

THE TENTH HEBREW MONTH OF TEVET - FERTILE DARKNESS

The Hebrew month of Tevet begins during the last days of Hanukkah, when tree branches are bare and a blanket of snow covers much of the Northern hemisphere. While we enjoy the radiance of the final blaze of the lights of the hanukkiah, we remember that we are facing the dark winter months still ahead. In Israel, Tevet is the time when, as Jill Hammer beautifully describes in *The Jewish Book of Days*, " Bare branches wait for sun to touch them, and trees wait for sap to begin to rise. Animals and humans dream, waiting for the sun's power to increase. The seedling waits in the earth for the nourishment of light."

"...in every buried seed there is a tightly-coiled new beginning." ~ Velveteen Rabbi

Just as a plant needs the sunlight to grow, so it needs the darkness of the soil. It is a time of waiting, dreaming, and expectancy. During this cold, dark, Winter season, or at any time in our lives when we feel we are "in the dark" and our life and creativity seem dormant, we can trust God to stir deep within our hearts and to bring His hidden dreams for us into the light. In the quiet, secluded time we also can trust Him to reveal and bring into the light any hidden wounds that need healing, which left unrevealed might remain a source of hurt and pain.

Seeds start in the darkness of soil, a baby in the darkness of it's mother's womb, and the caterpillar is transformed in the darkness of the cocoon into a new creation. From the depths of darkness comes new life. Indeed many stories of hope have their beginning in darkness and suffering.

Asarah b'Tevet - 10th Tevet

We find the word Tevet, in reference to the tenth month, in Esther 2:16. Historically, the Jewish people suffered much tragedy during Tevet and the tenth day of this tenth month is a day of fasting. We are encouraged, however, for the Hebrew root of the word Tevet is "tov" - good; which tells us that the goodness of God is hidden within the month.

The great tragedy of the siege of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple and the exile to Babylon are commemorated each year by fasting during the day on the tenth of Tevet, *Asarah b'Tevet*. To Orthodox Jews, the importance of this fast is such that, together with Yom Kippur, it is even observed should it fall on Shabbat. It is considered a time to reflect and to purify one's soul before God, trusting Him to expose and cleanse any form of idolatry in one's heart. In addition, the chief rabbinate of Israel has named 10 Tevet as *Yom Kaddish*, a memorial day, for the millions of Jewish victims of the Holocaust whose exact date of death is unknown.

Many other tragedies that occurred during Tevet are recorded. For example, in 1496 the Jews of Portugal, many of whom had immigrated there after their expulsion from Spain only four years before, were presented with the edict that they must be baptized into Catholicism or leave the country within a year.

How fitting, then, that the dark days of Tevet are illuminated by the lights of Hanukkah. At Creation, God created the light and saw that it was good. As we kindle the lights, we see and we remember that His light dispels every darkness. When we turn to Him and reach out, His deliverance is always at hand. Interestingly, it was on Rosh Chodesh Tevet that, after their ordeal in the Ark, Noah finally saw a sign of their deliverance,

"...in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen. "
Genesis 8:5

Closed tight in the ark and surrounded by floodwaters, the glimpse of those peaks was a sign of hope. Noah and his family still had to wait for spring for the ark to come to rest, but now, even while surrounded by the depths of the waters, Noah had hope. The twig of an olive tree brought back to him by the dove that Noah released was further confirmation of the hope of life and a new beginning. A fitting symbol of the truth of God's Word that is reflected by the light of the Menorah that is fuelled by pure olive oil.

So too, when the last flickering lights of Hanukkah come to an end and we find ourselves in the constraints of winter, we can know and be comforted that even in the deepest darkness, there shines the Light of Hope.

In connection with His Word, the eighth of Tevet is traditionally marked as the date when the Septuagint was completed. While Jewish tradition teaches that this was indeed miraculous, the Talmud also states that upon its completion darkness descended upon the world for three days.

"Like the sun lost behind the pall of darkness, the brilliance of the Torah had become eclipsed to all those who would now depend upon its rendering in a foreign language, with all its levels of depth and meaning lost. The Torah had become "like a lion in cage," no longer the king of the beasts striking fear into all who heard its roar, now behind bars and stripped of its freedom and power; so too had the Septuagint reduced the Torah to just another cultural document."

~ Rabbi Yonason Goldson, The Septuagint, Jewish Word Review

We may ask, " Was the translation of the Torah into Greek miraculous or a tragedy or both?"

WOMAN of the Month: REBECCA - RIVKAH



Apart from Adam and Eve, the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca is the first one mentioned in the Torah. Their union, like all godly marriages, was a match made in heaven. However, with Isaac and Rebecca, the intervention of Divine providence is more clearly discernible. An interesting clue can be found in the Hebrew verse Genesis 18:12. After Sarah hears the news that she will give birth to a son she laughs inwardly: *Vatitzchak Sara bekirba*. *Vatitzchak* - laughed - carries the name *Itzchack*, Isaac. *Bekirbah* contains the name *Rivkah*. Their destinies were woven together even before conception and Rebecca was, indeed, a vital partner for the fulfilment of Isaac's Divine mission and purpose.

Rebecca would prove to be a worthy successor to Sarah. At her first meeting with Eliezer, Abraham's servant who was sent to find a wife for Isaac, she demonstrates her qualities of goodness, kindness, and humility, when she provides him, and all his camels, with water and offers him hospitality. Exhibiting an extraordinary power of perception she recognizes that he is different from the men in her society and is godly, moral and just. Her spirit responds, as a thirsty rose does to water, and with decisive conviction she ultimately agrees to go with him.

When she marries Isaac, Rebecca's genealogy is given, informing us that she is the daughter of Betuel the Aramaian, of Padan Aram, and the sister of Lavan the Aramaian. Scripture does not mention Rebecca's mother and yet we can view her favorably as "...modern psychology has proven that when a woman anticipates her child with pleasure and happiness the baby is born with a self confident disposition." ¹ The Sages consider that the Torah mentions Rivkah's family background in order to emphasize how she flourished to become a "rose among the thorns" (*Bereishit Rabbah* 63:14). She grew up in a pagan, sinful environment and yet was not affected by it. She had the strength of character to make her own decisions and could act with conviction. She is an encouragement that a person can overcome a negative environment and walk in accord with God's light even in a place of darkness.

When challenged, Rebecca could act. When faced with a difficult pregnancy, she personally sought God and received His reply regarding the children she would bear. Rebecca knew, as God had told her, that "two nations are in your womb, the one shall be stronger than the other, and the elder shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:22). A Midrash adds that this is confirmed to her by Shem, the son of Noah, who said that there were two noble men within her, Antoninus, a descendant of Esau who was to become a Caesar of Rome, and Rabbi Yehudah the Prince. In his commentary, Rashi mentions how when she passed a synagogue one child in her womb would pull towards it, and when a pagan temple the other would pull toward that. It must have been a great consternation to her that one of her children would be against God and His ways. Shem's prophetic word may have given her Shalom in her spirit, for Antoninus eventually converted to Judaism and had a good relationship with Yehudah haNasi (the Prince) who was recognized as a brilliant Jewish authority and leader in the Second Century.

Thus, in his commentary *Meshech Cochma*, Rabbi Meir Simcha (Latvia, 1843-1926) points out that Rivkah was assured that even her "bad" seed contained a spark of future goodness, which made it worthwhile to be the mother of Esau as well as Jacob. When repentance follows, evil is overcome and transformed.

TRIBE: DAN

¹ Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, *Woman at the Crossroads*, Lamda/Urime Publishers, Israel

It was on the tenth of Tevet, 586 B.C.E., that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon began the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1). This led to the tragedy of the eventual fall of the city, the destruction of the Holy Temple, and the exile of Israel. Traditionally, the month of Tevet is associated with the tribe of Dan and as they were the first to worship idols the destruction is attributed to idolatry. Dan's leaning toward idolatry culminated with the rule of Jeroboam, King of Israel (the northern kingdom that split away from the southern kingdom of Judah). In Beth-El and in Tel Dan, in the region of Dan now established at the country's northern border, Jeroboam set up alternate sites of worship in place of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. On each site he set up a golden calf and proclaimed, "These are your gods, O Israel, who delivered you from Egypt" (1 Kings 12:26-29). The idolatry continued until the Babylonian exile.

It is considered that their grouping with Asher and Naftali to the north of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) was in order that the goodness and pleasantness of the two tribes would counterbalance the tribe's dark tendency toward idolatry.

Jacob's blessing of Dan in Genesis 49:16-18 reads:

"Dan will judge his people like the unique one of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path that bites the horse's heels so that his rider falls backward. I wait for Thy salvation, O Lord."

Symbols of the tribe of Dan are the scales of justice and the serpent.



The name Dan is derived from the Hebrew root word *din*, to judge. Before Saul was instituted as the first king of Israel, the judges and prophets were recognized as the leaders of the people. The traits of the tribe of Dan were most clearly reflected in one of its most famous descendants, Samson. Samson's mother was from the tribe of Judah and his father, Manoach, from Dan. We are told in Judges 13:4-5, that she was visited by angel of the Lord, who informed her that she would bear a son and she must not "...drink wine, or any other intoxicant, or eat anything unclean." And, once the boy was born, "...let no razor touch his head, for the boy is to be a Nazirite from the womb on." Samson's separation from general society was foreordained by God. Why?

Midrash makes a connection with Jacob's sudden outburst at his blessing of Dan, "I hope for Your salvation, O Lord!" and proposes that he had a vision of Messiah. Interestingly, too, the numerical value of *Mashiach* (358) equals that of *nachash* - serpent, which also connects this tribe with the promise of leadership and redemption.

Despite Samson's weakness of lusting after foreign women, which led to his downfall, he was used of God to unite Israel under his leadership, and he avenged his people by bringing retribution upon the Philistines. Just as a snake attacks the rider by striking his horse, so did Samson bring down the Philistines without actually touching them. Jacob's cry, "For Your salvation do I long, O Lord," can be seen to echo the blinded Samson's desperate plea that God restore his lost strength as he toppled the pillars of the pagan temple. God heard his cry and the temple of Dagon collapsed, killing Samson and all the Philistine governors as well as three thousand people who had come to scornfully watch the spectacle of the captured Israelite leader.

Dan and Yehudah were the largest tribes numerically, the strongest physically, and both are compared to lions. As the tribes of Israel travelled through the wilderness, Yehudah was at the head and Dan travelled in the last group, to guard the rear. The Midrash deduces a partnership between the two tribes from the verse, "Dan will judge his people like the unique one [*k'echad*] of Israel". The Hebrew word *k'echad* is related to *ha'meuchad* – the unique or special one (leader) of Israel that can only refer to King David, who was a descendent of the tribe of Yehudah, and who is the predecessor of Messiah Yeshua – the Lion of the tribe of Judah. In Moses' blessings of the tribes, he called Dan a "*gur aryeh*," a lion cub, a link with Jacob's blessing of Judah, "*gur aryeh Yehudah*."

We see another important connection between them in that two members of the tribes of Dan and Yehudah were chosen by God to be instrumental in the building of His Holy House. First the Tabernacle in the wilderness, when Moses said to the children of Israel, "See, Adonai has proclaimed by name Betzalel... of the tribe of Yehudah... and Oholiav... of the tribe of Dan" (Exodus 35:30 and 34). Later, King Solomon of the tribe of Judah, also chose Hiram, a descendent of Dan, to oversee the building of the Temple in Jerusalem.