was comprised of Judah, Issachar and Zebulon. They were situated on the East side of the Tabernacle. The next group, to the South, was made up of Reuben, corresponding with *Tammuz*, this month, and Simon (next month, *Av*) and Gad (the month of *Elul*).

The emblem on the standard of the tribe of Reuben is the rising sun. This possibly signifies that he was the first-born, and with him the family and ultimately the tribes of Israel had their beginning. The rising sun is also a sign of redemption; the dawn of new life, restoration and beauty. Through the family of Jacob and the nation of Israel, the Messiah would be born, and the light and beauty of the G-d of Israel would shine forth in His Anointed Son to be “the Light of the world”.

The matriarch Leah named her first son Reuven, which means “See, a son!” She describes her reason for choosing this name: “Because G-d has seen my humiliation”.¹⁵ Leah was painfully aware that she was Jacob’s wife through the deceptive manipulation of her father, and that Jacob’s true love was her sister Rachel, now his second wife. Leah is the first to conceive and bear a son, and she sees this as a vindication and a gift from G-d. He had seen her distress and had honored her with Jacob’s first-born. Rabbinic literature thus associates the month of *Tammuz* with the sense of sight, or vision (*re’iyah*).

Leah’s second son, Shimon, is so named: “Because G-d has heard (*she’mi Yah*) that I am unloved”.¹⁶ Thus, the month of *Av* that follows *Tammuz* is associated with the sense of hearing.

Pause and Reflect 2

And she conceived again and bore a son and said, "This time I will praise the LORD."
Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.¹⁷

¹⁵ Genesis 29:32

¹⁶ *ibid* 33

¹⁷ *ibid* 35

In G-d's loving-kindness, significant leaders of a nation are born through Leah. What profound lesson do we learn from Leah's response to G-d's gift of *chesed* in light of the reality of her marriage?



The Sin of the Eyes

The two older brothers, Reuben and Simon, fathered strong and influential tribes. Once they had arrived at its borders, Moses sent a leader from each tribe to spy out the Promised Land. The representatives from Reuben and Simon are listed first; before Caleb, who is third on the list and Joshua, who is fifth. The twelve spies were in Canaan for forty days, including the month of Tammuz. Regrettably, they sinned through their sense of sight as they viewed everything negatively and then carried a distorted vision of the Land back to the waiting Israelites.

As the leader, Reuben's representative was undoubtedly a large influence in this perversion of vision. Interestingly, the Torah portion of *Korach*, (Numbers 16:1- 18:32), is commonly read during *Tammuz*. Apparently the leader of Reuben had sided with Korach in his rebellion against Moses. Korach, a cousin of Moses and Aaron, had seen himself as equally entitled and equipped to lead the new nation and therefore had tried to overthrow them and to assume leadership. Korach & Co. were punished by G-d and swallowed up into the dust of the earth. They had not seen that it was G-d Himself who was the leader of His people, and only He was entitled to appoint those who would lead and teach them.

The following portion, also read during *Tammuz*, is *Chukkat* (Num. 19:1-22:1), where we find the dramatic incident of the invasion of poisonous snakes into the camp. It appears that this is a response to the ongoing complaints of the Israelites to Moses regarding their boring diet of manna and the lack of water. Offering an antidote to the snakebites,

G-d instructs Moses to make "... a fiery [*nachash* - serpent] and place it on a pole, and it will be that anyone who was bitten will look at it and live".¹⁸

We know that G-d does not use magic charms, rather, as the dying people would need to consciously raise their eyes to look at the serpent, it would trigger a process of interpretation in their minds that should lead to repentance. They would see a representation of the cause of their pain and impending death and should realize that it was a consequence of their sin of ingratitude towards G-d. He had been guarding them all along and now had removed His hand of protection. They owed Him their very lives. They had lost sight of the fact that He protected them and provided for their needs day after day, and they had become bitter and complaining. Now, in His *hesed*, His mercy, they had the opportunity to "see" and repent. We can consider this wilderness account in the bigger picture of redemption in Yeshua. How much more should all sinners repent when they see Messiah, the Anointed Son of G-d, as our representative, lifted up on a stake carrying the sin of the world with its poison that leads to death? When one looks up and "sees" and comes to repentance, one's life is spared and restored. Still further, we can rejoice in the resurrection and victory over death established by G-d when He raised our Savior from the grave into new and glorious life. In him, our High Priest at the right hand of the Throne, a sinner spared can now enter the Kingdom of G-d as a redeemed and royal child of the Great King.

We learn from these accounts that what we see in faith with our "mind's eye" is even more important than our physical vision. The understanding of our heart is far deeper and will affect all we see with our eyes. It is our inner vision that directs us to pursue the things of G-d rather than to stray after worldly pursuits and the pleasures designed to attract the eye. The strongest "antidote" to the poisonous effects of the sinful and ungodly ways of the world is G-d's Word, as we see incarnated and lived in the Word made flesh, Yeshua. May our eyes constantly be occupied with the treasure of His Word of Truth and Life; and may our hearts continually be filled with unbounded gratitude and praise to our Father in heaven for the good and bountiful gifts He bestows.

¹⁸ Numbers 21:8

Pause and Reflect 3

Once a woman was caught in the act of adultery and taken before Jesus for judgment. Her accusers were ready to stone her to death. But the Rabbi from Nazareth challenged them: “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.”¹⁹ The condemning crowd dispersed without a single stone being thrown, and the woman was left standing alone with the Master.

Note carefully what he says next: “‘Woman ... has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’”²⁰

Here we see an act of kindness – “Neither do I condemn you” – joined to a witness to the truth, “Go and sin no more.” Mercy and truth met together; righteousness and peace kissed.²¹

Yeshua did not ignore her sin. He affirmed and acknowledged the truth – she was culpable – but cautioned her to sin no more. *Chesed* prevented him from condemning her. In effect the Master extended the woman an invitation to repent of her lifestyle and, in response to the kindness of a gracious G-d, to turn around and walk in the way that leads to life. “Do you not know that G-d's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”^{22 23}

Biblical scholars have translated *chesed* in many ways, but as with so many Hebrew words, there is no English equivalent. How do we see in the Son, a Father who abounds in *chesed*?

¹⁹ John 8:7

²⁰ John 8:10-11

²¹ Psalm 85:10

²² Romans 2:4

²³ Dwight Pryor, *Abounding In Chesed*



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May it be G-d's will that His Presence lives in the work of your hands.²⁵

²⁴ David Baruch Wolk, Kindness And Mercy Are Before HaShem's Glory

²⁵ *Sifre to Bamidbar*, 143